Immigrants in a multinational political sphere: the case of Brussels (Belgium)

Dirk Jacobs

The integration of immigrants, and especially their political participation, is an issue which is very tightly related in Brussels, Belgium, to the dominant political cleavage along linguistic lines. The power struggle between the two national communities (the Flemish and the Francophones) both enables as frustrates political incorporation of ethnic minority groups. The stakes are especially high for the Flemish community: the political incorporation of the foreign population could put into question their demands for group differentiated rights but could arguably also lead to a strenghtening of their position. Within one and the same territory, Flemish and Francophone policy makers use different frameworks for incorporation of immigrants. The multi-governance situation which Brussels is confronted with, thus causes very diffuse political opportunity structures for participation of ethnic minority groups.

Brussels, a hybrid region in a multination state

Belgium, a clear example of what Kymlicka (1995) has called a 'multination state', has formally been a pure unitary state until 1970. The constitutional reforms of 1970, 1980 and 1988, however, gradually gave rise to a more diversified political system, containing several sub-national institutional levels (i.e. regions and communities). The most recent phase of this development was constituted by the 1993 constitutional reform in which Belgium was officially transformed into a federal state. The new Belgian constitution recognises that the constitutive nation is not a homogeneous entity. The constitutive nation of the Belgian state is instead seen to be the sum of national (autochthonous) sub-groups with (or which strive towards) an own cultural identity. The process of state reform and devolution has put recognition of cultural-linguistic diversity on the foreground as the guiding principle for Belgian political life. The (new) constitution, indeed, clearly departs from the postulate of a multination state and recognises the rights of (partial) self-determination of those groups which are seen to be the constitutive elements for the Belgian nation (Martiniello, 1997: 71). The constitution states that the Flemish, Francophone and Germanophone groups are the fundamental cultural communities of Belgium. This postulate then serves as the basis for organisation of the entire Belgian political field. The Flemish-Francophone divide, however, clearly constitutes the central political axis.

Belgium is, however, not only officially built out of three Communities (a Dutch speaking (=Flemish), French speaking and German speaking community), it is also officially the sum of three territorial entities, the so-called Regions (Flanders, Wallonia and the Region of Brussels-Capital). The Regions and Communities have specific political competencies. The Regions have jurisdiction over so-called 'space-bounded' matters such as regional economy, agriculture, environment, infrastructure and traffic. The Communities have jurisdiction over so-called 'person-related matters' such as health care, social policy, culture, education and language-use. Every Region and every Community has its own representative body (parliament) and government. In theory this leads to the existence of six sub-national parliaments and governments in Belgium. The governments (and administrations) of the Flemish Community and the Flemish Region have, however, been merged into one executive body which leads us to a total of five distinct sub-national parliaments and governments. At the same time there is a national parliament and national government in Belgium, responsible for issues as defence, justice, police, foreign policy, finance and social security.

Flanders, situated in the north of the country, is an official uni-lingual Dutch speaking region and Wallonia, situated in the south of the country, is an official uni-lingual French speaking region, albeit that there is an officially recognised German speaking area within the Walloon region (see map in figure 1). It should be noted, however, that some Flemish and Walloon municipalities, so called 'communes à facilités', have an exceptional semi-bilingual status; Francophone persons living in some Flemish municipalities (and vice versa) are allowed to address (and have the right to be addressed by) their local government in their own language. As a general rule, the regions are in principle clear cut territorial entities and the official communities have a specific relationship to the regions. In the Flemish Region only the Flemish Community has jurisdiction. In the Walloon Region only the Francophone Community (and in a specific area the German Community) has jurisdiction.

INSERT FIGURE 1 (map)

The Region of Brussels-Capital, an enclave within the Flemish Region (see map in figure 1), is an official bilingual (Dutch and French speaking) region. Both the Flemish and the Francophone Community have jurisdiction in the Region of Brussels-Capital. It contains nineteen autonomous municipalities. The sum of these nineteen autonomous municipalities is in ordinary life often referred to as the 'city of Brussels'. This could (and often does) create some confusion. The Region of Brussels-Capital is not a city in exact legal terms and has no city government as a whole, but it is a region and has its own regional government and representative body alongside nineteen municipal councils. Only one of those municipalities is officially named 'the city of Brussels' (in Dutch: "Brussel", in French: "Bruxelles") and contains the historical (and touristic) centre. The other eighteen municipalities are (respectively in Dutch and/or French): 1) Ganshoren, 2) Koekelberg, 3) Sint-Agatha-Berchem / Berchem-Sainte-Agathe, 4) Sint-Jans-Molenbeek / Molenbeek Saint-Jean, 5) Sint-Gillis / Saint-Gilles, 6) Anderlecht, 7) Vorst / Forest, 8) Elsene / Ixelles, 9) Etterbeek, 10) Ukkel / Uccle, 11) Watermaal-Bosvoorde / Watermael-Boitsfort, 12) Oudergem, 13) Sint-Pieters-Woluwe / Woluwé-Saint-Pierre, 14) Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe / Woluwé-Saint-Lambert, 15) Sint-Joost-ten-Node / Saint-Josse-ten-Noode, 16) Schaarbeek / Schaerbeek, 17) Evere and 18) Jette. We will be dealing with the entire Region of Brussels-Capital here.

According to population statistics, the Region of Brussels-Capital had 953,175 inhabitants on 1 January 1998, of which 279,810 (29.4%) were non-Belgian residents. Of the 673,365 Belgian inhabitants (71.4% of the total population), approximately 15-20% has Dutch (Flemish) and 80-85% has French as the mother tongue. These are unavoidably only rough estimates and it should be noted that there are quite some perfectly bilingual people in Brussels. There is no possibility of knowing the exact proportions since it has been forbidden since 1961 to census language affiliation in order to avoid political tensions. Although it would be possible to count the number of Dutch speaking and French speaking inhabitants by looking as a proxy at the language of their ID-cards (the language which is then used by the state to address the inhabitants), the Flemish politicians make sure these figures are never officially published. The number of votes cast in (obligatory) regional elections, in which voters are obliged to choose between linguistically divided lists of candidates, is one of the most frequently used alternative indicators for the linguistic proportions. Flemish lists usually receive 14% of the votes.

It can be noted that the Flemish often stress in a 'boutade' that Brussels might be a city clearly dominated by French at night and in weekends, but that Dutch is the dominant language during the weekday. This is clearly untrue, but it is a fact that there is

an important number of people commuting to Brussels every weekday on work-related grounds and that a majority of them is Flemish. The last Census (1991) showed that approximately 314.000 persons commute to the Region of Brussels-Capital (Merenne et alii, 1997: 132), of which 2/3 originate from Flanders and 1/3 originate from Wallonia. The commuters involve approximately 50% of the work force in Brussels.

Although the Flemish are clearly in a minority position in Brussels, Dutch is in principle used next to French as a fully fledged official language. The exact procedures to ensure this are the result of over three decades of difficult negotiations and complex reforms, which cannot possibly be discussed in the limited context of this paper (for further reading in English see Roessingh, 1996; Fitzmaurice, 1996; Murphy, 1988). I will try to present the main principles which should ensure bilingualism in the municipalities of the Region and in the Regional administration and Regional services (fire-brigade, hospitals).

All administrators working in one of the nineteen municipalities of the Region of Brussels-Capital have to be 'perfectly' bilingual (i.e. having passed tough language exams). Hence, there is a very strong protection of the Dutch language on the municipal administrative level. There are, however, no guarantees that Flemish people are part of city council if they are not directly elected into it. In addition, there is no guarantee that Flemish politicians, who are elected into city council, would be part of the committee of the mayor and aldermen. There is, nevertheless, an indirect stimulus to assure that a Dutch speaking person would be present in local government; if there is at least one Flemish member of the local government, the municipality is allowed to appoint one additional alderman.

Unlike in the municipal level, administrators and other personnel do not have to be bilingual in the Regional administration and services. The administration and services should, however, be able to ensure that clients can at all times be helped in either official language. To ensure this in practice, there are quota used for the employment of personnel. These often boil down to a 30 Flemish - 70 Francophone ratio. The parliament of the Region of Brussels-Capital consists out of 75 members. The members of parliament are elected on linguistically-divided lists in order to be able to differentiate Flemish and Francophones who are to decide over their own Community matters. There is no guaranteed minimal representation of the Flemish in the parliament. The number of Flemish seats is dependent on the electoral results. Up till now, the Flemish parties had 10 or 11 seats. The government of the Region of Brussels-Capital consists out of one prime-minister, four ministers and three secretaries of state. The prime-minister is chosen by the entire parliament, while every language group appoints their own two ministers. The Flemish thus enjoy a guaranteed representation in the government. Since the government has to decide in consensus, this means substantial effective political power for the Flemish. In addition, there is an 'alarm bell' system that can stop any decision which the Flemish minority deems to be unacceptable.

Due to these procedures to institutionalise bilingualism in Brussels, the Flemish are usually slightly over-represented in administrations. One can also fairly well claim that the Flemish have more political power than could be expected on the basis of their demographic importance. This advantageous situation for the Flemish in Brussels is balanced by an advantageous situation of the Francophones on the national level. Although the Francophones are demographically in a minority position in Belgium, they have been granted the right to an equal amount of ministers in the federal government. There is also an 'alarm bell' procedure on the federal level in which both language groups can block decisions if they judge them to be detrimental for their own position.

It will come as no surprise that this system of 'parities' is vulnerable. The Flemish parties (except the ecologist party) have in the 1999 pre-election period all been arguing

for a minimal guaranteed political representation for the Flemish in Brussels, while some Francophone parties (in particular the Francophone party Front Démocratique des Francophones (FDF) and the right-liberal PRL) have been clearly arguing to get rid of the special protections for the Flemish in the Region of Brussels-Capital.

Brussels as a town of immigrants

The Region of Brussels-Capital hosts a rather substantial number of foreign residents: in 1998 no less than 279,810 persons were non-nationals (29.4% of the total population). Half of these foreigners are EU-citizens (139,898 foreign residents), the other half are third country nationals (139,912 foreign residents). Of the latter, fifty percent is Moroccan.

The striking importance of the foreign population in the total population of Brussels, is a phenomenon which has to be understood in the light of social and economic developments in the last three decades. From the sixties onwards the Region of Brussels-Capital experienced a strong economic growth, a process which led to a disrupted demand-supply situation on the labour-market and the housing-market. One the one hand the city had a large demand for cheap low-skilled labourers, on the other hand the enriched middle-classes moved to better and more modern neighbourhoods which had been built in the periphery of the city in the fifties. Due to a mortality- and emigration-surplus of Belgians, a lot of houses in the 19th century inner-city neighbourhoods of Brussels became vacant. The demands on the labour- and housing-markets were thereupon filled by immigrants. Brussels increasingly attracted relatively large numbers of foreigners, while the original Belgian inhabitants started moving out of the city. The growth of the immigrant population in Brussels was first largely due to low-skilled foreign workers (predominantly from Italy and Spain, and later from Morocco and Turkey). The growth of the foreign population was secondly due to highly-educated foreigners working for international organisations (and associated organisations) as the European Communities and NATO (Van der Haegen et alii, 1995: 4). In contrast to the low-skilled foreign labourers, these richer foreigners did predominantly look for housing in the periphery. Large numbers of Belgian inhabitants started moving out of Brussels to the suburban areas (later joined by rich foreign residents) and young Belgians no longer moved into Brussels at the same rate as earlier. This process led to a deterioration of the quality of housing in significant parts of the inner-city. As a result, the total number of inhabitants in two decades time dropped below the million (Van der Haegen et alii, 1995: 5). At the same time foreign workers moved into the impoverished parts of the city. Between 1963 and 1995 the number of Belgian inhabitants in Brussels dropped from approximately 950,000 to approximately 666,000, while the foreign population (people not holding a Belgian passport) grew from approximately 90,000 to approximately 286,000 (Van der Haegen et alii, 1995: 5). As a result, the foreign population in 1999 stands for nearly 30% of the total number of inhabitants.

It is unknown how many children of foreign residents in Brussels exactly acquired Belgian nationality due to the gradual introduction of ius soli in 1985 and 1991 in Brussels. It is obvious that, while the population of foreign residents entails 30% of the total population of the Region of Brussels-Capital, the proportion of people of foreign descent must be well over one third of the total population. It can, however, not exactly be said how large the immigrant community exactly is. There have never been any attempts made - or the data were at least never published - by official administrations to chart the ethnic groups of the city (the only data available are based on the criterion of nationality). One estimate has been that there are about 53,000 Belgians of foreign non-EU descent in Brussels (Martiniello, 1998: 138). If one uses the same method of

calculation to make an estimate of the Belgians of EU-descent as Martiniello (1998: 137) has used to calculate the Belgians of non-EU-descent, there would be 30,000 Belgians of foreign EU-descent in Brussels. The total Belgian population of foreign origin would thus be constituted by 83,000 persons. This would imply that approximately 38% of the inhabitants of Brussels are of immigrant origin.

Policies towards immigrants and ethnic minorities

Immigration policy (regulation of access to the territory and residence) has always clearly been a national prerogative. Integration policy, on the other hand, is in principle a policy competence of the Communities since 1980 (see Hubeau & Van Put, 1990). However, depending on the involved policy field (labour, education, housing, urban renewal, fight against poverty, etc.) or the geographic region (Flanders, Wallonia or Brussels), in practice all political levels have some sort of policies directly or indirectly related to immigrants and ethnic and cultural minorities. In spite of this multilevel governance situation (Favell & Martiniello, 1998), it should be stressed that the overall framework for any policy regarding immigrants in Belgium - whatever institutional level it is stemming from - has clearly been set in 1989 by the Royal Commissariat for Migrant Policies (RCMP). This semi-official government body, attached to the administration of the Prime Minister, was set up in order to develop and monitor policy related to the integration of foreigners and ethnic minorities. In 1993, the Commissariat was replaced by a permanent institute, the Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight against Racism (CEOFR), still attached to the administration of the prime minister. The creation of the institute should be seen as the direct result of the electoral success of the extreme right-wing and racist party Vlaams Blok in the municipal elections of 1988 (in the city of Antwerp).

Of particular importance is the definition of 'integration' the Royal Commissariat introduced as the pivotal concept for government policies on migrants and ethnic minorities. On the one hand integration is seen to be insertion of migrants into Belgian society according to three guiding principles:

"(a) assimilation where the 'public order' demands this;
(b) consequent promotion of the best possible fitting in according to the orientating social principles which support the culture of the host country and which are related to 'modernity', 'emancipation' and 'true pluralism' – as understood by a modern western state -; and
(c) unambiguous respect for the cultural diversity-as-mutual-enrichment in all other areas" (RCM, 1989: 38-39).

On the other hand integration entails:

"promotion of structural involvement of minorities in activities and aims of the government" (RCM, 1989: 39).

This definition of integration was said to be the result of an effort to find a compromise between the theoretical options of assimilation and segregation for an immigrant policy (RCM, 1993: 51). It should be noted that the definition clearly excluded demands stemming from the periphery of the political field on the immigrant issue. On the one hand the far right idea of sending immigrants back to their countries of origin was rejected explicitly; while on the other hand the (left wing) idea of enfranchising foreign residents was also made impossible (Jacobs, 1998: 177). The definition of integration introduced by the Commissariat in 1989 has from 1990 onwards functioned as the official reference point for government policy regarding to immigrants and ethnic minorities.

The Flemish, Francophone, Walloon and Brussels' policies towards immigrants and ethnic minorities have all taken over the integration framework of the RCM and CEOFR as guidelines for their own policy efforts. They have, however, put the stress on other dimensions. The Flemish government has had a clear preference for supporting self-organisations of migrants which are willing to co-operate in federations and are co-ordinated by quango's. In addition, the Flemish government has financially supported local initiatives aimed at urban renewal and integration of deprived groups in disfavoured neighbourhoods. In 1998, the Flemish government adopted a new overarching policy framework clearly based on the recognition of ethnic-cultural groups and including both (settled legal) migrants on the one hand and refugees and groups with nomadic lifestyles ('gypsies') on the other hand as its target groups. The Flemish government has thus finally profiled its model of integration of immigrants in line with Anglosaxon and Dutch ideas of group-based multiculturalism.

Intellectually influenced by the individualist republican model of France, the Francophone and Walloon governments have not been willing to recognise ethnic-cultural groups as specific entities in its policies towards immigrants. Furthermore, although in practice often primarily directed towards immigrant groups, initiatives were often framed in such a way that immigrants were not specifically defined as target groups. The same can be said of several measures taken by the Region of Brussels-Capital. The large numbers of foreign residents and the de facto residential concentration of ethnic minorities has nevertheless forced officials in Brussels towards a more multicultural stance. The Brussels parliament, the Flemish Community commission (VGC), the Francophone Community commission (COCOF) and the common Community commission (GGC) have thus put forward a special Charter, the Charte des devoirs et des droits pour une cohabitation harmonieuse des populations bruxelloises, stipulating the ground rules for coexistence of the different groups in Brussels. In addition, a 'mixed' consultative commission - 'mixed' since it consisted out of an equal number of elected politicians and representatives of immigrant groups - on immigrant issues in Brussels was created in 1991 and installed in 1992. The mixed commission disposed of a consultative power in issues particularly relevant and/or important to the immigrant communities: the issues involved education, employment, housing, living conditions, relations with the police, problems associated to non-implementation of laws, teaching of Islam religion, local political participation, the rights and the position of women in society and refugees. It is worth noting that instead of starting its second term in 1995, the mixed commission was split up into one separate Francophone mixed commission and one separate Flemish mixed commission.

Competing Flemish-Francophone approaches towards immigrants

Both the Flemish Community Commission (VGC) as the Flemish Community subsidise migrant self-organisations in Brussels. To be eligible for funding an organisation has to be oriented towards emancipation, education and integration, has to function as a meeting point and has to fulfil a cultural function. In addition, the organisation has to operate using (also) the Dutch language - if not always, then at least at the executive level. It should be underlined that the creation and functioning of 'Flemish' migrant self-organisations is indeed very actively stimulated by the Flemish Community Commission and that this has given an important energy-boost to immigrant associational life in Brussels. In the second half of the nineties, the Flemish Community Commission has even given the organisation Intercultureel Centrum voor Migranten vzw (ICCM) the task to co-ordinate and support the 'Flemish' migrant self-organisations. The ICCM has, since its creation on 31 March 1993, thus already supported a significant number of migrant

associations in Brussels (Agrupacion Cultural Sur, Alhambra vzw, Bawasa vzw, Blanco y Negro, Centro Gallego, EATA, Euro-Afrikaanse Fondatie, Evrites vzw, Ghanaba, Koerdisch Bureau, Koerdisch Instituut, Matalumbo vzw, Meervoud, Mezcla vzw, N'Imagighen vzw, Pachamama vzw and Touba vzw). There is a special collaboration with the Moroccan federation FMDO and the African federation RVDAGE focusing on activities in Brussels.

Substantial efforts were undertaken to ensure good contacts with these and other immigrant associations. As an example we can cite the fact that the Flemish mixed invited all interested spokespersons of immigrant associations to extraordinary sessions in parliament in november and december 1998. In addition, the mixed commission organised a highly advertised 'day of dialogue' in March 1999 - with concerts, free food and drinks - to promote the Flemish community among immigrant associations. It is definitely not too far fetched to denounce these (and other) activities as - at least partially - strategic attempts of the Flemish government in Brussels to incorporate immigrant (often Francophone) self-organisations into its policy networks, thus hoping to strengthen the sphere of influence of the Flemish community within the Region of Brussels-Capital. Immigrant associations, of course, welcome the Flemish efforts as interesting new possibilities for funding and lobbying. The lack of governmental financial support of immigrant organisations had before in an important way frustrated the creation of strong immigrant associations and had stimulated incorporation of immigrants into existing (Belgian) religious and syndical organisations (Layton-Henry, 1990). The recent financial support by the (Flemish) government has, in contrast, given a boom to immigrant associational life.

On Francophone side, the Flemish efforts are looked at with quite some suspicion. Indeed, most Francophones claim a totally different policy should prevail. The militant Francophone party FDF, one of the partners in the Regional government and an important political force in almost all municipalities of the Region, claims assimilation of immigrants into French culture is the only solution in Brussels:

'La culture française est le creuset des solidarités entre habitants de Bruxelles. La dualisation sociale que subissent des populations précarisées à Bruxelles aurait des conséquences plus graves encore si les autorisés bruxelloises, influencées par les revendications des responsables politiques flamands, se laissaient guider par le discours en faveur du multiculturalisme, qui n'est que le discours de l'indifférence culturelle et de la ghettoïsation des communautés d'origine étranger. A Bruxelles, la participation de toutes les populations au rayonnement de la culture française est un des plus puissants leviers de leur intération à la vie sociale' (FDF, Congres doctrinal du 25 Octobre 1997, Bruxelles).

Favell and Martiniello (1998) correctly pointed out that the multi-levelled governance situation in Brussels enables and encourages new types of immigrant opportunities and political voice. Indeed, immigrant associations can now - to give but one example - go 'shopping' for funding and influence in either the Flemish or Francophone community. Favell and Martiniello (1998), however, also correctly stress that the institutional structures may further lead to pathological forms of political activity and expression among marginalised ethnic minority groups. The observation that political attention - and in its wake not only temporary harsher police control but also funding opportunities, renovation programs, youth centres - increases after urban violence, does not seem to be a good incentive for more constructive political and social forms of integration. Of course, urban violence by immigrant youngsters has not been a premeditated form of political activism. However, it should be pointed out that for instance the extreme leftist organisation PTB-PvdA systematically tries to cash in on local problems and enlarges every incident involving immigrants and the police. Nearly

every incident is followed by PTB-PvdA anti-police manifestations, which, as a 'safe' recipe for conflict between police and youngsters, often lead to violent outbursts. In addition, an important segment of the Moroccan and Turkish youngsters is increasingly putting into question the credibility and legitimacy of (immigrant) social workers, welfare organisations and official channels for political demands and instead prefers to opt for confrontation with local authorities and violent infrapolitics (and/or involvement in criminal activities). A structural reason is without any doubt the residential concentration of Moroccan and Turkish youngsters in disfavoured neighbourhoods with high unemployment figures and little hope for short term socio-economic revival (see figure 2 for the link between unemployment and residential concentration of Moroccans and Turks).

INSERT FIGURE 2 (SCATTERPLOT)

In order to tackle this problem, both Flemish as Francophone authorities support initiatives aimed at sustaining the (re)development of disfavoured neighbourhoods. These programs, however, only very slowly lead to major improvements. The situation in the disfavoured neighbourhoods, where often over 40% to 50% of the inhabitants is disenfranchised because they are foreign residents, has been one of the main reasons for antiracist lobbying in favour of enfranchisement of non-nationals.

The difficult road to formal political participation

In very diverse ways, the Flemish-Francophone struggle has had 'positive' effects on possibilities for political participation of immigrants. One example is the installation of municipal advisory committees in the seventies. It had been the radical-Francophone political party Front Démocratique des Francophones (FDF) which had demanded the creation of advisory committees in Brussels in 1971. Taking into account the list of municipalities in which advisory committees were created (i.e. the richer municipalities), it becomes evident that the aim was not merely to increase the political participation of immigrant workers as such, but of all foreigners - in particular those working in large multinational firms and international organisations - in Brussels and thus indirectly strengthen the position of the French language in the city and its periphery. For comparable strategic reasons, the Flemish authorities are these days supporting immigrant associations and stimulate (controlled) ethnic mobilisation in order to diminish Francophone influences and strengthen the Flemish positions. The Flemish-Francophone struggle has, however, not only been beneficial for political incorporation of immigrants. Indeed, it has strongly inhibited formal enfranchisement of foreign residents.

As I have highlighted in earlier work (Jacobs, 1998; 1999), Belgian politicians have been remarkably reluctant in enfranchising foreign residents. This was, as I have argued elsewhere (Ibid.), mainly due to polarisation and electoral struggle over the anti-immigrant vote in the 1980s and early 1990s and to the disruptive effect of the Flemish-Francophone cleavage in the second half of the 1990s. It took till early 1999 before Belgium finally enfranchised EU-citizens in compliance with the Maastricht Treaty and the derived European directive. They will be able to participate in the next local elections which will take place in October 2000. Non-Europeans, however, might only be allowed to vote in local elections in 2006 (municipal elections are held every six years). To assure this, the former Dehaene-II government included a special clause in the constitution that the electoral laws could only be modified in order to enfranchise third country nationals in the year 2001.

Particularly politicians of the Flemish community were reluctant to enfranchise all foreign residents, fearing that the foreign vote would benefit straight away to French speaking political parties and that Flemish parties would hence weaken their electoral positions in Brussels even more. It is a public secret that Francophone politicians shared these views and regarded maximal extension of the local electorate, although presented as a sacred universal principle, as a weapon in the conflict between the two communities. The debate over local enfranchisement of EU- and non-EU-citizens has thus become an issue in the power struggle between the two linguistic communities.

One can wonder how founded the Flemish fears about imminent electoral success of the Francophones, in case of enfranchisement of foreign residents, are. Estimates by Bousetta & Swyngedouw (1999: 120-127) have shown that the effect of EU-enfranchisement will probably be very diverse and local. Undoubtedly the overall majority of foreigners in Brussels will vote for Francophone parties. French is, after all, the lingua franca and the most likely language foreigners would (decide to) pick up. Since the overall majority of the Belgian electorate votes Francophone as well, it is, however, hardly certain if the political presence of the Flemish in Brussels would automatically be affected in a negative way. In municipalities where 85% of the Belgian inhabitants now vote for Francophone lists, a situation in which only 75% of the foreign residents would vote Francophone, could even improve the situation of the Flemish (Jacobs, 1998: 248). Positive campaigning of the Flemish within foreign communities could help them strengthen their positions. It could well be, however, that the negative position the Flemish have taken in the debate will turn their fear into a self fulfilling prophecy; foreign voters will not vote for political parties which have tried to keep them disenfranchised (Jacobs, 1998: 244). In any event, whatever the electoral scores of the Flemish on the municipal level may be, there will be no direct consequences for the rights of the Dutch speaking in Brussels since these are protected in the constitution. The Flemish, however, fear the Francophones will increasingly question these special minority rights if the political presence of the Flemish decreases. The resistance of the Flemish to enfranchisement of the foreigners boils down to defending the power and positions of the Dutch speaking. Enfranchisement is said to disrupt the existing system of checks and balances between Flemish and Francophones which ultimately is the basis for the federal structure of the country. Bousetta & Swyngedouw (1999: 115) have pointed out that it is striking that the same arguments have not been put forward explicitly in debates over acquisition of state citizenship. It is nevertheless clear that, especially in Brussels, there will be an increasing importance of the so-called new Belgians (people of foreign origin who acquired citizenship through ius soli, option or naturalisation) among the electorate. Martiniello (1998: 138) has estimated that there were about 35,500 Belgian voters of foreign non-EU origin in Brussels in 1996, thus constituting 6,6% of the electorate. It is equally clear that a large majority of these new Belgians are likely to be Francophone voters (Ibid.: 115). To explain why the debates over acquisition of state citizenship in the 1980s and early 1990s did nevertheless not become an issue in the power struggle between the two linguistic communities, Bousetta & Swyngedouw (1999) have put forward some plausible reasons. They have put forward an interesting institutional explanation, referring to the fact that only once Belgium had become a federal state, it made sense to see the idea of group differentiated rights as a stake (Ibid.: 118). In addition, they have pointed out the importance of the difference in salience and social impact of enfranchisement on the one hand and acquisition of nationality on the other hand. The former is a measure immediately affecting a large group, the latter is a more gradual measure which apparently is judged to be less threatening (Ibid.: 118).

In any event, in the wake of the ardent debates between Flemish and Francophones over enfranchisement in the late 1990s, both groups increasingly became

aware of the increasing electoral importance, especially in Brussels, of the new Belgians in the upcoming 1999 national and regional elections. As mentioned before, the Flemish Community (Commission) in Brussels started doing substantial effort to incorporate immigrant communities into its policy schemes and at the end of 1998 and in 1999 openly wooed immigrant organisations. On Francophone side, the right-liberal party PRL, which had before clearly been a party with moderate anti-immigrant positions, in March 1998 attracted Mostafa Ouezekhti, a well known former Ecologist politician of Moroccan descent, to its party. In addition, the PRL radically transformed its positions on enfranchisement of non-EU-residents and on acquisition of nationality, which they would now ardently defend.

The new 1999 'purple-green' government Verhofstadt, a coalition of socialists, right-liberals and ecologists, stated in its government agreement to further liberalise nationality acquisition rather than enfranchise foreign residents. Although socialists, ecologists and the Francophone right-liberals supported enfranchisement, the Flemish right-liberals were able to veto change in this matter. It seems the other coalition partners are willing to drop the issue in exchange for new (and - in international comparison - very open) procedures for nationality acquisition. Whatever the outcome of the debate over enfranchisement might be, there is no doubt that the issue of political incorporation of immigrants will remain closely tied to the Flemish-Francophone divide for years to come and that the political importance of the ethnic minority groups will unavoidably increase (given the importance of nationality acquisition). It remains an open question what the effect of the immigrant voices will be on the linguistic struggle in Brussels.

Conclusion

Brussels is confronted with multi-levelled governance. In this context it should be noted that there is an important difference in approach of the Flemish authorities and the Francophone autorities vis à vis immigrants and ethnic minorities. The Flemish encourage collective mobilisation and support self-organisation of ethnic minorities. The Francophones opt for an individual assimilationist approach and want to insert immigrants - and their (political) mobilisation - into existing structures, organisations and networks. As a result of the Francophone approach, a lot of immigrants are active within the structures of existing social organisations (trade unions, etc.) and anti-racist organisations. The fact that migrant associations are treated as legitimate partners for discussion by the Flemish authorities, has, however, also enhanced the creation of self-organisations and processes of ethnic mobilisation. The immigrant associations thus gain funding, while the Flemish authorities hope to gain influence. Overall, the (seemingly) contradictory policy schemes of the Flemish and Francophone authorities create all kinds of inhibitions and possibilities for immigrant mobilisation. The positions and actions of the Flemish and Francophones concerning the issue of political incorporation of immigrants should be seen in relation to their power-struggle. Indeed, the possibility that foreigners can disrupt the existing power balance between the two linguistic communities in either direction motivates the different political strategies and visions related to political participation of immigrants and ethnic minority groups. What the ultimate effects of the immigrant political voices will be on the Flemish-Francophone power balance in Brussels, however, remains to be seen.

References

Bousetta, H. & Swyngedouw, M. (1999) 'La citoyenneté de l'Union européenne et l'enjeu de Bruxelles. Le droit supranational européen confronté aux réalités d'une société multiethnique et multinational divisée', Courrier Hebdomadaire du CRISP, nr. 1636.

Favell, A. & Martiniello, M. (1998) Multinational, multicultural and multilevelled. post-national politics in Brussels, Capital of Europe, Paper presented at the ECPR Joint Sessions, Warwick University, March 1998.

Fitzmaurice, J. (1996) The Politics of Belgium. A Unique Federalism. London: Hurst.

Hubeau, B. & Van Put, R. (1990) 'Les compétences des communautés en matière d'immigration', Revue du Droit des étrangers, (58): 71-80.

Jacobs, D. (1998) Nieuwkomers in de politiek. Gent: Academia Press.

Jacobs, D. (1999) 'The debate over enfranchisement of foreign residents in Belgium', Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 25 (4): 649-663.

Kymlicka, W. (1995) Multicultural Citizenship. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Layton-Henry, Z. (1990) 'Immigrant associations' in Layton-Henry, Z. (ed.) The political rights of migrants in Western Europe, London: Sage.

Martiniello, M. (1997) Sortir des Ghettos Culturels. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.

Martiniello, M. (1998) 'Les élus d'origine étrangère à Bruxelles: une nouvelle étape de la participation politique des populations d'origine immigrée', Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales, 14 (2): 123-150.

Merenne B., Van der Haegen H. & Van Hecke E. (1997) 'België ruimtelijk doorgelicht. Atlas volkstelling 1991', het Tijdschrift van het Gemeentekrediet, 51 (4).

Murphy, A. (1988) The Regional Dynamics of Language Differentiation in Belgium. Geography Research Paper No. 227. Chicago: University of Chicago.

RCM - Koninklijk Commissariaat voor Migrantenbeleid (1989) Integratie(beleid). Een werk van lange adem. Brussel: Inbel.

Roessingh, M. (1996) Ethnonationalism and Political Systems in Europe. A State of Tension. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Swyngedouw, M., Phalet, K., Deschouwer, K. (1999) Minderheden in Brussel, Brussel: VUB Press.

Vandenbrande, K. (1997) 'Het Brussels migrantenbeleid bestaat niet. De ingewikkelde structuur van de Vlaamse initiatieven binnen het Brussels migrantenbeleid', pp. 153-216 in Deslé, E., Meynen, A. & Vandenbrande, K. (red.) Migrantenpolitiek in Brussel. Brussel: VUBPress.

Van der Haegen H., Juchtmans G. & Kesteloot C. (1995) *Multicultureel Brussel*, Brussel: Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest.

About the author
Dirk Jacobs is a research associate at the Institute of Political Sociology and Methodology (IPSoM), Katholieke Universiteit Brussel. Address. Dr. Dirk Jacobs, IPSoM, Vrijheidslaan 17, 1081 Brussel. (dirk.jacobs@kubrussel.ac.be)
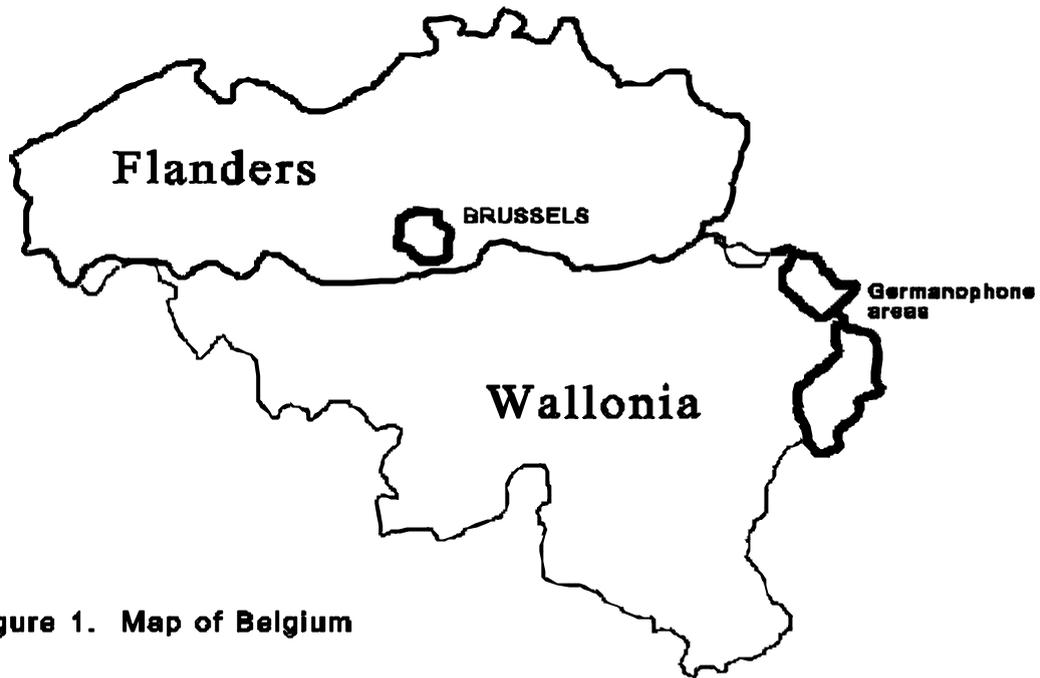
Figure 1. Map of Belgium

Figure 2. Scatterplot of percentage of unemployed and percentage of Moroccan and Turkish nationals on neighbourhood-level in the Capitol Region of Brussels (Census data 1991, treatment by IPSoM)

Turks and Moroccans