The challenge of minority representation in Brussels

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No less than 30 per cent of the inhabitants of the bilingual Region of Brussels-Capital are non-nationals. Among the nationals in Brussels, it is estimated, that 15-20 per cent is Dutch speaking and 80-85 per cent is French speaking. The (political) incorporation of the foreign population in either one of the linguistic communities is often seen as being (possibly) instrumental in tipping the power balance between the national communities in Brussels in one or the other direction (see Jacobs, 1998; Bousetta & Swyngedouw, 1999). It is therefore no surprise that the issues of citizenship and political incorporation have in recent times in Brussels been areas of policy prone to many contests between Flemish and Francophone politicians. This contribution will examine the intertwining of the issue of political incorporation of immigrant groups and the political cleavage between the national linguistic groups. The Brussels case will clearly show that multinational and polyethnic politics (Kymlicka, 1995) can in important ways be interlocked.

Multinational institutional arrangements in Brussels

Belgium 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 process of state reform 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 (Kymlicka, 1995) 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, while the Communities have jurisdiction over so-called 'person-related matters'. Every Region and every Community has its own representative body (parliament) and government.

The Region of Brussels-Capital, geographically an enclave within the Flemish Region, is an official bilingual (Dutch and French speaking) area, in which both the Flemish and the Francophone Community have jurisdiction. Although the Flemish are clearly in a minority position in Brussels, Dutch is officially used next to French as a fully fledged official language. The complex procedures to ensure this are the result of over three decades of difficult negotiations and complex reforms (for further reading in English see Roessingh, 1996; Fitzmaurice, 1996; Murphy, 1988; Witte, Craeybeckx, & Meynen, 2000).

Since the creation of the Brussels Capital Region in 1989, the parliament of the Region has consisted out of 75 members. This will remain the case until 2004. 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. The number of Flemish and Francophone seats is dependent on the electoral results. The Flemish parties have always 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. Following extensive debate and negotiations, in 2001 a deal was made between the Flemish and Francophones to install, amongst other things, a form of guaranteed representation of the Flemish in the Brussels Parliament. From 2004 onwards, the number of members of the Brussels parliament will increase from 75 to 89 members. A fixed number of 17 will go to the Flemish, while a fixed number of 72 members will go to the Francophones. The Flemish will thus have a fixed representation, regardless of their demographic strength.

At the municipal level, in contrast to the regional level, there is no obligation to take part in the municipal elections on linguistically-divided lists. At the same time, there are no guarantees that Flemish people are part of city council if they are not directly elected into it. As a result some municipalities have had no elected Flemish politicians - although the municipal administration is officially bilingual. 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. And from 2002 onwards, an additional incentive was created that a Dutch speaking person would be present in local government; if there are Flemish politicians part of the majority coalition, at least one of these Flemish politicians should be appointed alderman or president of the local council

for social welfare. Amongst all the municipalities in which the rule will be applied, a fixed yearly budget of 1 billion Belgian francs or 24,789,352 € (transfered from the federal level) will be divided.

Due to the 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 and are over-represented in the Senate. 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 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 (Jacobs, 1999a). In 2001, however, a deal was made in the so-called Lambermont and Lombard agreements in which – crudely summarizing - the Flemish got partial guaranteed representation in exchange for additional financial means for the Francophone educational system. Another long standing issue concerns the demand of the Francophone parties that French speaking people living in the Flemish periphery of Brussels would be granted more (special) rights. Especially the *Union Francophone* (UF) and *Front Démocratique des Francophones* (FDF) openly strive for adhesion to the bilingual Region of Brussels-Capital of those municipalities of the Flemish periphery of Brussels in which there are considerable numbers of Francophones - the result of processes of peri-urbanisation. The other Francophone parties are more moderate but do all suggest some kind of extension of the territory of the Region of Brussels-Capital or a special bilingual status for the municipalities currently endowed with linguistic allowances (Ibid.). With this in mind, Francophone politicians have undertaken several efforts to convince the Council of Europe that the Francophones in the periphery of Brussels should be regarded as a national minority entitled to special protection. For a lot of Flemish politicians these demands are a thorn in their side, since they strive for unilingualism of the Flemish Region and regard the demands of the Francophones to transfer municipalities to the bilingual Region of Brussels-Capital to be an unacceptable attack on Flemish territorial sovereignty.

The interconnectedness of polyethnic and multinational politics in Brussels

Brussels is clearly a polyethnic society (Kymlicka, 1995: 15). Indeed, all kinds of immigrant groups are present and integrated into the local societal structures of the

capital and a substantial amount of the ethnic minority groups *de facto* refuse to assimilate and want to preserve their own cultural identities (Ibid.: 15). The existence of ethnic minority groups has never been officially recognised as a reason for group differentiated rights and special representation. Ethnic minorities have no independent public recognition outside the dual Flemish-Francophone structure of the political field. Often, members of ethnic minority groups are not even individually incorporated in the Brussels polity, since non-nationals are in principle disenfranchised.

Of the three regions in Belgium, the Region of Brussels-Capital is in proportional terms clearly hosting the largest number of foreign residents (close to 30 per cent). European and non European citizens account for more or less similar shares of 15 per cent of the population. It can be noted that fifty percent of the non-EU citizens in Brussels are Moroccans.

It is unknown how many children of foreign residents in Brussels acquired Belgian nationality due to the introduction of *ius soli* in 1985 (and its extension in 1991). We *do* know that in the Census of 1991, 53,983 Belgian persons did not have Belgian nationality at the time of birth (and hence made use of the naturalisation procedure). As a result, we know that *at least* 34.1 per cent of the inhabitants of Brussels was of foreign origin in 1991. It may be noted that Belgium throughout the nineties liberalized its nationality legislation, to the extent even that the country as a result has one of the most open legislations in the world in 2002. Indeed, after three years of residence one can apply for naturalization, while seven years of legal residence gives you the right to semi-automatic access to Belgian citizenship. Due to the evolution of the nationality legislation and demographic developments, in 2002 probably around 10 per cent of the Brussels population are Belgians of foreign descent (who acquired citizenship through ius soli, naturalisation or the other systems for acquiring Belgian nationality). One can thus estimate that today approximately 40 per cent of the inhabitants of Brussels is of immigrant – non-Belgian - origin.

It is striking that there is an important difference between the Flemish and Francophone approach for dealing with the immigrant groups in Brussels. The Flemish (Community) government adheres a model for integration of immigrants in line with Anglo-Saxon and – until recently - Dutch ideas of group-based multiculturalism. The Flemish government adopted a policy framework based on the recognition of ethnic-cultural minority groups, with a clear preference for co-operation with (and support of) self-organisations of immigrants. As in the assimilationist-republican model of France, the Francophone (Community) government has not been willing to recognise ethnic-cultural groups as specific entities in its policies towards immigrants. Furthermore, although in practice often primarily directed towards individual members of immigrant groups, initiatives are consistently framed in such a way that immigrants are not specifically defined as target groups.

It should be pointed out that the difference between the Flemish and Francophone approach for dealing with polyethnic issues is very much interconnected with, and instrumental to, strategies used by both parties as contenders in the political field of Brussels. Their divergent positions on integration policy allow them to protect

and reinforce their respective positions in the multinational political arena. The Flemish Community has done substantial effort to woe immigrant associations in Brussels. It is definitely not too far fetched to denounce these 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. On Francophone side, the Flemish efforts are looked at with quite some suspicion. It is stressed that assimilation of immigrants into French culture is in their own best interest. It often seems that by denying the existence of ethnic minority groups, the Francophones equally hope to downgrade the legitimacy of Flemish demands for group differentiated rights and special representation.

Favell and Martiniello (1998) have correctly pointed out that this peculiar 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 and can strategically opt for different forms of collective mobilisation - stressing either ethnic identity or neutral forms of social insertion (Jacobs & Swyngedouw, 2002a).

The interconnectedness of multinational and polyethnic politics, however, also (re)produces problems of exclusion and non-representation of immigrant groups. This has particularly been the case in the debate over local enfranchisement of foreign residents. In earlier work (Jacobs, 1999b) I have shown how polarisation had transformed that debate into an electoral struggle over the anti-immigrant vote in the 1980s and early 1990s. It was only in the second half of the 1990s that the Flemish-Francophone cleavage gained importance in the matter (Jacobs, 1998). Constrained by a European directive on the matter and urged by a judgment of the European Court of Justice, Belgium did in the end grant local voting rights to EU citizens in 1999. The constitution had been changed in 1998 allowing to equally enfranchise third country nationals from 2001 onwards, but attempts to change the electoral law and effectively grant local voting rights to all foreign residents failed in 2002. In both cases, the Francophones increasingly supported enfranchisement of foreign residents, while the Flemish delayed any policy changes. Proposals for enfranchisement of all non-nationals were taboo for the main (Flemish) actors in the political field, fearing a white back-lash and further success of the racist party *Vlaams Blok*. This was the main argument of the Flemish right-liberals to veto enfranchisement of non-EU foreign residents early 2002. The Flemish resistance to enfranchisement of (even European) foreign residents was at an earlier stage, however, equally linked to a twofold set of external issues: the political representation of Francophones in the Flemish periphery of Brussels on the one hand, and the political representation of Flemish within the regional and municipal institutions of Brussels on the other hand.

The first issue was related to Flemish concerns about the increasing influence of the French language in the Flemish municipalities in the periphery of Brussels (Bousetta

& Swyngedouw, 1999: 115). The Flemish feared that enfranchisement of EU citizens would lead to an increase of the political representation of Francophone politicians in the periphery of Brussels. This increase of Francophone power would deteriorate the Flemish character of the periphery and would lead to further demands to transfer Flemish municipalities to the bilingual Region of Brussels-Capital. In order to avoid this, the Flemish Parliament - although not having any legal competence in this matter -, first in November 1994 and once again in June 1997, urged the Belgian government in a resolution to assure a set of conditions necessary to implement the citizenship of the European Union. In the June 1997 resolution, these conditions included respect for the linguistic legislation by potential voters and the elected, the paying of taxes by potential voters, a sufficient length of residence of the potential voters in the municipality and the preservation of local executive offices to nationals. These Flemish demands are remarkable for two reasons. First, the relevant European directive had foreseen a specific derogation for Belgium, given the presence of the European institutions and its specific linguistic equilibrium, but apparently this was regarded to be insufficient by the Flemish Parliament. Secondly, from a legal point of view, the Flemish demands were void. Not only did the European directive - which has priority over any national laws - not allow for additional conditions, changes to the constitution and the electoral laws are in addition a clear federal prerogative in which Flemish parliament has no say (Jacobs, 1998).

The second issue for Flemish resistance was related to Flemish fears concerning their representation as a minority group in the Region of Brussels-Capital. Indeed, the Flemish fear they would become even more of a minority group and in the long term would even lose their special protections when they are crowded out of local political institutions due to the fact (EU-) foreign residents are allowed to vote. Thus the Flemish have claimed they need a rearrangement of the group-differentiated rights of the Flemish minority within regional and municipal institutions to effectively protect the official status of Dutch in the capital. According to the dominant argument, these differentiated rights should take the form of special representation rights (Bousetta & Swyngedouw, 1999: 115). In other words, a claim was made for a number of guaranteed seats within the various Brussels assemblies, and more specifically within the Regional council and the nineteen municipal councils. It should be noted that the claim for a guaranteed representation within the Brussels' regional council went clearly beyond the issue at stake. It indeed links the issue of local voting rights to a discussion pertaining to another (supra-local) political level (The Region of Brussels-Capital) in which the EU-citizens will not be allowed to politically participate. The two matters were linked, however, since both a constitutional change allowing for enfranchisement of EU foreign residents as the issue of guaranteed Flemish representation within Brussels' regional and municipal councils, require a two third majority in the Federal Parliament. In other words, Flemish politicians tried to secure a good bargaining position.

In both cases, the entire Flemish argument relies on the implicit hypothesis that the foreign (European) vote would benefit straight away to French speaking political actors and that Flemish politicians would weaken their electoral positions in Brussels

and its periphery. 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. Predictions by Bousetta & Swyngedouw (1999: 120-127) that the effect of EU-enfranchisement is very diverse and local have been confirmed. Moreover, participation of EU-citizens was so low (Jacobs, Martiniello & Rea, 2002), it hardly had any effects in Brussels and its periphery. 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 effected in a negative way in case all foreigners went to vote. In municipalities where 85 per cent of the Belgian inhabitants now vote for Francophone lists, a situation in which only 75 per cent of the foreign residents would vote Francophone, could even improve the situation of the Flemish. Positive campaigning of the Flemish within foreign communities – for instance stressing the Flemish multicultural model - could help them strengthen their positions. It could well be, however, that the negative position some Flemish political actors have taken in the debate in the past will turn their fear into a self fulfilling prophecy; foreign voters will not vote for political parties which have tried to keep them disenfranchised. 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. A comparable logic applies to the problematic of the Flemish periphery of Brussels, although the power relations Flemish-Francophones are vice versa there. The Flemish will not accept that the Flemish status of these municipalities will be further put into question if Francophone parties win even more local political importance due to foreign votes.

In both cases, the situation in Brussels and the situation in the periphery of Brussels, 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 correctly 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 already in 1996 there were about 35,500

Belgian voters of foreign non-EU origin in Brussels, thus constituting 6,6 per cent of the electorate. It is clear that a large majority of these new Belgians are likely to be Francophone voters. 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 suggested an interesting institutional explanation, referring to the fact that only once Belgium had become a true 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. At the end of 1998 and 1999, the Flemish Community (Commission) in Brussels openly wooed immigrant organisations by inviting all interested spokespersons to extraordinary sessions in parliament. On Francophone side, the right-liberal party PRL, which had before 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. In a next paragraph I will look into what happened in the June 1999 regional elections and the October 2000 local elections in which the Flemish and Francophones in Brussels more or less anticipated the importance of the immigrant origin vote.

The June 1999 regional and October 2000 local elections

Since ethnic minority groups will increasingly play a very important role in the (demographic) development of the city, they clearly constitute an important new factor in the Flemish-Francophone divide and a potential electoral pool for individual political parties. The Francophone parties had already modestly taken this into consideration in the 1994 municipal elections and the 1995 regional elections. In the local elections of 1994, on a total of 651 elected councillors, 14 were of non-EU origin and these were all elected on Francophone lists (Martiniello, 1998: 135). In the regional elections of 1995, four candidates of foreign origin (three Moroccan and one Tunesian) were elected into Parliament (on a total of 75 MPs), once again all four on Francophone lists. The Flemish parties had done no efforts to enlist candidates of foreign origin.

This would change in the Regional elections of 13 June 1999, coinciding with no less than three other elections in Brussels (European Parliament, the Chamber and the Senate). The Flemish socialist party SP and the Flemish ecologist party *Agalev* joined forces with a group of independent intellectuals and formed the alliance *SP!Aga* for the

elections of the Brussels Parliament. On the *SP!Aga*-list a young female lawyer of Moroccan descent, Yamila Idrissi, was given a prominent (but not a very likely one to be elected in) 4th position. Moreover, several people of foreign origin, some of them clearly Francophones, took part in the alliance. The Flemish-right liberals VLD and the moderate nationalists *Volksunie* also joined forces in an alliance and gave a young male social worker of Moroccan descent, Fouad Ahidar, the 4th position on its electoral list. The Flemish chistian-democratic party CVP also incorporated candidates of foreign origin, but these were given less prominent positions. For the first time these Flemish parties also systematically campaigned in French in order to address possible Francophone (immigrant) supporters. On Francophone side, all parties (except the racist FN and FNB) included candidates of foreign origin on their lists. Ecolo, PS and PRL-FDF gave several candidates of foreign origin positions on their lists in which they would almost certainly be elected. In the neighbourhoods with high concentrations of immigrants, there was a very lively and intense campaign of all parties. Indeed, it was really only in the immigrant neighbourhoods of Brussels that one could not help noticing there would be elections held. It is worth noting that a lot of shops in the immigrant neighbourhoods had several posters of candidates of foreign origin from different political parties hanging in the same window. Although collections of posters of candidates of the same ethnic background were still predominant, there were also several shops and bars which had posters of candidates from different ethnic backgrounds (and different parties) in their windows. Indeed, street-level campaigning in immigrant neighbourhoods seemed to be both relying on ethnic as 'black' and antiracist identities (see Cadat & Fennema, 1998).

The *Vlaams Blok*, the racist and extreme right wing party, less surprisingly, did not include any people of foreign descent on its list. Their electoral campaign, however, also had the novelty of addressing itself to the Francophone inhabitants in Brussels. The official party line of striving for Flemish independence and incorporation of Brussels within the Flemish republic were, however, consciously kept low profile (and sometimes even avoided) in their Francophone advertisements which primarily wanted to appeal to anti-immigrant sentiments and feelings of insecurity. A striking development had further been that the *Vlaams Blok*, as an extreme nationalist Flemish party, had incorporated several figures of former Francophone and unitarist extreme right wing parties such as FN and FNB. Their advent had a lot, if not everything, to do with the advent of a new prominent figure within the *Vlaams Blok* who had been given the first position on the electoral list for Brussels: former head of police Johan Demol. Johan Demol had previously been head of police in the municipality of Schaarbeek where he had installed a harsh repressive zero tolerance regime which had been given a lot of media attention. He was forced to resign when it was revealed he had been member of the forbidden Francophone fascist paramilitary movement *Front de la Jeunesse* in his youth and had lied about this membership under oath. Ostracised by the political establishment, Demol was then welcomed by the *Vlaams Blok* to head their campaign in Brussels. Although perfectly bilingual, Demol had a clear Francophone profile. Indeed, to be able to head the list of the *Vlaams Blok*, Demol even had to change

the language of his ID-card from French to Dutch. As noted before, the members of the Brussels parliament are elected on linguistically-divided lists in order to be able to differentiate whether the politicians are Flemish or Francophone and thus assure the good functioning of the system of group-differentiated rights. To stand as a candidate on one of those linguistically divided lists, one has to be in possession of an ID-card in the language of that same list. This practice of the *Vlaams Blok* to give a (former) Francophone the central position for the regional elections in Brussels, is of course a very peculiar move for a party striving for absolute protection of the 'purity' of the Flemish culture and the collapse of the bilingual federal Belgian state. The *Vlaams Blok* nevertheless made no secret of its intentions with the peculiar choice for Demol. Putting forward a popular figure, almost physically embodying the idea of law and order, was seen as an instrument in gaining Francophone votes. The *Vlaams Blok* openly stated their aim was to gain more seats in Brussels' parliament through additional Francophone votes than all other Flemish parties joined together. If this were to be achieved, they would have a majority on the Flemish side and would be able to to disrupt (and even block) the entire system of checks and balances between Flemish and Francophones in Brussels. The Region of Brussels-Capital would thus become trapped in an institutional deadlock, which in turn would trigger the disintegration of the entire Belgian federal state system. *Mutatis mutandis*, a gain of 25,000 to 30,000 additional Francophone votes - the score of the extreme right Francophone FN in the 1995 elections - would possibly be sufficient to achieve an absolute majority on Flemish side. The group-differentiated right of the Flemish to be part of the Brussels' government would thus be (mis)used in a perverse strategy to tackle the entire consociational federal and regional institutional model.

It is clear the democratic Flemish and Francophone political parties were, mildly put, not at all pleased with the plans and the malign strategy of the *Vlaams Blok*. Several large scale campaigns were set up trying to convince the electorate - Flemish and Francophone - in Brussels not to vote for the *Vlaams Blok*. Alternative strategies were (semi-secretly) worked out to keep the *Vlaams Blok* from Flemish power in Brussels and make it impossible for them to disrupt the political system of the Region of Brussels-Capital, which is ultimately based on a cooperative model between Flemish and Francophones. Some Francophones movements urged their rank and file to vote for Flemish democratic parties in order to frustrate the attempts of the *Vlaams Blok*. Equally interesting, the computer system used for the ballot was thus programmed that voters should first choose their language for instructions and would then be presented the list of either the Flemish or the Francophone parties, according to whether one had chosen Dutch or French as the language for instructions earlier. It was not made impossible to still vote for a party in the other language list, but it was neither made very easy. Officially this procedure was opted for because of purely technical reasons. This could well be the case, but it is widely accepted in journalistic circles that there is more to the story. One can wonder if it is a coincidence that it has become less evident for Francophone voters to be able and locate the list of the Vlaams Blok on the computer monitor.

In these first post-*Dutroux* elections, which were held two weeks after the Belgian *dioxine*-scandal broke lose, the ruling christian-democratic (CVP & PSC) and socialist parties (SP & PS) faced major losses almost all over the country. Liberals (VLD) and moderate Flemish nationalists (VU-ID) slightly won and the extreme right *Vlaams Blok* and the ecologist *Agalev* scored major successes in Flanders. In Wallonia and Brussels the Francophone ecologist party *ECOLO* convincingly won the elections.

On Francophone side, the most remarkable results were the facts that ECOLO won 7 seats, doubling its number to 14, that the socialist PS lost 4 seats, falling back to 13 and that the extreme right and racist party FN and its dissident party FNB jointly lost 3 seats, falling back to 3 seats. On Flemish side, the gain of the *Vlaams Blok* is the most striking phenomenon. It is, however, clear that the *Vlaams Blok*, although conquering the first position among the Flemish parties did not succeed in its ambition to attain the absolute majority. It is unclear how many Francophones voted for the *Vlaams Blok*, since unfortunately no exit-polls were held in Brussels. Undoubtedly, the party did succeed in attracting Francophone votes, but not to the extent as they had hoped to do. The total number of voters for Flemish parties increased, leading to an additional seat. This is probably due to Francophones now voting for Flemish parties, but cannot be determined with certainty. It is further unclear how many of them voted for the *Vlaams Blok* or, on the contrary, voted for one of the Flemish democratic parties. What is clear is that the *Vlaams Blok* gained votes and that the sum of the Flemish democratic parties lost votes in comparison to the 1995 elections. As a result of the elections, all democratic Flemish parties are forced to co-operate in creating a Flemish government in Brussels, just as had been the case in 1994 in the municipal council of Antwerp (see Bousetta, 1998). It should be noted that after the elections, the Lombard-negotiations between the governing Flemish parties and all democratic Francophone parties led to a fairly complicated legislative strategy to avoid the Flemish extreme-right would ever come into actual power, even if they would achieve a majority on Flemish side in future elections (see Jacobs & Swyngedouw, 2002b).

It is telling that in the new Brussels' Parliament eight members are of foreign (Maghreb) origin. That is only three less than the Flemish representation in the parliament. Far from wanting to claim the MP's of foreign (Maghreb) origin only represent - or even worse: only should represent - the Belgians of non-EU immigrant origin, it can be pointed out that this is a good score if we compare it to the estimated amount of Belgians of non-EU origin in the electorate; Constituting 6,6 per cent of the electorate (in 1996, according to Martiniello, 1998: 138), the Belgians of non-EU-origin would proportionally only stand for five seats in parliament. If we would limit the attention to the Belgians of Maghreb origin, focussing on an estimated 15,000 voters (using 1996 data and the method of Martiniello, 1998: 137-138), this would proportionally even lead to only two or three seats. On the other hand, if we would regard these MP's as 'representatives' of all Belgians of foreign origin (EU and non-EU), adding an additional estimated 24,000 Belgians of EU-origin to the calculation, then there would indeed be eight, possibly nine seats needed to have a 'proportional' representation.

But of course, we should keep in mind that talk about proportional representation is controversial in this context, if only when taking into account that 30 per cent of the inhabitants of the Region are non-Belgians and are not even entitled to vote or stand as a candidate. If we would limit our attention to an estimated total of 65,000 adult inhabitants of Brussels of Maghreb ethnic identity (adult Maghreb citizens plus adult Belgian citizens of Maghreb origin in 1996), six or seven seats in parliament should be reserved for this community if wanting to attain a proportional representation. Limiting the attention to nationality and only differentiating between adult Francophone Belgians, adult Flemish Belgians, adult non-EU-foreigners and adult EU-foreigners - and thus not worrying about (other) ethnic identities -, one would have the following hypothetical proportional distribution of seats: For the non-EU-foreigners 10 seats would have to be reserved, while the EU-foreigners would have to be granted 11 seats. The Francophone Belgians (including Belgians of foreign origin) would possess 46 seats and the Flemish Belgians (including Belgians of foreign origin) would possess 8 seats. We should recall here that, regardless of demographic strength, from 2004 onwards, 17 seats will be guaranteed for the Flemish and 72 seats will be reserved for the Francophones in the Brussels parliament.

In the 2000 municipal elections EU-citizens hardly made use of their newly granted rights to local political participation (see Jacobs, Martiniello, Rea, 2002). Non-EU residents were not allowed to vote or stand as a candidate. Nevertheless, there was a fierce struggle for the 'immigrant vote', targeting Belgians of non-EU origin (especially Moroccans). The phenomenon of success of preferential voting for immigrant (non-EU origin) candidates (as seen in 1995 and 1999) reappeared and even shattered all expectations. As can be seen in Table 1, of 652 municipal councilors, no less than 90 (or 13.8 per cent) are of non-EU immigrant background. As a result, 20-25% of the politicians of the municipal councils in the boroughs of Brussels, Schaarbeek, St-Josse and Molenbeek are now of immigrant Turkish or Moroccan descent.

The success of Belgians of non-EU origin is quite remarkable and constitutes a better result than the Flemish politicians have achieved. The Flemish were, however, definitely not crowded out in the 2000 elections – contrary to what might have been expected. With 84 elected Flemish councilors, representation is better in 2000 than in the previous 1988 (78) and 1994 (71) municipal elections (Mares, 1999: 340). It did occur on a number of bilingual lists, that Flemish candidates (with a favorable position on the list) did not get elected due to better preferential voting scores of Francophone Belgians of non-EU origin (holding a lower position on the list). Francophone candidates, however, were equally surpassed by Francophone candidates of non-EU origin due to preferential votes – which in a number of cases led to internal party problems (see Jacobs, Martiniello & Réa, 2002). As is illustrated by the progress of Flemish councilors, it is clear that the increased presence of Belgians of non-EU origin has not been detrimental for the Flemish minority group. It is, however, obvious that there is a tricky relationship between minority representation of immigrant groups on the one hand and representation of the Flemish minority on the other hand.

Table 1. Elected councilors of non‑EU origin and Flemish elected councilors in the 19 municipalities of Brussels, their percentage of the total number of elected councilors in each municipality, October 2000

	Total number of seats	Elected councilors of non-EU origin (value)	% of elected councilors of non-EU origin	Flemish elected councilors (value)	% of Flemish elected councilors
Anderlecht	43	7	16,3%	11	25,6%
Auderghem	29	0	0%	1	3,4%
Berchem	24	0	0%	7	29,2%
Bruxelles	47	13	27,7%	8	17%
Etterbeek	33	6	18,2%	3	9%
Evere	31	2	6,5%	10	32,2%
Forest	35	4	11,4%	1	2,8%
Ganshoren	25	1	4,0%	7	28%
Ixelles	41	6	16,6%	1	2,4%
Jette	33	2	6,1%	7	21,2%
Koekelberg	25	3	12,0%	5	20%
Molenbeek	41	12	29,3%	5	12,2%
Saint-Gilles	35	8	22,9%	2	5,7%
Saint-Josse	27	13	48,2%	1	3,7%
Schaerbeek	47	10	21,3%	7	14,9%
Uccle	41	2	4,9%	0	0%
Watermael	27	0	0%	2	7,4%
Woluwé St-L	35	1	2,9%	4	11,4%
Woluwé St-P	33	0	0%	2	6%
Total	**652**	**90**	**13,8%**	**84**	**12,8%**

Source : Based on calculations by ISPO-KULeuven, a patronym analysis by GERME-ULB (see Jacobs, Martiniello & Rea, 2002), on data of the Ministry of Interior Affairs and on data of the Flemish Community Commission.

An example from the municipality of Brussels city can illustrate the delicate intertwining of the issues of linguistic and immigrant representation. Anticipating the electoral appeal of Belgians of immigrant origin, the Flemish green party – exceptionally contesting independently from the Francophone green party - positioned seven immigrant women among it's ten first candidates. A Flemish ecologist got elected, while in contrast the main Flemish socialist candidate (contesting on the list of the Francophone socialist party, of which seven of the thirteen elected councilors would be Francophone Belgians of Moroccan origin) did not succeed in getting elected in the council.

It remains an open question how the *de facto* political incorporation of segments of the immigrant community - those who have been granted or have acquired Belgian citizenship - on the one hand and the unavoidable debate over modes of (indirect?) representation of the 30 per cent disenfranchised inhabitants will further affect the position of the Flemish in Brussels in the future. In any event, it seems to be unavoidable that the issue of political incorporation of ethnic minority groups, and possibly in its wake the issue of polyethnic rights, will further encounter the Flemish-Francophone

divide and the issue of group differentiated rights for the Flemish in Brussels as a *companion de route*. Given the newly guaranteed representation on the regional level from 2004 onwards, the scenario of the Flemish being crowded out is no longer a threat. The Flemish do, however, still run a risk of loosing political ground on the municipal level. In addition, appealing to the immigrant origin electorate remains important for both the Flemish as the Francophone political parties in elections of the federal level. At the local level, the Flemish do run the risk of being crowded out by (Francophone) Belgians of foreign origin – although this has not been the case up till now - and will run this risk all the more once all non-nationals might be enfranchised one day. As a result, most probably demands for guaranteed representation of the Flemish on the municipal level will hence keep popping up in the future. In any event, for the foreseeable future, creating alliances with immigrant groups will remain an important political element in the power struggle between the two national language groups in Brussels.

Conclusion

In the 1990s, after Belgium had become a federal state, separate political fields on both federal and sub-national levels have come into existence. Politicians are no longer - as earlier - both active on the regional, community and national level but (have to) make a choice whether they will focus their attention and direct their political careers to one or the other level. The state reform has thus created new political institutions and political fields which apparently have a tendency towards the striving for expansion of competencies and spheres of influence, unavoidably leading to conflicts. Often, if not always, the main contenders in these conflicts are the Flemish and the Francophone Community. In the new federal structure both parties have a more or less symmetric and balanced position. The issue of special minority representation rights is in practice, however, the quintessential key to maintaining the multinational equilibrium. In Brussels, this issue is clearly related to the matter of political incorporation of immigrants.

In the late 1990s there has been a conflict over the issue of enfranchisement of (EU) foreign residents, which was symptomatic for the increasing intertwining of the issue of integration of immigrant communities and the political cleavage between Flemish and Francophones. The Flemish fear(ed) that political incorporation of immigrants through enfranchisement would threaten their own power positions in Brussels and periphery. In exchange for allowing enfranchisement of foreign residents, they demand(ed) a guaranteed political representation. The issue of political representation of members of ethnic minority groups has thus become clearly intertwined with the issue of minority representation and group differentiated rights for autochthonous national groups.

It is interesting to see that in the wake of the ardent debates over enfranchisement of foreign residents, awareness increased about the rapidly increasing potential electoral importance of Belgian state citizens of foreign origin. Both Flemish as Francophone parties and politicians therefore actively campaigned in order to conquer the immigrant

vote in the June 1999 and October 2000 elections. This competition between Flemish and Francophones over the immigrant vote has undoubtedly improved (and will continue to improve) possibilities for political mobilisation and incorporation of ethnic minority groups in the political field of Brussels. In fact, a double-layered political opportunity structure seems to have come into existence.

It is clear that in the future the position of foreign residents and immigrant groups will have to be increasingly and systematically taken into account in the political field in Brussels. The management of the interconnectedness of multinational and polyethnic politics will prove to be a key factor for the multinational equilibrium in Brussels - and thus for the integrity of Belgium. The Flemish establishment think they have to counter the assimilation of immigrants into the Francophone sphere of influence in order to preserve their influence in Brussels. The Flemish regard the recognition of ethnic minorities and funding of immigrant groups to be a good strategy for creating alliances with immigrant groups to this purpose. At the same time, however, they take care that they do not crowd themselves out of the system by adopting a multicultural stance in which (members of) polyethnic groups are treated in the same way as (members of) multinational groups. Indeed, multiculturalism is only embraced as long as it does not interfere with the own claims to guaranteed representation and influence in Brussels. One can, however, wonder if the Flemish (and Francophone) democratic establishment in Brussels has the luxury of playing a game of brinkmanship in *strategically* combining polyethnic and multinational politics. Brussels has been repeatedly confronted with urban violence by marginalised immigrant youngsters in disfavoured neighbourhoods. These incidents show how exclusion from regular politics, from jobs and from descent housing can lead to pathological forms of political activity. In the 1999 regional elections, the radical Flemish and extreme right wing party *Vlaams Blok* hoped it could gain enough votes with anti-immigrant propaganda among the Francophone electorate in order to be able to block the institutions. This perverse strategy shows how vulnerable the multinational arrangements are.

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