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Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713433350

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Dirk Jacobs

Online publication date: 04 August 2010

To cite this Article Jacobs, Dirk(2000) 'Multinational and polyethnic politics entwined: Minority representation in the region of Brussels-Capital', Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 26: 2, 289 — 304
To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/13691830050022811
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13691830050022811

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Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies Vol. 26, No. 2: 289–304 April 2000

Multinational and polyethnic politics entwined: minority representation in the region of Brussels-Capital

Dirk Jacobs

Abstract *During the 1990s, issues of immigrant entry and equity have increasingly become intertwined with the dominant political cleavage that exists between Dutch- and French-speaking Belgians and with related claims for group-differentiated rights. This is particularly the case in the bilingual region of Brussels-Capital where both the Flemish and the Francophone community have jurisdiction and where 30 per cent of the inhabitants are non-nationals. Political incorporation of the foreign population into the polity could tip the power balance between the national communities. The issue of minority representation has thus become a rather contentious issue. This article examines how these multinational and polyethnic politics are increasingly interlocked.*

KEYWORDS: BELGIUM; BRUSSELS; RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM; FOREIGNERS

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No less than 30 per cent of the inhabitants of the bilingual region of Brussels-Capital – geographically an enclave in the Flemish region – are non-nationals. It is estimated that 15–20 per cent of the nationals in Brussels are Dutch-speaking while 80–85 per cent are French-speaking. The (political) incorporation of the foreign population in 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 other direction (see Bousetta and Swyngedouw 1999; Jacobs 1998). It is therefore no surprise that issues of citizenship and political incorporation (among them claims for entry and immigrant equity) have given rise to a considerable amount of sparring between Flemish and Francophone politicians in Brussels in recent times.

This article will examine the way the two issues of immigrant groups' political incorporation and the political cleavage between the national linguistic groups have become intertwined. It will be discussed how and why Flemish and Francophone politicians have had conflicting views on (and different stakes in) the incorporation of foreign residents, in particular in relation to local enfranchisement of EU citizens and third country nationals in Brussels and its periphery. In addition, I will discuss the incorporation of (naturalised) ethnic minority candidates by both Flemish and Francophone parties in the June 1999 regional elections in Brussels and obstructionist attempts by the extreme right-wing party *Vlaams Blok*. The Brussels case will clearly show that – despite the fact that they are usually treated separately – multinational and polyethnic politics interlock in important ways.

Multinational institutional arrangements in Brussels

Belgium has formally been a unitary state until 1970. The constitutional reforms of 1970, 1980 and 1988, however, gradually gave rise to a more diversified

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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 served to bring cultural-linguistic diversity into the foreground as a 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 for those groups that are seen to be the constituent elements of 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 comprised of three communities (one Dutch-speaking (i.e. Flemish), one French-speaking and one German-speaking), 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, an enclave within the Flemish Region (see map), is an official bilingual (Dutch- and French-speaking) area, in which both the Flemish and the Francophone Communities have jurisdiction. Although the Flemish are clearly in a minority position in Brussels, Dutch is officially used alongside French as a fully-fledged official language. The complex procedures to ensure this are the result of over three decades of difficult negotiations and

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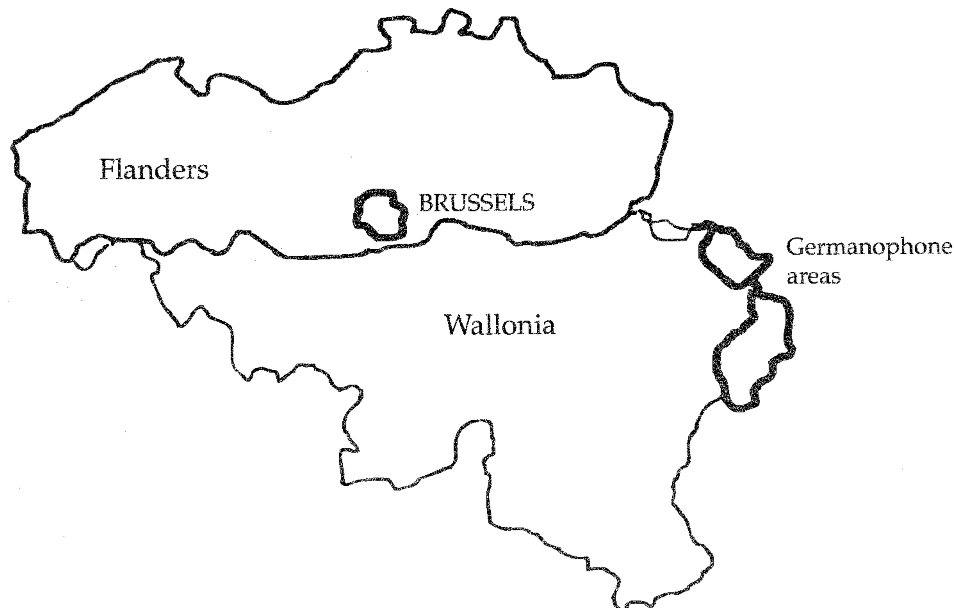

Map 1. *Belgium*

complex reforms (for further reading in English see Fitzmaurice 1996; Murphy 1988; Roessingh 1996).

At the political level, there are no guarantees that Flemish people will be represented on the city council (of one of the 19 municipalities in the Region of Brussels-Capital) if they are not directly elected. As a result some municipalities have no elected Flemish politicians – although the municipal administration is bilingual. In addition, there is no guarantee that Flemish politicians, who are elected into a city council, would gain a seat on the committee of the mayor and aldermen. The situation is somewhat different at the regional level. The parliament of the Region of Brussels-Capital consists of 75 members. The members of parliament are elected on linguistically-divided lists. This is done 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. The government of the Region of Brussels-Capital consists 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 take decisions on a consensus basis, 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 the procedures to institutionalise bilingualism in Brussels, the Flemish are usually slightly over-represented in administrations. It would also be reasonable to suggest 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 favourable situation for the Francophones at the national level. Although the Francophones are demographically in a minority position in Belgium, they have been granted the right to an equal number 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 to their own situation.

It will come as no surprise that this system of 'parities' is vulnerable. The 1999 pre-election period has, with the one exception of the ecologist party, seen all the Flemish parties 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 clearly been lobbying to get rid of the special protection for the Flemish in the Region of Brussels-Capital (Jacobs 1999a). In addition, the Francophone parties have demanded that French-speaking people living in the Flemish periphery of Brussels be granted more rights. Especially the *Union Francophone* (UF) and *Front Démocratique des Francophones* (FDF) campaign for those municipalities of the Flemish periphery of Brussels in which there are considerable numbers of Francophones – the result of processes of peri-urbanisation – to be incorporated into the bilingual Region of Brussels-Capital. The other Francophone parties are more moderate but (with the exception of the ecologist party) all seek some kind of extension to the territory of the Region of Brussels-Capital or a special bilingual status for the municipalities, with corresponding linguistic allowances (Jacobs 1999a). For a lot of Flemish politicians this is a thorn in their side, since they strive for unilingualism within the Flemish Region and regard

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the demands of the Francophones that their municipalities be transferred to the bilingual Region of Brussels-Capital as 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 number of the ethnic minority groups de facto refuse to assimilate and want to preserve their own cultural identities (Kymlicka 1995: 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 clearly hosts the largest number of foreign residents (29.4 per cent) in Belgium in proportional terms. Table 1 shows that European and non-European citizens account for more or less similar proportions. It can be noted that 50 per cent 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 were of foreign origin in 1991. I would estimate that today approximately 38–40 per cent of the inhabitants of Brussels are of immigrant origin.

It is striking that there is an important difference between the Flemish and Francophone approach to dealing with the immigrant groups in Brussels. The Flemish (community) government adheres to a model for the integration of immigrants in line with Anglo-Saxon and 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

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Table 1. *Belgian and foreign population by region on 1 January 1998*

	EU citizens	Non-EU citizens	Total foreign population	Belgian	Total population	Per cent foreigners/ tot. pop.
Brussels-Capital	139,898	139,912	279,810	673,365	953,175	29.4
Flanders	159,789	128,218	288,007	5,624,375	5,912,382	4.9
Wallonia	262,359	72,944	335,303	2,991,404	3,326,707	10.1
Belgium (total)	562,046	341,074	903,120	9,289,144	10,192,264	9.0

Source: National Institute of Statistics (NIS), Population statistics, 1998

cooperation with (and the support of) immigrants' own organisations. 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. Further, 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 to 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 made a substantial effort to woo immigrant associations in Brussels. It is definitely not too farfetched to denounce these activities as – at least partially – strategic attempts on the part 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 the Francophone side, the Flemish efforts are viewed with a considerable amount of suspicion. It is stressed that the assimilation of immigrants into French culture is in the immigrants' own best interest. It often seems that by denying the existence of ethnic minority groups, the Francophones are hoping simultanously to downgrade the legitimacy of Flemish demands for group-differentiated rights and special representation.

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Favell and Martiniello (1998) have correctly pointed out that this peculiar multi-levelled governance situation in Brussels enables and encourages new types of immigrant opportunity 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.

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 achieved significance in the matter (Jacobs 1998: 182–96). During the debates over (European) enfranchisement in the second half of the 1990s, the Francophones increasingly supported enfranchisement of foreign residents, while the Flemish delayed any policy changes. One major issue that held up implementation of the European directive was the question of whether or not the modification of the Belgian constitution and of the electoral laws should be limited to European citizens. As is well known, the Maastricht Treaty very consciously overlooked the political status of the 15 million non-EU citizens living in the 15 member states (Bousetta and Swyngedouw 1999: 112). It was left to the member states to decide whether they would enfranchise third country nationals or not. The Belgian antiracist move-

ment rallied fiercely against the discrimination between European citizens and third country nationals. At first, this was ineffective since proposals for enfranchisement of all non-nationals were taboo for the main (Flemish) actors in the political field, who feared a white backlash and further success of the racist *Vlaams Blok* party. The issue of European enfranchisement was in this context delayed as far as possible in order to avoid having to discuss the wider matter of possible enfranchisement of all foreign residents. It was only in spring 1997, when (at the time of the *Dutroux*-affair) a wave of solidarity and compassion in the Belgian population was triggered by the funeral of the murdered Moroccan girl Loubna Benaïssa, that the mainstream political actors were willing to state openly that they were considering full political incorporation of all foreigners at the local level.

The Flemish resistance to enfranchisement of (even European) foreign residents was, however, in an even more important way 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 the 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 within the periphery of Brussels (Bousetta and 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 diminish the Flemish character of the periphery and would lead to further demands for Flemish municipalities to be transferred 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, adopted a resolution to urge the Belgian government to implement a set of conditions as a prerequisite for the citizenship of the European Union. Among the conditions that the June 1997 proposed imposing upon the (potential) electorate were respect for the linguistic legislation (this also to apply to candidates standing for election); payment of taxes; and a minimum length of residence in the municipality. It was also proposed that local executive offices should be given only to nationals. These Flemish demands are remarkable for two reasons. First, the European directive had anticipated a specific derogation for Belgium, given the presence of the European institutions and its specific linguistic equilibrium, but apparently this was regarded as insufficient by the Flemish Parliament. Second, 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 such additional conditions, but changes to the constitution and the electoral laws are in addition a clear federal prerogative in which the Flemish parliament has no say whatsoever (Jacobs 1998: 277).

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 was that they would become even more of a minority group and in the long term risk losing their special protection if (EU) foreign residents were allowed to vote and crowd the Flemish out of local political institutions. Thus the Flemish claimed they needed 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.

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According to the dominant argument, these differentiated rights should take the form of special representation rights (Bousetta and 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 19 municipal councils. It should be noted that the claim for a guaranteed representation within the Brussels' regional council clearly went beyond the immediate issue that was at stake. The claim in fact 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 would not be allowed to participate politically. The two matters were linked, however, since both enfranchisement of EU foreign residents and the issue of guaranteed Flemish representation within Brussels' regional and municipal councils, required a two-thirds 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 immediately benefit French-speaking political parties and that Flemish parties 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 at the extent to which Flemish fears are well-founded, that enfranchisement of foreign residents would result in imminent electoral success for the Francophones. Estimates by Bousetta and Swyngedouw (1999: 120–7) 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 will (decide to) learn. Since the overall majority of the Belgian electorate votes Francophone as well it is, however, by no means certain that the political presence of the Flemish in Brussels would automatically be negatively affected. 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 (Jacobs 1998: 248). Positive campaigning on the part 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 that have sought 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 that 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 Flemish–Francophone power relations are here the inverse of those within the capital. The Flemish are concerned that the Flemish status of these municipalities might be called further into question if Francophone parties win even more local political importance due to foreign votes.

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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 projected 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 and Swyngedouw (1999: 115) have pointed out that it is striking that the same arguments have not been put forward explicitly in debates over the 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 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 the acquisition of state citizenship in the 1980s and early 1990s did not become an issue in the power struggle between the two linguistic communities, Bousetta and Swyngedouw (1999) have put forward some plausible reasons. They have proposed an interesting institutional explanation, referring to the fact that it was only when Belgium became a federal state that it made sense to see the idea of group-differentiated rights as a bargaining issue (Bousetta and Swyngedouw: 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 that apparently is judged to be less threatening (Bousetta and Swyngedouw: 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 mounting electoral importance, especially in Brussels, of the new Belgians in the upcoming 1999 national and regional elections. At the end of 1998 and 1999, all democratic parties of the Flemish Community Commission – the sub-parliament of the Flemish in Brussels openly wooed immigrant organisations in Brussels by inviting all interested spokespersons to extraordinary sessions in their parliament. On the 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. Below I explore what actually happened in the June 1999 elections.

The June 1999 elections to the Brussels Parliament

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, out of a total of 647 elected councillors, 14 were of non-EU origin and these were all elected on Francophone lists

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(Martiniello 1998: 135). In the regional elections of 1995, four candidates of foreign origin (three Moroccan and one Tunesian) were elected into Parliament (out of a total of 75 MPs), once again all on Francophone lists. The Flemish parties had made no efforts to enlist candidates of foreign origin.

This would change in the Regional elections of 13 June 1999, which coincided with no less than three other elections in Brussels, those to the European Parliament, to the Chamber and to 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 fourth position (but not one that was very likely to secure a seat). 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 fourth position on its electoral list. The Flemish Christian-democratic party CVP also incorporated candidates of foreign origin, but these were given less prominent positions. For the first time these Flemish parties also campaigned in French in order to address possible Francophone (immigrant) supporters. On the 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, all the parties conducted very lively and intense campaigns. Indeed, it was really only in the immigrant neighbourhoods of Brussels that one could not help noticing the impending elections. 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 that had posters of candidates from different ethnic backgrounds (and different parties) in their windows. Indeed, street-level campaigning in immigrant neighbourhoods seemed to be relying on ethnicity to signify both 'black' and antiracist sympathy (see Cadat and Fennema 1998).

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The *Vlaams Blok*, the racist and extreme right-wing party did, of course, 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 for the incorporation of Brussels within the Flemish republic was, however, given a very low profile (and sometimes even avoided) in their Francophone advertisements which were primarily aimed at appealing to anti-immigrant sentiment. 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 and repressive zero tolerance regime which had received substantial 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, so 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 implementation 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. The *Vlaams Blok's* decision to give a (former) Francophone the central position for the regional elections in Brussels, was of course a very peculiar move for a party striving for absolute protection of the 'purity' of the Flemish culture and for the collapse of the bilingual federal Belgian state. The *Vlaams Blok* nevertheless made no secret of its intentions with the peculiar choice of Demol. Putting forward a popular figure, almost physically embodying the idea of law and order, was seen as instrumental in gaining Francophone votes. The *Vlaams Blok* openly stated their aim as gaining more seats in the 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 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 that the democratic Flemish and Francophone political parties were, to put it mildly, not at all pleased with the plans and the malign strategy of the *Vlaams Blok*. Several large-scale campaigns were set up to try to convince the Brussels electorate – Flemish and Francophone – 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 Francophone movements urged their rank and file to vote for Flemish democratic parties in order to frustrate the attempts of the *Vlaams Blok*. Last but not least, the computer system used for the ballot was thus programmed that voters would first choose their language for instructions and would then be presented with the corresponding list of either the Flemish or the Francophone parties. It was not made impossible to vote for a party in the other language list, but nor was it made very easy. Officially this procedure was chosen for purely technical reasons. This might 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 easy for Francophone voters to locate the list of the *Vlaams Blok* on the computer monitor.

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Table 2. *Results of the elections for the Region of Brussels-Capital*

	Per cent		Seats		Votes	
	1999	1995	1999	1995	1999	1995
ECOLO	18.3	9.0	14	7	77,969	37,308
PRL-FDF	34.4	35.0	27	28	146,845	144,478
PS	16.0	21.4	13	17	68,307	88,370
PSC	7.9	9.3	6	7	33,815	38,244
VIVANT	1.5	–	1	0	6431	–
FN	2.6	7.5	2	6	11,204	30,803
FNB	1.3	–	1	0	5528	–
Total Francophone	*85.9**	*86.3**	*64*	*65*	*366,195**	*356,231**
VL.BLOK	4.5	3.0	4	2	19,310	12,507
CVP	3.3	3.3	3	3	14,284	13,586
VLD-VU-O	3.2	–	2	0	13,729	–
VLD	–	2.7	0	2	–	11,034
VU	–	1.4	0	1	–	5726
SP-AGA	3.1	–	2	0	13,223	–
SP	–	2.4	0	2	–	9987
AGALEV	–	0.9	0	0	–	3906
Total Flemish	*DJ: 14.1*	*DJ: 13.7*	*11*	*10*	*60,546**	*56,746**
Total (valid votes)	*100.0*	*100.0*	*75*	*75*	*426,741*	*412,977*

Note
* Includes other parties and data unavailable by party

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In these first post-*Dutroux* elections, which were held two weeks after the Belgian dioxin scandal brook 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) made slight gains 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. Table 2 presents an overview of the results of those regional elections for Brussels Parliament in 1999, that are of most interest to the present discussion. Of the 75 seats in Brussels Parliament, the Flemish parties had held 10 seats from 1995 to 1999. In the 1999 elections, the Flemish gained one seat.

On the Francophone side, the most remarkable results were the facts that ECOLO won seven seats, doubling its number to 14, that the socialist PS lost four seats, falling back to 13 and that the extreme-right and racist party FN and its dissident party FNB jointly lost three seats, falling back to three seats. On the 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 of attaining an 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 that 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

Table 3. *Score of preferential votes: top 10 Flemish candidates*

	Name of politician (and rank within top 100 of all preferential votes)	Political party and position on electoral list	Number of preferential votes
(1)	Johan Demol (5)	Vlaams Blok – 1	12,421 – elected
(2)	Jos Chabert (12)	CVP – 1	5819 – elected
(3)	Annemie Neyts (18)	VLD-VU-O – 1	4832 – elected
(4)	Brigitte Grouwels (31)	CVP – 2	3393 – elected
(5)	Rufin Grijp (58)	SP-AGA – 1	2178 – elected
(6)	Yamila Idrissi (86)	SP-AGA – 4	1621 – not elected
(7)	Anne Van Asbroeck (94)	SP-AGA – 3	1568 – not elected
(8)	Bert Anciaux (95)	VLD-VU-O – suppleant	1539 – not elected
(9)	Adelheid Byttebier	SP-AGA – 2	1482 – elected
(10)	Walter Vandenbossche	CVP – suppleant	1323 – not elected

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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 with the 1995 elections. As a result of the elections, all democratic Flemish parties are forced to cooperate in creating a Flemish government in Brussels, just as had been the case in 1994 in the municipal council of Antwerp (see Bousetta 1998).

Table 3 shows the top ten preferential votes for Flemish candidates in the Brussels elections. Johan Demol of the *Vlaams Blok* is clearly the most popular candidate, judging by preferential votes. Although this did not lead to her election, the *SP!Aga* candidate Yamila Idrissi of Moroccan origin had a very good personal score. It is unlikely that this is due to ethnic voting since Ms Idrissi originates from Antwerp and has only recently settled in Brussels. Accordingly, she has only been active in associational life in Brussels for a brief while and has no direct connection with the Moroccan community in Brussels. One should therefore interpret her electoral success as the result of support of an antiracist (mainly non-immigrant) electorate. Fouad Ahidar, highest-ranked candidate of foreign origin for VLD-VU-O and very active within the Moroccan community as a social worker, had a less spectacular result with 746 preferential votes. On the Flemish side, no candidate of immigrant descent was elected directly into the Brussels Parliament.

On the Francophone side, not a single candidate of sub-Saharan African origin nor of Turkish origin was elected. It should be noted, however, that Ramazan Koyuncu (PS), of Turkish origin, received quite a number of preferential votes even though she had a very unfavourable 64th position on her electoral list (see Table 4). It is further striking that not a single candidate originating from another EU country was elected. Eight candidates of Maghreb origin (Morocco, Tunesia, Algeria) were elected into the Brussels Parliament: Fatiha Saidi (ECOLO), Mohamed Daif (PS), Sfia Bouarfa (PS), Mostafa Ouezekhti (PRL-FDF), Mahfoudh Romdhani (PS), Mohamed Azzouzi (PS), Amina Derbaki Sbai (PRL-FDF) and Fouad Lahssaini (ECOLO). All of them ran on a Francophone list. Four of them, Sfia Bouarfa, Mahfoud Romdhani, Mostefa Ouezekhti and Mohamed Daif had already been elected in 1995. All of the elected Maghreb candidates had been given a good position on the electoral list, with the exception of Mohamed Azzouzi (PS) who only had the 38th position on the electoral list of his party and nevertheless was elected due to his good score of preferential votes. Without

Table 4. *Score of preferential votes: top 12 non-EU origin candidates*

	Name of politician (and rank within top 100 of all preferential votes)	Political party, position on electoral list and 'origin'	Number of preferential votes
(1)	Fatiha Saidi (19)	ECOLO – 7 – Maghreb	4737 – elected
(2)	Mohamed Daif (22)	PS – 12 – Maghreb	4235 – elected
(3)	Sfia Bouarfa (39)	PS – 5 – Maghreb	3013 – elected
(4)	Mostafa Ouezekhti (48)	PRL-FDF – 10 – Maghreb	2465 – elected
(5)	Mahfoudh Romdhani (65)	PS – 16 – Maghreb	2045 – elected
(6)	Mohamed Azzouzi (66)	PS- 38 – Maghreb	2025 – elected
(7)	Fatima Boudjaoui (67)	ECOLO – 37 – Maghreb	1979 – not elected
(8)	Fouad Lahssaini (69)	ECOLO – 12 – Maghreb	1967 – elected
(9)	Ramazan Koyuncu (75)	PS – 64 – Turkey	1812 – not elected
(10)	Abderrahim Cherke (78)	ECOLO – 22 – Maghreb	1713 – not elected
(11)	Mariem Bouselmati (79)	ECOLO – 17 – Maghreb	1703 – not elected
(12)	Amina Derbaki Sbai (80)	PRL-FDF – 21 – Maghreb	1702 – elected

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exception all these candidates of immigrant descent scored relatively high numbers of preferential votes when compared with other party members. This is probably due to a combination of an ethnic vote and antiracist voting by some members of the indigenous population.

It is telling that in the new Brussels Parliament's eight members are of foreign (Maghreb) origin. That is only three less than the Flemish representation in the Parliament. Far from wanting to claim that MPs of foreign (Maghreb) origin only represent – or even worse, should only represent – the Belgians of non-EU immigrant origin, it can be pointed out that this is a good score by comparison with the estimated number of Belgians of non-EU origin in the electorate. According to Martiniello (1998: 138) Belgians of non-EU origin constituted 6.6 per cent of the electorate in 1996 and would proportionally only command five parliamentary seats. If we were to limit the focus further to just Belgians of Maghreb origin, and reach an estimate on the basis of 15,000 voters (using 1996 data and the method of Martiniello 1998: 137–8), this would proportionally result in just two or three seats. On the other hand, if these MPs were regarded 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 eight, or possibly nine seats, would indeed be needed to have a 'proportional' representation.

It should be borne in mind, though, that talk about proportional representation in this context is controversial, given that 30 per cent of the inhabitants of the Region are non-Belgians and are not even entitled to vote or to stand for election. If the focus group were restricted to the 1996 estimated total of 65,000 adult inhabitants of Brussels of Maghreb ethnic identity (adult Maghreb citizens plus adult Belgian citizens of Maghreb origin), six or seven parliamentary seats should be reserved for this community 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: ten seats would have to be reserved for the non-EU foreigners, while the EU

foreigners would have to be granted 11 seats. The Francophone Belgians (including Belgians of foreign origin) would hold 46 seats and the Flemish Belgians (including Belgians of foreign origin) would account for eight seats.

It remains an open question how the position of the Flemish in Brussels in the future will be affected by the de facto political incorporation of the immigrant community – that comprises, on the one hand, those who have been granted or have acquired Belgian citizenship, and on the other, the 30 per cent of inhabitants who are disenfranchised. In relation to this latter group the debate over modes of (indirect?) representation will be unavoidable. It appears to be inevitable that the issue of political incorporation of ethnic minority groups, and possibly in its wake the issue of polyethnic rights, will come up against the Flemish–Francophone divide and the issue of group-differentiated rights for the Flemish in Brussels as a *companion de route*. Given the extraordinary consequences of possible enfranchisement of foreign residents at the regional level in Brussels, it is rather unlikely that the Flemish – and even the Francophones – would allow non-nationals to participate both actively as passively in the elections of the Brussels Parliament in the foreseeable future.

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Conclusion

Further to Belgium becoming a federal state, separate political fields have come into existence at both the federal and the sub-national levels during the 1990s. Politicians are no longer – as earlier – both active on the regional, community and national level but (have to) make a choice as to whether they will focus their attention on and direct their political careers towards one or the other level. The state reform has thus created new political institutions and political fields that appear to engender a competitive 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 communities. In the new federal structure both parties have a more or less symmetrical 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 the 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 of 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 the enfranchisement of foreign residents, there is an increased awareness of the rapidly increasing potential electoral importance of Belgian state citizens of foreign origin. Both Flemish and Francophone parties therefore actively campaigned in order to conquer the immigrant vote in the June 1999 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 their own claims to guaranteed representation and influence in Brussels. One can, however, wonder if the Flemish (and Francophone) democratic establishment in Brussels can afford 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 disadvantaged neighbourhoods. These incidents show how exclusion from regular politics can lead to pathological forms of political activity. In the last 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 succeed in its obstructionist attempts. This perverse strategy shows how vulnerable the multinational arrangements are.

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Acknowledgements

With many thanks to Cristiano Codagnone, Hassan Bousetta, Adrian Favell, Marc Swyngedouw, Andrea Rea, Marco Martiniello and Mylène Nys †. The research undertaken in preparation for this article, undertaken within the framework of the MOST-Unesco programme Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship (MPMC), was made possible by funding from the Region of Brussels-Capital. This article is dedicated to MPMC colleague Mylène Nys of the Université Libre de Bruxelles, who died in a tragic accident in the French Alps.

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Author details

Dirk Jacobs is a research associate at the Institute of Political Sociology and Methodology (IPSoM), Katholieke Universiteit Brussel. Dr Jacobs can be contacted at:

Dirk Jacobs
IPSoM, KUBrussel
Vrijheidslaan 17
1081 Brussels
Belgium

E-mail: < dirk.jacobs@kubrussel.ac.be >