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THE NEW BELGIAN SENATE. A (DIS)CONTINUED EVOLUTION OF FEDERALISM IN BELGIUM?

Régis Dandoy, Jérémy Dodeigne, Min Reuchamps and Audrey Vandeleene

The 2012–14 reform of the Belgian state has deeeply transformed its Senate. Not only does the reform reduce the legislative powers of the Belgian upper chamber, but it also alters its composition. The former appointment of Senators based on a system of direct and community-based election is replaced by a system of indirect and mixed regional and community-based designation. This article presents this important reform. On the basis of a comprehensive dataset of federal and regional political careers, it also comparatively analyses the profile of the Senators, before and after the reform. Overall, although rules regarding seats allocation have been thoroughly remodelled, we conclude that the reform had neither dramatically affected the subtle balances upon which the Belgian federal state relies nor altered the patterns of Senators' profiles.

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In Belgium, the constitutional reform of 2012–14 has deepened the process of devolution triggered in the 1970s. It broadens the scope of powers while increasing fiscal autonomy of the sub-state entities, namely the three Regions (Brussels, Flanders and Wallonia) and the three Communities (Flemish, French-speaking and German-speaking). This reform of the state structure also introduces a radical reform of the upper house, the Belgian Senate. Since 1995, the Senate was composed of three different types of members: Senators directly elected by two linguistically separated electorates (Dutch-speaking and French-speaking electorates), Senators indirectly elected by the community parliaments, and Senators co-opted by the first two types.[1] Not only did the state reform radically reduce the legislative powers of the Senate, it also altered its composition. Its members are now designated by the community parliaments but also by the regional parliaments while there are still ten co-opted Senators designated by the so-called Senators of sub-state entities. In other words, the appointment of Senators evolved from a system of direct and community-based election to a system of indirect and mixed regional and community-based designation. The 25 May 2014 elections have yielded the new Belgian Senate.

The intriguing feature of this upper chamber is its evolution through time. Designed initially as an upper house in an equal bicameralism with the House of Representatives, it remained largely unchanged even though the country was embracing a federal architecture. Its recent transformation into a 'true' chamber of the sub-state entities within a federal system raises the question of the extent to which this reform has affected the distribution of power in the Belgian federation. Indeed, the intention of ethno-regionalist political parties to merely

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suppress the Senate is clearly part of their campaign pledges (Dandoy et al. [2013]; Istasse [2015]) and it is likely that these parties see in the weakening of the federal Senate a way to target a symbol of the Belgian federation (Van Wynsberghe [2014]). To shed light on these dynamics, the political landscape before and after the reform will be compared, in terms of the way Senators are appointed, on the one hand, and on the profile of the appointed Senators, on the other hand.

The Belgian Senate in Comparative Perspective

Belgium's political foundation dates back to 1830 when a new state structure—not at all federal at the time—had to be created (Deschouwer [2012]; Mabille [2000]). One key element of this structure was bicameralism (Reuchamps [2013a]). The Constitution created a House of Representatives and a Senate, placed on equal footing. Such a bicameral architecture was quite common at the time. Yet, two main different rationales may be found in establishing second chambers (Balzac et al. [2014: 273–5]; Manin 1999). On the one hand, some second chambers—even if historically they were often seen as first chambers (Delfosse and Duprat [1999])—find their origins in the social and historical dynamics of the country. The second chamber in this case is a legacy of the past and a body made of representatives of the upper classes of the society. This is typically the case of the House of Lords in the United Kingdom that is made of Lords from the higher clergy (Lords spiritual) and Lords from the aristocracy (Lords temporal)—some of them were hereditary peers, whose number was reduced to 92 by the House of Lords Act 1999 (Russell [2013]). On the other hand, other second chambers find their origins in the institutional design of the state. More specifically, a second chamber can serve to represent territorial constituent units, as it is often the case in federal countries (Watts [2008]). Most federations have embraced bicameralism with the upper chamber representing the constituent units, such as the American Senate with two Senators per state or the German *Bundesrat* that hosts from two to six representatives by *Land*.

Initially, the Belgian Senate was of the former type. While the electorate was the same for the House of Representatives (lower chamber) and the Senate (upper chamber), several features distinguished the two assemblies: the term of office for a Senator was eight years and there were several eligibility criteria in order to be allowed to stand as a candidate for the Senate (Dujardin and Singelyn [2012]; Sägesser and Istasse [2014]). As Stengers (1990) observed, having both assemblies picked by the same voters prevented the Senate from becoming too overwhelming in the political scene. Yet, the Belgian Senate was seen as having the role of a moderator because of its conservative tendencies and kept the aristocracy from influencing the House of Representatives. Until 1993, the Belgian Senate remained about the same, beside the progressive extension of the electorate and eligibility rules (Bouhon and Reuchamps [2012]) in an equal bicameral system.

But in 1993, it was decided that the now officially federal state should hitherto rely on unequal bicameralism. In other words, the Senate ceased to share equal power with the House of Representatives. In all but four domains—institutional, international, financial and legal—the House of Representatives was now predominant over the Senate. Meanwhile the number of Senators was brought down to 71 (from 184): 40 directly elected (25 by a Dutch-speaking electoral college and 15 by a French-speaking electoral college), 21 chosen by the Communities (i.e. the so-called 'community Senators': ten by the Flemish community parliament, ten by the French-speaking community parliament and one by the German-speaking community parliament) and ten co-opted (six Dutch-speaking and four French-speaking).

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This new composition came to life after the 1995 elections and lasted until the elections of 2014 as the reform of the state structure brought about a new reform for the Belgian Senate, to which we will now turn with this specific question in mind: how can this transformation towards a true federal Senate representing the constituent units' interest be explained, whereas the Senate in other federations, such as the Australian Senate, moves in a quite opposite direction, becoming more of a guardian of the national interest (Brenton [2014])? A subsequent question follows, to what extent does this reform change the distribution of powers between the constituent units?

The New Senate

In 2010–11, Belgium was in a political gridlock because of the absence of agreement on the direction and the scope of a state reform, demanded mainly by Dutch-speaking parties (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps [2015]; Devos and Sinardet [2012]). After more than a year of negotiations, on 11 October 2011, eight political parties stroke a deal about a new step towards decentralisation (Deschouwer and Reuchamps [2013]). Altogether, the socialist, liberal, christian-democrat and green parties from both linguistic communities came to a quite far-reaching package deal that offers—tentative—answers to Belgian federalism's main challenges in four chapters: political renewal, the status of Brussels (the central and bilingual region of Belgium) and of its outskirts, greater autonomy for the sub-state entities and a new financial equalization system (Reuchamps [2013b]). This led to several revisions of the Constitution and the articles concerning the Senate have been adopted on 6 January 2014.[2] The transformation of the Senate thoroughly remoulds the political landscape of Belgium. The reform of bicameralism impinges all elected assemblies—at the federal level as well as at the sub-state level. On the one hand, the House of Representatives is affected through the new distribution of competencies between both chambers. On the other hand, almost all sub-state assemblies have to send a—larger than before—part of their members to the Senate.

First, this reform of the state structure intends to re-allocate the federal balance of powers[3] in which the Senate loses its permanent character, as there will be no longer permanently plenary sessions. The rules of the Senate have to determine the number of sessions and the context in which Senators have to gather. Accordingly, the House of Representatives gains competencies since the normative role of the Senate is restrained—that is, most competencies become unicameral in nature while the Senate now only holds the right of evocation in some specific policy areas instead of being equal to the House. These competences include ratification of international treaties and the organisation of courts and tribunals. The Senate remains equal to the House in only a few matters: the revision of the Constitution, the so-called 'special majority laws', the financing of political parties and the organisation of the Senate itself.

Second, the state reform aims at emphasising the federal character of the national parliament by modifying the Senate's composition that from 2014 onwards leans towards a 'true' federal upper chamber. Similarly to other federations (Stepan [1999]), the new Senate is designed as a meeting place for sub-state entities. Regions and Communities get a reinforced access to federal politics. Concretely, the number of the Senate seats decreases from 71 to 60 Senators while the 40 directly elected Senators disappear. From the 2014 elections onwards, only two types of Senators are distinguished: Senators of sub-state entities (new terminology for the previously 'community Senators') and co-opted Senators.[4] The formal membership of *ex officio* Senators (namely the king's children) is removed.

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As a result, 50 Senators are designated by the sub-state entities and ten will be co-opted. Out of the 50 Senators of the sub-state entities: 29 are designated by the Flemish parliament[5] (one of whom must be from Brussels), 10 by the parliament of the French-speaking Community,[6] eight by the Walloon parliament, two by the French linguistic group of the Brussels regional parliament, and finally one by the parliament of the German-speaking Community. Out of the ten co-opted Senators, six will be Dutch-speaking and chosen by the 29 Dutch-speaking Senators; and four will be French-speaking and designated by the 20 French-speaking Senators (Table 1).

TABLE 1
Composition of the Senate—mode of designation of Senators

Type of Senators	1995–2014	2014 onwards
Directly elected	40	0
Designated by community parliaments	21	40[b]
Designated by regional parliaments	0	10
Co-opted	10	10
Total	71[a]	60

[a]It does not include the king's children.
[b]The Flemish parliament is considered here as a Community parliament but it actually is both simultaneously.

Therefore, a large part of the Senate (83.33%) is composed of Senators holding *de facto* concurrently a seat in their sub-state parliament. Before the reform, only a third of them were in this situation. Regarding the co-opted Senators, the situation remains the same as before. From the viewpoint of the parliaments of the sub-state entities, large differences are also observed after the Senate reform. About one fourth of the members of the Flemish parliament also sit now in the Senate (8.06% before the reform). The parliaments of the Walloon and of the Brussels-Capital Regions previously did not send *per se* any MPs to the Senate. As a consequence of the reform, 10.67% of the Walloon regional MPs and 4.17% of the French-speaking Brussels regional MPs (i.e. 3.37% of the Brussels MPs as a whole) have a seat in the Senate. However, the parliaments of the French-speaking Community and of the German-speaking Community send the same proportion of deputies than before the reform (respectively about 10% and 4%). The impact of the reform is thus uneven. The Flemish parliament and to a lesser extent the Walloon parliament and the parliament of the French-speaking Community do have to share more MPs with the Senate than the other sub-state parliaments. As a result, less time will be devoted to discuss regional issues as a larger or equal share of regional MPs (depending on the parliaments) will now have to seat in the federal Senate. This is rather paradoxical as the 2012–14 constitutional reform also allocated more powers to the sub-state entities.

Because of this in-depth reform of the composition of the Senate, other rules had to be adapted. We explain first how this has changed for Senators from the sub-state entities and next for co-opted Senators. We then detail how rules regarding gender have also to be adapted to the new situation.

Firstly, the allocation of Senatorial seats across political parties is calculated on the basis of the sub-state elections.[7] This constitutes a major change compared to the prior situation as regional elections now directly impact the federal level. An electoral threshold of one seat in the Flemish parliament is raised to enter the Senate. The calculation is somewhat more

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sophisticated for the French-speaking group given the several parliaments involved. For each list, electoral results at the Walloon and Brussels elections are aggregated. Only parties obtaining at least one seat in the Walloon parliament, in the French-speaking community parliament and in the French-speaking group of the parliament of the Brussels-Capital Region may send regional MPs to the Senate. Hence, the French-speaking part of Belgium is torn between the territorial and the linguistic dimensions. While the former means Senators should come from regional parliaments, the latter implies Senators should come from the community parliaments. The chosen solution is typically a mix of both.

Secondly, rules regarding co-opted Senators have also changed. The 50 sub-state entities Senators, within each linguistic group, chose ten co-opted Senators. Federal MPs cannot be co-opted by Senators but seats are allocated according to the federal elections results (i.e. for the House of Representatives)—which means that not only the regional elections weigh on the power distribution in the Senate. The six Dutch-speaking Senators are allocated among political parties on the basis federal results in the Flemish and Brussels constituencies. The four French-speaking Senators are designated according to electoral results in the Walloon and Brussels constituencies as well as in the outskirts of Brussels (in order to take into account French-speaking voters who live in this area).

Thirdly, the law has also been adapted regarding the representation of women and men in the parliament. Because Senators are no longer elected, it is not possible to introduce a gender quota, as it is the case in the other parliaments (where one half of the candidates on a list has to be from each sex and where the first two positions must be allocated to persons of different sexes). Accordingly, the reform introduces reserved seats instead of legislative quotas (see Krook [2009]): the Senate may not count more than two-thirds of Senators from the same gender. However the implementation of this reform is obviously complicated without further specification of the working plan. The law provides that there should be a dialogue among sub-state entities Senators in order to guarantee the respect of the quota.[8] The decision-making procedure involves two steps. First, parties select Senators from the sub-state entities. They are rather free to decide upon the gender equilibrium within this pool of Senators. Second, when selecting the ten co-opted Senators, parties have to counterbalance a lack of (wo)men, if necessary. As large parties take precedence on smaller parties in the Senators' choice, the latter may be forced to select candidates from the less represented gender. In 2014, more women than men have been selected in the first stage (54%). The minimum of 20 women and 20 men being reached, no constraint had to be put on the choice of the co-opted Senators, leading to a proportion of 50% of women in the Senate.

Even though the Senate reform can be considered as an important change in both Belgian bicameralism and federalism, it hardly affects the representation of the linguistic groups, each of them being almost equally represented as previously (see Table 2). The Dutch-speaking Senators are still the largest group in the Senate and increase their representation (+0.59%) as well as the German-speaking group (+0.26%) whereas the French-speaking group loses a small share of the Senate's seats (−0.85%). However, an interesting change resulting from the reform that could slightly work on the power distribution is that the German-speaking Senator will not anymore be taken into account when calculating the quorum in each linguistic group.[9]

Electoral Results and Allocation of Seats

On 25 May 2014, Belgian voters elected their representatives for the European, federal and regional assemblies (Baudewyns et al. [2015]; Dandoy et al. [2015]). Since the 50 Senators

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TABLE 2
Composition of the Senate by linguistic group

Linguistic groups	1995–2014	2014 onwards
Dutch-speaking Senators	41 (57.8%)	35 (58.33%)
French-speaking Senators	29 (40.85%)	24 (40.00%)
German-speaking Senators	1 (1.41%)	1 (1.67%)

of the sub-state entities are distributed based on regional elections results and since ten co-opted seats are allocated according to the federal elections results, we can compare the seat distribution in the new Senate with the seat distribution for the House of Representatives (150 seats), the Flemish Parliament (124 seats), and the parliament of the French-speaking Community (94 seats which proportionally combines the Walloon Parliament and the French linguistic group of the Brussels Parliament) in order to assess the impact of the reform on the power distribution. Overall, we observe very few differences in terms of the composition of the different assemblies (Table 3), which is unsurprising as it is a rather mechanical effect. The indirect composition of the Senate seems to correspond to the composition of the House and of the Flemish and French-speaking parliaments. The largest differences are to be found among French-speaking parties. Ecolo obtains 5% of the Senate seats while the party holds 4% of the seats in the House and 2.75% in the sub-state assemblies. On the contrary, the three small French-speaking parties (i.e. the FDF, PTB-go! and PP) that managed to secure between one and three seats in the House and/or in a sub-state assembly—but not in the three of them—are excluded from the seat distribution in the Senate. The power

TABLE 3
Seat allocation in the federal and regional parliaments (2014), in percentage

Party	Senate	House	Sub-state parliaments
N-VA	20.00	22.00	19.72
CD&V	13.33	12.00	12.39
Open Vld	8.33	9.33	8.72
sp.a	8.33	8.67	8.26
Groen	5.00	4.00	4.59
VB	3.33	2.00	2.75
Flemish parties	58.33	58.00	56.88
PS	15.00	15.33	16.51
MR	13.33	13.33	13.76
cdH	6.67	6.00	7.34
Ecolo	5.00	4.00	2.75
FDF	0.00	1.33	1.38
PTB-go!	0.00	1.33	0.92
PP	0.00	0.67	0.46
French-speaking parties	40.00	42.00	43.12

Notes: The percentages for the sub-state parliaments are artificially calculated based on the Flemish and French-speaking parliaments. The Walloon and German-speaking parliaments are excluded from the calculations.

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distribution is therefore slightly different in the federal upper chamber compared to the assemblies whose Senators originate.

The sixth state reform changed the Senate and the last elections filled it in for the first time, but it was no without problems. Political parties did not agree on the way to interpret the new rules establishing seat allocation. Two issues are worth mentioning considering the article's objective to analyse the impact of the reform on power distribution. The first one is related to the 5% electoral threshold (Reuchamps et al. [2014]) and whether it should be calculated separately for the votes for the Walloon Parliament and for the French-speaking group of the Brussels Parliament or taken altogether to enter into consideration for the seat allocation in the Senate.[10] It was ultimately decided that a party needs to obtain 5% of the votes in each of the two regional assemblies. As a consequence, the radical left PTB-go! could not obtain a seat in the Senate.

The second issue concerns the assembly of origin of the sub-state Senators, especially among the French-speaking assemblies. Based on regional electoral results, it was straightforward to allocate the Senatorial seats between parties. Then, each party was free to pick the regional MPs of their choice. But the larger parties could designate first their Senators and the smaller parties that came after had to choose regional MPs who were missing from the overall allocation. The greens wanted to send a Brussels regional MP as one of the ten Senators designated by the parliament of the French-speaking Community but since the other—larger parties—had already designated three Senators from Brussels, they had to appoint a Walloon regional MP instead.

The same conclusions could have emerged if the gender rules would not have been met: the smaller parties would have been the ones designating the male or female Senator(s) that would have contributed to reach the minimum of 20 (wo)men in the Senate. This rule had no impact in 2014, but such an issue could occur in next elections or in the case of a resignation within the parliamentary term. Since at least 20% of regional MPs resign during their five years term (Dodeigne [2014a]), these rules can bring some instability in the composition of the new Senate.

New Senate, New Senators?

In this final section, we describe the profile of the new Senators after the 2014 elections, in comparison to the profile of former Senators (1995–2014), in order to assess whether or not the reform has changed the face of the Senate. The data used is based on Dodeigne's dataset (2014a) that records all regional and national political careers in Belgium.

Data for 2014 consist in 64 individuals even if there are only 60 Senate seats. The reason is that, since May 2014, there were already four changes in the composition of the Senate due to ministerial appointments. Three regional MPs—designated Senators by the Flemish Parliament—were subsequently called into the Flemish government while one co-opted Senator received a position in the Walloon government. Although there is nothing particular in these changes—level-hopping movements (regional politicians moving to the national institutions and vice-versa) are very common after government formation (Dandoy et al. [2011]; Dodeigne [2014b])—it is however interesting to observe that the Flemish ethno-regionalist party N-VA had designated as Senators two incumbent regional ministers. Despite the fact that dual offices are not permitted for regional ministers and Senators, the designation of two MPs who were very likely to be called again into the Flemish government probably

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underlines the desire for the party to enhance the transformation of the Senate into an assembly of the sub-state entities.

The 2014 Senate is first of all composed of experienced members with only 11 newly elected regional MPs designated as Senators (15.5%). As detailed in Table 4, the other 53 Senators are experienced parliamentarians—from a Belgian viewpoint—who were on average 2.8 to 3.8 legislative terms in office. At the beginning of this new legislature, they have about 100 months experience of parliamentary and/or government service. Yet, the 53 incumbents present very distinct profiles. First of all, only four Senators had a former federal career in the federal parliament. This is not very surprising considering that only co-opted Senators could maintain a position at the Senate without having moved to the regional level. In fact, due to the reduction of the number of federal positions caused by the reform (see above), many incumbent federal MPs (be it at the House or the Senate) had to run for regional elections and then be selected by the regional parliaments in order to 'come back' to the federal political arena. And this strategy was fairly common as 15 Senators used this path after the 2014 elections. As a consequence, many current Senators have multi-level careers. In total, this profile represents 28 members (39.4% of the assembly), inclusive of the 15 level-hoppers at the 2014 elections. Finally, there are 21 regional MPs who had never left the regional political arena, with on average 97.7 months of experience even though there were only 4 legislative terms since 1995.

TABLE 4
The 2014 composition of the Senate, by career pattern

Career patterns	*N*	%	Nb. offices	Exp. (months)
Newly elected	11	15.5	1	N.A.
Federal careers	4	5.6	3.8	103.0
Regional careers	21	29.6	2.8	97.7
Multi-level careers	28	39.4	3.9	113.7
Total	64	100		

Notes: Nb. offices = Number of offices. Exp. (months) = Experience in months. The total is inclusive of the four changes during legislative term. Data collected until October 2014.

In sum, there is a dual picture in the new Senate. On the one hand, a significant proportion of former federal MPs ($n = 20$ or 31.3%) managed to maintain their position at the federal level through the Senate thanks to electoral strategies. Some of them were re-selected as co-opted Senators ($n = 4$) but more importantly, most of them ($n = 15$) used their regional office—where they were first elected in May 2014 after lengthy federal career—as a 'boomerang' towards the federal level. On the other hand, we found experienced regional MPs who served in the regional political arena and who were recently designated to represent their parliament in the Senate. In this respect, the balance of power remains fairly distributed between the regional and federal political arenas. To assess whether the new reform has impacted the Senatorial composition, a comparison across time is needed.

To this end, we briefly detail the political trajectory of the 138 community Senators who previously served or are currently in office at the upper chamber. Based on Senators' regional and federal experience, it is striking to observe that the 2014 Senate—despite the reform—is fairly similar to what has been observed since 1995. First of all, about half of the previous Senators (48.6%) had a 'regional' profile. They were regional politicians who conducted their entire

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careers in regional and community parliaments and/or government (they served on average 2.3 offices over the period 1995–2014) but were once designated as community Senators (Table 5).

TABLE 5
Number of federal offices (House of Representatives and directly elected Senators) other than community Senator, 1995–2014

Nb. of federal offices	*N*	%
> 5	7	5.1
4	6	4.3
3	11	8.0
2	14	10.1
1	33	23.9
0	67	48.6
Total	*138*	*100*

Secondly, in addition to their regional experience, 51.4% of them have nevertheless developed federal careers. Those community Senators are thus best defined by their 'federal' trajectory, which is of two types. On the one hand, some have been elected in the House or as directly elected Senator and they have even been in office for 4.2 federal legislative terms on average. This profile accounts for 27.4% of all the 138 Senators analysed. On the other hand, some used their regional position for career maintenance at the federal level through their office of community Senators (Table 6). Indeed, during the period 1995–2014, 32.6% repeated twice as community Senators, and 15.8% even remained in office for three or four federal legislative terms. In the latter case, regional offices might thus be seen as a stepping stone to maintain a federal career.

TABLE 6
Number of terms as community Senator (except newly elected MPs), 1995–2014

Nb. of terms as community Senators	*N*	%
4 terms	5	5.3
3 terms	10	10.5
2 terms	31	32.6
1 term	49	51.6
Total but newly elected Senators	95	100
First time as community Senators	43	–

Discussion

From 2014 onwards, and for the first time in its political history, the Belgian Senate is no longer directly elected. The upper chamber was thoroughly reformed and is now considered as the 'meeting place' for the sub-state entities, that is, the Regions and the Communities. Such reform raises the question of its impact on power distribution within the Belgian federation. In line with the discourses of the Flemish ethno-regionalist parties, the Senate reform can be seen as a tool for the gradual empowerment of the Regions and Communities and the *de facto* weakening of the federal state or at least as an attempt to reduce the federal character of

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the country (Van Wynsberghe [2014]). However, our analyses demonstrated that even though the mode of designation (most Senators come from regional and community parliaments, while a minority is co-opted) and the number of Senators have changed, it did not dramatically affect the subtle balances upon which the Belgian state relies.

First of all, the seat distribution per linguistic group remains almost exactly the same and does not radically change the representation of linguistic groups in the Senate. Second, it did not lead to a different party composition, as the new Senate seems to be almost perfectly halfway between the composition of the House and those of the sub-state parliaments. This effect is mostly due to the simultaneity of the federal and sub-state elections in 2014. Yet, since the federal cabinet is no longer responsible before the Senate, it did not prevent the establishment of incongruent coalitions at the federal and regional levels. Third, the analysis of the Senators' career patterns also indicates that their profiles are hardly affected by the reform. Two types of profiles have been observed. About half of the Senators had a federal career and remained in the Senate thanks to their position of community or regional Senator. Regional offices are considered as a stepping stone as Senators—albeit a minority—developed a lengthy federal career thanks to this strategy. On the opposite, the other half of the Senators can be considered as genuinely regional parliamentarians who conducted their entire career at the regional political arena except that they serve as regional or community Senators.

Although the effects of the reform are limited and did not alter the pre-existing dynamics regarding the power distribution in the upper chamber, it remains to assess in the future how individual candidates and parties will adapt to the new structure of opportunity. Indeed, only the future will tell us whether the differences in the interpretation of the rules (especially regarding the designation of Senators, their gender and their geographic origin) may create problems when some Senators will resign and will have to be replaced. And in a context of reduction of federal seats following the 2014 reform, will the position of sub-state entities Senators be enhanced as a path to develop federal careers? By contrast, in a context where regional and community parliaments have received an extended scope and depth of power after the sixth state reform, will the regional profile predominate in the future?

Future studies will also allow to test whether this Senate reform will have other implications. First, it has been argued that, following the political gridlock of 2010–11, the government formation process should be revised, among others in its parliamentary aspects. However, as the federal government is not responsible before the Senate (since 1995, the government only needs to rely on a majority of seats in the House), we expect that the new Senate will have no impact on these issues. A second argument used by parties for justifying the Senate reform was to save public money. The indirect appointment of Senators implies that the Senate is no longer in charge of the salaries of the Senators and their staffs as they are covered by their sub-national parliaments. The reduction of the Senate's competencies and its number of sessions also should lead to a reduction of the costs related to the permanent staff. Finally, there were two different perspectives among the parties that negotiated the Senate reform. The 'minimalists' believed that the Senate should be reduced to a mere meeting place for sub-state entities while the 'maximalists' argued that it should also play a role regarding debates around important societal issues and transversal questions. Given the power distribution within the federal government (where the Flemish ethno-regionalist party remains isolated on these issues), it is likely the second perspective drives the scope of the future activities of the Senate. The first legislative term of the new Belgian Senate will undoubtedly provide tentative answers to these hypotheses.

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

NOTES

1. There also existed a fourth type of Senators: the king's children (or by default the heir to the throne) may chose to seat as *ex officio* Senators at the age of 18.
2. *Moniteur Belge—Belgisch Staatsblad*, 31 January 2014.
3. Modifications to the article 44 (12 July 2012) and articles 74–82 (6 January 2014) of the Constitution.
4. These two types of Senators will also differ financially speaking. Senators from the sub-state entities will financially depend on the sub-state entity level that also holds the power to determine the amount of their treatment. Co-opted Senators will be paid by the Senate's allowance. This could lead to different incomes depending on the type of Senator.
5. The Flemish parliament gathers both the competences of the Flemish regional parliament and the Flemish community parliament.
6. These ten Senators must include three French-speaking members of the parliament of the Brussels region among which one that does not sit in the parliament of the French-speaking community.
7. With the exception of the German-speaking Senator, who is elected by his/her parliament at the absolute majority of expressed votes.
8. Electoral code, art. 220 §7.
9. This contrasts with previous constitutional customs where the German-speaking Senator was sometimes included in the quorum, depending on the arithmetical context to pass the laws.
10. Electoral code, art. 210 decies § 2.

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