

The Central Perspective ***Belgium and Flanders***

International Conference

**Qualified Autonomy and Federalism versus Secession in the EU
and its Member States**

February 26-28, 2014

Empire Hall

Esterházy Palace, Eisenstadt, Austria

Min REUCHAMPS
Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium

Guiding questions

1. How does the centre (central political institutions, state-level political parties, statewide media) position itself vis-à-vis the secessionist challenge (confrontational/restrained; emotive/evidence-led etc)?
2. How does the centre mobilise in its opposition to secession (commitment of resources/time in government and parliament; prominence of the issue in media and policy debate at the centre; key themes in opposing secession)?
3. How do parties/governments/media in other sub-state units position themselves vis-à-vis the secessionist challenge?

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Short answers for Belgium

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3. *How do parties/governments/media in other sub-state units position themselves vis-à-vis the secessionist challenge?*
Short answer: From ‘no understanding’ to ‘what else can we do?’

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 - 3. From 'no understanding' to 'what else can we do?'*
- 4. What's holding Belgium together?**

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Factors

Main facts

Impact

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Historical

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Short-term history of tensions

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Figure 1
GDP per capita by Region

	2000	2005	2010
Brussels	50000	57300	61300
Flanders	24400	28700	32500
Wallonia	17800	20800	24100

Source: epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu

Figure 2
Personal income tax by Region (Belgium = 100)

	1995	2000	2005	2008
Brussels	93	90	86	83
Flanders	105	107	106	107
Wallonia	93	91	94	94

Source: Belgian federal government

Table 1

GDP per capita by province (2010)

UE 27	24500	
Belgium	32700	
Brussels	61300	
Flanders	32500	
Province Antwerpen		37600
Province Vlaams-Brabant		34500
Province West-Vlaanderen		30700
Province Oost-Vlaanderen		29500
Province Limburg		26700
Wallonie	24100	
Province Brabant wallon		35900
Province Liège		24300
Province Namur		23400
Province Luxembourg		22000
Province Hainaut		21300

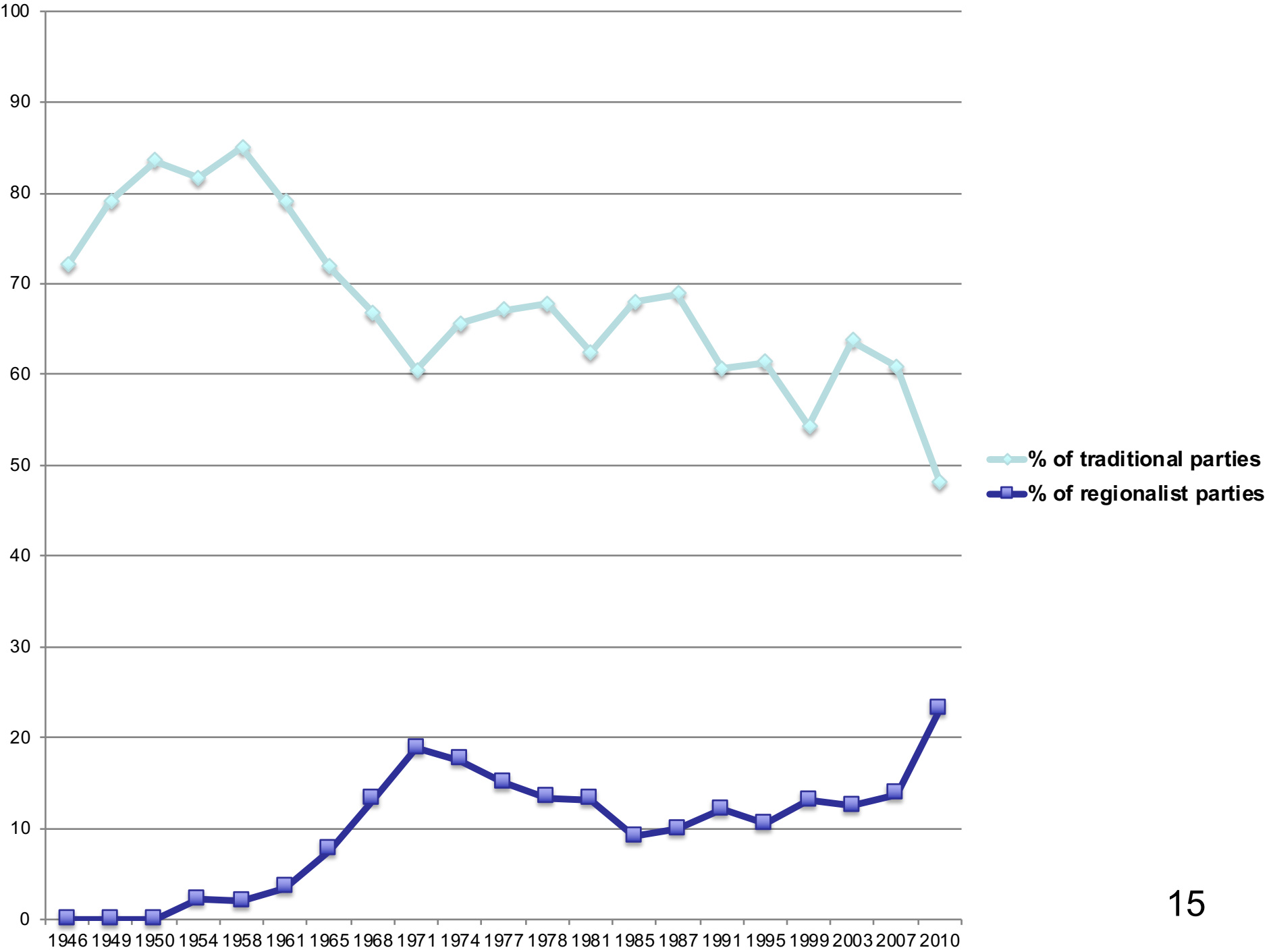
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Political	Macro: → no agreement on federal model Meso: → no national parties + regionalist parties Micro: → voters & citizens	



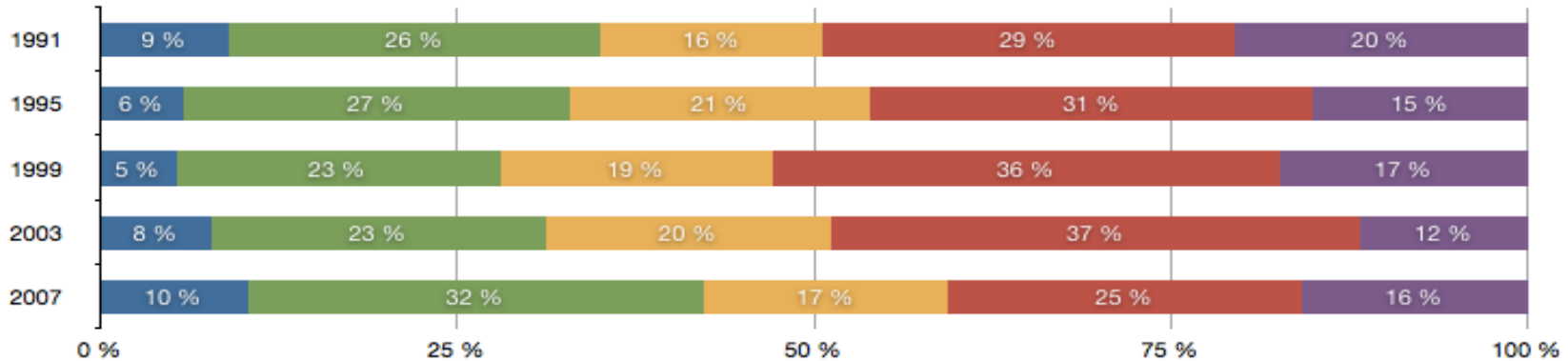
“Flanders/Wallonia decides everything”

vs.

“Belgium decides everything”

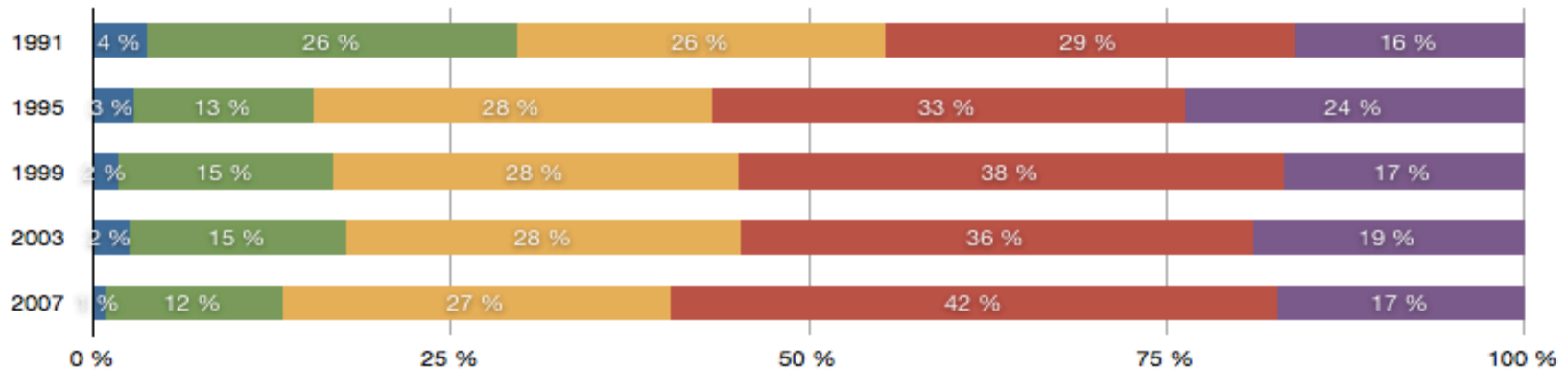
Data from ISPO/PIOP

Flandre décide de tout vs. Belgique décide de tout (5 catégories)



■ Flandre décide de tout (0) ■ Flandre > Belgique (1-4) ■ Ex aequo (5) ■ Belgique > Flandre (6-9) ■ Belgique décide de tout (10)

Wallonie décide de tout vs. Belgique décide de tout (5 catégories)



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Symbolic	The King, the Red Devils, chocolate or beer?	Difficult to assess

3. How do parties/governments/media in other sub-state units position themselves vis-à-vis the secessionist challenge?

Short answer: *From 'no understanding' to 'what else can we do?'*

•Parties:

- No national parties but region-wide parties
- No regionalist parties anymore: FDF is a pro-Belgium party, at least pro-Francophones

•Governments:

- Federal government with a French-speaking PM
- Increasing intergovernmental coalitions: R. vs F.

•Media:

- Might be tempted by clichés (eg. Byebye Belgium)
- Still believe in Belgium

2. How does the centre mobilise in its opposition to secession?

Short answer: *State reform(s) and thus 'hollowing the center' + 'paradox of federalism'*

- State reform(s)
 - From a center dominated by French-speaking elites to a center dominated by Dutch-speaking elites, with veto right for French-speaking elites
 - Six state reforms in 43 years (average of 7 years)
- 'Hollowing the center'
 - Solutions to the tensions: hollow the center
 - Waffle-iron policy
- 'Paradox of federalism'
 - Federalism as secession-reducing but also secession-inducing
 - The last reform?

1. How does the centre position itself vis-à-vis the secessionist challenge?

Short answer: *No real center, or better two centers: either Dutch-speaking or French-speaking*

- No real center
 - Federal government is made of Dutch-speaking parties and French-speaking parties
 - But only accountable in their own community
- Centrifugal dynamics
 - Hardly no centripetal incentives
 - Above all: saliency of the issue is very low among the population
- State-wide actors?
 - No state-wide political party
 - No state-wide media
 - The missing links?