

THE 1965 BELGIAN GOVERNMENTAL CRISIS

■ - *Xavier Dabe* -

In 1965, Belgium suffered the longest political crisis in its history, the first in a long series. It was sparked by the voting through, under the previous parliament, of a declaration to revise the Constitution, at a time when views on language and language Community issues were becoming more polarised. The crisis resulted in recourse to unusual negotiating methods, and was a precursor of the institutional and partisan developments which would change the country for ever.

This article aims to understand the real role played by the revision of the Constitution in this crisis. To do so, we will examine the role of the various protagonists and their positions. We shall also highlight the solutions proposed to the conflict between the language Communities and the negotiation processes used, as well as tracing various chronological stages in the development of the crisis. We will try, when it is relevant, to include this approach in Lipset and Rokkan's cleavage theory, which applies particularly well to Belgian politics in the 1960s. The specific circumstances, however, will also be examined within a broader timeframe, in order to analyse the crisis as an expression of a set of latent developments.

This research approach required the use of unpublished archives, such as the archives of the informateur, of the formateur² and of the party presidents. We consulted the private party archives of PSC-CVP, PSB-BSP and PLP-PVV, as well as the press and published sources³.

We shall begin by describing the precursors to the crisis, before explaining in more detail its various phases. The period under study begins with the task of the informateur, August de Schrijver, and continues with the two main stages in the work of the formateur, Pierre Harmel. We finish by describing some of the specific features of the latter's government, before considering what guidelines we can draw from this crisis as part of a more general approach to the language Community divide in Belgium at the dawning of the State reforms.

I. The origins of the crisis

From the 1950s language demands to the language legislation and the revision of the Constitution (1950-1965)

As of the 1950s Belgian political life witnessed the increase of one of the well-known cleavages described in Lipset and Rokkan's theory: the centre-periphery divide, generally likened to the language or 'communities' conflict in Belgium. After a long time of polarisation around the 'Church versus State' cleavage during the School War (1952-1958)⁴, the School Pact opened the door to this other divergence in Belgian political discussion. This was especially obvious with the

re-awakening of the Flemish movement, materialised in the creation of the party Volksunie in 1954 and its first electoral success in 1961⁵. The general strike of 1960-1961, caused by the infamous 'Loi Unique – Eenheidswet' of the Eyskens government, also made it clear that the language issue could permeate the socio-economic disagreements between the North and the South. It gave birth to the 'Mouvement Populaire Wallon' that was willing to fight in favour of the Walloon economy, whose decline of the industry contrasted with the growing of Flanders'. After the General Strike, the language cleavage could thrive.

The early 1960s was therefore a time of profound political change in Belgium. A significant revision of Belgian language legislation took place following tough negotiations between the two parties in the Lefèvre-Spaak government (1961-1965). Indeed, the pressure from the *Vlaams Aktiekomitee voor Brussel en Taalgrens*, the coordinating body of several Flemish cultural organisations, intensified as of 1959 and it urged the government to amend the 1932 language law⁶, as it feared an increasing move towards French in the Brussels suburbs, already clear from the language census organised in 1947⁷. The revindication eventually spread to the Flemish parliamentarians of the PSC-CVP, who raised their voices under the pressure⁸. Language censuses were officially abol-

1. SEYMOUR MARTIN LIPSET and STEIN ROKKAN, *Party systems and voter alignments: an introduction*, The Free Press, 1967.

2. To examine the papers of the formateur, Pierre Harmel, we consulted his individual archive at the Archives Générales du Royaume in Brussels, as well as a set of personal notes which he left in his will to his biographer, Vincent Dujardin. For these latter documents, we give the sources, followed by the abbreviation 'Doc. Pers.'

3. Unfortunately, only the records from the PSB-BSP were relatively exhaustive, and there was no archive from the presidents of the PSC-CVP and the PLP-PVV for the year 1965.

4. The School War was a conflict between the Christian (PSC-CVP) and secular parties (PSB-BSP and Liberal Party) which lasted for six years, and concerned, in particular, the issue of subsidies to independent schools (especially faith schools). It was resolved by the 1958 School Pact between the three traditional parties. (EMMANUEL GERARD and MARK VAN DEN WIJNGAERT, *In het teken van de regenboog. Geschiedenis van de katholieke partij en van de christelijke volkspartij*, Antwerp, 1985, p. 51-52.)

5. EMILIE VAN HAUTE, "Volksunie, Nieuw-Vlaams Alliantie, Spirit, Vlaams-Progressief", in PASCAL DELWIT, JEAN-BENOIT PILET and EMILIE VAN HAUTE (dir.), *Les partis politiques en Belgique*, Brussels, 2011, p. 210.

6. The 1932 language law, which re-stated the main principles of the 1921 law, created four language areas in Belgium, and a movable language border. It also granted specific treatment for certain communes (including external bilingualism for those where language-use was mixed). (STÉPHANE RILLAERTS, « La frontière linguistique, 1878-1963 », in *CH CRISP*, no. 2069-2070, 2010/24, p. 37.)

7. The 1932 law set out an 'external bilingualism' requirement, which applied in an administration if the language census, organised in theory every ten years, showed that the first language of at least 30% of the population in a commune differed from that of the local administration.

8. *Idem*, p. 57-58.

ished on 24 July 1961; new legislation on the use of languages was consequently needed⁹. The VAK organised then two ‘marches on Brussels’ in October 1961 and 1962 to assert the Flemish nature of the capital and oppose the linguistic projects of the new cabinet causing even more tension.

The search for a solution to the language disputes was a two-stage process. The first stage was launched in 1962 by the Minister of the Interior, Arthur Gilson. This involved mainly defining the language border between the Dutch and French-speaking parts of Belgium, but not in the Brussels region. Following many clashes between Walloon and Flemish politicians in Parliament, the language border was established in the law of 8 November 1962. This law required the ‘communes’ (municipalities) to use the administrative language of the region to which they belonged. Many ‘*communes égarées*’ (‘stray communes’), i.e. communes where a majority of the population used a language different from that of their language region, were added to a district or province in another language region, to ensure linguistic homogeneity within each region. The law transferred the region of Mouscron-Comines to the province of Hainaut, and the Fourons to the province of Limburg, in accordance with this principle¹⁰. The transfer of the Fourons to Flanders led to protests by both Walloon politicians and the local population¹¹.

The second stage took place in 1963. This involved the status of Brussels and its periphery, where the French-speaking population was constantly growing. When it was impossible to reach agree-

ment between the French and Flemish-speakers, the Prime Minister, Théo Lefèvre, presented his resignation to the King on 2 July 1963. Baudouin refused to accept it, and a conclave was organised in Val Duchesse, between representatives of the two parties in government. Finally, the PSC-CVP and PSB-BSP agreed that Greater Brussels would still be made up of nineteen bilingual communes, but also that six communes in the Brussels periphery would be granted ‘language facilities’. The laws of 30 July, 2 and 9 August 1963 thus modified the use of languages in teaching, administration and in judicial processes, structuring Belgium into a State made up of four near-homogeneous language regions. Only a few communes still had language ‘facilities’.

The language laws of 1962-1963 were seen by many French-speakers as a ‘Flemish victory’. This is confirmed by the voting record on the 1962 law: it was adopted by a majority made up largely of Flemish parliamentarians, who were more represented in the population and therefore in Parliament. Francophone dissatisfaction with the Gilson laws resulted in an increasingly hard-line position in the Walloon movement, which had been very active since the major strikes¹², and in the birth of a political movement representing the French-speakers of Brussels: the ‘*Front Démocratique des Bruxellois de langue française*’ (FDF)¹³.

The Lefèvre-Spaak government did not stop at language legislation. On 24 October 1962, it set up a ‘political working group’ to prepare a revision to the Constitution, to ‘*doter le pays d’une charte fondamentale adaptée aux besoins de son*

9. *Idem*, p. 37-41.

10. *Idem*, p. 72.

11. On 28 October 1962, in a local referendum organised in the six communes involved, almost 93% of votes were in favour of keeping the Fourons in the province of Liège. A demonstration was also organised in Liège on 24 October. However, the MPs did not take account of this in their final vote on the law. For more information see: «Le problème des Fourons de 1962 à nos jours», in *CH CRISP*, no. 859, 1979/34.

12. The Mouvement Populaire Wallon (MPW) was created in November 1961, by André Renard. It called for a federalist system and structural reforms. (FREDDY JORIS, *Les Wallons et la réforme de l’État. De l’État unitaire à l’État communautaire et régional (1890-1970)*, Charleroi, 1998, p. 125-126.)

13. On this subject, see: CHANTAL KESTELOOT, «De la liberté linguistique au fédéralisme: les débuts du FDF», in *DFD 50 ans d’engagement politique*, Brussels, 2014, p. 51-84.

avenir et aux aspirations des deux Communautés [linguistiques]'.¹⁴ On 14 January 1964, it set up the 'Round table Commission for institutional reform', made up of representatives of the two parties in power (PSC-CVP and PSB-BSP) and the main opposition party (the PLP-PVV, formerly the Liberal party until 1961, when it adopted a new name, a new political programme and abandoned its secular attitude). On 20 January 1965, after long discussions, the PLP-PVV left the institutional negotiations, after a proposal was made by the Socialists¹⁵ to introduce a 'special majority' vote to amend Belgian language laws. According to the PLP-PVV, such a voting system would be disastrous, mathematically-speaking: the PSC-CVP in Flanders would have enough votes (at the time, 51 % of the members of a language group) to easily veto and prevent any amendments to the language legislation in favour of the French-speakers, whom the Liberals sought to defend¹⁶.

Finally, an agreement between the PSC-CVP and the PSB-BSP was signed on 26 January 1965, mentioning that they would both support it regardless the results of the coming elections, and a declaration of amendment to the Constitution was published in the *Moniteur belge*, the Belgian official gazette, on 17 April. This amendment entailed the setting-up of Cultural councils, as well as several decentralisation and delegation mechanisms. A 'Permanent Commission for the Improvement of Community relations', designed to 'improve and promote relations between the Communities' and to 'prepare a status' for Greater Brussels, would also be established. In terms of language, there would also be a new article 3bis, proposed by the

Socialists, to add a special majority requirement for changes to the language legislation, in response to Flemish fears of changes to the legislation harming their interests: '*La Belgique comprend quatre régions linguistiques. (...) Le vote des lois portées en vertu du présent article n'est pas acquis si, non-obstant la majorité simple, il fait apparaître l'opposition de la moitié plus un des membres inscrits dans un groupe linguistique*'. This article was the main factor behind the Liberals' withdrawal from the agreements, since it would lead to a standstill in the language legislation. Finally, a new article 38bis was added, this time in response to the fears of the Walloon population that they would be marginalised, and setting out the main lines of an 'alarm bell' system¹⁷. An 'exceptional motion' brought by at least three quarters of the members of a language group could be used to declare that a draft law or proposal was likely to harm inter-Community relations. A special procedure would then be followed: if two thirds of the members of a language group were against it, the draft law would have to go to a second reading. If the opposition from a language group remained, the draft would be sent back to the Government¹⁸.

In accordance with Article 131 of the Constitution (currently Article 195), a revision of the Constitution takes place in two stages. Firstly, the two Chambers of Parliament decide, by a simple majority, which articles will be revised; then, after the dissolution of Parliament, the newly elected Chambers can revise the same articles with a two-thirds majority. For this reason, after the Chambers were disbanded, legislative elections were organised for 23 May 1965.

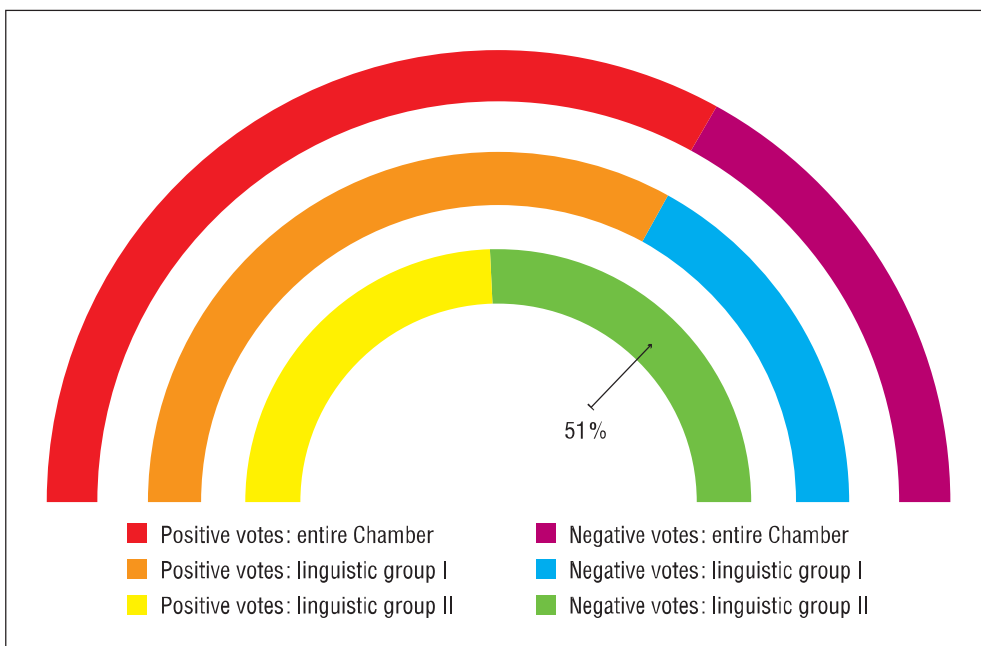
14. « Déclaration gouvernementale lue par le Premier ministre Théo Lefèvre à la Chambre le 2 mai 1961 et au Sénat le 2 mai 1961 », p. 4. On this subject, see: ALAIN STENMANS, « Le groupe de travail politique (24 octobre 1962 – 24 octobre 1963). Jalons d'une évolution institutionnelle », in *CH CRISP*, no. 1818-1820, 2003/33.

15. This Socialist proposal was in fact an alternative proposal to a demand from the Flemish Christian Social party, calling for an amendment to Article 23 of the Constitution, proclaiming language freedom in Belgium. (AYMÉ FRANÇOIS, *De l'État unitaire à l'État fédéral. La dynamique institutionnelle de la Belgique*, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1997, p. 118-119.)

16. See: « La révision de la Constitution (I) et (II) », in *CH CRISP*, no. 280-281, 1965/12-13.

17. This alarm bell system allowed the French-speaking language minority in Parliament to prevent a law being voted through by a majority essentially made up of Flemish MPs, who were more numerous, as occurred with the first language law (1962). This procedure is currently enshrined in Article 54 of the Belgian Constitution.

18. Conclusions of the PSC-CVP and PSB-BSP delegations on the work of the commission for institutional reform (IEV, *Papiers Léo Collard*, no. I-A-1.03.)



The principle governing voting on language issues, introduced in Article 3bis, published in the *Moniteur belge* on 17 April 1965. A language group can impose a veto if 51% of its members vote against a legal draft or proposal for language legislation, even if there is a simple majority in favour in the Chamber of Representatives.

	Chamber	Senate	Mean
PSC	32%	32%	32,00%
PSB	26,27%	25,98%	26,13%
PLP	20,08%	19,93%	20,01%
VU	6,22%	5,67%	5,95%
PC	4,24%	4,68%	4,46%
FDF	1,34%	1,32%	1,33%
FW	0,43%	0,44%	0,44%
PWT	0,42%	0,39%	0,41%
Other parties	1,88%	1,31%	1,60%
Blank and null	7,12%	8,27%	7,70%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

Proportion of votes obtained by the parties in Parliament in the elections of 23 May 1965. (« Élections législatives. Résultats des élections du 23 mai 1965 », in *Moniteur belge*, 1965.)

The electoral upheaval of 23 May 1965

The 'Round Table' agreements of 26 January had a far-reaching consequence: the PSC-CVP and PSB-BSP were the only parties to fully support them. It was therefore vital for them to obtain a two-thirds majority in both the Chamber and the Senate after the elections, so that these agreements could be enshrined in the Constitution.

The electoral campaign was marked by confusion and contradictions. An analysis of the parties' manifestos¹⁹ shows three key elements. Firstly, there was a clear split between the parties formerly in power (PSC-CVP and PSB-BSP) and the opposition, with the former supporting the revision to the Constitution and the latter formally against. There was a further division among the opposition parties, which disagreed on which adjustments should be made to the institutional reform. On one side of the divide was the PLP-PVV, defining itself as a 'unitary' party, and which felt that the Round Table agreements were an indicator of federalism, or even of dissolution of the country itself; on the other were several regionalist parties calling for greater regional autonomy. This latter group included the Volksunie, as well as new parties such as the Front Wallon (FW), and the Parti Wallon des travailleurs (PWT)²⁰. And then there was the recent language issue. In the view of the French-speaking Liberals and FDF representatives, it was essential that the language legislation be revised in favour of the Brussels French-speakers, and, to a lesser extent, French-speakers in the Fournons. The government parties and the Volksunie, however, claimed that the language issue was already settled.

The elections of 23 May 1965 can be seen as a break with the traditional stable voting pattern of the Belgian electorate. They show three phenomena: considerable volatility, greater fragmentation of votes and contradictory reactions to Community-issues.

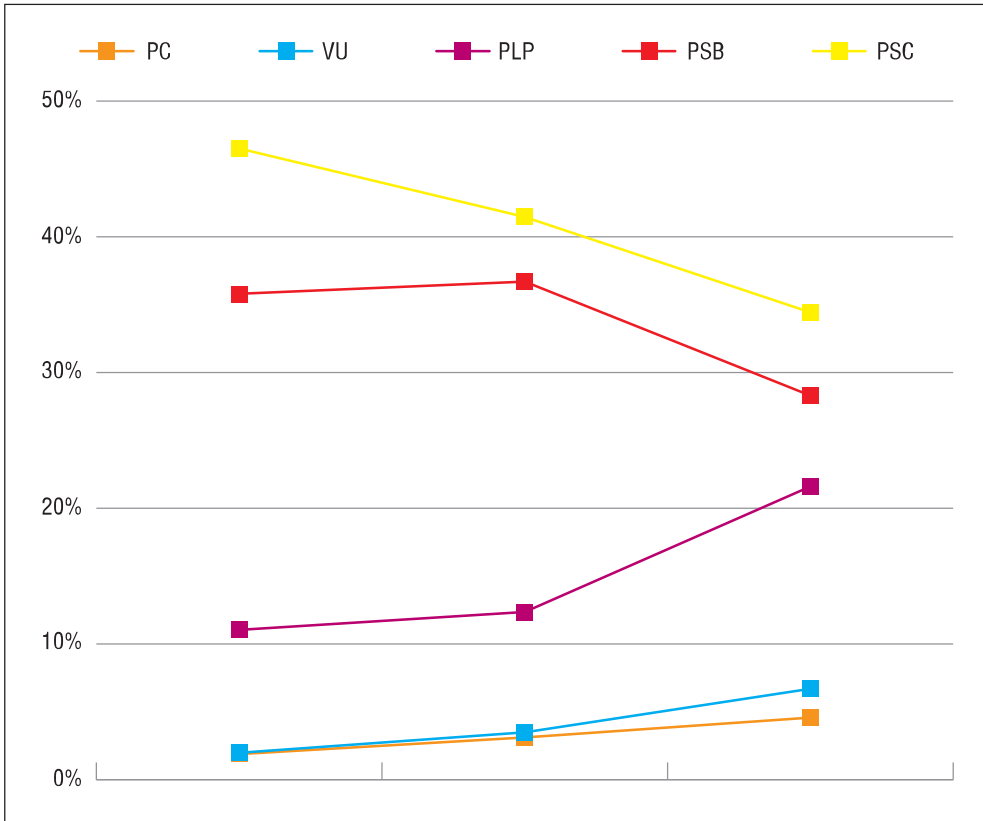
While the hierarchy between the parties was similar to that obtained in previous elections, the results showed clear differences. The PSC-CVP, with 34.45% of the votes (not counting blank and invalid votes) obtained its worst result since 1939. The PSB-BSP only obtained 28.28% of the votes, its worst outcome since the introduction of universal suffrage in 1919. However, the PLP-PVV won its greatest victory since 1919. The Volksunie and the Communist party saw a substantial increase in their votes. The proportion of blank or invalid voting papers increased from 4.96 to 7.12% between 1958 and 1965; this can be interpreted as indicating disapproval of government policy.

These fluctuations resulted in greater fragmentation of votes. The striking defeat of the PSC-CVP and PSB-BSP meant that they lost 39 seats in the Chamber and 27 in the Senate. The PLP-PVV increased the number of its seats from 20 to 48 in the Chamber and from 20 to 40 in the Senate. The number of Volksunie representatives in the Chamber went from 5 to 12. Finally, for the first time in Belgian political history, representatives of the Walloon parties were elected to the Chamber (one seat for the FW and one for the PWT); the FDF also had representatives in the Chamber (three seats) and in the Senate (one seat). This greater fragmentation, that joins Sartori's definition of 'moderate pluralism' in segmented societies²¹, had one

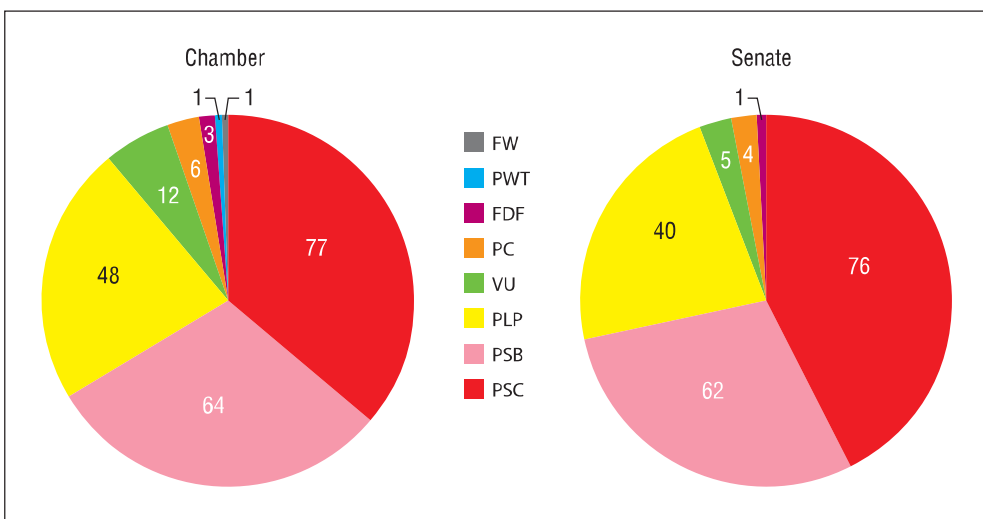
19. We analysed the manifestos of the parties gaining seats in the parliament following the 1965 elections: the PSC-CVP manifesto for the 1965 legislative elections (IEV, *Archives du PSB-BSP*); the PSC-CVP manifesto for the 1965 legislative elections (CPCP, *Archives du PSC-CVP*, no. 6.2.6.); the PLP-PVV manifesto for the 1965 legislative elections (CJG, *Archives du PLP-PVV*); Congrès de Bruxelles, 28 mars 1965 (*Idem*, no. 16A); G. VAN DE PUT, "Verkiezingsprogramma's", in *Res Publica*, no. 8/1, 1966, p. 67-105.

20. The FW is a Walloon regionalist party, an offshoot of the MPW, set up by the Charleroi politician Robert Moreau on 19 January 1964. (« Le Parti Wallon (FW) », in *CH CRISP*, no. 367, 1967/21, p. 3-4.) The PWT was formed just after the PSB-BSP 'incompatibility congress' on 12 and 13 December 1964, by François Périn, when the Socialist party refused continued membership for MPW leaders who supported federalism. (ROBERT FALONY, *Le Parti Socialiste. Un demi-siècle de bouleversements, de Max Buset à Elio Di Rupo*, Brussels, 2006, p. 80-81.)

21. GIOVANNI SARTORI, *Parties and party systems. A framework for analysis*, Colchester, 2005, p. 154-164.



The results obtained by the parties in legislative elections to the Chamber of Representatives (1958-1965) (« Les élections législatives du 23 mai 1965 », in CH CRISP, no. 288, 1965/20.)



Breakdown of seats per party in the Chamber and the Senate (1965) (« Les élections législatives du 23 mai 1965 », in CH CRISP, no. 288, 1965/20.)

important consequence: the PSC-CVP and PSB-BSP, with 141 out of 212 seats in the Chamber, no longer had the two-thirds majority needed to vote through, without support from another party, the 26 January agreement. They therefore had to reach agreement with the opposition if they were to adopt the constitutional revision as a whole.

The results of the elections of 23 May 1965, as well as hastening the end of the bipartisan politics present in the Belgian political system since the Liberation, confirmed the contradictory political atmosphere. The votes were given to parties opposed in the centre-periphery spectrum. The winning parties in the elections fell into two categories: those favouring unitarism (the PLP-PVV), and those which supported greater regionalisation (the Volksunie, FW, PWT and, to a lesser extent, the FDF). The PSC-CVP and the PSB-BSP, that showed a more consensual attitude towards the cleavage, were the big losers. On 25 May, the *Volksgazet* summed up this confusion perfectly: *‘Wij hebben (...) geschreven dat de Belgen gekozen hadden voor de verwarring en de moeilijkheden, door aan hun mistevredenheid uiting te geven in alle denkbare richtingen.’*²² However, the results should not be reduced to this cleavage only, as social and economic issues also thrived in the electoral campaign. The Lefèvre cabinet brought a general dissatisfaction caused by the language legislation, but also because of its fiscal policy, its poor management of the budget and the many foreign loans it had taken out, resulting in a steep increase of the public debt. This situation had been roundly criticised by the Liberals whose political manifesto demanded budgetary consolidation²³. The decline of the salience of the philosophical cleavage opened the gates to the socio-economic and centre-periphery cleavages. Those two were ever more overlapped, for example in Wallonia where the regionalisation demands of the PWT and the FW – the political

emanation of the MPW – were connected to the willingness of economic reforms. An illustration of this structural change in Belgium cleavages organisation is the success of the new ‘formula’ chosen by the Liberals in 1961. The party shifted from its original position around the ‘Church versus State’ cleavage, which might explain the less-wide potential electorate because of religious matters before 1965²⁴. Now opened to Catholics and carrying an unrivalled ‘political offer’ – the defence of the Belgian unity combined with a right-wing policy, the party won the elections as its objectives were more relevant to the current issues.

II. The task of the ‘informateur’ made more difficult by the parties (1 June – 17 June)

The Belgian governmental formation process is a customary practice composed of four steps: the royal consultations and the appointment of an ‘informateur’ and a ‘formateur’ supposed to be looking for a coalition; the negotiations between parties in order to write a government declaration; the allocation of portfolios and the appointment of ministers; finally, the agreement of parties’ congresses and of the Chambers²⁵. However, we shall focus on the first two stages in this paper.

Following the elections, King Baudouin began the royal consultations. These discussions were secret, so we have no precise information as to their content. Nevertheless, two main trends could be seen in the press with reference to the forthcoming government negotiations.

On the one hand, some felt that the electorate, by voting mostly for opposition parties, had spoken out against the PSC-CVP/PSB-BSP alliance and the Round Table agreements signed by these parties. A government should therefore be formed

22. *Volksgazet*, 25 May 1965, p. 1.

23. PLP-PVV manifesto for the 1965 legislative elections (CJG, *Archives du PLP-PVV*).

24. On this subject, see: DANIEL-LOUIS SEILER, *Clivages et familles politiques en Europe*, Brussels, 2011, p. 126.

25. RÉGIS DANDOY, « La formation des gouvernements... », p. 305.

without reference to the constitutional issue, which should be debated later by the Parliament²⁶. Others said that the constitutional issue could be linked to the formation of the government. In that case, the future government should reach a tripartite agreement on the constitutional revision and on a government programme. Many political commentators believed that the latter approach would result in a tripartite government²⁷.

Most support for the first hypothesis came from Walloon Liberals and Christian Social politicians, who put economic interests before the language split. They would form a PSC-CVP/PLP-PVV government in response to the 'labour policy' pursued by the Lefèvre government over the previous four years²⁸. In order to do so, they would need to put on hold the main policy difference between these two parties: the revision of the Constitution²⁹. The supporters of the second option, however, were mostly Flemish Christian Social members and the Socialists³⁰. The priority, in their view, was to resolve the Community issue. The Flemish Christian Social politicians, under pressure from the Volksunie, wished for a sort of cultural autonomy for the regions, while the Socialists sought to address the emergence of Walloon parties with strong demands for regional economic regeneration³¹.

On 1 June, the King appointed an informateur: the former president of the PSC-CVP, August de Schrijver, who had not stood for election³². This nomination might seem surprising, as De Schrijver had opposed the return of Léopold III at the time of the Royal Question³³. Nevertheless, there were probably two main reasons for this choice, as well as possible interventions from the parties of which we have no record. De Schrijver, firstly, was a peacemaker figure at a time of crisis: he had been a member of the second Van Zeeland government (1936-1937) on the eve of the Second World War, of the Pierlot government, from 1943, and had taken on the role of Minister for the Congo and for Rwanda-Urundi at the height of decolonisation³⁴. Moreover, as well acting as mediator, the former minister had played a key part in the discussions which led to the Round Table agreements. As Chair of a sub-committee on domestic issues, he had become somewhat of an expert on Article 3bis, which had led to the PLP-PVV leaving the negotiations³⁵. The King may, therefore, have chosen him in acknowledgement of the crisis-situation, but also to help conclude the 'new pact for Belgium'. This is reflected in the task he gave to De Schrijver: *'Sa première tâche consistera à rechercher la possibilité de former un gouvernement disposé à mener à bien la révision de la Constitution et donc de trouver une majorité*

26. This hypothesis was first mentioned by the Christian Social President of the Senate, Paul Struye. (*De Standaard*, 26 May 1965, p. 1.)

27. i.e. a government bringing together the three traditional parties (PSC-CVP, PSB-BSP and PLP-PVV), considered at the time to be the only democratic parties, unlike the regionalist and Communist parties.

28. The Liberals' electoral campaign involved frequent denunciations of the 'labour'-style policies of the Lefèvre government, referring to the policies of the Labour party in the United Kingdom. (PLP-PVV manifesto for the 1965 legislative elections (CJG, *Archive du PLP-PVV*).

29. *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 26 May 1965, p. 1.

30. *Volksgazet*, 28 May 1965, p. 1.; *Le Soir*, 28 May 1965, p. 1.

31. During the 1960s, the Walloon movement and Walloon identity became politically important. This movement, initially a cultural force, gained in strength as a workers' movement, particularly during the strikes of the winter of 1960-1961. It called for a solution to the 'Wallonia crisis', characterised by, in particular, the decline of the coal industry. (FREDDY JORIS, *Les Wallons et la réforme de l'État...*, p. 123-125.)

32. At the time, the appointment of an informateur was not common. It was only the case when several coalition formulas were technically possible, or when the formation was expected to be difficult. (RÉGIS DANDOV, « La formation des gouvernements... », p. 306.)

33. GODFRIED KWANTEN, *August-Edmond De Schrijver (1898-1991). Politieke biografie van een gentleman-staatsman*, (KADOC Studies, 27), Leuven, 2001, p. 386.

34. GODFRIED KWANTEN, JOS VERHOOGEN and LUC VINTS, *Inventaris van het archief van Minister van Staat August E. De Schrijver (1898-1991)*, (KADOC inventarissen en repertoria, 34), Leuven, 1993, p. 2-4.

35. GODFRIED KWANTEN, *Politieke biografie van een gentleman-staatsman...*, p. 598-607.

au Parlement.³⁶ The revision of the Constitution, and therefore the language cleavage, is at the core of this first step of the formation of a government.

We have very little record of the early work done by the informateur: we know only with whom De Schrijver met. The political parties, moreover, still in shock from the election results, said little as to possible participation in the government. The only decisions taken, in fact, related to the revision of the Constitution. The PSC-CVP and PSB-BSP recalled that this was the priority³⁷, while the PLP-PVV tended to advocate dealing with the government issue separately from the constitutional question, to prioritise socio-economic matters³⁸.

On 7 June, De Schrijver sent the presidents of the three traditional parties a confidential memorandum with ten points. His aim was to find common ground between the three major political forces. Most of the points in the memorandum concerned the constitutional revision, particularly Articles 3bis/38bis and the language laws. However, this attempt by the informateur to find a peaceful solution lasted just one day. On 8 June the PLP-PVV issued an official, public communiqué. In it, the party stated that it would agree to negotiate a revision to the Constitution if the other parties agreed that Article 3bis and the language laws be put to a commission for discussion³⁹. Then, on 9 June, the president of the Liberal Party, Omer Vanaudenhove, told the RTB radio station that his party would be happy to join the govern-

ment, but that he wished the future government to bring forward several points from his political programme, preferably in a PSC-CVP/PLP-PVV coalition⁴⁰. The press soon described these views as inflammatory⁴¹. Firstly, the PLP-PVV would agree to retain protection of the Walloons in Parliament (Article 38bis), but not the corresponding article for the Flemish (Article 3bis), which would be discussed in a commission and revisited to the benefit of the French-speakers. Moreover, setting conditions for a coalition government at that time without providing an immediate solution to the main point at dispute was seen as amounting to a wish to stay in opposition. These demands led to a de facto break between the Socialists and Liberals: from 12 June, the PSB-BSP refused to discuss with the PLP-PVV anything other than the revision to the Constitution⁴². From then on, therefore, the informateur's task would be limited to seeking a rapprochement on the constitutional issue, no longer to agreeing on a government.

On 12 June, the PSB-BSP General Council met. The atmosphere was highly-charged; several Walloon Socialists claimed that what the party needed was a stint in opposition. Collard, the party president, claimed that the defeat showed the need to review the party's public relations and communication methods⁴³, while the Walloon members called for changes to the party's political programme, focusing on the principles set out in the Charter of Quaregnon⁴⁴. The PSB-BSP, in response to the PLP-PVV statements, refused to work with

36. Éphémérides du mois de juin 1965 (KADOC, *Archief August-Edmond De Schrijver*, no. 4.15.1/2).

37. Léo Collard, PSB-BSP president, recalled the priority of this issue following a political bureau meeting on 31 May. (Article « Il est d'intérêt national », 2 June 1965 (IEV, *Papiers Léo Collard*, no. IV-5).) The PSC-CVP also took on this position from 3 June. (*Le Soir*, 4 June 1965, p. 2.)

38. Vanaudenhove declared in the press on 5 June: 'Le PLP-PVV, quant à lui, tout en estimant que la révision de notre Charte fondamentale est incontestablement l'une des grandes étapes de notre histoire (...), se doit de constater que certaines questions économiques et financières réclament une solution immédiate. (...) À notre sens, il serait extrêmement regrettable, sinon dangereux, que les négociations relatives à la révision de la Constitution retardent ou paralysent la formation du gouvernement (...).' (*La Dernière Heure*, 5 June 1965, p. 1.)

39. Communiqué from the PLP-PVV executive committee, 8 June 1965. (AGR, *Papiers Harmel*, no. 560).

40. *La Libre Belgique*, 11 June 1965, p. 1.

41. *Volksgazet*, 11 June 1965, p. 1.

42. *Le Soir*, 12 June 1965, p. 6.

43. Report from Léo Collard to the PSB-BSP General Council, 12 June 1965 (IEV, *Papiers Léo Collard*, no. I-A-3.2).

44. *Le Soir*, 13 June 1965, p. 1 et 3.

the PLP-PVV at all, in any colour of government, and stated that Article 3bis should be maintained, unless the Liberals could suggest an equivalent or better alternative⁴⁵. The gap between the left and the right was deepening.

In this tense situation, the informateur decided to hold a meeting of the three party-leaders, on 13-17 June, to attempt to find an alternative solution to Article 3bis and its corollary Article 38bis, and thus to remove the main hindrance to the formation of a government. At these meetings of the political leaders, several alternatives were put forward by three individuals: De Schrijver, Paul Vanden Boeynants, the PSC-CVP president, and Omer Vanaudenhove. Léo Collard made no proposals. These 'high-level negotiations', a typically Belgian way to seek compromise, did not reach agreement, but did enable progress to be made in the discussions, which until then had stalled.

In fact, the main bone of contention between the PLP-PVV and the other parties was that Article 3bis, with its right of veto for a language group over legal drafts seeking to amend the language legislation, spoke of a figure of 51%. In the eyes of the PLP-PVV, this was too low; the PSC-CVP, given its political strength in Flanders, could by itself prevent any revision to the Gilson legislation. Yet the PSC-CVP's pro-Flemish position was opposite to that of the Liberals. The PLP-PVV papers, moreover, show how important this issue was seen to be within the party, and how much hatred was felt for the Christian Social position. The archive papers for 17 June read as follows: *'la législation linguistique, dans la mesure où elle a été proposée par les extrémistes du PSC-CVP, repose sur un idéal archaïque, à savoir les prétendus droits du sol, de la race, du sang, de la langue.*

*On y retrouve la devise hitlérienne: Blut und Boden.*⁴⁶ The PLP-PVV also believed that such an article would result in an everlasting partnership between the two parties behind this hated legislation, as the Liberals alone could not reach the 51% and thus trigger the veto.

The alternatives to Article 3bis therefore tended to focus on this right of veto, and most proposed a merger of Articles 3bis and 38bis into one sole article, to make procedures easier. De Schrijver suggested a right of veto for two thirds of a language group (66.6%)⁴⁷, which the PSC-CVP and PSB-BSP considered too high⁴⁸. Vanden Boeynants proposed keeping the Article 3bis procedure, but putting the article to a committee specialised in language issues, and which reflected, in its political composition, the situation in Parliament. Under this proposal, the 51% veto would remain, and the committee would just be a mini-version of the two Chambers: for this reason, Vanaudenhove turned it down. Léo Collard also rejected it, since some members of this committee would be non-parliamentarians⁴⁹. Finally, the PLP-PVV leader saw two possible solutions. The first would be to add a prior stage – that of Article 38bis – to the Article 3bis procedure. In order to activate the threefold majority (in the Chamber and in each language group) described in Article 3bis, there would first need to be a vote on an exceptional motion supported by at least 75% of the members of a language group⁵⁰. Thus, by stating that Article 3bis would no longer be triggered automatically, and by adding a prior 'alarm bell', the PLP-PVV increased the language group veto to 75% (as set out in Article 38bis). As no one party – neither French-speaking nor Dutch-speaking – had such a large majority in Parliament, the PLP-PVV could prevent MPs from one sole party holding up dis-

45. *Le Peuple*, 14 June 1965, p. 2.

46. Comments made on the note from the Centre Paul Hymans on the constitutional and linguistic problems, 17 June 1965 (CJG, *Archives du PLP-PVV*, Bureaux directeur permanent/Comité politique 1963-1965, no. 1).

47. Suggestions made by August De Schrijver on Articles 3bis and 38bis (KADOC, *Archief August-Edmond De Schrijver*, no. 4/15.1/2).

48. Personal notes taken by Léo Collard at the meeting of 16 June 1965 (IEV, *Papiers Léo Collard*, no. II-C.1.-02).

49. Personal notes taken by Léo Collard at the meeting of 15 June 1965 (*Idem*).

50. *Idem*.

cussion of language legislation. It hoped, in this way, to change the language situation in Brussels without the Flemish veto. This formula, which raised the percentage which could impose a veto from 51 % to 75 %, was obviously rejected by the other two party-leaders. In their view, the alarm bell, in this case, should be sounded at 51 %, which thus also brought the right of veto down to 51 %⁵¹. Faced with this refusal, Vanaudenhove then offered to accept the original Article 3bis, or an alternative to this, as long as the language legislation was changed beforehand. This proposal was completely unacceptable to the other two parties. They felt that the Commission for the Improvement of Community relations should, in the long term, take on this task⁵².

The fact that the PSC-CVP and the PSB-BSP imposed a veto of 51 % can possibly be explained by the 'minimal winning coalition' theory. This concept developed by William H. Riker⁵³ postulates that political parties seek to minimise the required number of parties to make a coalition, within the scope of maximisation of their influence. In the case of a veto of 51 %, the Christian Social politicians and the Socialists had a sufficient parliamentary basis to reach the veto in a language community, alone or together. Therefore, they did not need to accommodate their views with the Liberals', and they could enhance their political influence. This would not have been the case if the higher veto demanded by the PLP-PVV had been chosen. Furthermore, those two parties had the closest positions on language issues (they both signed the agreement of 26 January), while those of the unitarian and liberal party were quite

different (the Liberals did not sign the agreement). According to political scientists, this ideological proximity favours a greater probability of a coalition⁵⁴, and thus greater chances of agreements between the Christian Social and Socialist politicians on language matters, which could explain the Liberals' fear of an 'everlasting partnership' between them.

However, by the time that August De Schrijver had completed his task, the situation was clearer. As his consociational approach enlightened, the main area of disagreement concerned the language laws and the related Article 3bis, particularly the right of veto for language groups. Once this last disagreement was resolved, therefore, a government could finally be formed.

III. National unity or disunity? The task of Pierre Harmel (18 June – 28 July)

After this initial progress towards an agreement, the King relieved De Schrijver of his duties on 17 June and appointed a formateur: Pierre Harmel, the former Christian Social Minister for Public Education (1950-1954), Justice (1958), Cultural Affairs (1958-1960) and the Civil Service (1960-1961). The formateur's mission in the forming process is to find a coalition supported by a parliamentary majority, to establish the guidelines of the governmental declaration, and to form a government team⁵⁵. Once again, this was a careful choice. Harmel had also played an active part in the discussions of the Round Table Commission⁵⁶. Like De Schrijver, he enjoyed mediating, brokering peace and establishing a

51. Personal notes taken by Léo Collard at the meeting of 16 June 1965 (*Idem*).

52. *Idem*.

53. See: WILLIAM H. RIKER, *The theory of political coalitions*, New Haven, 1962.

54. NICOLAS BUÉ and FABIEN DESAGE, « Le 'monde réel' des coalitions. L'étude des alliances partisanes de gouvernement à la croisée des méthodes », in *Politix*, n°88, 2009/4, p. 15-16. Theoretically, the PSC-CVP, as a 'pivot' on social and economic matters, could easily agree with both the left and the right to make a coalition. However, as the party had quite closer positions to Socialists regarding language issues and thus a greater ideological proximity, it could prioritise a coalition with the PSB-BSP rather than with the PLP-PVV.

55. BERNARD WALEFFE, *'Le Roi nomme et révoque ses ministres.' La formation et la démission des gouvernements en Belgique depuis 1944*, Brussels, 1971, p. 47-48.

56. « La révision de la Constitution 1964-1965 (I) »..., p. 10.

modus vivendi, and had made constant efforts to foster peace between the Communities ever since he had joined Parliament⁵⁷. Finally, Harmel was closely allied with the Palace. He was close to King Baudouin, and had, for a long time, been friends with the King's 'chef de cabinet' (private secretary), André Molitor, who was also Harmel's own former chef de cabinet⁵⁸. There were therefore close links between the formateur and the Palace.

News of his appointment, however, did not please the Socialists, whose Walloon wing was already attracted by the idea of the opposition. Harmel was someone they had battled against during the recent School War. In 1961, he had declined the Interior portfolio as he disagreed with the structure of the government and the fact that most of social and economic departments were owned by Socialists, and he had abstained from the vote of confidence⁵⁹. He embodied the right wing of the PSC-CVP, while the PSB-BSP had specific left demands, which led to growing distrust between the PSB-BSP and the formateur⁶⁰.

The impossible constitutional compromise (June 1965)

Harmel also believed that the government crisis could only be resolved with agreement on the Constitution. On 17 June, he spoke to the press of the need '*que le problème constitutionnel soit abordé avant tout autre par les dirigeants des trois partis (...)*'⁶¹. Although he declared that he had no clear ideas on the government to be formed⁶²,

his private notes make it clear that he wished to try to form a tripartite government, seeking agreement between the three main political groups, both on the constitutional revision and on a government programme⁶³. This position determined his first talks.

Harmel began his duties by gathering extensive information from around fifty important figures, between 21 and 25 June. We still have some notes from these talks. They show that, with regard to the Constitution, the PLP-PVV demanded that the Gilson laws be revised as soon as possible, while the PSB-BSP was adamant that this should not occur before a vote on Article 3bis⁶⁴. Within the PSC-CVP, views were less clear-cut. Struye saw an urgent need to form a government, while Henri Moreau de Melen, a former minister and friend of Pierre Harmel, asked the formateur to give priority to resolving the constitutional issue⁶⁵.

There was even more disagreement on who should be in a governing coalition. In the view of Vanaudenhove, '*le corps électoral a voulu un gouvernement PSC-CVP-PLP-PVV, c'est un gouvernement de droite qu'il faut*'⁶⁶. The Flemish Socialists were in favour of another PSC-CVP/PSB-BSP coalition, while the French-speakers preferred to be in the opposition. Nevertheless, like the Liberals, they were against the idea of a tripartite government. Within the PSC-CVP, finally, the Flemish refused to work with the PLP-PVV – probably due to their strong disagreement on the language issue – while the Walloons were split as to the best approach to take⁶⁷.

57. He had also been responsible for setting up the 'Centre Harmel' on social, legal and economic problems in Wallonia and Flanders, which aimed to find solutions to the differences between the Communities. (VINCENT DUJARDIN, *Pierre Harmel. Biographie*, Brussels, 2004, p. 754-760.)

58. *Idem*, p. 12; p. 780.

59. *Idem*, p. 382-385.

60. *Volksgazet*, 19 June 1965, p. 1 and 6.

61. Taken from *La Libre Belgique*, 19 June 1965, p. 1.

62. *Le Soir*, 20 June 1965, p. 1.

63. Note drawn up by the formateur's private office, 23 June 1965 (Doc.Pers.).

64. Talks between Pierre Harmel and Hougardy, Vanaudenhove and Grootjans (AGR, *Papiers Harmel*, no. 560).

65. Talks with Paul Struye (*Idem*). ; Letter from Henri Moreau de Melen to Pierre Harmel (AGR, *Papiers Harmel*, no. 546).

66. Talks with Vanaudenhove (AGR, *Papiers Harmel*, no. 560).

67. Talks with Collard, Van Acker, Leemans, Struye, Lefère and Vanden Boeynants (*Idem*).

Following these talks, Harmel began drafting his proposals. At this point, the PLP-PVV intervened once again. On 25 June, they gave the formateur and the press a document once more setting out their position. All the document in fact did was present the points they had made to De Schrijver ten days or so previously⁶⁸. But it expressed in more detail their position on revision of the language laws: the PLP-PVV called for the Fourons to be returned to the province of Liège, and for completely new arrangements for Greater Brussels and the Brussels periphery. It insisted that the six communes with language facilities, established in the 1963 law, be included in Greater Brussels, and that language facilities be introduced in the other communes in the periphery, to create a 'zone de rencontre'. The Liberals also opposed legislation on the use of languages in private companies and in schools⁶⁹.

Vincent Dujardin had found a proposal apparently made by Harmel to the PLP-PVV. According to this proposal, two communes with language facilities would become part of Greater Brussels, two of the French-speaking communes in the periphery – it was not clear which – would become bilingual, and the Fourons would return to Liège⁷⁰. In the formateur's archives, we found a letter from Arthur Gilson, the former Minister of the Interior, on 'les trois communes wallonnes de la périphérie bruxelloise': this seems to suggest that this proposal was indeed made⁷¹. The title of the letter suggests that the two French-speaking communes were among those referred to in Gilson's first (abortive) plan (1962): Braine-le-Château, Waterloo and La Hulpe⁷². According to this version of events, the formateur's proposal was accepted by

the presidents of the three parties, which could have resolved the constitutional crisis. However, the Brussels federation within the PLP-PVV then rejected it⁷³, thus preventing any agreement and restricting the number of communes in Greater Brussels, even till today, to nineteen.

On 26 June, Vanaudenhove, at a speech given in Louvain, declared that he would only form a government with the PSC-CVP if the latter agreed to the essential points in the Liberal programme⁷⁴. These demands were soon criticised by Vanden Boeynants: 'Il va falloir se décider, et non plus lancer des tracts électoraux par les portières. Être sérieux, cela veut dire ne pas rester sur le bord de la route, dans un parking peïnard, de crainte de griffer ne fût-ce qu'un pare-chocs'⁷⁵. It was another hard blow for the formateur's plans to form a government. Harmel, moreover, was receiving numerous, contradictory language demands, in addition to those of the PLP-PVV⁷⁶.

On 28 June, Harmel made his final proposals in a memorandum addressed to the presidents of the three parties. With regard to the Constitution, he suggested a return to Omer Vanaudenhove's proposal, i.e. to merge Articles 3bis and 38bis, and to add a prior alarm bell system to the Article 3bis procedure so that it would no longer be automatic. However, the exceptional motion would only be triggered if voted through by 51% of the members of a language group, not 75%, as in the case of the original Article 38bis⁷⁷. A veto, therefore, could still be obtained with 51%, although the procedure was no longer automatic: this was far from the 75% veto demanded by the Liberals.

68. Proposals made by Vanaudenhove to Harmel, 25 June 1965 (Doc.Pers.).

69. *Idem*.

70. VINCENT DUJARDIN, *Pierre Harmel...*, p. 392-393.

71. Note from Arthur Gilson to Pierre Harmel (AGR, *Papiers Harmel*, no. 546).

72. STÉPHANE RILLAERTS, *La frontière linguistique...*, p. 77.

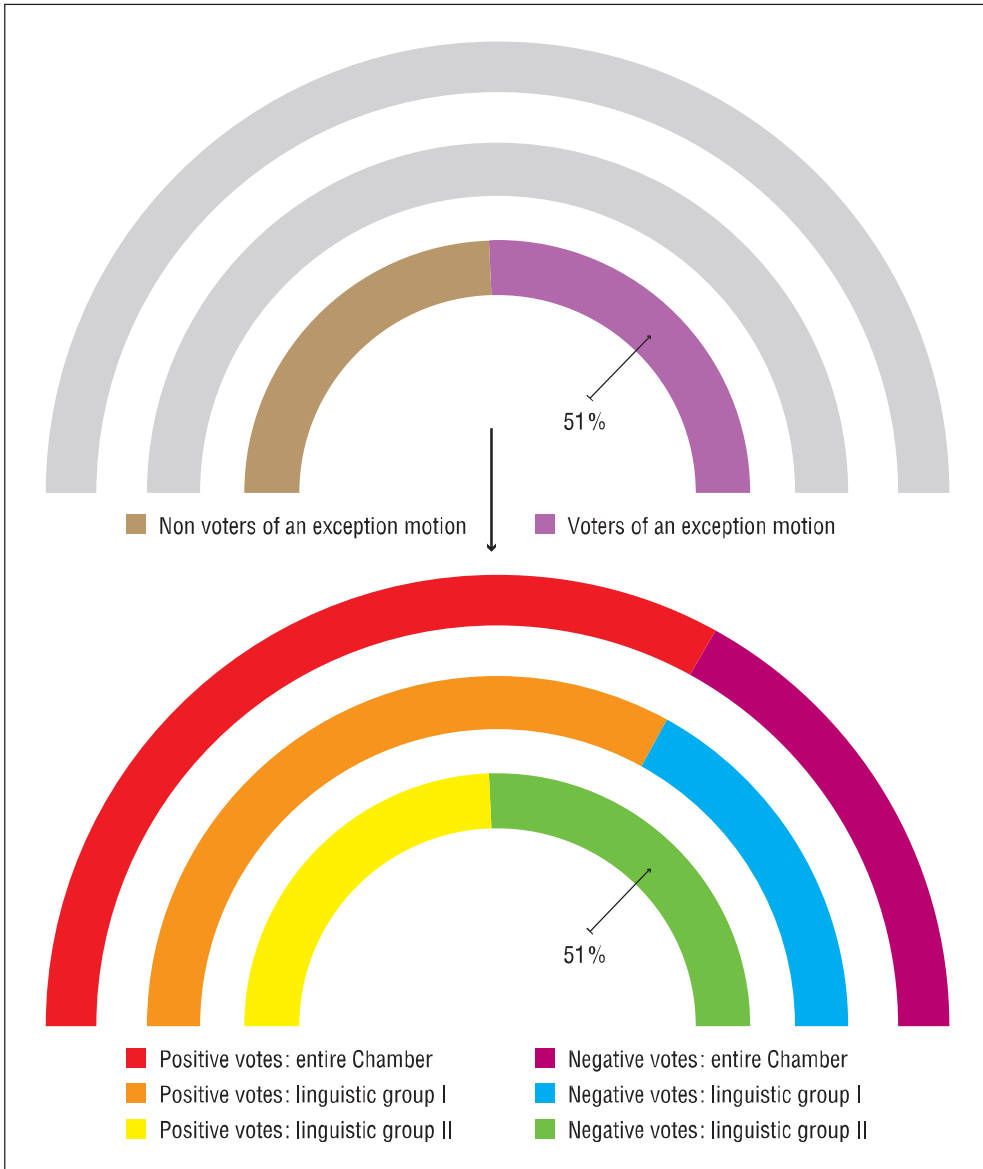
73. VINCENT DUJARDIN, *Pierre Harmel...*, p. 393.

74. *Le Soir*, 27 June 1965, p. 2.

75. *La Libre Belgique*, 28 June 1965, p. 2.

76. Letters from the *Rassemblement pour le Droit et la Liberté*, the *Association pour le retour de la Voer à Liège*, and demands from the *Vlaams Volksbeweging*.

77. Memorandum from the formateur, 28 June 1965 (Doc. Pers.).



This shows the voting procedure for Article 3bis, according to Pierre Harmel's memorandum of 28 June 1965. This time, the triple majority is no longer automatic, but the support of 51 % is needed to activate the veto, not the 75 % veto demanded by the PLP-PVV.

Harmel also proposed the immediate creation of the National Commission for the Improvement of Community relations, as set out in the Round Table agreements, in order to resolve the language dispute as soon as possible. Finally, he suggested the formation of a tripartite government, despite the general criticism of this idea. In his view, a 'national unity government' was needed in the country's difficult circumstances⁷⁸. He explained that by having the constitutional revision as his top priority, he was undertaking to keep both the parties which signed these agreements (the PSC-CVP and the PSB-BSP) out of opposition⁷⁹. If the PLP-PVV, therefore, refused to take part in a tripartite government, only one possibility, according to Harmel, remained: a return to the PSC-CVP/PSB-BSP alliance.

It is difficult to know why Pierre Harmel made this choice, as no clear explanations are given in the source documents. Emmanuel Gerard has referred to possible support from King Baudouin⁸⁰. In practical terms, Harmel also explained to the press that he feared the PLP-PVV forming a government in alliance with only one of parties which had signed the Round Table agreements. The PLP-PVV was calling for revision of the language legislation. In Harmel's view, it could not achieve this without support from the PSC-CVP and PSB-BSP, which had worked on these issues over a whole term in office. Also, if it were to make changes to the Round Table agreements, any party pushed into opposition would tend to reject these amendments. On this point, he declared the following:

*'Il y a un grand risque qu'un gouvernement du PLP-PVV avec un parti seulement de l'ancienne coalition entraîne le retrait de tout l'accord de l'autre grand parti qui serait dans l'opposition et cela en raison même des modifications que le PLP-PVV réclamerait du parti avec lequel il gouvernerait'*⁸¹. Finally, at a more individual, personal level, Harmel saw the revision of the Constitution as the highest priority. He had stated this many times in articles published some years previously⁸²: in his eyes, Belgian unity would lead to a reform of the institutions by means of a national agreement, and a tripartite government seemed the best way to achieve this. Indeed, he confirmed this idea in an interview given to Jean-Claude Ricquier in 1993⁸³.

Failure of the tripartite idea and polarisation on social-economic issues (July 1965)

The three parties responded by 30 June. The PSC-CVP was the only party to accept the formateur's proposal⁸⁴. Both the PSB-BSP and the PLP-PVV refused a tripartite coalition. On the Constitution, the PSB-BSP viewed the formateur's alternative as too complicated⁸⁵. The PLP-PVV, however, saw it as a basis for discussion⁸⁶. Everything was not lost, although the public were becoming rather sceptical⁸⁷.

Harmel met with Vanaudenhove on 1 July. The PLP-PVV president suggested two changes to Harmel's alternative proposal for Article 3bis:

78. *Idem*.

79. *Idem*.

80. EMMANUEL GERARD, « Le Roi Baudouin, le gouvernement et la politique intérieure », in *Le Roi Baudouin. Une vie – une époque*, Brussels, 1998, p. 123.

81. Memorandum from the formateur, 28 June 1965 (Doc. Pers.).

82. On this subject, see, for example: PIERRE HARMEL, « Au-delà du fédéralisme et de l'unitarisme, l'union des Belges », in *Revue générale belge*, April 1962, p. 1-16.; *Id.*, « L'union des Belges », in *La Revue générale belge*, no. 18, November 1963, p. 1-12.; *Id.*, « Pourquoi l'union des Belges appelle-t-elle à une révision des institutions? », in *Revue de la Société d'Études et d'Expansion*, no. 210, March-April 1964, p. 186-196.

83. *Id.*, *Temps forts. Entretien avec Jean-Claude Ricquier*, Brussels, 1993, p. 83.

84. *Le Soir*, 30 June 1965, p. 1.

85. Resolution of the PSB-BSP Bureau, 29 June 1965 (IEV, *Papiers Léo Collard*, no. I-A-1.09).

86. Reply from the PLP-PVV Executive Committee to the formateur's memorandum, 30 June 1965 (AGR, *Papiers Harmel*, no. 554).

87. *De Standaard*, 29 June 1965, p. 1.

either the prior exceptional motion had to be approved by 66% of the members of a language group (as a compromise between the formateur's 51% proposal and the initial 75% PLP-PVV proposal), or the language legislation would be changed before the vote on Article 3bis⁸⁸.

These options, however, were rejected by the PSC-CVP and the PSB-BSP. On 1 July, Harmel gave up his attempts to reach agreement with the Liberals and turned to the Socialists. This was the start of another very tense period, in which the positions of the PSC-CVP and PSB-BSP became entrenched, and in which individual initiatives would play an increasingly important role.

While the King had already agreed to extend Pierre Harmel's duties as formateur, the latter had to await confirmation from the PSC-CVP National Committee before he could continue his task. During this meeting, Vanden Boeynants apparently dropped a few potential 'banana skins' in the way of the formateur⁸⁹, before finally renewing his trust in him.

Between 5 and 9 July, delegations of PSC-CVP and PSB-BSP experts met to discuss the economic, financial and social priorities of the future government. Even though the two parties agreed about the language matter, the socio-economic issues would henceforth cause a strong disagreement, symptomatic of the traditional 'left versus right' cleavage. At this time, we can also perceive a change in the process of negotiations: they had initially followed a sequential logic, but from

now on they would adopt a synchronic and gradual logic⁹⁰. The discussions soon focused on two demands from the Socialists: on the one hand, the PSB-BSP called for nationalisation of the electricity sector, in order to continue with the rationalisation process which had been on-going since 1955. On the other hand, it asked for increased supervision of holding companies, requiring private lending institutions to do more in the collective interest, and calling for their merger operations and financing to be monitored⁹¹. These two points, pushed by the FGTB since 1954⁹², were strongly rejected by the PSC-CVP representatives, whose alternative proposals were unacceptable to the Socialists, especially the Walloons. Vanden Boeynants acknowledged in private that: '*Pour l'électricité, les socialistes n'ont rien obtenu, pour les holdings ils demandaient un arbre et nous leur avons offert une fleur...*'⁹³ After five days of discussions, the PSB-BSP's political bureau rejected the draft government programme which had emerged from the negotiations, largely because of these two points⁹⁴. It must be noted as well that another disagreement concerned the formateur's propositions of social policies, considered broadly inadequate by the Socialists, but still very close to the Liberals' electoral programme⁹⁵.

In these discussions, we should highlight the role played by figures from the business community, such as Albert Thys, Secretary General of the Electricity Management Committee, and Roger De Staercke, President of the FIB, in countering the Socialist position⁹⁶ and that of the FGTB⁹⁷. The discussions, moreover, became more ideological,

88. Note from the formateur to the presidents of the three national parties, 1 July 1965 (Doc. Pers.).

89. Note from the formateur's private office, 1 July 1965 (*Idem*).

90. The negotiations were at first monopolised by the revision of the Constitution. Afterwards, all the economic, financial and social discussions were worked in parallel in working groups, and the sensitive files were set aside and handled at the end of the process. (RÉGIS DANDROY, « La formation des gouvernements... », p. 311.)

91. PSB-BSP programme for the 1965 legislative elections (IEV, *Archives du PSB-BSP*).

92. PASCAL DELWIT, *La vie politique en Belgique de 1830 à nos jours*, Brussels, 2010, p. 152-153.

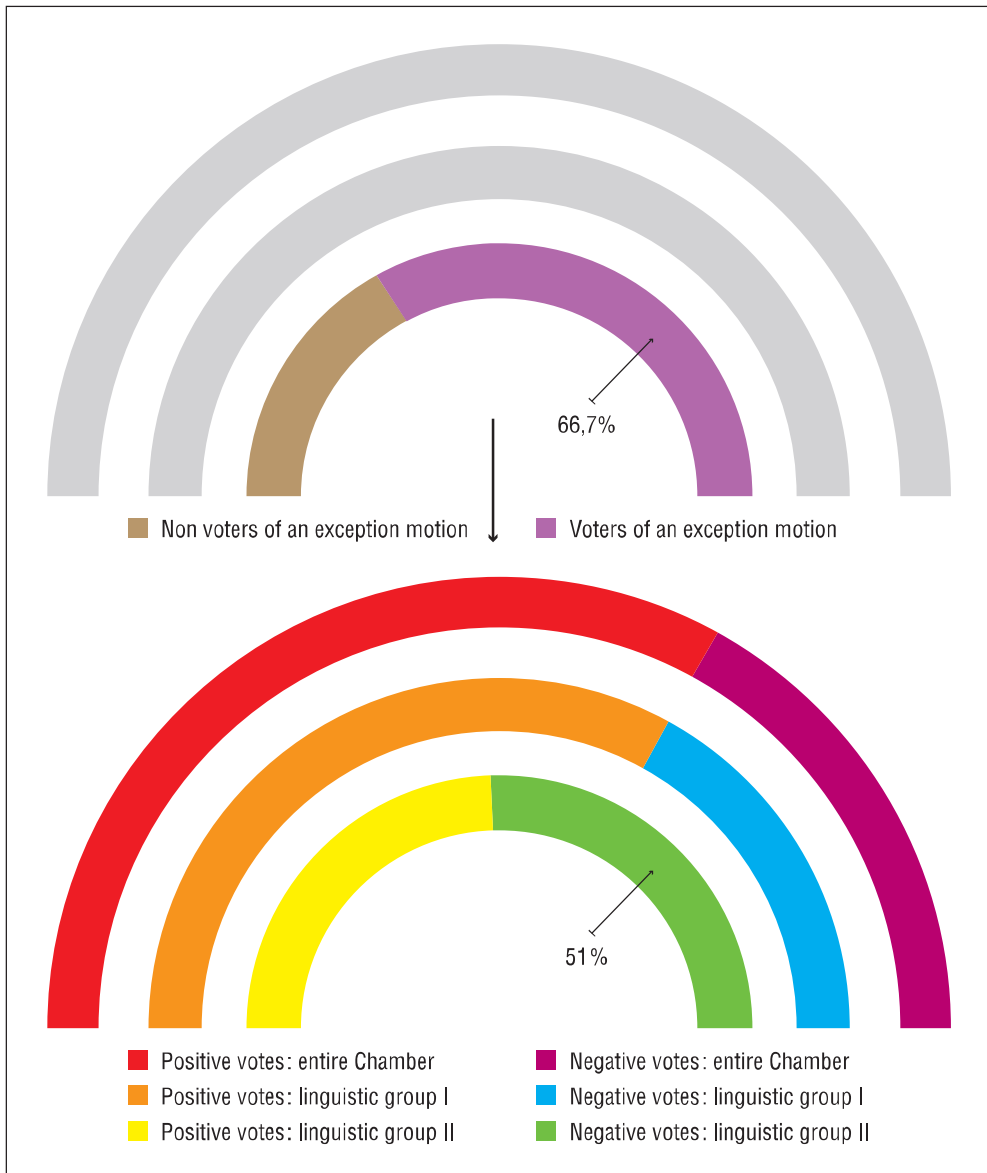
93. Hand-written note from the formateur's private office, 8 July 1965 (Doc.Pers.).

94. *La Libre Belgique*, 12 July 1965, p. 4.

95. Report from the meeting of 8 July between the delegations, 9 July 1965 (Doc.Pers.).

96. Letter from Albert Thys to Pierre Harmel (AGR, *Papiers Harmel*, no. 546); Letter from Roger De Staercke to Paul Vanden Boeynants (AGR, *Papiers Harmel*, no. 545).

97. Notes written by A. Delourme, FGTB President (IEV, *Papiers Léo Collard*, no. II-C.1.-02).



Voting mechanism proposed by Omer Vanaudenhove to Pierre Harmel on 30 June 1965. The threefold majority would only be needed when 66.6 % of a language group supported an exceptional motion, which raises the language community veto from 51 to 66 %.

in a clash between Paul Vanden Boeynants' conservative approach and the progressive ideas of the Socialist Antoine Spinoy, who gradually replaced Collard in the discussions. Vanden Boeynants, in fact, expressed privately to Harmel his wish to abandon discussions with the PSB-BSP and to turn to the Liberals⁹⁸, a feeling shared, for the first time, by some of the Flemish members of the Christian Social party⁹⁹, but also by the business community¹⁰⁰. In contrast with the 1961 cabinet formation, the conservative wing of the PSC-CVP – portrayed by Vanden Boeynants – which wanted at the time to pursue the coalition with the PLP-PVV, seemed to strengthen. This can arguably be explained by the latest defeat of the party in the 1965 election, after its participation in the Lefèvre-Spaak government which had constantly been criticised by the conservative part of the National Committee of the party¹⁰¹, and by the victory of the PLP-PVV that defended a right-wing policy.

This difficult deadlock was broken by the intervention of new figures. The first of these was the former Prime Minister Théo Lefèvre. In a letter dated 13 July, he gave Harmel some words of advice: he should not *'accepter le débat avec Collard seul. Il faut toucher un Spaak et un Spinoy par exemple. Au lieu de reprendre la discussion sur tel ou tel point de la note, il faut jeter sur le tapis la répartition des compétences dans le gouvernement. Ceci ne veut pas dire qu'il faut mettre des noms sur les portefeuilles. Ainsi beaucoup de méfiances seront dissipées. Essaye enfin de refondre la note en un tout qui ait de la gueule. Si dans ce tout, la réponse aux questions-prétextes des socialistes peut être fondue, ce sera bien.'*¹⁰² A second figure to play an

important role was André Molitor, the King's private secretary. In a letter, he too advised his friend Harmel to address Spaak in the negotiations, rather than Collard, the party president, who had been taking a back seat for several weeks. To help with this, Molitor himself organised a discreet meeting between Spaak and the formateur, and invited Harmel to share his new proposals with the Socialist politician, since Spaak would be in a better position to convince the Socialists of the benefits of being part of the government¹⁰³. Harmel followed this advice, and immediately began to negotiate with Spaak and Spinoy. After some discussions, another note was sent to the Socialist Bureau. It did not fully meet the Socialist objectives, but was closer to these than the first note.

By this time, mid-July, the atmosphere was difficult. Harmel feared another refusal from the PSB-BSP, in which case he felt he would himself be unable, after so much chopping and changing, to form a PSC-CVP/PLP-PVV coalition. Also, as he said to his staff: *'Encore faut-il que le Roi accepte que je fasse cette nouvelle tentative.'*¹⁰⁴ The role of the King seemed a priori essential in this second stage of the process. This is probably because the King's 'power of influence' in the forming of a government increased at times of crisis. In these situations, according to Francis Delpérée, Baudouin shed his usual reserve and took action¹⁰⁵. Finally, however, on 15 July, the Socialist Bureau agreed to convene a congress, so that its militants could vote on whether the party should help form a government. The Bureau, however, did not accept this idea unanimously: fifteen members voted in favour, eight voted against and two abstained. The opponents of the programme

98. Note from the formateur's private office, 12 July 1965 (Doc. Pers.).

99. The disagreement on economic and financial issues became more important than language issues for some Flemish Christian Social members, according to Vanden Boeynants. This was a first: they were ready to shelve the language and Community issue for a time and work more closely with the Liberals. (*Idem.*)

100. Franz De Voghel, Vice-Governor of the National Bank, and Roger De Staercke had increasing doubts as to whether Pierre Harmel should remain as formateur, given his desire to create a coalition with the Socialists at any cost. (*Idem.*)

101. PAUL WYNANTS, « Le 'centre': histoire et sens d'un positionnement politique pour le PSC-CVP », in PASCAL DELWIT (éd.), *Le Parti social-chrétien. Mutations et perspectives*, Brussels, 2002, p. 53.

102. Letter from Théo Lefèvre to Pierre Harmel (AGR, *Papiers Harmel*, no. 560).

103. Note from the formateur's private office, 13 July 1965 (Doc.Pers.).

104. *Idem.*

105. FRANCIS DELPÉRÉE, *Chroniques de crise 1977-1982*, Brussels, 1983, p. 158.

were all French-speakers, thus highlighting the divisions among the Socialists¹⁰⁶. The manoeuvre which helped to replace Collard with Spaak in the negotiations seemed to have worked: it had been Spaak, apparently, who had encouraged several French-speakers to agree to the convening of the congress¹⁰⁷. The journalist Manu Ruys concluded that the negotiations had undermined the prestige of the PSB-BSP president, as he had not been able to convince his own party without Spaak's support¹⁰⁸. Was this, however, really a loss of authority, or rather a deliberate manoeuvre to join the opposition, with his party imploding?

IV. The final adjustments

During this second phase of the crisis, the constitutional question was set on one side. In fact, the PSC-CVP and PSB-BSP delegations agreed to maintain the Round Table agreements, and therefore the Article 3bis mechanisms, and, as soon as the government came to power, to create a National Commission for the improvement of Community relations¹⁰⁹. This whole area, on which so much had been written, was thus put to a commission, in the hope that agreement would be reached at a later date. Many observers on the right of the political spectrum felt that the constitutional issue was being used as a pretext to prevent any agreement with the PLP-PVV, and thus to facilitate a return to a PSC-CVP/PSB-BSP government¹¹⁰.

1965 inaugurates a novelty in Belgian politics, which still applies today: the content of the

government agreement was, for the first time, relayed by the press¹¹¹. The Socialist congress of 25 July, which was intended to ratify, or otherwise, the decision to join the government, kept the suspense levels high¹¹². For ten days, the press gathered contradictory views from within the PSB-BSP, to highlight the internal dissent in the party. On the one hand was the Walloon wing, weakened but radicalised since it had not obtained the economic structural reforms which it had demanded (nationalisation of the electricity sector and closer supervision of holding companies); on the other hand was the Flemish wing, much closer to the Christian Social party and which wished to be part of government at any price. Indeed, on 13 July, a 'Socialist Study Centre', made up of, among others, French-speaking politicians from the left of the party (such as André Cools, Ernest Glinne and Léon Hurez), sent a manifesto to the PSB-BSP leadership, calling for a new party programme, more to the left, and rejecting participation in the government¹¹³. The language division thus strengthened the socio-economic division: the party was divided between a more left-leaning Walloon wing and a more moderate Flemish wing. Polemics also broke out between the Walloon and Flemish Socialist press¹¹⁴. Collard himself confided to Harmel that he feared a split in his party at the congress along Community lines¹¹⁵. On 25 July, the outcome of the congress confirmed these fears: 672 votes in favour of participation in the government, 356 against and 14 abstentions, i.e. a small majority of 64.5%. Only the Leburton government (1973) would score lower before the PSB-BSP split along language lines¹¹⁶. But while

106. Note from the formateur's private office, 15 July 1965 (Doc.Pers.).

107. *La Libre Belgique*, 15 July 1965, p. 4.

108. *De Standaard*, 16 July 1965, p. 1.

109. Notes from Léo Collard's talks with Harmel and Vanden Boeynants on 3 July 1965 (IEV, *Papiers Léo Collard*, no. II-C.1.02).

110. *Le Soir*, 15 July 1965, p. 1 and 2.

111. PATRICK DUMONT and LIEVEN DE WINTER, «La formation et le maintien des gouvernements (1946-1999)», in *CH CRISP*, no. 1664, 1999/39, p. 31.

112. The decision of congress was binding: the political bureau undertook to respect the opinion of its congress. If congress, with a simple majority, rejected the programme, all party leadership bodies would also reject it.

113. Manifesto «Pour un nouveau départ» (IEV, *Papiers Léo Collard*, no. II-C.1.-02).

114. A series of articles between the weekend issues of the *Peuple*, *Germinal*, and the *Volksgazet* illustrate these polemics in July 1965.

115. Note from the formateur's private office, 14 July 1965 (Doc.Pers.).

116. On this subject, see: PATRICK DUMONT and LIEVEN DE WINTER, «La formation et le maintien des gouvernements...».

most of the Flemish Socialist federations voted in favour of participation, only 36.2% of the Walloon federations accepted the programme¹¹⁷. Several of the speeches reflected the internal crisis. The MP Jules Bary, for example, told the leadership that: *'Nous ne sommes pas nostalgiques de l'opposition ni des neurasthéniques, nous sommes des hommes humiliés et en colère qui redoutent que l'on commette des erreurs néfastes au parti'*¹¹⁸. The PSB-BSP was deeply divided, but it would finally join the government.

Harmel chose a new structure for the government, partially inspired by the recommendations in the Round Table agreements. He put in place a pyramidal structure with three levels, and, at the very top, six coordinating ministers, the 'Political coordination committee'. This committee coordinated the activities of many departments, each headed by a 'usual' minister, answerable to them. Beneath each minister, finally, was a secretary of state, under their authority, to support them in certain areas¹¹⁹. In order to strike the language balance required by the Flemish Christian Social politicians and by Vanden Boeynants, who feared for his position as president, Harmel added to this structure, several days later, a 'Royal Commissioner for development cooperation', a post held by Jef Van Bilsen¹²⁰. With 28 ministers and a rather cumbersome structure, Harmel's government was sure to run into difficulties very soon. Another feature of this structure were the arrangements for the Department of National Education and Culture. Following on from the promotion of cultural autonomy in the Round table agreements, Education and Culture each received a minister and

a state secretary, one Fleming and one Walloon. While Education was managed by the Socialists, Culture was in the hands of the Christian Social party¹²¹. It was the first time since the School War that education was not in the hands of one secular and one Christian politician: this shows how the philosophical divide had become less problematic, and language issues had gained in importance, although some fears were still voiced by both the PSC-CVP and the episcopate¹²².

As for the allocation of ministerial portfolios, the Harmel government included, for the first time, a woman minister. Marguerite de Riemacker-Legot was appointed Minister for the Family, having initially been allocated the Justice portfolio¹²³. Harmel, his Christian Social advisers and Spaak worked together to share out posts. But once again, external interventions made the negotiations more complicated. This time, there were Socialist demands, but also an intervention by the Palace, which opposed the appointment of Albert de Clerck, former Minister for small businesses, as Minister of Defence, although it was not really clear why¹²⁴.

On 28 July, the Harmel government was sworn in, bringing to an end the longest political crisis in Belgian history, which had lasted 66 days¹²⁵. The King's speech reflected this, and included a rare reprimand from Baudouin: *'Le Gouvernement qui va se présenter devant les Chambres s'est formé dans des circonstances difficiles. La longueur anormale de la crise confirme l'existence dans le pays d'un malaise qui n'en affecte pas la santé foncière, mais auquel il est grand temps de porter*

117. *Le Soir*, 25 July 1965, p. 1.

118. *Le Peuple*, 26 July 1965, p. 4-5.

119. Preparatory documents on the government structure (AGR, *Papiers Harmel*, no. 526).

120. Handwritten note from the formateur's private office, 28 July 1965 (Doc.Pers.).

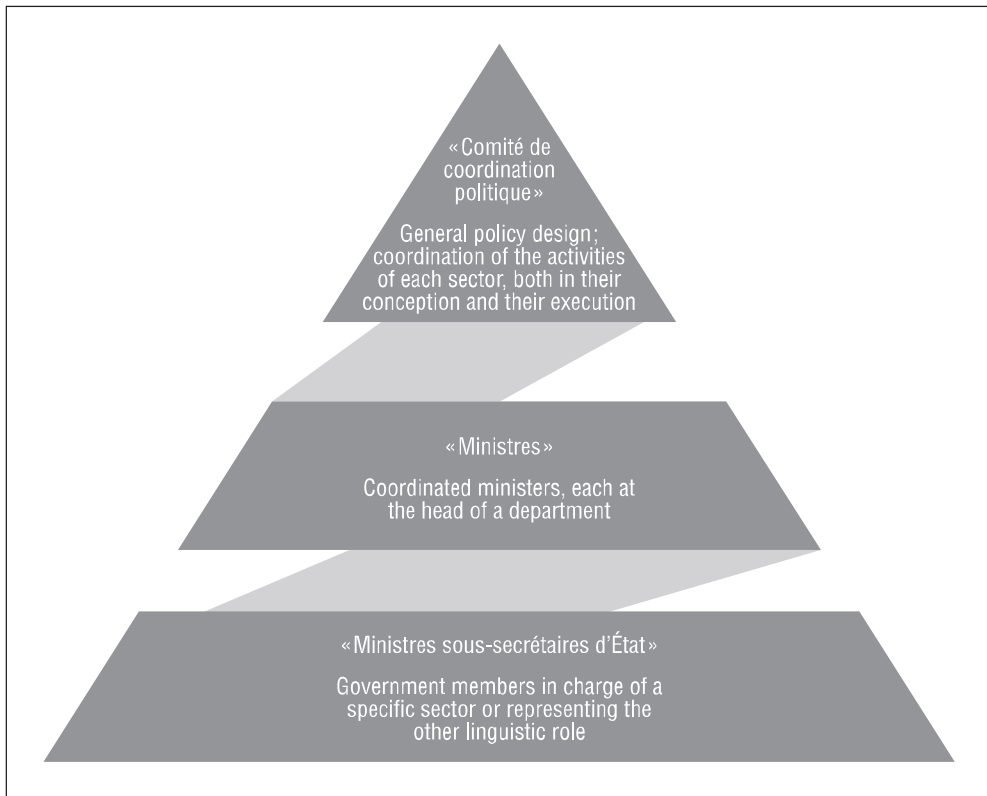
121. Preparatory documents on the government structure (AGR, *Papiers Harmel*, no. 526).

122. Notes from the formateur's private office, 20 July 1965 (Doc.Pers.).

123. Note from the formateur's private office, 28 July 1965 (Doc.Pers.). On this subject, see: ÉLIANE GUBIN and LEEN VAN MOLLE, *Femmes et politique en Belgique*, Brussels, 1998.

124. Note from the formateur's private office, 27 July 1965 (Doc.Pers.).

125. In 1925, it had taken 73 days to form the Pouillet-Vandervelde government. However, this period included the very brief nine-day Van de Vyvere government, which means that the 1965 crisis was the longest to date. (MICHEL DUMOULIN e.a., *Nouvelle Histoire de Belgique*, vol. II: *L'entrée dans le XX^e siècle 1905-1950*, (Questions à l'histoire), Brussels, 2006, p. 96-99.)



The three-level pyramid structure of the Harmel government. Top of the pyramid: “Comité de coordination politique”: General policy design; coordination of the activities of each sector, both in their conception and their execution. Middle level: “Ministres”: Coordinated ministers, each at the head of a department. Base of the pyramid: “Ministres sous-secrétaires d’Etat”: Government members in charge of a specific sector or representing the other linguistic role.



Marguerite de Riemacker, Minister for the Family, was the first woman minister in Belgian history (CPCP, Collection Paul De Stexhe, no. 11).



The Harmel government and its 'ministerial inflation'. Until that time, no government had ever had so many members : 28 (CPCP, Collection Paul De Stexhe, no. 10).

remède.¹²⁶ The particularly long and critical parliamentary debates in the Chamber and Senate on the content of the government agreement, and on how to exit the crisis, resulted in a typical 'majority against opposition' vote of confidence.¹²⁷ The Socialist confidence, however, concealed serious differences between Walloons and Flemings behind the voting discipline. Throughout the discussions, the Walloon Socialists made no secret of their lack of confidence in the Prime Minister and his programme; this was probably one factor in the short duration of the Harmel government.

The Harmel government was put in place in August 1965. In line with the tasks it had set itself, on 28 October it submitted draft legislation to create the National Commission for the Improvement of Community relations, but this bill had not completed the final stages of the parliamentary procedure when the government fell¹²⁸. The draft was passed on to the Vanden Boeynants government in 1966, and the Commission was established on 20 October. Nevertheless, given the serious financial problems facing the country, the language and Community issues were put on hold until the government fell, in 1968, due to the Leuven crisis¹²⁹. Harmel's government had itself collapsed on 10 February 1966, as a result of the Executive's financial problems, and particularly the miners' strike at the Zwartberg coalfields and the controversial reform of sickness and disability benefit, which had led to fractures in the already fragile alliance between the Christian Social party and the Socialists¹³⁰. The issue of Articles 3bis and 38bis would only really be resolved in 1970 when the Eyskens government completed the first State

reform, marking continuity between the Round Table agreements and the actual reform of the Constitution five years later¹³¹.

V. Conclusion

The 1965 crisis can be said to reflect a reconfiguration of the political cleavages dividing Belgium. The philosophical issues had prevailed since the end of the Second World War, and through the Royal Question and the School War, they had already caused confrontations between the Communities. In the 1960s, as they were dampened down by the School Pact, it gave way to a greater salience of the two other closely-linked divisions, affecting the dynamics of inter-partisan rivalry.

An analysis of the crisis, therefore, reveals two major phases. The first ran from just after the elections at the beginning of July, and was, largely, a conflict related to the centre-periphery divide in cleavage theory: the revision of the Constitution. While the PSC-CVP and PSB-BSP were more on the 'periphery' side, insisting on the need for greater cultural autonomy and typically federalist legislative mechanisms to protect minorities, the PLP-PVV was more in the 'centre', demanding more unitary mechanisms and wishing to protect French-speakers against Flemish language ambitions. The issue of the Article 3bis right of veto determined the progress of negotiations and the quest for solutions. In fact, Article 3bis was a political lever for the PLP-PVV: raising the right of veto to 75% was, partially, a key to electoral survival, following a long period of decline of the Liberal

126. King's speech to the new government, 28 July 1965 (Doc.Pers.).

127. On this subject, see: *Annales parlementaires de la Chambre des Représentants*, 30 July 1965.; *Annales parlementaires du Sénat*, 2 August 1965.

128. MAURICE-PIERRE HERBEMANS, « La Commission Meyers (Commission permanente pour l'amélioration des relations entre les communautés linguistiques belges ou C.P.A.R.C.L.B.) », in *CH CRISP*, no. 381, 1967/35, p. 3.

129. XAVIER MABILLE, *Nouvelle histoire politique de la Belgique*, Brussels, 2011, p. 295.

130. On this subject, see: « La crise gouvernementale en Belgique (février – mars 1966) (I) », in *CH CRISP*, no. 314, 1966/7.; VINCENT DUJARDIN and MICHEL DUMOULIN, *Nouvelle histoire de Belgique*, vol. III: *L'Union fait-elle toujours la force ?*, (Histoire), Brussels, 2008, p. 124-125.

131. On this subject, see: ROBERT SENELLE, *La révision de la Constitution 1967-1971*, (Textes et Documents, no. 279-281), Brussels, 1972.

party. With a 75% rate, neither the PSC-CVP in Flanders nor the PSB-BSP in Wallonia could oppose language legislation without the support of a medium-sized party such as the PLP-PVV. Seen from another angle, it would become easier to protect the French-speakers, as the pro-Flemish parties would need support from other parties to hold up a language legislation procedure. In this way, the PLP-PVV would become a possible partner in government for both the PSC-CVP and the PSB-BSP, if these two parties were to fall out.

The second stage of the process, however, saw a resurgence of the more traditional socio-economic conflicts. This was the 'owner versus worker' cleavage in Lipset and Rokkan's theory. Already before this second step, some socio-economic quarrels can be noticed. The electoral campaign of the PLP-PVV had been led against the 'labour policy' of the previous government, and the differences between the left and the right partly explain the refusal of a tripartite, as the Liberals called for a PSC-CVP/PLP-PVV government, with the objective of budgetary consolidation. But during the second part of the crisis, the parties themselves were divided on the issue as well: the Walloon PSB-BSP members, backing the structural reforms, were more to the left than their Flemish counterparts. The Flemish PSC-CVP members, however, were closer to the Flemish PSB-BSP politicians than to the Walloon wing of the PSC-CVP, which was quite attracted by the PLP-PVV's more conservative policy. More broadly-speaking, the PSB-BSP and PSC-CVP disagreed on the economic and financial reforms needed in the country. It was, then, the 'cross-cutting cleavages' mechanism¹³² which finally enabled the birth of the Harmel government: the PSC-CVP and PSB-BSP were able to form a coalition, by setting aside their socio-economic differences and agreeing, with similar

views, on their joint priority, the cleavage between the Communities. However, the PSB-BSP and PLP-PVV categorically refused to work together, since they held diametrically opposite views on both the language divide and the socio-economic divide, which strengthened the ideological conflict between these two parties. In this context, the role of pivot played by the PSC-CVP, as a party with a greater sociological mix typical of the Christian democracy, became an advantage: on socio-economic issues, the party could agree with both the left and the right. Its president was aware of this, and described the party during the crisis as a 'young girl being wooed'¹³³. The greater salience of the 'owner versus worker' divide, also discernible in other European countries such as Netherlands or Luxemburg in the second part of the 20th century¹³⁴, might therefore partly explain the constant making of centre-left and centre-right coalitions between 1958 and 1973 in Belgium. However, the greater diversity of socio-economic opinions in the PSC-CVP at a time of decline of the philosophical cleavage also raised the question of the coherence of the Christian Social model after the School Pact. As a matter of fact, several socialist and liberal press articles called for a grouping of the workers – the left, i.e. the PSB-BSP – against the grouping of the conservators – the right, i.e. the PLP-PVV, previously secular but open to all religious beliefs since its programme renewal in 1961¹³⁵. The increase of the socio-economic divide thus caused demands towards a more 'bipolar' party system, such as in Britain, where two great parties compete while tolerating the existence of several smaller regionalist parties. Still, time would show that this was not possible in a country such as Belgium. This was in fact already described by Sartori in the 1970s, who wrote that 'the structure of moderate pluralism remains bipolar. Instead of two parties we generally find bipolar alignments of alternative coalitions'¹³⁶.

132. 'Cross-cutting cleavages' means that the two parties agree on one cleavage, but not on another, which mitigates the conflict-potential of each cleavage and thus makes it easier to reach agreement. (THIERRY BALZACQ e.a., *Fondements de science politique*, Brussels, 2014, p. 178.)

133. *La Dernière Heure*, 15 June 1965, p. 3.

134. On this subject, see: DANIEL-LOUIS SEILER, *Clivages et familles politiques en Europe...*, p. 136.

135. See, for example: *Le Peuple*, 17 May 1965, p. 1.; *La Dernière Heure*, 24 June 1965, p. 1.

136. GIOVANNI SARTORI, *Parties and party systems...*, p. 159.

With regard to partisan issues, the crisis therefore revealed the internal tensions within the political parties, affected by the reconfiguration of the cleavages as well. The Flemish PSC-CVP refused to collaborate in any way with the PLP-PVV for language reasons, although the Walloon wing of the party was attracted by its economic policies. Within the PSB-BSP, a demarcation line separated the Walloon federations, attracted by the opposition and calling for more radical left-wing policies, from the Flemish federations, which were happy with the Flemish PSC-CVP's language policies and therefore more inclined to make economic concessions. Finally, the PLP-PVV was less divided, but its Brussels federation was increasing in size, foreshadowing the role it would play in the breakdown of the party at the beginning of the 1970s¹³⁷. The three traditional parties were therefore beginning to specialise geographically when discussions turned to Community issues: the PSC-CVP defended the Flemish language, the PSB-BSP defended Walloon economic regeneration, and the PLP-PVV defended the 'freedoms' of the people of Brussels.

Another observation concerns the role of the regionalist parties. These parties, favouring federalism, had been excluded from the negotiations despite their success in the elections. Nevertheless, this important development in the partisan system had two major consequences. The first was greater electoral fragmentation. While this did not play an important role in the crisis, it would do so some years later, and, above all, it brought to an end a long trend towards bipartisanship in the Belgian political system, dating right back to the end of the war. 1965 was the spearhead of multipartism in Belgium. The second consequence, even less visible at the time, was that, from that time, these

parties were able to speak in Parliament and had access to its material resources. The institutional breakthrough of these new forces would help them to increase their membership, with positive retroactive effect. As elected parties, they gradually lost the aura of naivety or extremism sometimes attached to them, and were better able to develop and grow thanks to the new resources available to them¹³⁸, and thus increasing their electoral power. In that way, another victory awaits them in 1968, these regionalist parties would increase their number of seats from 17 to 32.

All these conclusions show that the 1965 crisis is some sort of a 'contre-exemple' of the Lipset and Rokkan's 'freezing of the major party alternatives' theory, which claims the consistency of party systems since the 1920s. Indeed, the crisis foreshadows the forthcoming division of the traditionalist parties, it highlights the arrival of the regionalist parties as new Belgian political actors, and it is the first manifestation of the transformation of the PLP-PVV, which left its original position regarding the philosophical cleavage in order to make a strategic stand on others¹³⁹.

Individuals also played a key role. These included Paul Vanden Boeynants, who was an extremely important figure: he was the main Christian Social representative in the talks with the informant, he vigorously defended the January 1965 agreements, and held a position close to that of the Socialists on the language issue. However, he became the Socialists' main adversary during socio-economic debates, advocating a conservative policy closer to that of the Liberals. In July, moreover, he was happy to throw a spanner in the works of the formateur¹⁴⁰ to encourage closer links with the PLP-PVV...links which would materialise

137. On this subject, see: HERVÉ HASQUIN, *Les libéraux belges. Histoire et actualité du libéralisme*, Lovreval, 2006.

138. One example of these resources not discussed in this article was the frequent participation of the representatives of these parties in the parliamentary debates on the government declaration in July and August 1965.

139. On this subject, see: VINCENT DE COOREBYTER, « Clivages et partis en Belgique », in *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, n°2000, 2008/15, p. 92-93.

140. Harmel wrote in his July notes: 'Je n'ai pas été soutenu par mon parti, même pas par VDB.' (Handwritten note by the formateur, undated (Doc.Pers.).)

eight months later, in his own government. For the PSB-BSP, Collard was, at the beginning of the crisis, a key Socialist figure. However, he soon took a back seat on several occasions: he proposed no alternative to Article 3bis during discussions with De Schrijver, did not speak with conviction during the socio-economic discussions, and did not urge his party-members to enter into government. The only explanation we can see for this is that he feared for the future of his party, and preferred to keep silent, in a show of party unity, rather than make long, moralising speeches to his own militants. This silence, however, had a consequence: the arrival of Spaak in the negotiations. The latter was a PSB-BSP strong-man, who replaced Collard in meetings of the Socialist political bureau, in the technical discussions with the formateur and in the sharing out of ministerial roles. This 'Saviour' did not arrive out of the blue: he was encouraged to play a role by the Palace. On several occasions, the King intervened, via his *'chef de cabinet'*. By his choice of informateur and formateur, by introducing Spaak or even in the appointment of ministers, the King tried to hasten the resolution of the crisis, and to prioritise the revision of the Constitution. This role played by the Palace shows how it could act in times of crisis: as a mediator, aiming to encourage the birth of the new government implied by the election outcome, and, above all, to ensure survival of the State by preventing a further prolongation of the crisis¹⁴¹.

Finally, with regard to the negotiation mechanisms themselves, we should not forget the 'mine-sweeping' and peace-making practices of the informa-

teur and formateur. Their personalities were also important; both were fervent believers in Belgian unity; the King had chosen them for a reason. The main factor in the crisis, however, even more so than in the past, was the strength of the political parties. The many interventions by party figures and bodies disrupted the work of the informateur, whose 'memorandum', ultimately, had no impact. As Pierre Harmel tried to carry out his task, the parties ruled out options, blocking the proposal he made on 28 June for a tripartite government. In July, the government programme was negotiated by the party delegations, and the PSB-BSP and its divisions set the pace of political developments. Finally, the vote of confidence in the two Chambers was just a formality, since in fact it was the Socialist congress on 25 July which really determined whether the Harmel government would or would not see the light. These practices were condemned in the press, as can be seen from these words in *La Libre Belgique*: *'Jamais on n'a vu les partis si peu soucieux du fonctionnement régulier des institutions et enlisés à ce point dans le marécage de leurs petits intérêts et des petites ambitions personnelles de leurs membres (...). Les partis occupent l'avant-scène de la politique comme s'ils incarnaient à eux seuls tout le pouvoir et comme s'ils constituaient eux-mêmes les institutions délibérantes prévues par la loi fondamentale'*¹⁴². However, such practices would gradually become the bread and butter of Belgian politics. Participatory is one way to respond to the problems of a country torn apart by divisions; it becomes a means of pacifying and stabilising the system, thanks to the links between the parties' governing bodies.

141. On this subject, see: FRANCIS DELPÉRÉE, « La Couronne de Belgique », in *European Review of public law*, no. 2, 1991.

142. *La Libre Belgique*, 15 June 1965, p. 1.

Abbreviations

AGR: Archives Générales du Royaume

BSP: Belgische Socialistische Partij

CH CRISP: Courrier Hebdomadaire du CRISP

CJG: Centre Jean Gol

CPCP: Centre Permanent pour la Citoyenneté et la Participation

CVP: Christelijke Volkspartij

FDG: Front Démocratique des Francophones

FGTB: Fédération Générale du Travail de Belgique

FIB: Fédération des Industries Belges

FW: Front Wallon

IEV: Institut Émile Vandervelde

KADOC: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven Documentatie en Onderzoekcentrum voor België

MPW: Mouvement Populaire Wallon

PC: Parti Communiste

PLP: Parti de la Liberté et du Progrès

PSB: Parti Socialiste Belge

PSC: Parti Social Chrétien

PVV: Partij voor Vrijheid en Vooruitgang

PWT: Parti Wallon des Travailleurs

RTB: Radio-Télévision Belge

VAK: Vlaams Aktiekomitee voor Brussel en Taalgrens

VU: Volksunie

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