INTRODUCTION

Sport is in Belgium highly related to politics. Together with the King, social security and some typical Belgian figures and food specialties, sport is generally considered as one of the cement of Belgium (De Winter, 2003; Dandoy & Baudewyns, 2005). The success of the national football team in the ‘Mundials’ of 1982 and 1986 and, more recently, the performances of two tennis-women at the top of the WTA have been seen as a way to maintain a ‘Belgian spirit’ (some kind of ‘Belgiumess’) and therefore, the unity of the country. Another example can be found in the fact that numerous MP’s at national and regional level as well as influential decision-makers originate from the sport arena. ‘Going to politics’ is for former top sportsmen – generally still young and having no other work experience that the one related to their sport – a good way to make use of their popularity in order to get a new position or a job. And during elections, political parties always welcome these people that can bring a lot of votes.

Sport is therefore a topic often discussed in the political arenas at different decision-making levels and the sport policy can be seen as a popular – if not a ‘populist’ – policy domain that can easily boost the electoral results and the popularity of a politician or a political party. Nonetheless, the formal competency regarding the definition and implementation of the sport policy in Belgium has been fully attributed to the sub-national entities. Based on quantitative and case-studies analysis, this paper intends to evaluate whether the sport policy issue is a topic still discussed at various levels of the decision-making process and, more precisely, if the topic is still on the agenda of the various actors and institutions at the Belgian federal level.
As sport policy formally belongs to the Community’s sphere of competence since the state reform of 1971, this topic should no longer be discussed in the federal arena. We would therefore expect that none of the federal actor or institutions like the federal cabinet or the federal parliament still deal with the sport policy issue. Nonetheless, as the sport policy can be considered as closer – and more understandable – to the citizen than other complex policies like the budgetary or financial ones and, as it is related to sport events and exploits, it can be easily ‘used’ or ‘recuperated’ by decision-makers for politics purposes. The underlying hypothesis of this paper is that even though the sport policy competence has been fully delegated to sub-national entities, it still manages to reach the federal agenda and is being discussed within the federal arena. The thematic agendas of different actors and institutions will be analysed in order to find out whether traces or debates on the sport policy issue can be found.

In addition, and in the framework of a more global perspective of agenda-setting processes, this paper will attempt to analyse the relations between political actors and institutions in order to assess whether some links and/or influences can be found between agendas. Does the sport policy issue follow the general agenda-setting processes of Belgian federal agenda or does it possess its own and specific agenda-setting power? Altogether, this paper tries to explain the behaviour of the different actors and institutions regarding the sport policy, their relationships (common agenda, influences, etc.), and the influence of relevant external factors, like the organisation of major sport events.

The majority of the data used here comes from a Belgian agenda-setting project conducted between 2001 and 2004. The collected data concern several political and societal agendas more or less related to the Belgian federal level during the 1991-2000 period. A whole set of themes, topics and issues where coded, covering all the aspects of public policy and of the political phenomenon that appear during the nineties. In the framework of this paper, only seven relevant agendas will be overviewed and the sport policy topic will be the only one under study.

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1 SPORT POLICY WITHIN THE BELGIAN COMPLEX POLITICAL SYSTEM

While our paper deals with the issue of sport policy in the nineties, we may not ignore how the Belgian federalism came into existence. As far as sport is concerned, the situation of today sport’s associations for instance² is obviously linked to the federal process.

1.1. Belgium as a Federal State

The Constitution of 1993 states that Belgium is a federal State made up by Communities and Regions (art. 1). Belgian federation is therefore unique. Indeed no other federation is composed of two types of polities. To understand this situation an historical point could be useful.

During almost a century (1873-1963), the political Belgian life has been punctuated with linguistic legislation that led first to the establishment of a linguistic border (1962) and then started the federal process in 1970. On this year, the national Parliament voted the first State reform and creates three cultural Communities as well as three embryonic Regions. The first ones are based on culture and language (as well as education) while the second ones are build on a territorial base. Analysts say that communities originated from Flemish claims while Regions constituted an answer to citizens and politicians from Wallonia who demanded more economic competences.

Since 1970, the Flemish, the French-speaking and the German-speaking cultural Communities⁴ exercise – as stated in their name – cultural competences (a.o. culture and education). They rule it by decree. Communities received more competences in the second round of the State reform in 1980 and were equipped with their own executive (Community cabinet) and council (Community assembly). The newly attributed competences were linked to people (‘matières personnalisables’ in French and ‘persoonsgebonden aangelegenheden’ in Dutch) and consist mainly of health and social care policies, making the Communities not only ‘cultural’.

Furthermore, two Regions were developed: Wallonia and Flanders. No compromise has been expressed on Brussels and thus still remains on an embryonic stage as a Region. Like the Communities, the two new Regions are ruled by a cabinet and a council and received additional competencies such as public works, environment, housing, or employment policies.

The problem of Brussels is a product of the linguistic tension. The capital city is the only bilingual area in Belgium and Flemish as well French-speaking politicians are not able to reach an agreement on its status. In order to explain it, we must be aware that Communities and Regions overlap especially in Brussels, making the Belgian Federation more unique and complex. Due to the bilingual nature of Brussels, the French-speaking and the Flemish

² A question could be why some sport federations are still organised as unitary (national) associations while others have split off into linguistic wings.
³ In this paper, we will use the words ‘Community’/‘Communities’ when dealing with the federated entity based on language and culture. The English term ‘community’ has not exactly the same meaning. That explains why the C in capital has its importance. Following the same idea, we will use the word ‘Communitization’ to qualify the process in which “Communities” receive more competences coming from the national (or federal) State.
⁴ They represent respectively 60%, 40% and less than 1% of the Belgian population. We will further concentrate our paper on the two main Communities. As the German-speaking Community constitutes so small part of the Belgian population the interest of this case is limited
Communities were both competent for cultural (broadly speaking) matters. Nine years later, the Region of Brussels finally received its own cabinet and council and was able to exercise fully its competences like the two others Regions. In their regional dimension (i.e. specific to the territory of Brussels in matter of location and/or interests), culture (and therefore sport), education, health and social care are managed by Community Commissions: COCOF (Commission communautaire française, French-speaking) and VGC (Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie, Dutch-speaking). They may be seen as branches of the French-speaking Community and the Flemish Community. In that sense, neither COCOF nor VGC have an authority similar to law or decree power.

The last State reform of 1993 confirmed the three previous steps and settled the Belgian Federation in today’s shape. Communities and Regions are federated entities. Remit of these polities are going to widen until now to the detriment of the federal field of competences but the spirit of the four waves of reform remains.

It is also important to notice that laws (thus originating from the federal parliament), decrees (from the Communities and regional parliaments, with the exception of Brussels) and edicts (‘Ordonnances’ in French and ‘Ordonnantie’ in Dutch) from the Brussels parliament are all three on the same constitutional level and have the same enforcing capacity. The Constitution states that every entity (federated as well as federal) acts in respect with the federal loyalty and in order to avoid any conflict of interests (art. 143). In the case of conflict between two legal norms (law, decree or edict), it is possible to refer the case to the ‘Arbitrage’ Court (art. 142). The submission of the case may be the fact of a government, a president of an Assembly (on claim of 2/3 of the Assembly) or of a moral or physical person who demonstrates being affected by the text.

1.2. The sport competence in the Belgian federal process

In 1956, a National Institute for Physical Education and Sports (INEPS) is created and constitutes the first step toward a Belgian sport policy (Silance, 1998:149). Until 1961, INEPS and all the competences linked with sport belonged to the (national) Ministry of Public Health and Family. Sport policy has been transferred in 1961 to the Ministry of National Education and Culture but the Ministry split into linguistic wings in 1962 prior to the Belgian federal process. Basically, two Directorates-General for education and culture were created but the Secretary-General remains common. Since that moment, the competences of INEPS were shared by two linguistic departments called ‘Administration for physical education, sports and open air life’: ADEPS (Administration de l’Education Physique et des Sports) and BLOSO (agency for Bevordering van de Lichamelijke Ontwikkeling, de Sport en de Openluchtrecreatie).

In 1969, a real administrative scission occurred leading to the first State reform. Within this process, ADEPS and BLOSO became two different administrations and managed sport matters according to the main language used by the different clubs or associations.

Simultaneously to the first State reform, decision-makers drew up a list of cultural matters. Sport was part of this list and became therefore a competence attached to the cultural councils.

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5 Actually edicts from Brussels are not exactly on the same level than decrees and laws, as they may be controlled following a federal complaint. But the federal authorities have never used this veto right.
in 1971. Education also becomes a competence of cultural councils. That means that physical education is therefore a competence of cultural Communities. This transfer did not change much the basic administrative structure and the policies as ADEPS and BLOSO already dealt with the sport question within their cultural arena. But it nonetheless implied that sport federations have the obligation to choose their linguistic role in order to get grants and financial support. ADEPS will only distribute money to French-speaking federations while BLOSO will do the same for Dutch-speaking associations only. This legal obligation originating from a Flemish claim, the French-speaking and German-speaking cultural Communities had no other choice than to follow the same way. Finally, the cultural councils agreed that sport has a physical dimension. It excludes cerebral activities such as chess, scrabble as well as pigeon fancying. In January 1978, after this definition of what sport is, decrees ruling this subject came into force.

Decrees from Flemish and French-speaking cultural communities are quite similar. One of the differences is the question of language. The first decree states that sport activities must be held in Dutch while the second one considers that French must be the administrative language.

The main problem raised by this ‘Communitization’ is located in Brussels that is a bilingual city. Sport clubs from Brussels are required to choose an administrative language regime otherwise they won’t be eligible for receiving grants and financial support.

The problem with this financial support coming from two different organs depending on the language regime is that only ‘rich’ federations would remain unitarian because they are able to bear the grant cuts. For instance, in 1978, athletics, basketball, boxing, cycling, equitation, football and hockey associations refused to split. On the contrary, handball, skiing or rugby federations split in order to be eligible for grants from their own Community.

No one brought to a standstill the possibility of a national coordination organ. On the contrary, national federations ‘hat’ may be granted by ADEPS or BLOSO. The reason can be found in international federations that only recognize national associations. It is also the case for the International Olympic Committee or for the Belgian Olympic Committee. Furthermore – with some exceptions as England, Scotland and Wales in rugby and football – only national teams may participate to international competitions. In addition, both Community ministers competent for sport as well as the Chairman of the Belgian Olympic Committee signed in 1971 the ‘ABC Convention’ – where the ‘A’ means ADEPS, ‘B’ BLOSO and ‘C’ (Belgian Olympic) Committee. This convention constitutes a coordination and advisory organ particularly in the perspective of the Olympic Games. But as sport is no more a national competence, the subsidies to national federations came strictly from the two Communities and not from national State.

1.3. Today’s situation

Nowadays, only few sport federations still remain united, among them football, basketball or grass hockey. They were eight in 2000 (Thibaut, 2000: 11) but in 2002 the Belgian Cycling League split. The unitarian federations succeed to survive without any financial support from the Communities because they may rely on subsidies originating from national lottery or from major sponsors.
The Belgian Olympic Committee changed its name into Belgian Inter-federal Olympic Committee (BIOC) in 1978. This new denomination demonstrated that it is an ‘emanation of national sport federations generally divided into two or three leagues from the Communities’ (BIOC website). 81 sport federations are represented in the General Assembly of the BIOC, meaning 20,000 clubs and 1,500,000 sportsmen and –women (figures quoted by BIOC website).

The ABC agreement has been renewed in 1982 and enlarged in 1985 to the German-speaking Community. It becomes the ABCD Convention, with a ‘D’ for ‘Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft’ (German-speaking Community) but it has still only an advisory capacity. Its main purpose remains to discuss the collaborations for international competitions and to settle linguistic conflicts. Thibaut mentions a second meeting institution: the Inter-Ministries Dialogue Group. For the first time in 1993, the three ministers of sport get together with the directors of the COIB-BOIC, discussing, among others, of the status of the sport elites, of youth sport education, of collaborations for events organised in common, like the European Cup of football in 2000 (Thibaut, 2000: 17). But it has to be mentioned that both commissions function only according to the good will of their members.

In addition, the French-speaking Community decided in 1993 to share some of its sport competence with the Walloon Region and with the COCOF. The purpose was actually to share the financial costs. This transfer also means that since 1993, COCOF and VGC do not enjoy anymore the same authority. For matters transferred COCOF may passed decrees while VGC have still only a ruling capacity.

1.4. Doping

A federal law of 1965 organised for the first time the fight against doping. In 1991, the Flemish Community voted its own decree ruling the topic, abrogating the federal law on the territory of Flanders, while the French-speaking Community waited until 2001 to rule doping on its territory on the basis of a decree. But since 1991, the three Communities collaborate on this topic thanks to a formal Cooperation Agreement. When this agreement has been signed, Flanders was already autonomous as far as doping is concerned while the French-speaking Community was still using the federal law of 1965 because it has no own legislation on doping. Actually the list of doping product was already transposed into a ministerial order from the Community but this order only implemented the application of the law of 1965 and did not abrogate it.

As the fight against doping has become a priority for the ministers of sport, they are all nowadays competent for sport and for doping. It was not the case previously (before the decree of 2001) in French-speaking Community where the minister of Community for health has fight against doping in its remit.
1.5. **Sport on the local level**

Belgium is also divided into provinces (10) and communes (589). There are five provinces in Flanders and five in Wallonia. Brussels is not anymore part of a province. Provinces and communes are both local subordinated level. In this sense, they implement decisions taken by superior levels. But besides, both provinces and communes enjoy a certain degree of autonomy: they may take initiatives in various domains until it is not forbidden by a legal text from a superior order. A college of mayor and aldermen rules each commune in Belgium.

Some sport infrastructures in Brussels belonged to the former Province of Brabant. Since the exclusion of Brussels of any Belgian Province, COCOF and VGC share the management of these infrastructures. In this framework, both Community Commissions may only make regulations thus may not act as an organising authority.

One of these aldermen is in charge for the sport issues on the territory of the commune. Actually, communes (as provinces) may only act as ‘organising authority’ as far as sport policy is concerned. The general competence remains at the level of the Community and subsidising power is – since 1993 – of the competence of Wallonia and the COCOF in Brussels (no change in Flanders). Subsidising may take different forms, from the financial transfer to a more concrete intervention. For instance, communes may be in charge with the costs of the law enforcement during football matches or other sport events (bicycle race, etc.). The agreements are negotiated individually.

1.6. **To summarise**

Since 1970, sport is officially a competence belonging fully to the Communities. Sport has thus been one of the first policy domains transferred to what will later become ‘federated entities’. But the picture is not that simplistic. Even if since the first State reform, decisions has been taken to remove sport from the remit of national State, the implementation of this kind of reform may take more or less time.

For example, grants and financial support to sport associations became a competence of the Communities only in 1978. Flanders played an active and leading role in the process and French-speaking Community had no other choice than to follow. The consequence is not unimportant: the different sport federations do not beneficiate anymore of national grants or financial transfers. Another example is the doping issue that remained even longer a competence of the national state. The (federal) law of 1965 ruling the fight against doping has been in use in Flanders until 1991 and in the South of the linguistic border until 2001.

In addition, as provinces and communes enjoy a quite large autonomy in Belgium, they may act as organising authority for sport events or clubs. They have also the ability to subsidise local sport organisations. As a result, in Flanders and Wallonia, three decision-making levels may be competent for sport: the Communities, the provinces and the communes. In Brussels, Flemish and French-speaking Communities are competent depending on the language regime of the sport associations, while the COCOF is competent for domains delegated by the French-speaking Community in 1993 and VGC and COCOF (in its ruling dimension) as well as communes also may also been concerned with sport. Since the fight against doping has
been implemented at the Community level, no competence linked with sport policy remains at
the Belgian federal level.

In the current Flemish government, sport is the competence of Bert Anciaux (from Spirit, a
‘left-liberal’ party, in cartel with the Flemish Socialists) who is also competent for culture and
youth. Culture, youth and sport are also gathered in the German-speaking Community where
Isabelle Weykmans (Liberal party) is minister of culture, media, monuments protection, youth
and sport. Finally, in the French-speaking Community, Claude Eerdekens (Socialist party) is
minister of sport and civil servants. Culture and youth are given to two others ministers. Bert
2 LOW AGENDAS: MEDIA AND PARLIAMENT

In this part, we will mainly deal with two different kinds of data: the content of the TV-journals – and, in a lesser extent, the one of the newspapers – and the control activities of the parliament on the federal cabinet. Both agendas are considered as part of the low political agenda, ‘low’ in the sense that is the closest to the citizen and the society. Their other characteristic is that they are part of the fast track of the decision-making process; they are able to react rapidly (a few days or weeks) to changes of the public opinion, to external triggering or challenging factors, etc.

These two datasets will be first analysed on the aggregate and ‘quantitative’ level in order to assess the importance of the topic of sport policy in these two agendas and in order to distinguish the main trends, stabilisations or evolutions across time and on a yearly basis. In a second step, a more ‘qualitative’ and in-depth analysis will be performed at the case-study level and will allow us to have a more detailed image of the different actors and issues at stake, but also to point out a potential link between the news in the TV-agenda and the written questions that appear in the Federal House of Representatives.

In order to illustrate our analysis and to draw a larger picture of the whole Belgian political system concerning the sport policy, we will also analyse other higher ‘agendas’ like the legislative production, the council of minister’s decisions, the party manifestos, the coalition agreements and the federal budget. All these seven different agenda’s have their own logic and coherence and are supposed to be stable across and to be relatively close to each other in terms of issues (Walgrave, De Winter & Nuytemans, 2005). As opposed to the low and fast-reacting agendas like the media and the parliament’s control activities, these five agenda are considered as ‘high’ and ‘slow’, meaning that they are highly institutionalised and that they rely on a set of rules that limit their agenda, mainly based on incrementalism.

Based on previous research, we can schematically represent the interaction of the different agendas in the Belgian political system as follow:
The data gathered here will be presented in absolute figures, and not in relative terms as the total ‘n’ is evolving considerably for some agendas, meaning that 5% of 200 law proposals does not really represent the same amount of items as 5% of 2000 law proposals. And as the sport policy topic has never been an important topic on the agenda, we would have to deal with very low relative figures (mainly between 0% and 0,5%) making the description of the data and the analysis even more difficult.

2.1. Media

In Belgium, media are no longer considered as ‘national’ as only a very small minority of readers from Flanders read French-speaking newspaper and reciprocally (respectively 3,7% and 3,5%) – it is also the case for the audience of the different TV channels. In other words, media are fully ‘communitarised’ and should therefore address different issues according to their target audience. This detailed focus on the media will also allow us to assess the importance of the constitutive characteristics of each media that is, for the newspapers, if it is a ‘tabloid’ or a ‘quality’ newspaper and – in a minor way – the political orientation of the
newspaper and, for the TV journals, if it belongs to a private or a public TV channel. As result, we expect significant differences among media in amount of news items covering the issue of sport policy.

2.1.1. Media – TV Journals

At the aggregate level, summing all the different news items from the four main Belgian TV channels, the TV journals show a quite stable pattern between 1993 and 1999 (cfr. Graph 1). It varies slightly around 40 news items per year before 1996 and about 60 after. Nonetheless, we may notice in 2000 a considerable increase of the attention given to the ‘sport policy’ topic in the Belgian TV media, reaching not less than 210 news items on this topic. The selected TV journals concern the four main TV channels: the main Flemish public channel (VRT), the main Flemish private channel (VTM), the main French-speaking public channel (RTBF) and the main French-speaking private channel (RTL-TVI) (see Appendix).

Graph 1- Total number of news items in Belgian TV-journal on sport policy (1993-2000)

Both Flemish TV journals show a comparable pattern. As shown on Graph 2, their number of news items dealing with sport policy seems to gradually increase in a parallel way. If the years 1993-1996 look quite stable, the trends increase rapidly and reach almost 60 news items on the topic in 2000. As a result, it is quite impossible to distinguish between the public and the private channel regarding the sport policy issue.
Graph 2- Number of news items in Flemish TV-journals on sport policy (1993-2000)

As far as French-speaking TV journals are concerned (Graph 3), the pattern of both media seems to be sensitively no more divergent. They stay stable during almost the whole decennia and show only a significant increase in 2000. While the number of news items turns around 10 per year, it reaches 40-50 items on sport policy in 2000. However, we can notice some light divergences between the private and the public channels on two occasions – 1994 and 1998 – but the differences does not really seem to be crucial.
More generally, while the two Flemish TV journals cannot be dissociated, we can notice that the French-speaking private channel is closer to its Flemish counterpart – the private channel VTM – than to its main competitor, the French-speaking public channel. In addition, if the four media show an significant increase in the number of new items devoted to the sport policy at the end of the decennia, this trends has been noticed since 1997 in Flanders while only present in 2000 in the south of the country. Nonetheless and in contrast with other issues (Sinardet, De Swert & Dandoy, 2004), we can hardly notice any significant difference between the Flemish and the French-speaking news-broadcasts and between private and public channels.

The analysed TV-agenda covers seven years, from 1993 to 2000. Intuitively, while sport and politics may have strong links in Belgium (some MP’s and local representatives are coming from the sport arena), we could say that the media relay only a few sport policy topics because they seem perhaps too anecdotic or at least less ‘attractive’ than other news. Or maybe politicians produce only a few sport policies.

We have to keep in mind that sport policies are determined by Communities and no more by the Federation. That implies a smaller audience for these outputs, as the application field is limited to one side only of the linguistic border. Few sport policies passed by a Community have a direct impact on sport in the other Community. The TV-media interests may be therefore limited as well. We can assume that more sport policy outputs in a Community would lead to more news on this item broadcasted in this Community.

But as in 2000 (from 10th June to 2nd July) Belgium was co-organiser of the European Cup of football with the Netherlands, the topic of sport policy would probably become of larger interest for the media. This major national and international event – especially for a small country that is not used to celebrate medals and other sport victories – would probably deeply
modify the normal evolution of TV-agenda in relation with sport policy. To verify this assumption we will begin by dealing with news in relation with Euro2000.

*Euro2000*

The first time TV-media dealt with this event was in September 1994 when both countries announced their official application to the organisation of the Cup. All the four TV-channels covered the registration of the application on 27th Sept. 2004. A few days before, on 22nd Sept. only RTBF and VTM reported the application of both countries while on 23rd Sept. the same channels as well as VRT announced the official support of the federal government to the application.

Between 1994 and 2000, items linked to Euro2000 are quite diversified. The first issue has been the choice of the stadiums and their compliance with security and safety rules. A first justification is trivial and linked to the needs of the organisation. Building and renovation of stadiums required months if not years. That explains why it is the first concern in time. Secondly, the major argument is certainly to be found in the traumatic experience of the Heysel disaster. On 29th May 1985 the Heysel stadium in Brussels hosts the Champions’ League finale between Liverpool and Turin. The stadium was quite old and not planned to facilitate evacuation. Provocation and violence from British hooligans will lead to one of the more serious disaster in a football stadium: 39 people killed and hundreds injured. This disaster had not only human consequences but also political ones. The minister for Home affairs has been seriously blamed for his crisis management. Since this fatal event safety and security in stadiums is considered as a top-priority by authorities (at all levels federated as well as federal). To illustrate this statement, we can also refer to the current controversy in relation with the compliance to security rules of the Heysel/King Baudouin stadium.

A first presentation of stadiums that could potentially host Euro2000 matches was made on 24th March 1995. This information was only relayed by RTL. Same scenario on 27th March with the renovation project of the stadium of Charleroi, a Walloon city.

The most ‘popular’ (in terms of quotations in TV-media) stadium in the French-speaking TV-agenda is undoubtedly the King Baudouin stadium. The number of quotations in the news is certainly to put in relation with the fatal event of 1985. Before the application to the Euro2000, the French-speaking televisions relayed all the steps of renovation. On 22nd July 1993, both RTBF and RTL broadcasted a report on the announcement of the renovation thanks to a federal subsidy. On 20th and 22nd of August 1994, only RTBF reported the controversy about the delay of the works and showed the model of the new stadium. On the 3rd January 1996, RTBF and RTL announced a federal-regional agreement to finance the end of the renovation. But the year before, the stadium has been inaugurated and for the first time Dutch-speaking televisions showed an interest in the topic. On 22nd August 1995, VRT, RTBF and RTL relayed the re-opening of the stadium and the day after, all four TV-channels dealt again with it. The explanation of the difference of attention between Dutch- and French-speaking televisions may be linked with the location of the stadium, i.e. in Brussels city predominantly French-speaking. Furthermore while Flemish politicians show an important

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6 After its renovation the Heysel Stadium has been renamed into King Baudouin.
interest to the capital city\(^7\), Flemish citizens seem to feel less concerned by it. Flemish TV would in this case only follow the interest of their audience.

The year 2000 is entirely covered by the topic of the Euro2000, mainly by considerations about security. It may be understood in two ways. On the one hand, the more obvious way is security a priori (safety and security prevention, police, assistance and emergency services). On the other hand, we may consider security a posteriori as the handling and the efficiency of security measures: arrest and custody of hooligans as well as courts working.

Televsions prepared reports about security in cities and stadiums in accordance with the location. On the 5\(^{th}\) January, RTL relayed information about security measures in Mons while RTBF did the same about the city of Liège on 25\(^{th}\) of January. VRT and VTM dealt with watching cameras in Antwerp on 21\(^{st}\) of March. But all the four TV-channels reported the statement of minister for Home affairs on 27\(^{th}\) March in which he declared that security during the Euro2000 was his top priority. As a federal minister speech can potentially reach a larger audience (i.e. not limited to a single Community), TV-companies will probably less hesitate to relay this kind of information linked with sport policy.

As far as law is concerned, RTBF informed on 4\(^{th}\) of January that a court in Brussels would deal with hooligans and delinquents during the Euro2000. VTM explains on 9\(^{th}\) March that there is no space enough in jails to keep hooligans in custody and on 7\(^{th}\) of June, VRT, VTM and RTBF dealt again with this topic, as Belgian prisoners will be released in order to gain space for hooligans. Justice and prisoners releases are sensitive topics for the entire Belgian public opinion. The ‘Dutroux affair’ has lead to a deep malaise and a confidence loss in justice as Marc Dutroux was a first time put in jail but early released. He thus kidnapped, abused and killed children and teenagers during his release on parole. These considerations may explain why the topic is dealt on both sides of the linguistic border.

From the end of the month of May to the end of the competition there is almost no day without information about security and law. For instance on 23\(^{rd}\) May, we count 12 cases about these two topics, 11 cases about security on 11\(^{th}\) of June and 8 on 18\(^{th}\) but also 4 on law on 21\(^{st}\) June (all TV-channels on each time). Security and law are in general quite popular topics for media as it is very attractive as well in the North than in the South of the country, as well for private channels than for public ones.

Home affairs and Justice are the ministries mainly involved in the Euro2000 but two of their colleagues have also been quoted. Mobility ministry was the object of reports on RTL and RTBF on 3\(^{rd}\) May and on VRT and RTL on 10\(^{th}\) June. As the country will host thousands of tourists and football supporters, mobility and public transportation policies have been implemented in order to facilitate travels and avoid huge traffic jams. All the four TV-channels also focused on the Foreign affairs minister on 5\(^{th}\) June when he opened a tourist stand in a railway station as a launching action to welcome foreign visitors in Belgium during the Euro2000. The mobility minister was French-speaking while the Minister of Foreign affairs came from Wallonia but was also quite popular in Flanders (and quite popular among the journalists).

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\(^7\) Brussels is not only the Belgian capital city. Flanders has indeed chosen Brussels as their own capital. It is quite a symbolic choice but above all a very strategic decision. It may be understood as a demonstration of their own conception of this city, i.e. Brussels is a Flemish city.
Others concerns – but rather marginal – about Euro2000 that may be taken into account are tickets sales (VTM 23rd March, VRT, VTM, RTBF and RTL 8th May and 8th June) and supporters accommodation (RTL 24th February, VRT 3rd May, RTBF 7th June).

Other sport policy topics

The sport policy TV-agenda is not only made up with facts linked to the Euro2000. But again security is by far the major interest. Mostly it is to relate to the maintenance of law and order during football matches. Both Dutch-speaking TV-channels reported a meeting between fans of Gent football club and police on 27th March 1993. On 2nd and 3rd Nov. 1993, RTBF and RTL dealt with security measures taken in Liège for a match against Arsenal. The location seems having a clear impact on the choice of channels to broadcast or not the news.

Stewards hiring appear to be a key element of monitoring system near the stadiums. It has been presented on 31st January 1994 by RTBF and RTL. After a first test relayed on 6th March 1994 by VTM, the Home affairs minister required their presence for all the matches of first league (VRT and VTM 18th April 1994). In 1996, his successor confirms stewards hiring for the Euro2000 (RTBF and RTL 9th July).

Sportsmen and audience safety is another priority of media and politicians. On 2nd Sept. 1994, RTBF journalists affirm that Minister Di Rupo wants hard hats to be worn at all times for cyclists. Further to a crash during a rally in Flanders, all the four TV-channels focused on safety measures taken for this kind of event (24th June 1995, 6 cases). The day after on VTM, the Minister for Home affairs asks for more controls during rallies. On 26th June, VRT broadcasted three sequences in relation with reactions to the car crash. During the next edition, VRT again organised a report on safety measures (26th Jan. 1996). Unlike security, safety seems to be linked with the location of the event or with the linguistic origin of the minister in the case of the hard hats for cyclists.

Sport policy – strictly speaking – is a less popular topic for TV than the previous points. Televisions relayed quite logically news from their own Community as federal is no more competent for sport policy. For instance, on 31st March 1993, the BLOSO organised a running day for Flemish pupils (VTM). The Flemish Community also planned a day for aquatic sports (VRT 15th May 1993) and a bicycle week (VRT 16th and 25th May 1993). RTBF (26th March 1994) reported an analysis ordered by the Minister of sport of the French-speaking Community that dealt with youth condition. RTBF also raised the question of health and medical control for sportsmen (5th Feb. 1995). When COCOF (French-speaking Community branch in Brussels) releases money to save a football club in Brussels, RTBF relayed the news (14th Feb. 1997).

The creation of a Flemish judo-team had an impact that crosses the linguistic border. On 16th Dec. 1993, VRT, VTM and RTBF dedicated a report to this announcement and the day after VRT, RTBF and RTL recorded the reaction of the Belgian Olympic Committee to this decision. The same dynamics applied for the vote by the Flemish Parliament of a decree ruling amateur sport, which has been the subject of reports from VRT (3rd July 1996) and RTL (10th July).
Common topics however remain on both side of the linguistic border, like the Olympic Games and the Belgian Interfederal Olympic Committee (BIOC) as well as football. On 17 Feb. 1993, the BIOC wondered about consequences of lack of common training of Belgian athletes (RTBF). Before the Olympics Game of Lillehammer both Flemish TV-channels showed an interest for the BIOC selection of Athletes (17th Jan. 1994). TV also relayed announcements of application to be the city hosting the Olympics Games: Liège (RTL, 1st July 1993), Brussels (RTL, 28th March 1994), Lille and Antwerp on suggestion of the Flemish Minister-President (RTBF, 31st March 1994), in Belgium without determining a city (all four TV-channels 19th June 1995 and 21st July). Chairmanship of the BIOC has also been an issue for VRT and VTM (3rd and 6th Dec. 1996).

Often French-speaking citizens, politicians or media are considered as the only/last supporter of Belgium. We may probably find an explanation to the distribution of these news in the TV-media. It would have been surprising that a Flemish TV-channel deals with a possible lack of common training between athletes from both Communities. Feeling nostalgic of a certain Belgium is in most case the fact of French-speaking people. Considering that Belgium would be able to host Olympic games may also be relevant of nostalgia of a Belgium that belongs to history. The organisation of this major event requires such an agreement between Communities that it is impossible to reach it, especially if the city host is located elsewhere than in Flanders. That explains why mostly French-speaking televisions relay these news. To be precise, we must add that the news broadcasted on 21st July 1995 on all the four channels was the refusal of political world to support such a project.

As far as football is concerned, we may find various items such as the project of the Belgian Football League that would like to convince supporters to attend matches (RTL 2nd March 1993) or to organise matches in jails (RTL 1st Aug. 1995). News items also appeared around educational programs against youth unfit (RTBF and RTL 23 March 1993) or reactions from footballers to the potential split of the Belgian Football League (RTL 7th March 1993) or to the potential split of the provincial championship (RTBF 13th April 1993). These quite anecdotic proposals are only relayed by French-speaking televisions. The potential explanation in relation with the nostalgia of a certain Belgium remains valid concerning the broadcasting of these items by only the media from the South of the linguistic border.

Football financial questions are also quite recurrent. The minister of finances has been interviewed by RTL on 9th March 1993 about VAT on footballer’s transfers. On 16th Aug. 1994, VTM raised the question of the financial situation of the football clubs and RTBF did the same on 26th Dec. 1994. VRT investigated in matter of debts of football clubs to social security (17th Jan. 2000) and VTM follows on 9th Aug. 2000 with debts broadly speaking. We must add that these issues are the only sport policy news from 2000 that are not relevant of Euro2000. Questions of finances are obviously federal matters. That is probably why all the TV-channels showed an interested in it.

Another news that has been relayed on both side of the linguistic border is the vote of a federal law against advertising for tobacco. The risk was that competitions like the Formula One Grand Prix (in Wallonia) or motorbike races (in Flanders) lose financing from tobacco companies. All the four TV-channels relayed the news (6th, 9th and 12th Dec. 1997), as both parts of the country were involved.

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8 Without considering the organisation of the Euro2000 that has already been the object of its own section.
9 TV-media have also dealt with doping in 2000 (1 occurrence). See below.
Quite surprisingly, doping is not a significant topic for TV-channels. We count only two occurrences in the 10 years of TV-agenda, both were on Flemish televisions (VTM on the 31st July 1997 and VRT and VTM on the 1st Feb. 2000). When reminding that at these dates French-speaking Community has not yet passed its decree on doping, we may easily understand why doping appears to be only a concern of the Dutch-speaking televisions.

Finally, we can notice an annual event that is not relevant for sport policy but that mixes sport, political and Community dimensions: the ‘Gordel’ (literally: belt). This ride organised by BLOSO turns each year around Brussels (but in Flanders) and is very popular in Flanders. It gathers politicians as well as families but the first purpose of this event was to surround Brussels in order to show its belonging to Flanders. Twice the director of the BLOSO has been interviewed by Flemish TV-channels (VTM 1st Sept. 1996 and VRT 7th Sept. 1997). It is likely that French-speaking media considered this ride as a problem of tensions between Communities and not as a sport policy fact.

In sum, when TV-media deal with sport policy it may be understood in a broad sense. The scope of issues is indeed quite large even if it is obvious to point out the most popular thematic that is security a priori. Security a posteriori was a popular issue but only in the framework of the Euro2000. ‘Real’ sport policy topics are quite frequent too10 but seem anecdotic in their contents. Televisions relay only few news on purely political outputs such as decrees on sport.

Euro2000 intervene deeply on the content of TV-agenda. During the year 2000, media did not consider other facts than Euro2000. We count only three exceptions, which are drowning in the mass of events linked with the organisation the football competition. Euro2000 news already occurred in 1994 with the application.

Two issues can be found throughout the database. The Euro2000 is obviously the major one. But the renovation of the Heysel/King Baudouin stadium is the second. The first time TV relayed information about this stadium was in 1993 and the last one was during the Euro2000 as it was the central stadium in Belgium.

Handling differences between media from the North and from the South may be easily explained when considering the attachments of French-speaking people to the country while it less the case for Flemish. But differences are not so wide actually with the exception of some themes that bring both Communities into conflict (common training, hosting the Olympic games…).

Finally, we may link sport policy news with sport events in general. But the Euro2000 is the only major sport event that has an influence on sport policy news. For instance, the Olympic Games per se (not the question of hosting) have no direct influence. But local event like a car crash in a rally or security measures taken for football matches lead more often to sport policy news. It is likely typical in Belgium, a small country without big ambition on the world sport arena.

10 Without considering the year 2000 that was almost only dedicated to the Euro 2000.
2.1.2. Media – Newspapers

The importance of the issue of sport policy in the front page of the Belgian newspapers may be assessed by adding all the articles dealing with this topic in the five selected newspapers (see Appendix). We can notice in Graph 4 that there is a general decrease of the attention given to this issue between 1991 and 1993, while it tends to grow between 1993 and 2000, almost reaching scores of 100 articles per year in the front page dealing with sport policy. But these evolutions are not the same on the North and on the South of the linguistic border.

Graph 4- Total number of front page news items in Belgian newspapers on sport policy (1991-2000)

On the average, each Flemish newspaper publishes more or less 10 articles on their front page per year on sport policy issue. The different newspapers show in Graph 5 a similar pattern. All three experience a decrease of the attention given to this topic in 1993, 1997 and 1999 and the years 1995 and 1998 appear to stress the importance of sport policy as they witness a increase of the three selected newspapers. Nonetheless, it is interesting to notice that the newspaper ‘De Standaard’ is globally a step behind his competitors on the issue while ‘Het Laatste Nieuws’ seems to be systematically more prone to deal with sport policy on its front page in the last few years. We could have expect that this newspaper, labelled as a ‘tabloid’ – while the other are considered as more ‘serious’ in terms of issues – would leave more space to sport policy than the other newspapers (Sinardet, De Swert & Dandoy, 2004). It is definitely not the case, probably because sport policy is neutrally considered by the journalists as a common public policy or perhaps it has been considered as pure ‘sport events’ (and not as ‘sport policy’ items) by journalists and therefore not taken into account in our calculation.
As far as the French-speaking newspapers are concerned (Graph 6), they show a different pattern than the Flemish ones. On the 10 years basis, the increase is quite clear and almost linear. The average number of front page articles at the beginning of the decennia is about 5-10 articles, while it grows to 25-30 around the year 2000. In addition, it is not possible to distinguish the two selected newspapers because they present similar evolutions and none of them seems to take the lead.
In sum, the main differences between newspapers are not explained by the cultural or political characteristics of the different newspapers (e.g. tabloid versus ‘quality’ newspapers; conservative versus progressive newspapers), but by the fact that they belong to a language-based Community. At the end of the period under study, the French-speaking newspapers diverge significantly from the Flemish counterparts and are responsible for the global increase of the number of front-page articles dealing with sport policy in the Belgian newspapers throughout the nineties.

2.2. Parliament

In our data concerning the Belgian federal parliament, we make the distinction between the ‘cabinet control function’ parliamentary agenda and the legislative function agenda. In our paper, the control activities consist of interpellations, oral and written questions while the legislative activities include the introduced and approved law projects and proposals (see Appendix for more detailed explanations).

Parliament – control functions

Written and oral questions concern primarily demands for clarification or confirmation. They aim at exposing a neglect, abuse or ill application of the law, and sometimes suggest legislative improvements and reform. They can force a minister to voice an opinion on delicate matters. Yet, in spite of their substantial control potential, about half the questions only concern demands for information and are often inspired by mere electoral and publicity-
seeking motives, given an MP a written proof that he has taken to heart a matter raised by his constituents or client pressure groups (Dandoy & De Winter, 2005). Interpellations of ministers can aim at obtaining information from the government, question the policy of a particular minister but sometimes also criticize general governmental action. In principal matters of local or special interest are excluded, although in practice these tend to become more numerous. Therefore, we can hypothesise that a significant part of the parliamentary activities concerning the issue of sport policy might be explained by these electoral and publicity-seeking motives.

In our period under study, we can identify 14 oral questions dealing with sport policy, three interpellations and 36 written questions (see Graph 7). We may hardly notice some trends in our data, as the global amount of cabinet control activities by the parliament seems to be quite stable across time. As total ‘n’ of the written questions (24,848) is largely superior to the one of the interpellations (3,029) and of the oral questions (7,628), it may seem normal that the amount of written questions that concern sport policy would be superior to the one of oral questions and interpellations. Nonetheless, the absolute number of written questions seems to decrease with time (7 items in 1992 and not a single one in 1998), while these of the oral questions seems to increase (0 in 1991 and 5 in 1998), making the global control activities stable. Finally, the three interpellations are localised in time and occurred in the 1993-1995 period.

Graph 7- Number of interpellations, oral questions and written questions on sport policy (1991-2000)

Since the 70’s, sport policy is not anymore a national competence. But it remains a topic discussed within the federal Parliament. As evidence, the website of the House of Representatives allows a search in database by keyword. Sport is one of these keywords. During the current legislature (2003-2007), we already count 59 questions in relation with sport and two related to professional sport. During the previous legislature, the House’s
website listed 91 items on sport and one on professional sport. But the search engine of the
House of Representative does not distinguish between written and oral questions.

Type of questions

The first observation we may make on the data is that some MP’s make an intensive use of
‘duplicated questions’, i.e. addressing the same question to different ministers. We notice two
configurations. Either they ask two ministers simultaneously, or they realise they asked the
wrong minister and formulate the same question to the right minister. They realise the error
when receiving an answer suggesting asking the competent colleague, like for instance, J.-P.
Detremmerie that asked on the 6th July 1992 the minister of social affairs about social
legislation in relation with young footballers. The minister suggested him to ask his colleague
of employment and work, to whom the MP formulates the same question on 7th Aug. 1992. Or
they assume there was an error because they received no answer like for instance, G.
Annemans that asked on the 12th Feb. 1996 the minister of Home affairs about technical
problems in a sport hall but never received any answer. On 22nd April, he finally asked the
right person (State secretary for security) who would answer. Sometimes both configurations
co-exist. These kinds of ‘duplicated questions’ imply that only one is addressed to the right
minister. That is why we consider these ‘double questions’ are single questions. We may
therefore suppose they ignore the competent minister or that they guess several ministers are
competent.

Besides it exists obviously another type of questions: ‘reproduced questions’ that are asked to
several ministers in a deliberate purpose (mainly to gather information from different
departments). Actually it constitutes only one case in the database but not the least. On 7th
July 2000, L. Paque asked all the ministers of the government about the costs of the Euro2000
to their department(s). In the case of a minister responsible for several portfolios he asked as
many questions as there were departments. In other words, he asked 25 times his question.

We also notice that MP’s may stay coherent between two mandates by repeating the same
and minister of employment and work about property rights of football clubs on footballers.
The first answered he was not competent and the second never did. Two years later (8th March
1993), he formulated same question again to the new minister of employment and work.

Coherence or interest for similar topic may also be a family business. On 8th March 1999,
Louis Vanvelthoven addressed a question to minister of finances in relation with VAT
overdue in football clubs. A few months later (9th Aug. 1999) and after the federal elections,
his son Peter Vanvelthoven formulated almost the same question to the same minister. While
his father had considered all football clubs in the title of his question, Peter Vanvelthoven
precised that it is a matter of football clubs from league 1 and 2. And again on 14th Apr. 2000,
he showed his interest for the same topic but added the question of professional tax
withholding.

Written questions are always signed by a single MP. When wanting information, MP’s write
their own questions even when colleagues have the same query. In May 1991, two MP’s (E.

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11 We finally consider this case of reproduced question as a single question; otherwise, it would have introduced
a quite strong bias.
Van Vaerenbergh on 7th May and J. Devolder on 30th May) asked the State secretary for environment about the presence of dioxin in flooring of sport infrastructure. The cost of a journey of the Prime Minister to Germany in order to attend a football match has also been the object of questions from two MP’s. In this case, only one (G. Saulmont, on 22nd May 1992) seemed to know the right minister to ask the question: as it was a travel organised by national defence, the question should be addressed to minister of defence and not to the Prime Minister. G. Annemans asked on 21st May 1992 the PM and on 24th June 1992 the minister of defense.

Issues

Some topics are more popular than others even through the years. As far as VAT is concerned, it seems to be obvious. Seven questions deal with this question but the area of application is wide: before the three questions of the Vanvelthovens about VAT overdue in football and a similar question from Y. Leterme but in the field of basketball (28th Sept. 1999), M. Cordeel showed interest in VAT for sport infrastructure renting (4th Nov. 1993), F. Sarens in VAT rate for boat (without motor) purchase (30th Nov. 1994) and I. Lowie asked a question in relation with VAT on footballers transfers (16th Jan. 1996).

Safety and hygiene seem to be another major concern for MP’s in relation with sport policy. The compliance of sport infrastructures with safety rules constitutes indeed the object of several questions during the period under study. Presence of dioxin in the flooring has already been mentioned (two questions from different MP’s, May 1991). Safety rules in football stadiums are another example (R. Van Steenkiste to minister of Home affairs 19th June 1991). A general question about definition of safety standards for all devices which can be used in the framework of sport activities has been raised by J. Ansoms to minister of economical affairs on 17th March 1992. Another question dealing with safety is the one of G. Annemans (199612) about technical problems in a sport hall in Antwerp. Swimming pools and entertainment water parks are the object of concerns in relation to hygiene and safety. During two legislatures, three MP’s asked the minister of public health on the topic: X. Buisseret on 15th June 1993, G. Sénéca on 14th Nov. 1994 and R. Daems on 5th Dec. 1997.

Finally violence and football give also rise to quite recurrent questions but in a least extent. Two questions about hooliganism were raised: E. Van Vaerenbergh (16th May 1991) and L. Standaert (19th Feb. 1993), both to minister of Home affairs. M. Dillen asked the minister of Justice (7th May 1993) about legal proceedings in case of violence in the frame of football matches. Cost of security measures to prevent violence for a UEFA-Cup match has also been the object of a question to minister of Home affairs (J.-P. Viseur 21st May 1996).

Logically – in the case of questions addressed to the competent minister – as these topics are the most ‘popular’, the minister of finances is by far the most questioned minister in relation with sport. The ministers of Home affairs and of public health come just after with the minister of defence. As far as the minister of finances is concerned, we have to notice that he is used to be the most questioned minister. When taking into account all the written questions during the ten parliamentary years, we observe that he received clearly more questions that his colleagues13. The data concerning only sport policy is therefore not a surprise.

12 Already mentioned.
13 For instance, almost twice the numbers of questions asked to the minister of justice or to the minister of Home affairs and four times more than the minister of public health.
Parliament and Television

As shown on Graphs 1, 4 and 7, the stable pattern adopted by the parliamentary control activities is not parallel to the increasing trend of the Belgian media – both TV and newspaper – during the nineties. In addition, when performing an in-depth analysis of the content of both kind of documents, there is no obvious link between the parliamentary questions and the TV-journal news items, with the exception of the 25 questions of L. Paque that are clearly linked with the recent events (the organisation of Euro2000 by Belgium and the Netherlands). But that does not mean that topics dealt by MP’s were not considered by TV-media. Violence and football were indeed frequent topics in the news broadcasted by TV-channels as well as sportmen and audience safety but it was not the case for VAT, for instance or for the controversial flight of the Prime Minister to Germany to attend a football match. Even if ‘popular’ topics are the same in both agenda, we may not conclude to any relation. News originating from TV did not lead to direct written questions from MP’s to ministers.

However, we can notice two exceptions. On 26th Apr. 1996, A. Colen asked the minister of transports about the owner of the property rights on the King Baudouin stadium\textsuperscript{14}. Her intervention was precisely linked with renovation works undertaken in the stadium, which were widely related by TV some months later (on 22\textsuperscript{nd} and 23\textsuperscript{th} Aug. 1995 and 3\textsuperscript{rd} Jan. 1996). The second case deals with the first question asked about football and hooligans. The starting point of E. Van Vaerenbergh’s text was precisely a TV intervention of the minister of Home affairs who pointed out a reduction of hooligans violence during and after football matches. This TV intervention was not recorded in the framework of the news but during a political program. These cases may constitute an evidence of a potential link between the parliamentary written questions and the media agenda.

Differences between Communities

In comparison with their French-speaking counterparts, Flemish parties seem seriously more interested in sport. With the exception of the PSC (Christian-democrat) all the French-speaking MP’s limit themselves to a single question in relation with sport. It is also the case for the Flemish green party (Agalev). Flemish Socialist (SP), Liberal (ex-PVV, VLD), Christian-democrat (CVP) and Regionalist (VU) parties have asked four questions each\textsuperscript{15} while the Extreme-right party (Vlaams Blok) doubled this figure (8 questions).

An explanation of this difference of parliamentary activities could be that Flanders is in general more pro-active as far as the sport policy is concerned. Not only we notice significant differences regarding the definition and implementation of sport policy among regions, but this can also be explained by the regular sport controversies that have a linguistic (‘communautaire’) base. For special occasions like world competitions or Olympic Games Belgium is regularly crossed by tensions between both Communities: athletes are supposed to be better prepared in Flanders, Flemish athletes have more medals than French-speaking ones, etc (Thibaut, 2000: 31-32).

\textsuperscript{14} The choice of asking the minister of transports may be considered as an error by most people but we have to keep in mind that the minister of transports is responsible for the cooperation agreement between federal and regional (Brussels) cabinets. This cooperation agreement subsidises a part of works undertaken in the King Baudouin stadium.

\textsuperscript{15} Five for the Socialists actually.
Furthermore questioning ministers in the Parliament is probably seen by political parties as an efficient way to be heard in one way or another and to reach a larger audience. This audience is furthermore not limited to the assembly. Media report regularly on parliamentary activities. Before the general elections, newspapers usually publish a ranking of individual MP’s and political parties in relation to their activities (how many sessions did they attend? how many questions did they ask? etc.). In this perspective, questioning ministers may be seen as a populist activity, i.e. a way to enlarge if not the electorate or the number of members, at least the number of sympathizers.

A last point should be raised, that is the one of the parliamentary questions’ conformity to the competences of the federal assembly. We put a stress on the fact that sport policy is not a federal competence but well one of the Communities but sport is still a keyword in the written/oral questions database. All our cases in this database limited to sport had this item as first keyword. Does that mean that MP’s made mistakes in addressing these questions? Obviously not, in the large majority as all the examples given showed that the questions were well relevant to the federal level because focusing on federal matters more than on sport (VAT, retirement pension, police…).

But three questions were addressed to the federal minister of public health instead of minister for health from the Communities. These three questions dealt with swimming pools and for each of them, the questioned minister reminded the MP that safety and hygiene in swimming pools is a competence belonging to the federated entities. It could be considered only as an anecdote or on the contrary it could reveal a lack of knowledge of the share of competences between the different levels. In relation with our starting point of observation (MP’s sometimes addressed the wrong minister), this second proposal may make sense but concerns only a small number of cases in comparison with ‘right questions asked to the right minister’.

The explanation may be twofold. Either MP’s and theirs staffs are not always perfectly aware of the share of competences in federal Belgium or these errors are deliberate. The first proposal could be understandable as the Belgian political system is quite complex, even for the ‘professionals’ of Belgian politics. It is impossible for someone to manage fully all the different policy domains and their characteristics and MP’s assistants are usually specialised in a specific topic. In addition, as the MP’s individual staffs are institutionally restricted, the intellectual and administrative support received is quite limited. MP’s have therefore the tendency, within their political group, to specialise on one or two policy domains, making them not always fully aware of the specificities of each policy dealt by the federal parliament. This behaviour is similar in Regional and Community Councils, where support to regional and Community MP’s is even more limited.

The second one is linked with a will to be considered as active in the parliamentary work whatever it is pertinent or not. It may show a particular interest or concern of the MP who would introduce his own activity in the assembly to potential electors, for instance. Parliamentary questions have sometimes for origin a problem raised by a citizen. The MP acts then as a relay and demonstrates therefore that he cares about his electors. It seems especially true with questions in relation with health and safety. Even if the question is not addressed to the right minister it confirms clearly a worry.
2.3. **Other Political Agendas**

2.3.1. **Parliament – Legislative function**

There are two types of legislative agendas or of legislative production: one that concerns legislative initiatives and one that concerns passed laws. Within each, we can distinguish between the initiatives stemming from governmental origin (‘law projects’) and the laws stemming from MPs initiative (‘law proposals’). The procedural rules dealing with government initiatives differ from those dealing with private member bills.

According to the share of competences, the Belgian federal parliament has no competences regarding sport policy. As expected, none of the legislative activities within the parliament deal with this topic. It is the case of the passed law projects, the passed law proposals and of the introduced law projects, with the exception of some law proposals – that is initiated by individual MP’s – concern the sport policy issue. In the 1991-2000 period, seven law proposals dealt with this topic, mainly at the beginning of the decennia. Like the interpellations, the oral and written questions, this might be explained by the fact that these proposals are driven by the electoral and publicity-seeking motives.

2.3.2. **Council of Ministers**

One of the most important decision-making moments of Belgian government is the weekly council of ministers in which all cabinet ministers meet for a sometimes lengthy gathering to take and confirm all executive branch decisions ranging from appointing officials and top civil servants, setting up agencies, initiating legislation, to all kinds of minor executive decisions on maintenance on government buildings, etc. The decisions of the Council of Ministers are public in a summarized version and constitute the empirical basis of our ‘cabinet data’ (see Appendix).

Even if the total amount of federal cabinet’s decisions increases slightly during the period under study, the amount of cabinet’s decision concerning the sport policy is quite stable – about one per year, except for the years 1992, 1995 and 1999 that witnessed more than a single decision in this topic. At the end of the decennia, we can nonetheless notice an increase of these decisions, mainly due to the security measures around the Euro2000, i.e. four decisions in 1999 and six in 2000.

However, this increase can also be explained by the fact that a new cabinet – and a new coalition – came into power after the June 1999 federal elections as the four cases for 1999 (and by definition, the six cases for 2000) occurred under the cabinet of Verhofstadt I. Compared to the former coalition made up with social-democrats and socialists and not really performing as far as political communication is concerned, this new coalition composed of six parties tried in the first years of its existence to be more ‘transparent’ or, at least, to be closer to the citizen. In that case, it would confirm the hypothesis of political actions and decisions driven by motives more related to popularity and electoral benefits than purely related to relevant public policies.
2.3.3. Political Parties

Because party manifestos are the most authoritative statements of parties’ policy positions (as they are usually endorsed by sovereign party bodies, they bind all members of the party and thus reduce uncertainty for voters and potential partners on the behaviour of party representatives in power), analyzing the contents of these documents seemed to be the best way to measure such a position. Proponents of manifesto data research (Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann et al. 1994) add that party programmes are publicized official documents that are read by commentators and journalists and party preferences are thus brought to the public through the media during electoral campaigns. Altogether, both the rational choice and the sociological-historical approach show that political parties perform an intermediate function between public opinion and government, and either because parties are vote-seekers that adapt their positions to the median voter’s or because parties have to mobilize their own electorate, the party agenda as a whole should reflect the public agenda. In a country where referenda are prohibited by the Constitution and where opinion polls are – compared to other Western democracies – rather rare, it is all the more likely that party leaders learn about the preferences of the public opinion mostly through the media (Walgrave, Nuytemans & De Winter, 2004).

During the period under study, federal elections occurred in 1991, 1995 and 1999. As sport policy is a competence entirely delegated to the Community’s level, we may assume that this issue is only present in the regional electoral manifestos and not in the federal electoral manifestos. In 1995 and 1999, federal and regional/Community elections occurred at the same time. Political parties tend however to distinguish between the different elections and often present separate party programs for each policy level. According to our data and summing all references made to the sport policy by the main Belgian political parties at separate elections, we notice that sport policy is an issue that sometimes appears in the federal party programs. We count 83 items in 1991, 37 in 1995 and 77 in 1999, proving that political parties made a clear distinction between their Community manifesto – meaning that it is oriented towards the Community competences only – and their ‘national’ program.

However, analysing the data at the individual party level brings additional information. As show on table 1, the elections of 1991 witness a clear difference between parties according to their linguistic origin. Only two Flemish political parties made a reference to the sport policy (CVP and SP), while all four French-speaking parties mention this issue in their programs. In 1995, the pattern is less clear as only four parties deal with this issue: CVP, Volksunie, PS and PSC. In 1999, and probably a consequence of the forthcoming organisation of the Euro2000 football championship making the issue quite unavoidable, it seems that this issue takes a space in almost all party programs as only the SP, Ecolo and PSC do not dedicate an attention to the sport policy. It is also interesting to notice that only one party systematically make reference to the sport policy in its manifesto (the CVP) and that the 43 items of the SP program that concern this Community topic represent almost two entire pages of its program.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Agalev</th>
<th>CVP</th>
<th>SP</th>
<th>VB</th>
<th>VLD</th>
<th>VU</th>
<th>Ecolo</th>
<th>PRL</th>
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<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1- Number of manifestos items dealing with sport policy in the federal elections campaigns (1991-2000)
This behaviour towards sport policy might be explained by their quest for attracting more voters. As the number of voters with no party loyalties increase (long-standing determinants seem less effective on younger generations and some previously faithful voters may become unattached due to discontent of their party’s performance), major parties must also be attentive to preferences of the ‘floating voters’ unless new parties will capitalize on channelling these new demands and discontents. Parties may well be informed through the media of the changes of voter’s preferences, and of the topics that might attract the voter’s attention when reading the manifesto, whatever the competent policy level.

2.3.4. Government Agreements

The governmental agreement sets the priorities of the government for the whole legislature.\textsuperscript{16} In Belgium and in most countries using an electoral system with proportional representation, most of the time no single party is able to reach a majority in parliament on its own. Hence, coalition governments are the rule rather than the exception, and as governmental agreements are one of the products (together with the allocation of ministerial portfolios) of negotiations between delegations of the parties of the coalition, they are supposed to reflect the programmatic stances of the parties that are coalescing. Contrary to what is argued by sceptics, they mostly cover substantive policies, not distribution of jurisdictions or procedural matters. Some scholars (for Belgium, see Timmermans, 2003) have showed that coalition agreements contain issues that are salient to the member parties and for which they have formulated policy pledges, even when they disagree on the solution of such issues. Hence, they do not just focus only on non-divisive issues. On the contrary, during the negotiations the pledges most salient to each party end up being included in the agreement. Regarding their potential policy impact, coalition agreements are never legally binding.

We would therefore expect that not being an official policy document, but more a ‘guideline’ for the forthcoming legislature, the Belgian coalition agreements would deal with issues not directly linked to the competencies remaining at the federal level, like for example regional or local ones. In addition, as the drafting of coalition agreement is based on the content of the party’s electoral manifestos, we would hypothesise that some coalition parties might bring the sport policy into the government agreement agenda. It is obviously not the case according to our data: none of the analysed coalition agreement of 1992, 1995 and 1999 deal with this issue. As they are not released in the media and as, by definition, they are not clearly identified with a party, an actor or an institution that can directly benefit from this document they have obviously no function of publicity-seeking and therefore do not need to make comments about topics that do not belong to the federal – both cabinet and parliament – sphere of competence.

2.3.5. Budget

The last analysed ‘high’ or ‘slow-reacting’ agenda is the one of the expenses’ budget of the federal state. The Belgian federal budget is considered as the ultimate political agenda as most of the decisions imply the allocation and investment of money. But the aspect of the zero-sum

\textsuperscript{16} A governmental agreement should be distinguished from the government declaration the incoming Prime minister reads when he presents the new cabinet for the first time to parliament. Declarations are much shorter and less detailed documents.
game of the budget and its incrementalism make this agenda difficult to be evaluated across time and across policy domains. In addition, the allocation of a certain amount of money via the budget means not only that the problem received some attention but also that a real decision has been made.

As expected and related to the lack of sport policy competence at the federal budget, none of the expenses mentioned in the federal budgets between 1991 and 2000 deal with this sport policy issue, with the exception of the costs of the organisation of the Euro2000. These expenses already appear in 1998 (reaching 5 M.Bef, that is about 125,000 Euros) within the budget specifically allowed to the ministry of Home affairs, Department of Police, and entitled ‘Euro2000: functioning costs’. The double amount of money is mentioned the year after (about 250,000 Euros) and still in the same Ministry and Department. Finally, in 2000, year of the European Championship, the budget grows again (and reaches 1,125,000 Euros) for the functioning costs and is about 2,300,000 Euros as far as the support for police services is concerned. In sum, no mention through the different budgets is directly made to sport policy but rather to the side-aspects of it.
CONCLUSION

The results of the analysis of the thematic content of the different Belgian media and political agendas between 1991 and 2000 provided two outcomes. First of all, and according to the share of competences between decision-making levels, the sport policy should not be discussed at all in the federal arena. As a result, the Parliament legislative activities – with the exception of a few law proposals – and the coalition agreements do not deal with this issue. They obviously fully respect the repartition of competences related to the sport policy, but this is not the case for every federal political agenda. The parliamentary interpellations, written and oral questions, as well as the council of minister’s decisions still deal from time to time with the topic. As mentioned earlier, this might be explained by the fact that these political actions are driven by popularity-seeking motives and expectations regarding potential electoral benefits.

As far as they are concerned, the analysed party manifesto’s and the different media are the documents that put the larger emphasis on the sport policy issue in the nineties. As expected regarding their status of ‘lower’ political agendas, they are less sensitive to the formal and rigid share of competences and deal with various forms of sport policy. The different items are related to safety in stadiums, doping, youth education, financial aspects, etc. While there is an obvious increasing trend towards more sport policy items in the media, we cannot distinguish between media and party manifesto’s from the North and their respective counterparts in the South. We can hypothesise that the surprisingly low amount of Community-related topics in sport – that would oppose both sides of the country as it is often the case for numerous policy areas like social and transport policy – renders that linguistic distinction less relevant.

Secondly, we intended to observe whether it could be possible to underline potential influences or links between agendas regarding the Belgian sport policy. The often too limited amount of data regarding certain agendas did not allow us to study quantitatively these relations and influences, but we can nonetheless confirm the assumption that the media agenda and the parliamentary control activities do not show similar evolutions and seem therefore not to be linked. These findings are broadly confirmed by the in-depth case-studies. Finally, as far as external influences are concerned, we observed that the organisation of the Euro2000 is the most salient event and allow us to explain many of the items of the observed agenda for the years 1999 and 2000. It is especially the case for the Council of Ministers and the federal budget contents that barely deal with the sport policy in ‘normal business’ times and that witness a significant increase of their attention devoted to this issue during the late nineties.

We finally notice that, as far as sport policy is concerned, MP’s are used to consider the federal parliament as a platform to show their activity and express their concerns while sport is a competence of the Communities since the 70’s. The assembly would give the opportunity for MP’s to reach a larger audience than their electors as parties and media may report their activities. Even agreeing that sport is a very popular topic in Belgium and that MP’s are only relaying citizens’ worries, this behaviour may be seemed as sometimes close to populism, especially when asking a question to a minister who is not competent in the topic.

These considerations are obviously not only linked with sport. A general explanation would probably be found if dealing further with the problematic of MP’s activities. Some of them
may be tempted by a more populist approach of their job while most of them act as they are, i.e. non-professional of public policy but representatives of the citizens. As mentioned earlier, Belgian politicians come from various spheres; they may be lawyers, scientists or sport-professional, for instance. They are not particularly educated to their parliamentary or even decision-making positions. No administrative school that may lead to political life exists in Belgium and political groups within the parliament are relatively small in comparison with other countries. Furthermore, they act constantly in a popularity-seeking orientation in order to keep their seat or their place on the list. They delegate therefore a part of their job (writing questions for instance) to their staff, which is not numerous and share working time between the political group in the parliament and the party itself.
APPENDIX

1. Government Agreements and Party Manifestos

The governmental agreements coded are the federal agreements of 1992 (Dehaene I), 1995 (Dehaene II) and 1999 (Verhofstadt). Due to the time gap between the 1988 governmental agreement (Martens VIII) and the first data gathered for other agendas (beginning 1991), we did not code the Martens VIII agreement. Notice that the Volksunie, which was part of the Martens VIII government, left the coalition in 1991, triggering the formation of a Martens IX cabinet. As there was no new coalition agreement due to the proximity of elections, we did not code any other document than the three referred to earlier.

The time periods that were used for the drafting of these governmental agreements are as follows:

- 1991: Elections on November 24th; Dehaene finally succeeds in forming a centre–left (CVP-PSC-SP-PS) coalition; the government is sworn in on March 7th.
- 1995: Elections are held on May 21st; Jean-Luc Dehaene (CVP) is appointed “formateur”; the centre–left (CVP-PSC-SP-PS) cabinet is sworn in on June 23rd.
- 1999: Elections are held on June 13th; on July 24th, the cabinet of a rainbow (VLD-PRL-SP-PS-AGALEV-ECOLO) coalition is formed with Guy Verhofstadt (VLD) as Prime Minister.

Those elections also determined the date of publication of the manifestos. When elections are not anticipated unexpectedly, parties make their manifestos public about three months before the elections and that is the case in 1991, 1995 and 1999.

The unit of analysis is the sentence or the semi-sentence in case two or more issues can be traced in the same sentence. Whenever enumerations were found and separated by either ‘—’ or ‘;’, parts of the ‘sentence’ were coded separately (if manifesto drafters use these separators, it seems reasonable to consider that they do so in order to put emphasis on each separately).

The total N-value of the governmental data-file is 1810. Per government agreement, the N sentences are distributed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=</td>
<td>1810</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The total N-values in the party manifestos:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1991</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGALEV</td>
<td>712</td>
<td>1242</td>
<td>2586</td>
<td>4540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVP</td>
<td>899</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>1278</td>
<td>2927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECOLO</td>
<td>3052</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>1698</td>
<td>5090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRL</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>1248</td>
<td>1830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>1268</td>
<td>1077</td>
<td>851</td>
<td>3196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>2932</td>
<td>776</td>
<td>557</td>
<td>4265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VB</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>1426</td>
<td>4831</td>
<td>6527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VLD</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>1339</td>
<td>1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VU</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>1730</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>3813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>10601</td>
<td>8537</td>
<td>16892</td>
<td>36030</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Together with the party manifestos agenda, the governmental agreement agenda only gives data for three points in the 1991-2000 period. This is an important feature that will constrain some time-series analyses.

The governmental agreement is not an exhaustive document of all what is to be implemented during the legislature (it is even enshrined in the documents of 1991 and 1995). Some issues are not tackled because there is no consensus between the coalition parties or because there is no urgency to negotiate on them all. Coalition agreements are thus documents comprising the priorities (either because some parties wanted to tackle the issue or because there was an emergency to deal with it) on which government parties have agreed. Moreover, the length of the coalition agreements studied differs, which also means that in shorter documents either there were less issues tackled or the same number of issues was present but less space was devoted to each of them. The same methodological remarks can be made as far as party manifestos are concerned.

2. Council of Ministers

The agenda of the Council of Ministers is based on a previous research on social movements of Peter Van Aelst of University of Antwerpen. We applied his methodology and adapted it to our 141 categories. We needed to recode the existing database (1993 and 1997) and add the remaining eight years yourselves. Yet, neither the council’s official minutes nor the preparing documents listing the topics to be discussed are accessible for scholarly research, although we tried very hard to lay hand on them. They fall under the strict Belgian official archives legislation and are classified for some more decades. Not being able to draw upon those original, and probably way too detailed, original sources, we decided to examine the weekly press summary called Facts (Feiten/Faits) and edited during the whole period by the Federal Information Service. Facts contains a short description of the decisions been taken by government in its weekly gathering. We were able to lay our hands of just a few official comprehensive minutes of the ministerial councils in 1999 and 2000 and a careful comparison with Facts disclosed a correspondence of more than 80%. The problem with Facts is threefold: it contains no technical decisions; it only contains actual government decisions and not governmental debates, nor non-decisions, or exploratory discussions; it only mentions the decisions that the government is allowed and/or wants to communicate with the media and the
public. The first incompleteness is not really a problem. The second neither because it assures us that we deal with a truly institutional agenda reflecting actual policy-making. Yet the third selection problem, in contrast, might point in the opposite direction since Facts only contains the government’s public communication. This might have as a consequence that we are indeed dealing with a symbolic agenda, the things on which the government wants to share its views with the public, and not only with tangible policy-making. Careful examination of the differences however revealed that the omissions in most cases deal with defence or international relations matters which are simply classified. In short, the exact position of this governmental agenda on the substantial vs. symbolic continuum is not totally clear. The government agenda was gathered on a weekly basis. Except for some weeks, there is only one council a week. The council shows the same macro discontinuity pattern with no, or less, records during parliamentary recess, holiday periods and election times. In total we issue coded 6,296 governmental decisions. Problematic, however, is the gradual and almost linear rise of the number of issues reported in Facts over the years. In 1991 Facts contained 218 governmental decisions, in 2000 that number has risen to 825. Again, the zero-sum assumption on which this study is build is challenged. As we do not have access to earlier official minutes than the few we were able to analyse in 1999-2000, we can not determine whether this apparently dramatic governmental activity rise is due to effective rising work load or just to the increasing completeness and accuracy of our indicator Facts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>825</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**N= 6296**

### 3. Budget

The agenda of the Belgian Federal Budget is based on a copy of the official federal budgets. Through the Documentation Services of the Federal Parliament, we have bought a copy of the official texts as released in the “Moniteur” every year. The data was available for the period of 1991-2000. The smallest time-unit is one year. The total N-value is not easy to determine. Because of the desire to measure the saliency of each point of the budget, we had to weight each budget point by its real cost in terms of billions of Belgian francs\(^\text{17}\).

There are five different levels of analysis in the federal budget:

- the ministry level (15 to 20 items per year)
- the organic division level (150 to 200 items per year)
- the program level (400 to 500 items per year)

\(^\text{17}\) The budget of 2000 was libelled in Euros and in Belgian Francs. We decided, in order to keep the same logic and compare more easily the differences between years, to take the Belgian Francs as only currency for this agenda.
- the agenda-coding level (1000 to 1250 per year)
- the detailed explanation of each point level (4000-6000 items per year)

We can only give an estimation of the N-value, due to the weight given to each point of the budget: for the period of 1991-2000, between 10,000 and 12,500 items were coded, and their budgetary weight was determined by the sum of 40,000 to 60,000 items.

The total amount of expenditure and the number of pages that contain coded data by year are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Date of vote</th>
<th>Total budget (in millions)</th>
<th>Total (cat. 165 excluded)</th>
<th>Number of pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>26/09/1990</td>
<td>2372071,7</td>
<td>923731,6</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>27/09/1991</td>
<td>2192913,6</td>
<td>958030,9</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>30/09/1992</td>
<td>2573735,6</td>
<td>984224,2</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>28/09/1993</td>
<td>2302729,1</td>
<td>1008486,9</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>27/09/1994</td>
<td>2204404,9</td>
<td>1033754,3</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>27/10/1995</td>
<td>2497696</td>
<td>1066398,2</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>28/10/1996</td>
<td>2491134,7</td>
<td>1063331,6</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>23/10/1997</td>
<td>2640490,6</td>
<td>1086835,2</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>26/10/1998</td>
<td>2966578,6</td>
<td>1128481</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>26/10/1999</td>
<td>2897049,5</td>
<td>1151096,4</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the description and analysis of our data, we decided to not deflate the figures we obtained. Indeed, because the one of the main objective is to work in relative terms to be able to compare this agenda to others, it is not necessary to take into account the inflation rate that obviously raised between 1991 and 2000.

The elaboration of a budget is a political decision. This would explain, for the budget of 1992 for example, the temporal gap between the decision-making end 1991 and the data labelled to the 1992 budget. In the global database, we decided to place the different budgets on the day of their vote in the Parliament and, as far as the budget of 1991 is concerned, to place it on 1st January 1991 (given that our database starts at this date). We also decided to only take into account the originally engaged items (that are politically legitimated) for each budget and not the adjusted budgets voted during the following year.

Some other methodological choices had to be made with regard to the problem of the 071 category (‘Organisation of the administration’). In this category, we put only the items that concerned directly the administration not directly linked with a policy: cabinets, general secretariats, general services, general administrative services, administration of the general services, ministry of civil service, etc. Thus, we did not put in this category the items that concerned specific (policy based) administrations. Example: the administration of the agricultural policy goes to the category 311 (‘agricultural policy’) and not to the category 071.

4. Parliament

We made the distinction between the ‘lower’ (‘control’) parliamentary agenda and the ‘high’ (or legislative) agenda. In our research, the low parliamentary agenda consists of interpellations, oral and written questions while the high agenda includes the introduced and
approved law projects and proposals. Only the agenda of the House has been studied. The House has the reputation to be more focused on ‘politics’, to react faster to external events and to be the place where the fight between the majority and the opposition and between the government and the parliament occurs. In addition and as a result of the implementation of the revision of the Constitution of 1993, the Senate lost in 1995 some competences and influences. Finally, the quantification and the computerisation of the parliamentary activities were developed in faster way in the House than in the Senate. For approximately the same reasons and in order to avoid additional complexity, we did not observe the parliamentary agendas of the Communities and of the Regions. Thanks to the computerisation of the documentation service of the parliament, we received a limited access to the database of the federal parliament. PAROLIS (PARIliamentary OnLine Information System) is a virtual structure of different databases (for example, databases on press releases, on biographic file, etc.). We selected three of them in order to build our own databases: the written questions and answers (QRVA), the interpellations and oral questions (INQO) and the legislative file (FLWB). There is officially no missing data. But we are totally dependent on the quality of the database of the parliament. As a result, the increase of the number of parliamentary activities across years may be the result of a better data collection process in the parliament.

Number of coded items per year (1991-2000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Oral questions</th>
<th>Interpellations</th>
<th>Written questions</th>
<th>PDL</th>
<th>PPL</th>
<th>PPV</th>
<th>PJL</th>
<th>PJV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>1677</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>2310</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>872</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>3221</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>275</td>
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<td>1994</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>2846</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>2163</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>3381</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>805</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>3034</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>1571</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>2470</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>1469</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>1506</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1882</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>2240</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>445</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOT</td>
<td>7628</td>
<td>3029</td>
<td>24848</td>
<td>1299</td>
<td>1396</td>
<td>1191</td>
<td>3951</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PDL: Legislative production (=PPV+PJV) ; PPL: Law proposals (parliament) ; PPVGWP: Approved law proposals ; PJL: Law projects (government) ; PJV: Approved law projects.

5. Media

The media-agenda is undoubtedly the largest agenda our database. The amount of information we processed for it, together more than 160 000 media news-items from four TV-channels and five newspapers. The data we use for the media agenda consists out of two major parts: the coverage of newspapers and the television news-broadcasts. The selection of the specific media within these two groups was hard. Fruitful discussions in the network-meetings resulted in the following selection:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspapers</th>
<th>TV-news broadcasts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>De Morgen</td>
<td>VRT (19h30/19h00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Het Laatste Nieuws</td>
<td>VTM (19h00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Standaard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Soir</td>
<td>RTL (19h00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Libre Belgique</td>
<td>RTBF (19h30)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Flanders:**

We opted for these three newspapers several reasons:

1. Previous research with the same newspapers in our research-group (with obvious positive consequences for the availability of the newspapers copies)

2. The representation of the three main ideological groups in the Flemish society (De Morgen for the socialist, Het Laatste Nieuws for the liberal and De Standaard for the catholic ideology). Despite of the general trend of depilarization in society, and media especially, we think this could be a (minor) factor to explain differences in coverage of newspapers, worth taking in consideration.

3. This allows us to take up both broadsheets (quality newspapers) and a “tabloid” or popular newspaper. Generally, broadsheets are considered to have more relevance for the policy makers (and influence on the policy-making process) than tabloids, even if the latter have many times more readers. But in this agenda-setting-project, we also try to make a link with the agenda of the public, which could be influenced more by the tabloid newspapers, even if it was just because it’s mostly the only kind of paper people read. The taking-in of a tabloid newspaper also enlarges the relevance and possibilities of our media-database for other applications outside the field of agenda-setting.

4. De Standaard is the largest ‘quality-newspaper’ in Flanders (almost 100.000 copies every edition), with a very high relevance for the policy-makers and the other media. De Morgen is a smaller ‘quality-newspaper’, but recovering: its number of sold copies has been rising considerably during the last years of the nineties (up to about 65.000 in 2000). Also interesting about De Morgen is that research has shown that with some elements of the newspaper’s coverage (e.g. large pictures), De Morgen tend more to the tabloid-newspapers (Walgrave & Manssens, 2000). Het Laatste Nieuws is the largest tabloid in Flanders, with 330.000 copies sold every day in 2000. Since there was no budget or time for encoding more tabloid newspapers, we went for the largest, best available and ideologically fitting tabloid. With more funds available, we would have considered Het Nieuwsblad and Gazet Van Antwerpen as the first alternatives, but both are considerably smaller in copies/day than Het Laatste Nieuws and both their (historical) orientations are catholic.

The two TV-news-broadcasts are chosen for the following reasons:

1. The Commercial channel VTM (most) and the public channel VRT are the only companies who where continuously showing news-broadcasts for a large public during the research period. More specifically for the public channel, the TV1 (first public channel) broadcasts are taken, since they are (at least recently) intended for a

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18 Maxwell McCombs, the founder of the agenda-setting concept, found in his study with Shaw that for example in the United States, the (broadsheet) New York Times alone was sufficient to measure the media-agenda, since all the other media had almost perfect correlations with this newspaper.
broader public. The TV2/CANVAS-news has been through a structural change during time, and has in addition no comparable counterpart for the commercial broadcaster, and is therefore not an option.

2. The 19h-version of the news is the most viewed news-broadcast, and the only one broadcast at the exact same time of the evening every day (unlike the late news).

3. Local news broadcasts were to some extent available (TV-Brussel), but encoding them was not financially attainable, and hardly relevant for the project. They also do not have the range that the selected channels have, and often exist as a complementary/secondary news source.

French-speaking Community:

We opted for two newspapers: Le Soir and La Libre Belgique, for the following reasons:
- La Libre Belgique: it is considered as ‘The’ reference quality newspaper for decision-makers, (although not so many copies are sold). Therefore it can be expected to have the largest influence on decision-making. It also has a rather right-of-center orientation, rather “Belgicist”, and also has a Christian/Catholic background, though less obvious during the last few years. Finally, it is quite comparable with De Standaard, and hence will open the way for some fruitful comparative (North/South) analyses.
- Le Soir can also be regarded as ‘quality’ newspaper, but the key reason why we chose it is that it has the largest audience (readership) in the French-speaking Community. Therefore, it gains the most visibility among the public, and at the same is also considered as important by decision-makers. It is quite complementary with La Libre Belgique, as it is rather pluralistic in party/political terms, with quite a few left-of-centre journalists though, and with a more ‘francophone’ (non-Belgicist) profile.

We also seriously considered to include La Dernière Heure/ Les Sports (the most read newspaper among the French-speaking Community, along with Le Soir), but eventually decided not to for four reasons: a/ budgetary reasons; b/ the fact that La Dernière Heure has changed it's format to ‘tabloid’ during the research period; c/ the fact that a certain (certainly not negligible) proportion of La Dernière Heure/ Les Sports mainly purchases this newspaper for the ‘Les Sports’ section. Hence, one may assume that the ‘real’ readership of this newspaper’s main (non-sports) page is substantially lower than that of Le Soir; d/ it has a clear Liberal (PRL (MR)) party-political orientation.

The French speaking TV news broadcasts were selected in a similar way as the Dutch-speaking TV news: one public, one commercial news broadcast, with the addition of the time-gap: since there is a 30 min starting-time difference, people can watch both TV news broadcasts after each other. In addition, the RTBF and RTL news broadcasts reach, by far, the largest news audiences in French-speaking Belgium.

The sources we used are:

i. For the newspapers: The paper copies of the newspapers, either from our own archive, or copied from microfilm, available in the Antwerp City Library and in the Bibliothèque Générale des Sciences Humaines at the UCL.

ii. For the TV-news broadcasts: We did NOT encode the video-material itself. We used the encoding of a private company AuxiPress, partly (since 1998) available at the centre of Communication studies from Louvain-La-Neuve, the rest we purchased at a reasonable price. Guarantees have been asked and obtained for the quality and continuity of the by AuxiPress encoded data. They encoded the news-broadcasts of both parts of the country in the same way: for every item one or two
lines, catching the content of the item, the people that were interviewed and the length of the item.

Encoding three complete newspapers every day for 10 years was of course not a realistic option (in budgetary terms). Concessions had to be done on both the amount of encoded newspaper days (frequency of measurement) as the amount of articles per newspaper.

To limit the tedious and expensive encoding task, we have chosen to take the coverage of the newspapers of four of the six newspaper days every week (there are no Sunday-editions of newspapers in Belgium). We originally planned to encode only half of the newspaper copies, alternating the days of the week. Previous research on Belgian newspapers showed, however that Saturday’s newspapers contain considerably more political news, and we chose to include all Saturday’s papers. Since this agenda-setting project aims at explaining the political agenda, also the Monday’s papers seemed indispensable: in Belgium Sunday’s TV-news shows regularly set the political agenda for the following week. Moreover, Monday’s papers contain two days of exceptionally interesting news (e.g. in combination with the protest-agenda that often take place in the weekend) (Rucht & Neidhardt, 1998). Therefore, we preferred to take four, instead of three days of each week, leaving us the choice between Wednesday’s and Friday’s newspapers or Tuesday’s and Thursday’s newspapers. A preliminary test proved that Wednesday’s and Friday’s newspapers contain more political news than Tuesday’s and Thursday’s newspapers, and together with the better and more equal dispersion over the week, this led us to omitting the Tuesday and Thursday-newspapers in our encoding.

The other limitation of the (too) large amount of articles, is situated within the selected newspapers, concerning the question how much of the coverage of each newspaper was encoded. To stay within the budget, we had to limit this amount drastically till about five-maximum ten articles per newspaper. This is grosso modo the amount of articles on the front page, which made it easy to decide: only the front-pages of the newspapers were encoded. This is also defendable, because it contains the – for the newspapers – most important stories and it has a high visibility-rate by the readers. We are well aware that the omitting of for example large reports or big interviews inside the political news pages of the newspapers are a loss, but mainly, they are also announced on the front pages, not unusually even with a summary-article.

Concerning the TV-news broadcasts, we did not structurally omit any days of the week (including Sundays), since the pre-encoding by AuxiPress made the work easier and faster. We also encoded the themes of all the items in the news, not just the headlines. These are important factors to keep in mind while comparing between newspapers and TV-news. The news broadcasts aren’t comparable with the newspapers on a day-by-day basis, since newspapers are printed and read at a different time of the day than the TV-news. The Saturday-paper is that the TV-news of Friday evening or Saturday evening? Probably a combination of both, with the complicating factor that the media also influence each other all the time.

Despite all our efforts to complete encoding of the media-agenda to the largest extent possible, our dataset suffers of, mostly small, discontinuities, which are not all solvable.

° Some data are unavailable and just not traceable anymore. This is mostly a problem for the TV-news broadcasts, since the AuxiPress data include holes often caused by technical
problems and (most likely) by bad archives. Mostly this is just one or two days (holidays are especially frequently in this case), but one period is specifically problematic because of its length of three full months: October-November-December 1995. There are no records of these data, and it is unrealistic and spurious to start encoding that period using the real video-material.

° Some data are not yet available. This is the case for e.g. the TV-news broadcasts of May 1998.

° Some missing data, like single missing days for one of the three newspaper (for whatever reasons), will not be ‘hunted’ for in other libraries. Their missing does not cause any vital problems for the database continuity, and the research to get them would take more time than the information is worth.

° Taking this into account, together with the fact that the non-existence of newspapers and TV-broadcasts because of strikes within the editorial staff does also count as a missing, leaves us with a database with a missing percentage of 10,52 % for the newspapers, and 14,08% for the TV-news-broadcasts.

Not part of this missing rate, are the missing years 1991 and 1992 for the TV-news-broadcasts. This is also a period we cannot retrieve (AuxiPress does not have data before 1993), but since it is in the beginning of the period, we just cut that off for the TV-media-data, and don’t count it as ‘missing’ in the missing rate. But they are definitively missing. As a result of this, we have only 8 years of TV-news and 10 years of newspapers-data.

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Taking newspaper reporting and television news together, we dispose of a media content dataset that contains almost 190,000 news items spread over a ten years period (1991-2000).

Some restrictions are to be made:

1. A consequent amount of articles not encoded: The following five categories of articles were not encoded further, just counted. The reason for this is substantial time-profit without losing any politically relevant articles. The number of articles about royalty (everything that has to do with royal families, foreign or domestic, except for the institutional matters); the number of articles about sport (all results, transfers, predictions, match analyses… without sport policy relevance); the number of articles about celebrity (everything about famous people, foreign or domestic, low or high culture); the number of articles 'faits divers’ (domestic accidents and house fires, funny stories, trials fro the Guinness book of Records, etc. It’s not impossible that politicians are mentioned is this category); the number of articles not determinable due to lack of information (sometimes it is not determinable about what the article handles. This is often the case for teaser articles, referring to larger articles inside the newspaper).

2. The presence of reports on criminality. Newspapers and television give very much attention to crime, and more specifically on (spectacular) crime acts (robberies, riots, theft, vandalism, rape, murder cases, etc.). These are ‘issues’ that can not occur in most other agenda’s, where criminality is mostly limited to crime-policy or maximum the general feeling of insecurity. This is a first restriction, because these codes (41, 188, 1371, 1372, 1373, 1374) weigh seriously on the percentages of media-attention of other issues, especially for the more ‘popular’ media (up to 25% crime!)

3. Another, similar, problem is the continuous presence of the code 402: Domestic policy of foreign countries. This is another typical media-code, because it’s hardly relevant for the most other agenda’s. This brings us to the second, more general problem of the policy level (multi-level problem). We work at the federal level, and some agenda’s just have federal data (Government Agreement), while others have also regional items, European items and even items which do not fall under the powers of any European or Belgian instance (Media).

4. Despite all our efforts to work completely the same way, the French-speaking and the Dutch-speaking media-agenda might not be completely encoded the same way. A few trouble areas (difficult issues to encode) could be encoded differently, without us knowing it at the present time. Therefore, the datafiles need to be synchronised, and

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changes in the future (recoding) should be as much as possible happen in both datafiles.

5. The limitation to four newspaper days and the fact that the encoding only contains the front pages of the newspapers is a restriction. The choices are understandable and defendable, but we are not sure that there are no systematic errors because of these choices.

6. The layout and concept of some of the newspapers has changed over the years of the research period. For instance, La Libre Belgique in 1993, De Morgen and De Standaard in the beginning of the nineties, with serious consequences for the amount of articles, and even the content of the front page articles.
REFERENCES


