Sixty years of party patronage in the Belgian partitocracy: quantitative and qualitative transformations

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Abstract: This paper present a case study of the qualitative and quantitative changes in party patronage in the post-war period. It presents an overview of the scope of patronage goods that were available to political parties since the 1950s, in the sectors of public administration, judiciary public economy, media, local government, etc. In qualitative terms, we will describe how party patronage became gradually cartelized—given the large number of parties in government—leading to the operation of a sophisticated set of informal arenas aiming at consensual and pacified partition of patronage goods, between and within parties.

Since the end of the 1980s there seem to have occurred a clear decline of the width and depth of party patronage, partially due to the introduction of New Public Management techniques, a less clientelist political culture, the emancipation of civil servants as well as the virtual bankruptcy of the Belgian state. While optimists believe that these changes dealt a major blow to party patronage in Belgium, sceptics would call them clever window dressing and that the phenomenon just has gone more underground.
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I. Introduction

Party patronage in Belgium was seen to have reached its zenith in the 1970s, as part of a wider evolution towards evil “particratie” (De Winter, 1980, 1981). As presented in detail below, Belgium represented with Italy and Austria a strong case of Proporzdemokratie or partitocrazia (De Winter, Dellaporta & Deschouwer, 1996; Blondel & Cotta, 1996). The widening of the scope of patronage together with the massive increase of the number of parties in government led to the operation of a sophistication set of informal arenas and rules aiming at consensual and pacified partition of patronage goods, between and within parties. Since the end of the 1980s there seems to be a clear decline of the width and depth of party patronage. Sceptics believe that this decline is just clever window dressing and that the phenomenon just has gone more underground.

In order to contribute to this debate, and certainly not in a definite way, as party patronage in Belgium remains with many other pathologies (corruption, nepotism) a taboo area for researchers, we will in this paper first tackle the question about the scope and beneficiaries of party patronage. Second we address the questions of the operation of party patronage. As far as possible, we will describe changes over time and the internal and external factors that triggered them. We believe we can distinguish three periods of party patronage since WWII. The first one lasts until the late 1950s and displays patterns of a “ministerial patronage dictatorship”. The second period is one of increasingly comprehensive, institutionalised and consensual cartel patronage of governing parties. By the end of the 1980, early 1990s, we see signs of obvious decline or retreat, but also sophisticated attempts to circumvent measures taken to reduce party patronage. The success of this circumvention cannot be fully estimated yet.

We will only marginally address party patronage at the substate level. Since the 1960s, Belgium has followed a difficult path in the direction of federalism. In 1993, the main of many revisions of the Constitution virtually transformed Belgium into a federal country based on three overlapping linguistic Communities (Flemish, French and German, a tiny minority) and three socio-economic Regions (Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia), with numerous connections between them (for example the fusion of Flemish Community and Region). Each substate unit has its own directly elected legislature, executive headed by a PM, civil service and (semi-) public entreprises. This level of government controls about one-third of overall public spending. It would be naïve to believe that old “Belgian” habits of party patronage did not

1 After the 1993 reforms, regional competencies include urban planning, environment, local government, housing, as well as parts of the following sectors: agriculture, economy, energy, employment, public works, transportation,
find their way to these new levels of governance. However, scientific research on party patronage at the regional level is scarce, and mainly inspired by public administration discipline. Where available, we will indicate regional patronage data as well. Finally, at the local level (communes, and provinces), there is hardly any data at all.

We will draw from results from the different scientific approaches to party patronage in Belgium: as an element of pillarization and de-ideologisation, of electoral linkage and clientelism, pork barrel politics, parliamentary behaviour, political culture, control over policy making and implementation, political pathology, executive-legislative relations, multilevel governance, and explanations to the rise of the extreme right.

Little work has been done on the actual operationalisation of party patronage within and between parties. In addition, given the scarce data on the operation of party patronage at the local level, and the new regional/community levels of government, we ignore how multilevel patronage management works.

II. The scope, loci and beneficiaries of party patronage

The high politicization of the civil service is a traditional feature of Belgian consociationalism (Huyse, 2003). Patronage became more institutionalized and pervasive during the 1970s due to the massive fragmentation of the party system (De Winter 1981, 1996). The party system became the most fragmented in Western-Europe in terms of effective number of parliamentary parties (9.1 in 1999, while at 2.6 in the 1950s, and 14 parties in parliament in the early 1980s), with the highest average number of parties in government, the largest number of relevant policy dimensions and an extremely long government formation process (Muller & Strom, 2000:561). Since 1978 (the split up of the last traditional party) one cannot strictly speak anymore of a party system at the Belgian or federal level. Since then, there are two distinct parties systems: a Flemish and a Francophone one. In the Flemish constituencies, only Flemish parties compete for votes, and as a rule they do not present any lists in the Walloon constituencies (and vice versa). Only in the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde constituency, these two party systems overlap, and Flemish as well as Francophone parties compete, at least potentially, for the same set of voters.

This increasingly complex party system triggered the implementation of a sophisticated sets of patronage mechanisms, in order to assure that every coalition party got its fair share, and thus to prevent that “ministerial patronage dictatorship” would become an additional source of intra-coalition conflicts between the four to six governing parties.

A. Jobs and promotions

science and research, and even international relations. The communities’ competencies include nearly all educational matters, culture, parts of health policy and assistance to families, the disabled, elderly, youth, etc

2 For a critical analysis of the Walloon and Brussels regional and Francophone Community administrations, see Mémoradum du GERFA (May 2004).
1. The size of public administration and semi-public sector

Employment in the public sector in Belgium is quite large. Nearly a quarter of the working population is employed in the public sector, and numbers are still on the rise, in spite of numerous efforts to cut public employment down. Although studies of the OECD tend to omit Belgium, one estimate is that there are 9 civil servants per 100 inhabitants against a European average of 6.5 (Destexhe, Eraly & Gillet, 2003).

Table 1: Number of public employed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Public Employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>525,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>618,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>864,675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>850,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>803,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>905,995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>922,908</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2: Public employment by sector (in 2001, unless mentioned otherwise)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal ministries (and scientific bodies) (2005)</td>
<td>65,128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specials corps (policy, justice; military)</td>
<td>77,575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public services and enterprises</td>
<td>127,814</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local and provincial bodies</td>
<td>285,843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regions and Communities</td>
<td>363,218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(of which education)</td>
<td>(279,736)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislative bodies</td>
<td>2,860</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The emergence of the regions and communities as main public employers makes comparisons with the previous periods hazardous, as we have less information on the degree of party patronage at those levels. Also note the large share of the local and provincial level, another terrain that is largely under-researched.

The size of public employment also varies noticeably between regions: the Walloon and Brussels regions, as well as the Walloon provinces, have a considerably higher degree of public employment than the Flemish region and provinces (Destexhe, 2005).3

a) Recruitment

With regard to normal jobs within the national administration, recruitment is effectuated by the Permanent Recruitment Secretariat (now called SELOR), on the basis of a comparative concours. At that level, no or little patronage is possible, as ministers that want to recruit new civil servants are obliged to pick candidates from this pool of candidates by order of achievement in the exam. However, since 2000 recruitment is based on exams, where the minister can pick the candidate of his liking between those that have passed the entry exam, and organise additional within-house tests to select the final candidates, with opens the door to further political recruitment.

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3 This is one of the many frictions on the large agenda of conflicts the between Flemish and Francophones, as most substate authorities are paid by the federal budget, to which the richer Flemish community contributes most.
Before, political patronage is made possible by circumventing these normal provisions.⁴ Through a variety of measures, like the abuse of the rule which allows for the exceptional nomination of outside candidates of unique value to the civil service (art.18 of the old Civil Service Code), the recruitment of temporary or “contractual” personnel and the urgency recruitment of personnel for newly created departmental services (both types do not fall under the normal recruitment requirements), and finally the 'regularisation' of temporary personnel, parties have managed to circumvent to a large extent the normal non-partisan recruitment procedures monitored by the Permanent Recruitment Secretariat.

Apart from the creation of new services for which the normal objective rules do not apply, allegedly due to urgency, the most effective patronage strategy is the recruitment and later on the regularisation of temporary or contractual agents. In several waves, tens of thousands of temporary civil servant became regular civil servants without exam.

The exact size of recruitment that is controlled by parties is different to estimate. First, one can safely say that temporary personnel is most often recruited on partisan grounds, as ministers are not bound by Selor rules. The size of the temporary sector has grown considerably in the 1990s. Due to budgetary crisis and devolution of competencies, the federal government recruited less and less tenured personnel: 21% of federal civil servants are temporary (Destexhe, Eraly & Gillet, 2003), in the Flemish region 17.7%, the Walloon region 38% and in the frenchspeaking community, 46% (Gerfa, 2006). By the early 1990s, about three out of four higher civil servants were party members (Dierickx and Majersdorf 1993: 151), against an average of 8.6% for the entire population (Deschouwer, 1994), 60% being Christian-democrats.

b) Promotion

The promotion of lower administrative levels (below university degree, i.e. levels 4, 3 and 2) were subject to quite strict rules, strongly rules by seniority (a principle cherished by the trade unions) and thus the interference of parties was judged to be minimal. At level 1 (i.e. civil servants with university degrees) promotions were entirely subject to patronage at least since the 1950s.⁵

Two types of interparty negotiations govern the distribution of first level civil service promotions between governmental parties. First, the distribution of top positions (director general and secretary general⁶) is decided by the government collectively. Second, promotions of lower ranks of university-trained civil servants are in principle decided by the minister of a department, upon proposal of a list drawn by his “comité de direction”, the board of directors of the ministerial department. This list is however not compulsory.

In the 1970s and 1990s, these promotions are decided by an unofficial interparty governmental committee, in which each coalition party is represented. Each coalition party had a share proportional to its parliamentary strength (infra).

As far as the evolution of the degree of promotion patronage is concerned, we can notice at the end of the 1980s a (temporary) decline of party patronage of the promotion of ⁴ For a description the party politicisation of Belgian public life, see DE WINTER (1981, 1989), DE WINTER, FROGNIER, RIHOUX (2003); De Winter and Dumont (2006).
⁵ The secret files of the secretary of a party leader of the late 1950s indicate that in those days, already all level 1 civil servants had their party colour known to the party leaders, as well as all level 1 diplomats, and judges. In addition, in the sector of public schools, most employees had a party colour as well, from the school directors to simple school maintenance personnel.
⁶ University degree holders enter the civil service at the “level 1” at rank “10”. The highest position is that of secretary general of a ministry (1/17) while a director general is 1/16. Promotions above rank 1/12 are considered to be fully subject to party patronage.
civil servants. In fact, the Martens VIII government decided to reduce partisan interferences in the promotion of civil servants. In the first half of 1988, still 80% of the promotions were divided between sponsoring parties. By mid 1990, the committee followed in 80% of the cases the advice given by the board of directors. A second factor that reduced political interventions in promotions were the appeal against political nominations accepted by ruling of the Council of State, the administrative court. More and more functionaries started fighting breaches of nominations before court, and the Council of State has annulled many nominations in which the minister did not respect the order of candidates produced by the comités de directeur. Hence, by the mid 1990s, about five of six higher civil servants were nominated on the basis of the proposal of the departmental board of directors (Hondegem 1996: 60).

The unedited purple coalition (socialists, liberals and greens of 1999) launched several administrative reform programmes, aiming among others to reduce party patronage. One of these was the Copernicus reform, that included -- amongst others -- the recruitment of top civil servants (concerning about 100 secretary generals and director generals, as well as the directors of public enterprises) on the basis of an assessment (made by private assessment bureaus), recruitment open to civil servants as well as non-civil servants. These new top civil servants get a mandate of six years, which could be renewed once if evaluated positively at the end of their first term. Their salary was considerable higher than that of secretary-generals in the old system, but in comparison to the private sector, still relatively low (Hondegem & Dupré, 2005). In addition, private sector candidates still perceive that top managers under the new system are too subject to party political interference, and the number of top civil servants recruited from the private sector remains low (Pelgrims, 2005).

Of the first wave of candidates that passed the Copernican recruitment, most were civil servants (three quarters). The ministers still remain free to make a choice between the candidates that got excellent scores. Hence, in practice, were chosen mostly candidates from within the civil service, often with a political pedigree (but not always from majority parties). The introduction of the six-year term may also open recruitment to spoils, as for a new minister it is now easier to get rid of a higher civil servants he dislikes than the old system of tenure. In fact, many perceived this reform as a covered attempt to eliminate the disproportionate large number of Christian-democratic higher civil servants (Gerfa, 2006), and replace them by liberals and socialists. This “circulation of administrative elites” was further facilitated by reducing the role of external assessment firms.

In 2003, the minister of civil service (Arena) formally announced that she would cancel most innovations of the Copernicus reform, including the new recruitment system of top-managers, and bringing their salaries back to the old regime. Although audit firms are not used

7 Of course, this does necessarily mean that the selections made by these boards are nonpartisan. First, about all directors themselves were promoted on partisan grounds. It is possible that these boards themselves to into account partisan motivations and party quotas by establishing the lists of promotions within their department.

8 In the 1988 government agreement, the parties agreed that if the board of directors unanimously recommended a particular candidate, the inter-party nomination committee would follow this advice. Since then, these boards of top civil servants have tended to increase their nomination power by increasingly issuing unanimous recommendations, a move which shifted power over promotions from the parties back to the higher civil service.

9 Generally, one third of the new managers had served before in a ministerial cabinet, and half of the top managers (Pelgrims, 2005:209).

10 The first wave of Copernicans were biased in favour of the civil servants with backing of the liberals, that had been out of office for 11 years and called for a recuperation operation, and in favour of free-thinkers, that jumped into the career openings made by the absence of political support for Christian-democratic competitors, whose party was in opposition for the first time in 40 years.
anymore, candidates will be selected by a board of experts, composed à la carte, often by selection committees manned by Copernican top managers and their trustees.

c) Local, intercommunal and provincial levels

There is little empirical research on the politisation of local civil servants. Ackaert’s (2006) interviews with mayors revealed that 55% of mayors (period 1988-1994) that headed a coalition in their commune confirmed that coalition negotiations talks included arrangements regarding the division of political nominations in the communal civil service.

Also, the system of temporary agents is increasingly used. In the Flemish communes and provinces, the number of temporary agents at the local and provincial level surpassed 55% in 2004. However, when local government became a regional competence in 1988 (expanded in 2001), the statute of the local civil service has been reformed in different degrees and speed. Most researchers agree that at least at the Flemish side, there seems to be less room now for political nominations.

2. Patronage in the public economy sector

Given the encompassing party patronage in the civil service (supra), it comes as no surprise that public, semi-public and quasi-autonomous enterprises and services, etc., parties (together with trade unions) interfere with the recruitment and promotion of personnel, at different levels (ranging from the janitor in a public kindergarten to the chairman of the board of directors of SABENA). Not only were all members of the board of directors of all (semi-) public enterprises nominated by political parties, also at the lower levels political patronage was widespread.

In the 1990s several important public enterprises were given more autonomy (airways, telephone, railroad, ferries, post, some public banks and credit institutions, etc.). Management contracts between the minister and ‘public managers’ heading these enterprises have been concluded. They stipulate the objectives of the service and the financial means allocated by the minister in charge for the purpose of attaining the objectives. Managers themselves can decide how to allocate these resources and achieve the goals. However, a government commissioner supervises the manager to ensure that the contract is being respected and, if it is not, he can ask the minister to annul the manager’s decisions. In many of the public enterprises, public stockholding has been reduced to 51% or even less (De Ruyter, Michielsen and Mortelmans 1994). Private sector participation puts an additional break on strong direct ministerial or party interference in policy making and, in particular, personnel recruitment in these enterprises.


12 Parliament has no supervisory authority vis-à-vis these enterprises insofar as the latter are only required to submit their annual reports and budgets to parliament a posteriori (during the following year). This rules out any parliamentary debate on the main policy and budgetary options open to these enterprises (Bock and Debroux 1995).
With the Copernican revolution, also the top-managers of these enterprises are subject to the new recruitment system. Many of the new managers have a political pedigree, and their board of directors are still largely nominated by parties. Hence, while top managers have acquired much more autonomy in running their public enterprise (including personnel policy), political parties keep control over the nominations of the top managers and the board of directors.

Finally, in comparative perspective, the Belgian National Bank scores low on political autonomy (Lijphart, 1999). Although the National Bank is formally autonomous, there has been a rather symbiotic relationship between the Governor and the top echelons of the government.

### 3. Patronage in the judiciary

Already before WWII, recruitment to the courts, and especially the constitutional ones, is heavily subject to party patronage (De Winter 1981). As the professional criteria to become judge were flimsy, political actors (the minister of Justice and his cabinet, the ministers of Labour, of Economy and of Small and Medium Enterprises and corporate bodies (for the Labour courts), a variety of local party and regional officials (for the lower courts) and party presidents) enjoyed a large freedom of choice in selecting and promoting judges. Although there is no strong evidence that judges recruited through party patronage are easily influenced by party pressure, their partisan recruitment and career dependence raise questions about the independence and political neutrality of the ‘third branch’.

Also here one notices a move toward consensual management of patronage, formally in the name of guaranteeing pluralism in the judiciary, which was dominated by Christian-democrats. In every party there is a committee that evaluates the party candidates for recruitment and promotion. Candidates for recruitment and promotion have to seek support within these committees. Once the committee decides on the priorities within the party, party representatives of the majority parties bargain over the positions in the judiciary to filled up, respecting fixed quotas for each coalition party.

Political patronage in the judiciary also varied over time. In 1991, recruitment to the judiciary was made conditional upon success in three entrance exams and candidates had to fulfil a stage for three years. Yet the Minister of Justice could still freely choose between the candidates that passed the tests and performed a satisfactory stage. Only in 1998 was it decided to de-politicize the promotion of judges by transferring the minister’s powers of nomination to a more neutral and pluralist Council of the Judiciary (De Winter, 2002). This system took of

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13 Including the minister that launched the Copernicus reforms, who promoted himself to the top of the Brussels International Airport Company, and had his daughter skyrocketed as federal vice-PM.

14 In Cukierman-Webb-Neyapti index (1994:40-57) of central bank political independence, Belgium obtains the lowest score of 33 countries, while in the Grilli, Masciandaro, and Tabellini’s (1991:386-69) index is scores lowest amongst 18 OECD countries. In other surveys its position is less dramatic, but still quite low (Eijffinger, 1997).

15 The previous Governor (1989-1999) was the PM Martens’ chef de cabinet for several years. His evaluation of the government’s socio-economic and budgetary policy often seemed to have been drafted after consultations with the PM and was not viewed by the opposition as an independent opinion. His successor, the socialist Quaden, has never been member of a ministerial cabinet and is considered to be more independent from his political patrons (SM, 2000).

16 Which probably also explains the low degree of trust of Belgians in the judiciary, as revealed by numerous Eurobarometers.

17 About two third of the judges were nominated with support of christian-democratic parties (Verhoest, 2000).

18 Since the Martens VIII government (1988), the minister of Justice has launched concrete proposals for reducing partisan interferences. When in 1993, for the first time exams were organised to secure the objective recruitment
in 2000, but the minister of Justice can still refuse selected candidates.\(^1\) Also, more and more do unfairly treated judges appeal to the Council of State to fight the few political nominations left.

However, in 2005, the recruitment conditions were again made more flexible, suppressing the judiciary stage for lawyers with a long professional experience, which only have to pass one oral exam. This new short cut to the judicial career solely based on long professional experience as a lawyer may undermine the recent attempts to depoliticise the judiciary (Gerfa, Communiqué: 5/6/2005), while many lawyers maintain privileged professional contacts with ministerial cabinets. Yet, only 12% per type of judges may be nominated through this third way.

4. Patronage in the educational, culture and media sector

Political parties have for a long time tried to control the main channels of political socialisation: education, media and culture. While the conflicts between seculars (socialists and liberals) and Catholics had predominated the political agenda since the country’s independence (1830), in 1958 a quasi-final compromise by a three party pact (Schoolpact) was concluded over the issue of schooling, by giving “free” (i.e. catholic schools) large funding, as well as the public school system, and for the public sector, a consensual division of the nominations, ranging from school directors and teachers to school maintenance personnel (Tegenbos, 1989).

In 1973, a similar pact was formulated for the cultural sector (the so-called Cultuurpact). It made large sums of money available to organisations of different pillars, and imposed a “pluralist” management of all publically financed or subsidised entities, like the public radio & TV, theatres and libraries, universities, school boards, sports organisations, tourism bodies, museums, etc. Although pluralism was defined in philosophical terms, in practice, this was rapidly translated in party terms. Hence, management boards in sector were mainly constituted by representatives of the main parties, and as newcomer parties, like Greens and the Vlaams Blok became numerically relevant, they could also claim their proportional share of these seats.\(^2\)

Although in 1993 the Constitutional Court (Court d’Arbritage) declared party affiliation and pluralism an anti-constitutional criteria for filling up positions in the cultural sector, only in this decade serious attempts are made to bypass the straightjacket of the Cultuurpact (especially at the Flemish side).

The Cultuurpact was also applied to the public media, although politicisation there dates from the 1950s. The 1960 law formally guarantees autonomy to the public radio and television institutions, but immediately the parties concluded a secret agreement on the division of the leading positions. But already in the 1940s, politicisation at the lower levels was widespread. The Cultuurpact provisions just streamlined these practices and institutionalised party patronage along party quota lines (but also including opposition parties). All promotions are

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\(^1\) Of judges, exams which were open to temporarily nominated judges. Most of the latter failed the exam, which illustrates the quality of the judges nominated under the old patronage system.

\(^2\) Which occurred in 8 out of the 133 nominations of Dutchspeaking judges made in 2001.

\(^3\) Although the cordon sanitaire still holds, the VB has entered the governing bodies hundreds of Flemish public organisations, due to application of the Cultuurpact. The VB can nominate one or several representatives in the board of directors of the Flemish public television and radio, in half of the communal and provincial libraries and school boards, in the advisory councils of public culture and youth centres, sport, tourism, museums, and a large number of (semi-) public entreprises.
subject to party patronage, and to some extent also the recruitment of journalists.\textsuperscript{21} Also here the mechanism of regularisation of temporary personnel is used frequently (GERFA 2004). With the emergence of competition from private television stations\textsuperscript{22}, the statute of the public radio and television institutes have become more professional and market oriented. Still, the new heads of these institutes and the new leading personnel is recruited on party grounds. Given the strong politisation of hierarchy of the radio and television companies, there were frequent attempts of direct intervention of parties into the programs’ contents.

\textbf{B. Housing}

Housing traditionally belongs to the patronage package of political parties in Belgium. Yet, the sector of social housing is probably less important by itself than in other countries, as Belgium counts the lowest percentage (5\%) of tenants of social housing in the European Union.\textsuperscript{23} Social housing is completely decentralised to the sub-state level, primarily to the communal level, but coordinated by a regional agency.\textsuperscript{24}

As there are very long waiting lists for obtaining social house (the total number of applicants is about half of the number of available houses/apartments), this creates a fertile ground for parties to serve their clients first. The allocation of social housing to applicants is therefore by members of the local executive, party organisations and factions, and out of reach for actors in the national government and party. With regard to the extent of the control of these local actors on the allocation of social housing to local clients, a 1993 survey amongst social housing associations in Flanders indicated that nearly two thirds do not allocate houses or apartments on objective grounds.\textsuperscript{25}

However, at least at the Flemish side, serious efforts have been made to use objective criteria, rather than political support, for allocating public housing. With the effect, that most of them go to allochtones, as they objectively need them more than autochtones, a situation easily exploited by the extreme right. On the other hand, recent scandals have indicated that in Wallonia party patronage in the sector of social housing is still widespread. Beneficiaries of patronage allocations are asked to hang electoral poster of their patron on their windows during the election campaigns, while maintenance workers of the housing companies are actively engaged in the running of the election campaign of their patron-employers (and fixing up the latter’s houses).

Patronage in the housing sector is not only limited by the allocation of social housing. Political support is often sought to speed up the deliverance of a building permission, to obtain

\textsuperscript{21} A 1976 inventory within the Radio et Télévision Belge (RTBF) revealed that about all (92\%) university trained personnel had (or was assigned) a political colour, from simple journalists to the Administrateur Général. Positions also received weights: a simple journalist was worth one point, a directeur général seven.

\textsuperscript{22} On the Flemish side, the creation of the private Vlaamse Televisie Maatschappij (VTM) in the late 1980s was pushed by Liberals and Christian-democrats in order to on the one hand open the market of TV advertising to private investors, and the other hand, to weaken the position of the leftist Vlaamse Radio en Televisie (VRT), especially the news service. In fact, since the early 1970s, many “May 68 generation” journalists were recruited on the basis of a fair exam. Many of them preferred to remain simply journalist and not climb the greasy pole for which they would have had to adhere to one of the traditional parties. Their often “left of centre” Weltanschauung irritated strongly the centre and right wing parties. Hence, very often parties represented in the board of directors complained about the biased news programs (also through parliamentary questions), but rarely were journalists found to have violated professional codes. Since 1996, direct political interventions seem to have decreased. Also, the news service of VTM has developed into a politically neutral body, contrary to the expectations of the Liberals and Christian-democrats intentions for creating a right-wing alternative to the left VRT news service.

\textsuperscript{23} Together with Spain and Portugal (GABRIEL, 1990).

\textsuperscript{24} At this moment there 115 social housing societies in Flanders, in Wallonia there were 104 but they will be reduced to 71 after scandals of 2005, and 33 in the Brussels region.

\textsuperscript{25} DE BATSELIER, Press conference of May 19, 1993.
a building permission for locations where building is non-permitted, to obtain a special
premium or a higher amount (like for renovation of old houses, energy insolation, etc.). Yet,
also for these housing patronage goods and services, the main actors are situated at the local
level.

C. Government contracts
Government contracts are also to some extent subject to political patronage. This
impact is related to the relatively little weight economic cost/benefit and efficacy criteria count
in the allocation of public expenditure (see the section on pork barrel). Hence, political actors
(party leaders, ministers, trade union and employers leaders) can and do lobby for different
companies competing for a government contract.26
It is however difficult to assess which actors are involved most in this allocation
process, as one clearly enters into the sphere of political corruption and illegal party finance
(De Winter, 2002). In fact, it is usually only with regard to corruption dossiers that one learns
to what extent political and other actors have been lobbying and have been rewarded for this.27
Yet, it is very difficult to judge to what extent the revealed facts are common practice, or rather
exceptional.28

D. Pork barrel legislation
De Winter’s (1992) survey of amongst Belgian MPs indicates that MPs are quite active
in procuring collective benefits to their constituency, and therefore that pork barrel legislation
is an important patronage commodity. With regard to the policy sectors in which MPs seem to
be most effective to attract pork barrel legislation, the survey indicates that a large majority of
MPs managed to attract governmental subsidies for communication and transport infrastructure
works (like roads, ports, rail, and telephone connections) and attract governmental and private
investments stimulating the economic development and employment in their constituency.
About one out of three was able to provide infrastructure relating to the educational, health,
cultural and sport sector. One in five managed to solve urbanisation and housing problems, and
a little less referred to problems with regard to the environment and physical security.
Typically, also community problems emerge as a sector in which Belgian MPs assist their
constituency (like the linguistic statute of communes on the linguistic frontier). Helping local
government in solving their problems (like merges, financial statute, etc.) is mentioned by one
out of ten MPs. Finally, less than one out of ten MPs refer to agricultural problems and social
security problems specific to their constituency.

26 For the lobbying related to the purchase on military equipment, see L. BEULS (1993) "De aankoop van
gevechtsvliegtuigen: analyse en evaluatie van de besluitvorming", in REYCHLER, L. (a.o.), Een onvoltooid
27 As is the case with the investigations conducted within the context of the assassination of the former Socialist
party president Cools, which has been linked to political corruption involving the purchase of army helicopters as
well as to building contracts in Brussels.
28 Two more general indicators suggest that impact of political actors is large. One of the socialist ministers
interviewed within the framework of the research project on Cabinets In Western European confirmed that in one of
the first weeks of his office, party president Cools invited all his ministers to a meeting with entrepreneurs that
had been financing the party. He urged his ministers to favour these entrepreneurs whenever they as a minister
had the occasion to. Second, the party treasurer of the CVP declared that during a election campaign, he would
visit companies that had been obtaining contracts of the government in the last term, and asked contributions of
them in proportion to the size of the contracts involved. As a compensation for his "taxation", he offered each
entrepreneur an interview with a minister of his choice (ACKAERT, DE WINTER, 1984).
Thus, it seems that Belgian MPs manage to serve in a considerable way the collective needs of their constituency, and that pork barrel activities represent an important task of the Belgian MP. The prominence of pork barrel activities of the Belgian MP is also related to the 'non-rational' way in which public expenditures are allocated in Belgium. Given the ongoing conflicts between the different regions and cultural communities, departmental spending is carefully distributed over the regions and communities, so that each unit receives public investments according to its size.\textsuperscript{29} Hence, many projects are allocated to constituencies which normally, in terms of socio-economic cost/benefit calculations, would not be able to attract such investments.\textsuperscript{30} As the decisions on the allocation of public investments are largely based on political criteria, rather than on socio-economic cost/benefit calculations, politicians in Belgium have a larger pork barrel market to manipulate than in many other countries.

\textbf{E. Other patronage products}

\textbf{1. Status improvements}

Non-material status improvements are less relevant in the Belgian case. First, knighthoods etc. are not frequently given in comparison with for instance the UK. Hence, promotions of politicians into the aristocracy are relatively rare, and usually only occur after one's political career has ended.\textsuperscript{31} The same applies for the nomination of minister of state, which is only an honorary function awarded to the King for elderly statesmen.

As far as decorations are concerned, the national government attributes a large number of them. However, there are not considered a particular honour, and cannot be considered a important instrument of sanctioning party actors.

\textbf{2. Ordinary citizens benefits}

De Winter's (1992) analysis of the content of MPs' constituency service also reveals that apart from the patronage products mentioned above, several other public service products and services are subject to political patronage.\textsuperscript{32} Apart from jobs, the second most important sector relates to income problems, generally to obtaining a (or a higher) social security transfer (like pensions, child allowances, etc.). Problems related to the army also constitute a sector of importance, and include problems of professional army men as well as draftees.\textsuperscript{33} Then one finds four sectors of about equal importance: education, culture, and leisure (which basically

\textsuperscript{29} For instance, in 1981, a socio-economic cost-benefit analysis was made of the investment projects with regard to roads and waterways. The analysis showed that 72% of the most cost/beneficial works were situated in Flanders, representing 90% of the investments. In Flanders, 74% would go to the province of Antwerp. The minister of Public Works declared that cost-benefits analysis is only one element of the decision-making, together with political, community and local factors, and that the division between Flanders and Wallonia suggested by the study was politically unmanageable. Hence, he decided to allocate investments in a proportional way. Undoubtedly, the same kind of situation occurs for investments made by many other departments, like defence, public health, education, etc.

\textsuperscript{30} This method of allocating public expenditures - the so-called \textit{wafer iron politics} - is partially responsible for the high public debt of the Belgian state.

\textsuperscript{31} Of the post-war prime ministers, only Gaston Eyskens became a viscount, as an exceptional recognition of the King for the role he played in Belgian politics (9 years PM in the 1949-1973 period).

\textsuperscript{32} The most prominent demands to MPs are for employment, which includes general demands for a job as well as for political support for recruitment and promotion in the civil service. Nearly seven out of ten MPs reported this sector as the most important. The third sector is housing, which includes social housing, as well as obtaining building permissions.

\textsuperscript{33} In fact, the cabinet of the Ministry of Defence receives about 25,000 recommendations of politicians with regard to the placement of a draftee in the barracks close to his home. This represents about two thirds of the annual number of draftees.
concern problems of obtaining scholarships), taxes (problems of tax declaration, evasions and overtaxing), transport and communication (rapid telephone connections, car license plates, road works and security)\textsuperscript{34}, and family problems (divorce, juvenile delinquency, adoption). The least important sector is related to problems with the police and justice (immigration, legal support, prisoners). As this sector primarily includes the annulment of traffic fines, it comes as no surprise that MPs report this sector to be the least important one, since it is most likely to be also regarded by public opinion as the most illegitimate one.\textsuperscript{35}

Regarding to the extent of the parliamentary patronage, the average MP spent in 1996 four hours a week on constituency case work (5.2 hours in 1983), and took care of 689 cases per year (against 2134 in 1983). There remain strong differences between regions. In the 1978-1981 period the average Flemish member of the House of Representatives treated 1979 dossiers, against only 461 in 1996. The francophone Representatives treated in 1996 1040 cases, against 2492 in the period 1978-1981.

However, this apparently dramatic decline, in spite of a decline of the total number of members of the House of Representatives from 212 to 150, may be caused by a dislocation of party patronage. The 1988-1993 constitutional reforms devolved a large number of competencies from the federal to the regional and community level (roughly tripling these levels’ revenues). In addition, an entirely new political class was created. Before 1995, the members of the regional and community assemblies were also Representatives and Senators. Since, 1995 regional MPs are elected directly, and \textit{cumul} with a federal mandate is prohibited.

Hence, in spite of a reduction of the number of federal MPs from 396 (184 senators and 212 representatives in 1994) to 221 (71 and 150 respectively), there has been an explosion of regional MPs (currently 124 in the Flemish parliament, 75 in the Walloon parliament, 89 in the Brussels’ parliament, and 25 in the parliament of the German speaking community), or a total of 373 regional MPs. This makes estimates on the side of the patronage market hazardous, as very little elite surveys are held for these new elites. The federal Representatives, having lost many competencies to their regional colleagues, are probably less in demand for political interventions of clients.\textsuperscript{36}

Also the introduction of ombudsmen at all levels of government, within specific ministries and public enterprises, has further undermined the demand for constituency service.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{34} For instance, until recently, political support could speed up considerably the delay which are normally necessary for obtain a telephone connection or a new car license plate (DE CONINCK, D., "Platen-fraude 'geregularizeerd', De Morgen, 3/4/1991, p. 9; VAN HECKE, G. "Eén jaar wachten op telefoonaanslutting", De Standaard, 1/3/1990, p. 9).

\textsuperscript{35} An internal evaluation of the Gendarmerie revealed that 20% of the speed violations files 'get lost'.

\textsuperscript{36} Although one should not overestimate the capacity of citizens to know which level and type of MP is actually in charge of the problem he is concerned with. In 1996 (VRIND-data) about half of the Flemish respondents believed that federal PM was minister-president of Flanders, this in spite of the fact that the real minister-president got high media exposure.

\textsuperscript{37} In spite of the introduction of ombudsmen in other public institutions, the House of Representatives did not establish a parliamentary ombudsman until 1997. One reason for this reluctance was the fact that MPs themselves are very active in constituency casework. The prominence of this role is related to a clientelist political culture, to the lack of other sources of administrative redress, and to the wide scope of party patronage until the early 1990s (De Winter 1996, 1997). To some extent, this casework has informational spin-offs for legislative oversight, as it reveals the quality of government services. On the other hand, MPs tend to pay very little attention to the yearly ombudsmen report, indicating dysfunctions in the bureaucracy. In fact, at the end of their term, the first two federal ombudsmen even refused to publish their last yearly report as they did not receive any response on their previous reports from the House....
Still, the PIOP-ISPO post-electoral surveys do indicate a general decrease in the capacities of elected officials to deliver the goods to their clients. In 1991, about 21% of respondents declared to have applied the last four years for “a politician’s help for the solution of one or more personal problems”, against only 12% in 2003. In 1991, 69% of these clients found that the politician’s involvement had helped to resolve their problem, against 61% in 2003 (own calculations). Hence, while the appeals to federal MPs has diminished considerably, their effectiveness has suffered little, and the political exchange of “votes for favours” remains fairly intact.38

III. Party patronage actors, processing and management

A. Ministerial cabinets

1. General role and composition

Federal and regional39 ministers have large personal staffs (‘ministerial cabinets’) paid by the state. The size of ministerial cabinets ranged from several dozens to over 200 members40 (De Winter, Frognier, and Rihoux 1996). In the traditional parties, most top cabinet members are appointed by party headquarters, including the chef de cabinet, the minister’s main advisor.41 This enables party leaders to install their ‘men of confidence’ as monitoring and information channels in the immediate entourage of their ministers. All traditional parties keep lists of potential cabinetards, i.e. party confidents that they recommend to their incoming ministers when the latter have to compose their cabinet.42 Parties also drop in the ministerial cabinets MPs who were not re-elected, or set out promising young party workers in order to acquire some political or governmental apprenticeship. Cabinet members recruited amongst the civil service use their passage through a ministerial cabinet as a way to ensure their promotion in the civil service, as parties completely control promotions. The chefs de cabinet often remain in charge of a department longer than do ministers. As a reward for their party service, they often advance to the top civil service, or become MPs, ministers, or, in exceptional cases, the PM. Many cabinetards go back and forth between the ministerial cabinets and the civil service, with cabinet service quickening promotion in the civil service, and the civil service serving as a waiting room for the politically active whose party is in opposition (Dewachter 1995; Decat, Pelgrims & Hondeghem, 2004). A similar exchange operates between ministerial cabinets on the one hand, and the judiciary and the public enterprises on the other.43

38 In 1991, 53% declared to have voted for this politician in the last parliamentary elections, against 52% in 2003.
39 In the 80s, the regional and community executives simply copied the ministerial cabinet system from the former unitary government.
40 The vice-prime ministers (usually each supporting party has one) are usually in charge of a large department. In addition, they serve as the chef de file, the leader in cabinet of the ministers of their party, a role for which are equipped with a special ministerial cabinet for general policy. In addition to this ministerial cabinet for general affairs, they can rely on a cabinet for each ministerial portfolio they have. Thus, these vice-PMs often have more than two hundred personal collaborators, as they often have three cabinets. For instance, in the Dehaene II cabinet (1995-1999), one vice-PM was minister of Justice and of Economy.
41 A very large majority (86% in the 1970-1999 period) were party members and about half declared to be an active militant of their party (Suetens & Walgrave, 2001).
42 Often party leaders already contact potential chefs de cabinet during government negotiations, before the final nomination of ministers is concluded!
43 A 1973 study into the influence of more than twenty factors on civil servants’ professional careers revealed that civil servants felt that participating in a ministerial cabinet was the first requirement for gaining promotion (Depré, 1973: 332). In a similar study conducted in 1990, civil servants still found the ministerial cabinet the
The core of a ministerial cabinet constitutes about ten policy collaborators who are the main personal political advisors of the minister even representing him sometimes at formal occasions. Apart from these substantial aids, a ministerial cabinet typically consists of almost 40 technical and administrative collaborators: secretaries, chauffeurs, cleaning personnel.

The members of the ministerial cabinet prepare their minister’s own projects and positions on issues to be raised in upcoming cabinet meetings or in cabinet committees on which the minister serves, formulate potential compromises that the minister can propose, and also prepare the minister’s positions for parliamentary appearances. Some advisors specialize in the policy area of another department, usually when a coalition party has a particular interest in a policy area in which it does not have any ministers. Finally, the ministerial cabinet, especially its lower-level staff, is responsible for running the clientelist machinery, especially in the minister’s electoral constituency. Dozens of ministers’ staff members also work directly and exclusively for the party, and hardly ever show up at the offices of the minister’s personal cabinet.

2. Evolution of size

In spite of regular complaints by civil servants, opposition parties, journalists and academics about the ministerial cabinet system in terms of dysfunctions (infra) and cost, their size has continued to grow. Accurate data is however not available for all periods and government levels (table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>FEDERAL Number</th>
<th>Costs</th>
<th>REGIONS/COMMUNITIES Number</th>
<th>Costs</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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<td>1958-61</td>
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<td>2003</td>
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shortest path to the administrative top (Hondegheh 1990: 318, 439). Consequently many top civil servants in Belgium served as a cabinetard before. Of the ten top officials of the Belgian civil service (secretary-general of a department) in 2000, all these served in a ministerial cabinet at least for a while. In addition, former cabinet service is also helpful for making career at the lower levels of federal, regional and even local functionaries and in most semi-governmental enterprises and services not belonging to civil service in the strict sense (Walgrave et al, 2004).

Since the Copernicus reforms of the cabinet system (infra) it has become increasingly difficult to count the exact number of cabinetards, especially per cabinet status. Still, all data suggest a gradual increase of the overall (federal + regional) size and costs. Following a different methodology, Pelgrims and Dereu (2005) estimate that the cost of federal cabinets has risen from 31,000,000 euros in 1994 to 46,000,000 in 2000, the year of introduction of the Copernicus reforms. The first years after one can notice a considerable drop in costs to 42,000,000 euro at the end of the Verhofstadt I term (1999-2003). However, in the Verhofstadt II government, costs started rising again up to 53,000,000 euros in 2005.

3. Reforms of the cabinet system

Since the end of the 1980s, and especially after the shock of the 1991 ‘Black Sunday’ elections (i.e. the breakthrough of the extreme right) and the subsequent calls for a ‘new political culture’, there has been a general move towards accountability and the depoliticisation of the civil service. In addition, a code on the relationship between ministers and their administration has expanded the role of the latter. The ministerial staffs are now required to meet regularly with the top civil servants in their ministry. In the past, ministerial staffs tended to work with civil servants loyal to their party, often bypassing the hierarchical order of the department. Higher civil servants have been made more responsible for the management of their departments, are regularly evaluated and can now be sanctioned (or even fired) for poor performance. The role of the departmental secretary general has been enhanced with regard to budgeting, personnel policy and policy implementation. A college of secretary-generals advises to the government and plays a co-ordinating role in matters that concern several departments (De Ryck 1994). As a consequence, ministers now tend to have much more direct contact with their top civil servants. The emancipation of the higher civil service has been enhanced by the reduction of the size of the ministerial cabinets by a third, basically due to the introduction of a constitutional amendment limiting the number of ministers to 15.

In 1999 an ambitious reform of the administration was initiated by the unprecedented "rainbow coalition (liberal, socialist and green parties). Especially the Greens -- which had never taken office before -- aimed at the reduction the size and the power of ministerial cabinets in favour of the regular civil service (Walgrave et al, 2004). Only a few months after this government took office it decided to abolish the ministerial cabinets tout court, to create small “strategic policy cells” and for the rest to rely on civil service for policy advice. Ministers were allotted a fixed sum for their cabinet that they could use at will. This allowed for paying higher wages for specialists, including spin doctors. Yet, the abolishment of the ministerial cabinets did not really succeed and the next government of socialist and liberal parties that took office in June 2003 reinstated the ministerial cabinets.

B. Nomination actors within and between parties

It is however quite difficult to assess possible differences in the degree of job patronage between cabinets, or between parties. All supporting parties considered in this paper participate

45 In the 1970-1999 period the total number of “political advisors” within cabinets increased from around 300 to 900.
46 Some departments (Finance, Defence, and Foreign Affairs) traditionally managed to maintain a relative high level of autonomy vis-à-vis the ministers and their cabinets. Since up to the end of the 1970s the latter two policy sectors were not arenas of strong partisan conflicts, parties felt less inclined to control policy-making through the politicisation of recruitment policy in these departments.
47 Only the Minister of Administrative Reforms and the Prime Minister decided to liquidate their cabinet, the latter by transferring most of his personal collaborators to the enhancFed Chancellery.
in job patronage. However, as Liberals and Socialists are not always in power (contrary to the Christian-democrats until 1999), they try to effectuate a catch-up operation, which should compensate for the fact that these parties have not been able to nominate their clientele for the years they were in opposition.\(^{48}\) Hence, at the moment of the coalition talks, parties usually agree upon the quotas of nominations and promotions each party has a right to effectuate and the extent of the catch-up.\(^{49}\)

As far as differences (if any) between cabinets is concerned, they are mainly determined by the number of jobs governments are allowed to create. In the governments before Martens V (1981), the government launched many special employment programmes to fight rising unemployment. In the period 1981-1988, recruitment into the national public sector nearly came to a halt, due to budgetary and political constraints (infra). The come-back of the Socialists and their \textit{retour du coeur} policies expanded public employment again. In addition, the probably most fertile job patronage fields are not situated any more at the level of the national administrations, but that of the regional and community administration. Since 1981, these levels have been building up their own administrations, which were often to be created from scratch, which allowed for massive circumventions of the normal statutory recruitment proceedings. The constitutional reforms of 1988 and 1993 have triggered another wave of patronage recruitment into the newly created or expanded administrations.\(^{50}\)

In practice MPs and other elected sub-state actors\(^{51}\), representatives of the constituency party organisations and of intraparty factions recommend their candidates to the national party secretary, who tries to aggregate the demands and compose a final preference list of his party to be communicated to the nominating minister, or to the interparty conference(s) that decides upon allocation of jobs.

The management of the promotion of university trained civil servants was strongly controlled by the majority parties until the end of the 1980s. Two types of interparty concertation governed the distribution of promotions between governmental parties. First, the distribution of top positions in the civil service, i.e. director general and secretary general, were decided by the cabinet itself, whereby evidently a candidate's support by a coalition party is taken into full consideration. Second, for the lower ranks of university trained civil servants, an unofficial interparty committee was established in the early seventies, chaired by a collaborator of the PM.\(^{52}\) Each coalition party has one representative in this committee. This committee met regularly, often twice a month, depending on the number of promotions to be decided upon.

\(^{48}\) According to D'HONDT (p. 128), Liberal and Socialist parties always demand a catch-up operation. The need for this seems real, as for instance data for 1990 indicates that six out of ten higher civil servants belong to the Christian-democrats ticket (TEGENBOS, 1990). However, the figures published by DE WINTER (1981), HONDEGHEM (1990) and TEGENBOS (1988) suggest that Liberal and Socialist parties do not manage to recuperate too much of the lost ground, and that the quotas agreed upon correspond closely to the parties' parliamentary strength.

\(^{49}\) For instance, in the Martens VIII government, of the jobs attributed to the Flemish parties, the CVP obtained 47\%, the SP 35\% and the VU 18\%. The distribution between the francophone parties was as follows: PS 68\%, PSC 32\%. For quota's used in previous governments, see DE WINTER (1981), HONDEGHEM (1990). In the 1990s, the francophone parties did not only conclude an agreement on the quotas (1/3 PSC and 2/3 PS), but also named the civil servants that would profit from this sharing.

\(^{50}\) According to the 1988 agreement between the parties supporting the Flemish executive, the CVP got 40\% of the nominations, the SP 30\%, and the VU 15\%. The remaining 15\% was left to liberal or neutral candidates (Van Den Driesche, 1991).

\(^{51}\) Provincial councillors and deputies, and mayors, aldermen and members of the local council, all engage in service activities towards individual citizens. In terms of numbers of clients and jobs involved, patronage at the local and provincial level probably exceeds the one on the national level.

\(^{52}\) Since the federalisation of the national civil service, similar committees have been set up to monitor the patronage of the promotions of civil service of the regional and communitarian level.
For each position, the committee considered the candidates for promotion, and the support each candidate has from a coalition party. In principle, each coalition party could make nominations in proportion to its parliamentary strength. When no candidate was backed by any party, the committee nominated the candidate proposed by the board of directors of the ministerial department. This committee was installed to prevent ministers to nominate their own protégés, without taking into account those supported by other coalition parties or candidates supported by other politicians of their own party into consideration.

In order to prepare the meetings of this committee, parties installed intraparty nomination committees, in which the value of candidates supported by party leaders, MPs and other patrons were compared, and whereby a decision was reached on which candidate the party would eventually support for a specific post. In the CVP, this committee included the representative of the CVP in the interparty nomination committee, the party officer responsible for nominations, the representatives of the three estates, a CVP higher civil servant of the department(s) in which the nominations were to be made. The most important intraparty nomination criteria were services to the party or to the intraparty faction. In the PSC, the intraparty nomination committee was composed of the representative of the PSC in the interparty nomination committee, a representative of the party leadership, and a representative of each minister. The representative of the PSC in the interparty nomination committee checked whether candidates were party member, asked the opinion of PSC civil servants about the quality of their candidating colleague, sometimes invited the candidate for an interview, and finally drew up the party's preference list. Once the selection made in the CVP and the PSC, both parties tried to reach a pre-agreement, which reinforces their position at the interparty nomination committee. In the Liberal parties and the VU, there was no internal nomination committee, as they usually had only one (or not even one) candidate that fitted the formal recruitment criteria for a given position. In the Socialist parties the nomination committee included a delegate of the president, representatives of the ministerial cabinets, a representative of the Socialist trade union, and socialist civil servants of the departments concerned, as well as representatives of the constituency parties. The representative in the interparty nomination committee was either a representative of the party president and/or a member of the cabinet of a prominent minister.

Hence, the composition of the intraparty nomination committees suggests that several types of nominators interfered at that level (party president, prominent ministers and their cabinets, factions, constituency parties, MPs and other brokers). Yet, it is too difficult to assess which actor carried most weight in this intraparty nomination decision making process.

Since the Copernicus reforms, comprehensive coordination of patronage between coalition parties seems to have decreased, apart from the top nominations that are still discussed in the Council of Ministers. But within departments, for the lower levels, there seems to be less interparty coordination. This is in tune with the more general political culture of these liberal-socialist governments, which allow each party to pursue its policy preferences within their own department, without looking for every decision for a consensus between coalition parties, as was the case in the 1990s (De Winter & Dumont, 2006, Witte).

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53 Data is based on HONDEGEM (1990) and DE WINTER (1981, based on own interviews with members of interparty nomination committee).

54 In case of disagreement within the SP intraparty nomination committee, the president sometimes has to make the final decision, which is sometimes even submitted for approval to the party bureau.
IV. Rationales of patronage

A. Electoral support

Party patronage used to be an important source of electoral support until the end of the 1970s. MPs in the early 1980s believed that this was the best way to attract preference votes, and also voters believed that was the best way. When in the 1980s the patronage market was still much larger than today, estimates indicate that about two thirds of clients actually voted for their patrons (De Winter, 1995). However, this success rate has gone down to about half, while the number of clients has also decreased dramatically (supra).

B. Party cohesion

1. Patronage as party collective and individual material incentives

The party leadership can utilize governmental patronage resources for controlling their party organisation. Some extreme cases reveal that manipulation of the party through government patronage does occur. Yet, in most cases, ministers will utilize governmental patronage not as a negative sanction against party rebellion, but rather as a means of raising intraparty support for their own ministerial position, for the party as a whole, and as a means to reward clienteles situated outside the party.

Patronage rewards of government participation are so massive that most party rank-and-file, mid level elites, MPs and the party leadership is strongly biased in favour of government participation. Formally, this participation has to be endorsed by the party’s sovereign or supreme decision-making body, the party congress. In practice, no party conference has ever rejected a coalition agreement. The votes taken indicate a usually large consensus on government composition and agreement, with some notorious exceptions. This large consensus is due not only to the attractiveness of the policies the new government promises to implement, or the brilliance with which the party negotiators present their deal to the rank-and-file. It is also due to the fact that a large number of conference participants have - directly or indirectly- an interest in their party gaining or maintaining power. First, most top party leaders are appointed to the cabinet, to which every normal MP aspires. Second, MPs support the government because participation facilitates their individual and collective constituency service and thus their chances for re-election. Third, the party intelligentsia is awarded with positions in the ministerial cabinets and with promotions into the highly politicized public sector (supra). Fourth, intraparty factions not only find a government favourable to their demands, but also often can nominate the ministers relevant to their interest, and appoint trustees in the relevant cabinets and administrations. Finally, most constituency

55 For instance, in 1988-1990, former party president Cools, by then the minister of Interior for the Walloon region, ignored or delayed for a long time the demands made by the mayors of Charleroi and Liège for governmental subsidies, as these cities constituted the hard core of the intraparty resistance towards the participation of the PS in the Martens VIII government, and towards the leadership of Spitaels, the dauphin, protégé and successor of Cools.

56 Apart from the Brussels Francophone Liberal splinter party in 1974, that should be considered as a party faction, rather than an autonomous party.
party organizations can put some of their administrative personnel on state payroll by "parking" them in the ministerial cabinets (De Winter, Frognier and Rihoux 1996).

Hence, it is not at all surprising that party congresses usually approve government participation by overwhelming majorities. The outlook for personal and collective rewards endorsed the deal the party leaders have struck during the formation negotiations, and reinforced intra-party respect for the compromises made, as well as loyalty to the coalition partners, on the basis of the common policy contract, the coalition agreement (De Winter, Timmermans, Dumont, 2000).

C. Aiding and controlling MPs

MPs have in many cases to rely on the ministerial cabinets in order to receive a benevolent treatment of their interventions on behalf of individual constituents. Hence, with regard to individual and collective constituency work, one can assume that some political exchange occurs between MPs and other party officials seeking benefits for their clientele, and the ministers who take the final decisions on these matters.57

D. Control over policy initiation, formulation and implementation

1. The verification of the coalition policy agreement and control over individual ministers

The members of the ministerial cabinet spend a considerable time in following government's conduct of business at the level of the Council of ministers and in the cabinet committees of which the minister is member. They prepare the ministers interventions in these meetings as well as in parliament. Evidently, they also prepare with particular care the minister's own projects, which often require numerous consultations with the administration and with other ministerial cabinets. These consultations can be formally organised, for instance in intercabinet groups, or informal. Sometimes the chefs de cabinet or other superior level collaborators can replace the minister in certain cabinet committees.

Ministerial cabinets serve to inform the party in policy fields where the party does not have a minister or secretary of state of his own. Hence, inside some ministerial cabinets, shadow cabinets are set up in order to scrutinize the policies intended by ministers of other parties.

The main instrument for party control over government decision-making is position of vice-prime minister. Usually each supporting party has one. These vice-PMs are usually in charge of a large department. In addition, they serve as the chef de file, the leader in cabinet of the ministers of their party, and constitute with the other vice-PMs and the PM the so-called Kerncabinet, the top cabinet committee which meets quite regularly, in which major decisions are reached between the coalition parties on conflictual matters, whereby the final decision is

57 Note that parliamentarians of the majority parties, although they do bark more during the parliamentary investiture debate, do considerably rebel less than the party militants at the party investiture congress. Parliamentary votes of investiture of a new cabinet are characterized by a high level of voting discipline. In the entire post-war period, in each chamber, on the average only 0.6% of the majority MPs voted against the government at the investiture vote. Since the coalition program and configuration are approved by the national congress of the respective coalition parties before the government seeks the investiture by parliament, a negative vote by majority MPs would openly defy the decisions of the party’s supreme decision-making body. Thus, during the vote of confidence debate, majority MPs do occasionally criticize governmental intentions contained in its program, but rarely dare they follow up with a negative vote.
later only formally approved by the full cabinet. For their cabinet leadership role, these vice-PMs are equipped with a special cabinet for general policy, a personal staff of about seventy collaborators, whose main tasks is to follow the decision-making of the other ministers in the government and safeguard the party's interest (De Winter, Dumont & Timmermans, 2000). Hence, one of the main political function of the ministerial cabinets is to assure the party organisation a government paid personnel utilized for a variety of purposes, governmental as well as others. At the level of the government, even when the main collaborators do help the minister with his ministerial responsibilities, they also exercise control over the minister on behalf of the party, upon which they have to rely for their nomination and career.

Yet, even if the cabinets are channels of influence of parties on ministers, and thus on the governmental process, they also represent means of influence of the ministers on the party, if the ministers themselves are political heavyweights. For ministers who have exercised important functions within their party and the government, cabinet members can represent a personal following, which they can deploy as loyal troops at the party's congress.

2. Control over administration

Given the encompassing politicization, ministers feared that they could not unconditionally rely on the loyalty of their civil servants. Hence, until the early 1990s, ministerial cabinets carried out most policy development, verification of policy implementation, and mediation with interest groups (Hondeghem 1996). The civil service, including high civil servants, basically only provided the cabinet with the information necessary for policy planning and policy and department management (except for personnel policy, which was also controlled by the ministerial cabinets). Hence, a vicious circle exists between politicization and ministerial cabinets. The excessive use of ministerial cabinets is partially due to the politicization of the civil service, which often creates tensions when top civil servants belong to a different party than their minister. But cabinets also play a major pro-active role in the politicisation of the civil service.58

Apart from the reforms of the cabinet system mentioned above that altered the power relations between cabinet and administration, recent comparative case studies in six ministries indicate that interdepartmental coordination is still managed by the ministerial cabinets, and the participation of civil servants remains rare unless their expertise is really required. Also external relations with interest groups are still entirely managed by the ministerial cabinets. On the other hand, civil servants are involved, with the ministerial cabinets in the implementation process. The political level does grant the public service a predominant role in management of their services, in terms of budgetary and personnel management. In the end, the degree of collaboration between the political and administrative levels heavily depends on the will of the minister (and his cabinet), the latter’s recognition of the expertise civil servant may offer, the degree of career interface between the cabinet and the civil servants, the existence of a good code on interaction between the cabinet and the higher civil service, the pro-active role definition of the secretary-generals, and the fact that the agents (civil servants) have a single or several principals (ministers) (De Visscher, 2004:161-165).

Hence, the Copernicus reforms do not seem to have altered the old ways. The basic power relations between the political and the administrative have not changed (De Visscher, 2004:179-180).

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58 60% being Christian-democrats.
3. Control over judiciary

The political Kaltsstellung of the judiciary worked relatively well until the mid-1990s. The outbreak of corruption scandals related to party funding, as well as the Dutroux affaire created a window of opportunity to break through the “party/judiciary complex”. Before, brave judges embarking on an embarrassing case (especially linked with illegal acts linked to party finances) were promoted out of the way, or their case was delayed until it became void. In the 1990s, with the outbreak of the Agusta scandal of illegal party finance, some judges felt that they could launch a Mani Pulite operation. However, this window of opportunity was gradually closed, because in the war between politics and the judiciary, both were vulnerable and not beyond reproach. In addition, since the laws of 1989 and 1993 on public financing of parties, all parties have become quite “clean”, and therefore are less vulnerable vis-à-vis judiciary clean hands operations.

E. Minimizing agency loss

Partitocracy can also be analysed within the principal-agent framework of the democratic process of delegation and accountability (Strom, Müller & Bergman, 2003): a partitocracy is a system of delegation and accountability in which the main principals in the political system are the political parties, and that enter in a principal agent relationship with most other political actors and institutions, like the government and civil service, the legislature, the judiciary, the (public) media, and the neo-corporatist actors. In order to minimize agency loss, they have installed a wide variety of a priori control mechanisms (selection, screening, contracting, etc.) and a posteriori (monitoring devices (cabinets, cabinet committees, party leader summits, etc., de-selection, etc.). The Belgian party principals use predominantly a priori control mechanisms, and, depending the sector, also a posteriori (government, parliament).

In each process of delegation of political power, political parties play a predominant role. They channel the delegation of power from voters to MPs, from parliament to the cabinet, from the collective cabinet to individual ministers, and from ministers to their civil servants. The parties have developed a large number of ex ante and ex post control and permanent monitoring mechanisms in order to maintain their control over voters, party rank-and-file, MPs as well as ministers and civil servants.

Party patronage certainly offers strong ex ante and ex post control and permanent monitoring mechanisms: it links voters and party members to elected and party officials, it reinforces parliamentary discipline, it offers party substantial control over the management and policy of ministers and civil servants, and generally enhances party cohesion.

V. Evaluation and outlook

The extreme fragmentation of the Belgian party system in combination with its increasing needs for multilevel coordination have enhanced the position of political parties in the Belgian polity. In that sense, Belgium has become even more partitocratic than in the heydays of the 1970 and 1980s. On the other hand, some of the clientelistic and patronage excesses have somewhat been reduced in the 1990s, at least to the external world, and restored to some degree the legitimacy of Belgian partitocracy.59 While the Italian partitocrazia

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59 Survey research indicates that a large majority of Belgian citizens believe that parties and politicians are not responsive to the policy preference of ordinary citizens (ISPO-PIOP 1999 post-electoral survey). This public disaffection with Belgian parties reached alarming degrees at the end of the 1980s, as reflected in the breakthrough of the extreme right and other protest parties.
suddenly imploded in the early 1990s, the Belgian *particratie* underwent a number of gradual adaptations, which reduced the perception of the negative consequences of the grip of political parties on central government and thus prevented a full collapse of the partitocratic system.\(^{60}\) Still, even while some major corrections have been made, one can wonder whether these are sufficient to cope with the strong outburst of public dissatisfaction with the way parties have run the country in the past decades.

One of the main constraints on the further expansion of party patronage in Belgium has been the fact that the state has run virtually bankrupt. In the 1990s Belgium had the highest level of public debt of the fifteen EU members (in 1993 137.1% of GNP and still at 90.7% in 2006). The repayment of this debt absorbed in 1993 11.1% of the GDP or 28.4% of the federal budget (as most of this debt was made by the federal government). It has decreased to 4.8% of the GNP by 2004, or 9.6% of the federal budget.\(^{61}\) The Maastricht norms forced the governments of the 1990s to heavily cut in public expenditures, leaving little space for innovative policies (Belgium has one of the lowest public investment degrees in research and development) nor for expanding social security benefits, hiring new civil servants or increase their pay. The heavy burden of the repayment of the gigantic public debt will remind the population for decades of the dysfunctions of the party patronage and therefore the legitimacy of the main political parties. Given these budgetary constraint, the possibility of the central government to react to and meet new societal needs is severely restricted, due to the wastes of the 1970s and 1980s.

To some extent, partitocracy is unavoidable and even functional for political system stability. Given the extremely high fragmentation, a minimum level of government stability and coherence requires power to be concentrated in the hands of a small number of actors. Autonomous MPs, ministers, top civil servants, and to some extent even judges and courts could ‘spoil’ the extremely complex and delicate process of delegation, and even contribute to its collapse.

The systemic costs of sixty years of party patronage are high: apart from the gigantic public debt there we find an oversized public sector, underqualified personnel and ineffective public service, demotivation of civil servants, public policies aimed at satisfying parties and their clienteles preferences, de-ideologisation of party membership incentives, and weak institutional support and governability.

Since the 1991 ‘Black Sunday’ elections, institutional reform and democratic refinement have been high on the political agenda. This has produced a large number of institutional reform proposals (De Winter and Brans 1999). Amongst that have been effectively been implemented and are related to party patronage, one finds restrictions on the accumulation of local executive offices by MPs, closing loopholes with regard to private party financing, lowering the ceiling on campaign spending for individual candidates, increasing citizens’ access to public administrators, increasing the transparency, responsiveness, responsibility, and efficacy of public administration, (partially) depoliticizing civil service recruitment and promotions, and drafting different codes of conduct for MPs, civil servants and party officials that should curtail their clientelistic intervention in public administration.\(^{62}\)

\(^{60}\) However, while satisfaction with democracy took a dramatic dip in 1997 (minus 34% to 19%, the lowest in the EU), it has recovered surprisingly quick, to even above the European average (De Winter and Türsan, 2002). Trust in political institutions has followed this trend (with trust in government, parliament, the parties and public administration approaching again the European average), but trust remains dramatically low for the judiciary, police, army and the Church.

\(^{61}\) Since the last 6 years, Belgium has produced a balanced budget.

\(^{62}\) The Flemish Parliament has in 1997 promulgated such a code, drafted by Dr. De Winter, which has gradually become the standard for similar codes being drafted by other national, provincial, and local assemblies. Also many parties have drafted codes of proper conduct, which are usually stricter than the current consensus, and in
However, the window of opportunity to curb party patronage, opened by the scandals of the 1990s leading to a call for a “new political culture”, seized by the first Verhofstadt government, seems to have been wasted. This opens the door to another victory of extreme-right anti-establishment parties.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{63} The Vlaams Blok has since the early 1980s never lost an election (De Winter, Gomez & Buelens, 2006).
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