

AN ALPHABETIC GUIDE TO THE BELGIAN COMMUNITY DISPUTE

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Introduction

The dispute over Belgium's future between Flemish and French speaking parties seems to be insurmountable. It's not the first time that the country experiences a crisis but this one seems to be more difficult due to the lack of historical knowledge. This document aims at contributing to a better understanding of the current situation by taking into account the history of the country. This paper is subjective and "historically" dated (second half of 2007) and its only purpose is to try to comprehend the debate's terminology. The issues addressed here only give a partial view but are steadfast. The following are fragments of the Belgian mosaic that will help to explain the global situation.

Affiliations

Belgian political history has been understood in relation to the three main rifts¹ that originated from the modern industrial era: the rifts Church/State, property owners/workers, city centre/suburbs, the latter being at the root of the linguistic and community quarrel. Even today, these rifts cover different political, economic and social affiliations and influence political party programs even if their stand on different issues have been qualified.

Throughout Belgium's history, the different combination of these rifts have demanded complex compromises which have guaranteed a certain perpetuation of the Belgian political system throughout successive reforms. Since the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, the community rift has increasingly dominated the political scene, leaving other differences in the background. In a federal majority, the parties belonging to a same Community often feel closer than those belonging to the other Community, even if they hold the same confessional and/or economic and social positions. Moreover, hasn't the evolution of our societies dictated an always ever deeper reshaping of the social rifts? Aren't we noticing the emergence of a new rift concerning the ecological issue? Finally, won't the community rift be progressively supplanted by a regional rift determined by the affiliation to territorially different Regions?

Belgium

This European State was created in 1830, from different coexisting internal (economic social and religious) and external forces (great European powers). The national feeling is not as strong as in other European countries, which has not always been the case, for example, during and after the First World War, following the Prussian invasion. Also during the 19th century, the Constitution of the new State, very democratic for its time (even without universal suffrage), was cause for patriotic pride for the aristocratic class which dominated the political system². Today, the different viewpoints between the French-speaking and Flemish political parties on the evolution of the Belgian institutions make the idea of an end to the Belgian state increasingly plausible. Nevertheless, it could be that on the French-speaking side, the fear of the end of Belgium is impeding a real internal debate on the future of Belgium, Wallonia and Brussels, either in the current framework or within a different institutional framework.

¹ Xavier Mabille, « Histoire politique de la Belgique, Facteurs et acteurs de changement » CRISP, Edition 1992

² E. Witte, E. Gubin and J.-P. Nandrin; G. Deneckere, *"Nouvelle Histoire de la Belgique"* Col1 : 1830 - 1905, Complexe, 2005

C onfederalism/federalism

These two words single out the two opposite approaches for the institutional future of Belgium. On June 10th, 56.68% of Flemish citizens voted for parties with a “confederalist” vision, and even in some cases a “separatist vision”, including the CD&V, the party of Yves Leterme, the man chosen to form a government and thus, the next prime minister. What does this mean for Belgium? For the CD&V (a position expressed at a press conference in March 2007), transforming Belgium into a confederal state would mean having the country co-ruled by the Flemish Region and the Walloon Region. The Brussels Region would also be co-ruled by both Regions but would keep some of its current powers. This transformation would, among other things, require the modification of Article 35 of the constitution. The Regions would be entrusted with the so-called residual powers, which would become powers that are not explicitly attributed to the Federal State. The French-speakers believe that confederalism will pave the way to separatism and the split of Belgium. They defend the Federal Belgium established in 1993, when the first sentence of Article 1 of the Constitution “*Belgium is divided into provinces*” became “*Belgium is a Federal State composed of Regions and Communities*”. We can compare this sentence to Article 1 of the Swiss Constitution entitled “*Swiss Confederation*”: “*The Swiss Nation and the cantons (administrative division) of Zurich, Berne, Lucerne, Uri, Schwyz, Obwald and Nidwald, Glaris, Zoug, Fribourg, Soleuref Bâle-Ville and Bâle-Campagne, Schaffhouse, Appenzell Rhodes-Extérieures and Appenzell Rhodes-Intérieures, Saint-Gall, Grisons, Argovie, Thurgovie, Tessin, Vaud, Valais, Neuchâtel, Genève and Jura form the Swiss Confederation*”. Paradoxically, Switzerland is more of a federation than a confederation. It has a federal hierarchy of government which controls its institutional structure.

D ispute

The Belgian institutional evolution is the result of a consensus between totally different views. It is certainly not issued from a pre-established common project. The Flemish will to privilege the development of Communities responsible for carrying out specific cultural and linguistic projects has been confronted with the Walloon desire for acquiring economic tools for strengthening its weak economy. The bilingual aspect of the Brussels Region has also had to be taken into account. These different views have resulted in an original institutional system characterized by the coexistence of Regions and Communities. The dispute has been accentuated by the lack of federal parties and/or elected representatives as well as the fact that no common media shared by all Belgians exists where the different positions could be debated.

Europe

At the heart of Europe, Belgium has often considered itself to be a model - a “mini-Europe”. As the essayist Geert Van Istendael once said, “*Europa zal Belgisch zijn of zal niet zijn*”³. The European fate of Belgium is an old issue that was already present in the minds of Belgium’s founders in the 19th century... Even today, some Belgians who are ardent Europeans ask themselves “*why try to build a united Europe when we are incapable of building a united Belgium*”. Combining centralization and decentralization, identity and solidarity, building a shared space where different opinions are expressed: these are the common challenges for Europe and Belgium. Nevertheless, there is at least one big difference: the European process is heading towards integration (difficult as it may be) while the Belgian process is heading towards a slow and apparently inevitable separation.

Frontiers

It was in 1962 that the linguistic borders were defined. The law established unilingualism for administrative matters in Flanders and Wallonia, and bilingualism in Brussels. In certain communes of the unilingual Regions, a special system exists called “facility communes” (“communes à facilités”) that enables its citizens to dispose of administrative services in the minority language. The infallibility of the linguistic border, as a State border, has always been a Flemish claim as they fear that the number of bilingual communes may increase (this is the fear of “the oil spill” on the outskirts of Brussels). In 1954, after the linguistic census of 1947, the number of bilingual communes rose from 16 to 19. The Flemish parties have always feared that the trend would continue and succeeded in putting a stop to censuses and the definitive creation of the linguistic frontier. On the other hand, the French-speaking parties are threatening to demand the extension of the Brussels Region to the six facility communes that already have a majority of French speakers. The Flemish claim for the scission of the Brussels-Hal-Vilvorde electoral district also aims at keeping the linguistic homogeneity of Flanders. In the elections of June 10th 2007, the French-speaking parties obtained more votes on the outskirts of Brussels than in the previous election (20% in the BHV district compared to 16% in 2003). The same trend was observed in the Brussels Region (88.5% in 2007 compared to 85.9% in 2003).

Government (equally represented)

³ Geert van Istendael, « L’Europe sera Belge ou ne sera pas », Het Belgisch Labyrint, De Arbeiderspers, 2005, p. 291

Article 99 of the Constitution specifies that an equal number of Flemish ministers and French-speaking ministers are represented within the Federal Government, *“except for the Prime Minister”*. For the Flemish community, this parity is a “concession” since the Flemish speaking population is the majority. The same parity rule is applied within the government of the Brussels Region although the Flemish only represent 11.5% of the population (June 2007 election). The Belgian federal government (with the Brussels government) is one of the only places left where the parties, organized on a community basis, negotiate and govern together. During the last government mandates, community rifts have emerged on all matters, making it increasingly difficult to govern.

Hierarchy (of norms)

If the hierarchy of norms exists in Belgium, it is extremely limited. A regional or community decree, as well as a law, must respect the Belgian Constitution which is a superior norm. It is different for laws and decrees since no hierarchy exists between them, but rather a strict equality. This is the equipollence of norms. The area of authority of each entity which issues these norms also has to be respected, which further complicates matters. This equipollence is generally seen as a consequence of the minority aspect of the Walloons within the Belgian state and the fact that they do not want to have norms imposed upon them by the Flemish majority. In the case of the noise pollution caused by Zaventem airport, it has also been apparent that the Brussels Region can issue norms that come into conflict with Federal norms, and that the Federal government is incapable of imposing its policies on the Brussels Region. In the absence of superior norms, the Federal entities are obliged to co-operate. Certain constitutionalists believe that the absence of the hierarchy of norms is a typical confederalist trait of our system although it is known to be a federal system.

Identities

Identities define a person or a group in relation to another. This notion of identity is criticized as “murderous”⁴ referring to its criminal use during the 20th century, dating from the extermination of the Jews to the Rwandan genocide and the ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia. But it could be debated whether a policy is really possible without stating differences, as long as they are not a source of hierarchy and exclusion. Philippe Destatte, the director of the Jules Destrée Institute, suggests a Walloon identity could be *“an open political identity, respectful of people, participative and citizen-based, pluralist and allowing other affiliations”*⁵ He also adds: *“this identity could reflect the will to participate in a project rather than a feeling of an affiliation”*. The manifesto for the Walloon Culture⁶ signed in 1984 by Walloon intellectuals and creators simply stated: *“Those from Wallonia, without exception, are*

⁴ Amin Maalouf, « Les identités meurtrières », Grasset, 1998

⁵ Philippe Destatte, « L'Identité wallonne : une volonté de participer plutôt qu'un sentiment d'appartenance. Contribution »

⁶ www.toudi.org

all those who work and live within the Walloon space. They are those whose thoughts and beliefs respect mankind. As a community of simple humans, Wallonia wants to emerge within its own right and remain open to the rest of the world". The European, Belgian, French-speaking and Walloon identities can coexist within the same person. Identity can encourage dialogue, an opening to others, because one can recognize and identify the origin of the other. In 2003, a group of intellectuals from Brussels also published a manifesto calling for the recognition of a multicultural and multilingual Brussels reality⁷. According to the signatories, the community and linguistic rift is a thing of the past and the institutions that were built at that time no longer meet the real needs and aspirations of the population of Brussels.

Journalism

The media plays a key-role in the Belgian community issue. As for Belgian political parties, the media is strictly divided according to their community affiliation, excepting the Belga Agency which is the only remaining national Belgian media. The media organizations have a double role: to inform their community as well as being their spokesperson. The Flemish editorials have played an important role in the emergence of the Flemish movement, through sustained pressure on politicians. On the other hand, the French-speaking media at times increase their reader's incomprehension of the evolution of the Flemish community. Over these last years, an awareness of the lack of communication between Flemish and French-speaking public opinion has arisen. This separation has resulted in the fact that in Flanders, the media does not speak about the same political issues as in the French-speaking part and if they do, it is to say completely different things. Federal politicians rarely appear on the television channels of the other community, either by lack of electoral interest or because many of them do not master their counterpart's language, especially true of the French-speaking politicians. Several initiatives have been taken during recent years to renew the dialogue and to oppose different opinions, for example with the Prince Philippe Fund.⁸

Katastrophe

On December 13th 2006, the French-speaking public television channel RTBF aired a program announcing the independence of Flanders, using stereotyped appearances to create a fiction. Many spectators believed the hoax, which proves at least two things: 1. the scenario is a possibility. 2. the political knowledge and understanding of what is really happening in Flanders is not very acute. The belief in this hoax also created a certain stress for some of the audience. The end of Belgium would be a real catastrophe. We could say therefore that there is a certain "national" feeling of belonging within the French-speaking community. Nevertheless, it is difficult to measure its extent. The death of King Baudouin demonstrated that it can be expressed massively as well as spontaneously. On the other

⁷ www.manifestobru.org

⁸ www.monarchie.be/fr/initiatives/filip - Also David D'Hondt « Flandre et Communauté Wallonie-Bruxelles : le fossé médiatique se creuse », La Revue Nouvelle, April 2007 n°4

hand, we can not say that the unitary political parties have ever been successful. If a “Belgian national feeling” can sometimes be expressed as strongly as unpredictably, it has not yet found a convincing political expression.

Languages

Initially, the community conflicts were rows over the use of languages. The history of Belgium in the 19th century was characterized by the will to impose the French language throughout the country despite the fact that, in 1830, the majority of the country did not speak the language. At the end of the French occupation in 1814, the Brussels’ corporations protested (in French since it was the language of those who dominated the country) against the preservation of French linguistic rules: *“the proscription of the Flemish national language must stop. The languages, the laws and institutions of the Belgium people must be reborn with the happiness of this country”*.⁹ At the end of the 18th century, Brussels only had 15% of French-speakers. In 1830, the city’s population was only 100.000 inhabitants. The growth of the capital’s population coincided with its “Frenchness” even if the trend was accelerated at the end of the 20th century. Learning French was often synonym of social promotion. It was a matter of overcoming the *sociale taalgrens*, the social linguistic border that segmented society. Conversely, with time, the linguist borders became little by little cultural and community borders that increasingly separated the two public spaces. Like the Flemish language, the Walloon language was to endure the social and political domination of the French language. But this did not generate the same opposition, probably because of the similarity of the Walloon language to the French language.

Minority/Majority

The type of social relationships between rival groups of the population that can be found in several parts of the world. The minorities feel oppressed and perceive domination as a restraint to their interests. On the other hand, the majority group believes that the minority group is doing far too much to defend their interests and specificities. The English-speaking Canadians believe that the people of Quebec exaggerate when defending their language. There is always something niggling or even mean when it comes to defending minorities who don’t always seem friendly or kind. The Belgian distinctiveness is that the minority/majority relationship is inversed, at least perceived like that. The Flemish, although being a majority, have behaved as if they were a minority, adopting strategies by enhancing their presence within the Federal government while the French-speaking population perceived themselves as a majority and disregarded the reality of the population ratio, which has often been detrimental to their cause. These last years, it seems that the French-speaking population has really come to realize that they are a minority within the Belgian state. But as the RTBF program of December 13th 2006 illustrated, there is this victim’s behavior.

⁹ Quoted by Van Istendael, page 19

Nations

The 19th century was marked by the political and industrial modernization of European states characterized by the centralization of the political system. In modern liberal states, the nation is the legitimate basis. The Belgian constitution stipulates that all power originates in the Nation. The creation of Belgium in 1830 as a new state is portrayed by the creation of a Belgian national feeling¹⁰. The “nationalization” of the Belgian state was to be the work of the different governments of the 19th century. At first, the demand of acknowledgement of the Flemish language, as a national language, was considered as part of the development of Belgian patriotism, at least for the Flemish. But Flemish nationalism gradually emerged, in particular because of the reluctance of the Belgian authorities to recognize the Flemish language. Instead of speaking of a community quarrel, shouldn't we speak about a quarrel between Belgian nationalism (unclear as it may be) and Flemish nationalism? The fact is that there is no real Walloon nationalism. The Walloons renounced *“the constitution of a national Walloon Community in favor of recognizing its inhabitants as belonging to a certain territory generating the same rights and obligations for all those who live there, in the name of the values put forward and destined to preserve social cohesion”*. Is Wallonia a nation? Certainly not, at least not in its current form. Philippe Destatte says *“The lack of the birth of a tangible and sustainable Walloon national dynamism is due to the inhabitants' mistrust of the nationalist phenomenon observed in Flanders putting the common Belgian State in peril, and furthermore, the absence of a proper response to the provincial and municipal political divisions is emphasized by the structure of the media and the weight of France”*.

Opaçity

The complexity of the Belgian political institutions is often criticized. Some even judge it artificial. As if the politicians had intentionally transformed a simple situation into a complex one. As if the institutional problems had been invented to justify an inflation of the mandates and political functions. Several arguments can be opposed to these common theories. The first one is that the politicians who carry out these reforms get their legitimacy from the universal suffrage and it is the responsibility of the electors to sanction the politicians if they don't approve of their actions, in particular on institutional issues. So far this has never happened. The parties have been sanctioned rather more for their supposed lack of firmness in negotiations between Communities. Additionally, the complexity of the institutional solutions is often a reflection of the complexity of the social situation. Complex institutions have been necessary to do justice to the complexity of the Brussels Region, which stands as the Federal and Community capital and lies within the Flemish territory but which has only a very small minority of Flemings. Having said that, it could be that the institutional process has suffered from a lack of democratic participation;

¹⁰ «Le sentiment de l'unité nationale est né de nos jours», Nothomb. quoted by E. Witte, E. Gubin et JP Nandrin, p. 101

this is probably because of the fear of the rift that could arise from a referendum with different results according to the different communities. The confusion that reigns in the voters' mind is also due to the fact that regional representatives stand in federal elections, and vice versa. The complexity of the Belgian institutions and especially the Brussels' institutions is probably just temporary. With no global vision, this complexity is the consequence of an institutional pragmatism that we should not be proud of and which could do with more clarity.

Pavia

Name of a committee of intellectuals united under the philosopher Philippe Van Parijs and the sociologist Kris Deschouwer. They suggest the election of 15 federal Members of Parliament (out of 150) standing in one electoral district covering the entire territory of Belgium. Their objective would be to legitimize the decisions taken at the federal level by exposing the politicians who are responsible for such decisions and therefore could be sanctioned by the whole electorate and not only by the electorate of their Community. This proposition also aims to reinforce the federal dynamism by bringing the parties, currently organized on a Community basis, to collaborate and present joint lists. This does not, however, entail the merging of parties. This proposition could also be implemented at a European level and have Members of the European Parliament elected on lists that are presented in the entire European Union. Such a reform would certainly reinforce the federal dynamism. Today, only the French-speaking Greens have brought in a bill that coincides with the Pavia proposition. (they suggest the election of 50 Members of Parliament in one electoral district). An increasing number of politicians from the South and the North have expressed their interest in this bill. Nevertheless, the former Prime Minister, Jean Luc Dehaene, was quite harsh. *"And today they would like to impose a unique electoral district, deciding in advance the number of seats attributed to Flemish and French-speaking politicians? No thank you!!..." "...I have never seen in Brussels or Wallonia a French-speaker opening a Flemish newspaper! If they had that tradition of bilingualism, the image of the country would be different. I see today that a new generation of Flemish politicians don't speak French. Soon, we'll be negotiating in English! The efforts undertaken by the French-speakers who, like you, speak increasingly good Dutch have come forty years too late."*¹¹

Quaternary (4th) Region?

First of all, the third Community: the Germanic Community is made up of the inhabitants of nine German-speaking communes in the east of Belgium, 71.500 citizens with German as their mother-tongue. They are often presented as the "last Belgians", maybe because they have been able to progressively find their own place within the evolution of the Belgian

¹¹ Le Soir, August 3, 2007

federal state. The German-speaking Community has also taken advantage of its geographical position through the development of close ties with the neighboring regions of Germany and the Netherlands within the Euregio Meuse-Rhin, as well as with Luxemburg. Although it is part of the Walloon Region, the German-speaking Community is increasingly acquiring the status of a Region in its own right. On April 29th 2002, the parliament of the German-speaking Community approved a resolution favoring the transfer of power (until now in the hands of the Walloon Region) for land settlement, accommodation, agriculture, subordinate authorities and roads.

Regionalism

Initially, it is the Walloons who emphasized the notion of Regions. Wallonia needed political and economic instruments to carry out the necessary reforms in order to put its economy back on track. During the strikes of 1960, a FGTB (socialist) trade unionist from Liège named André Renard, led a movement that combined social, economic and political claims. Although the cultural aspect was already present in the “renardisme”, it was with the *Manifeste pour la culture wallonne* that culture truly became a priority within the Walloon culture. Conversely, some defenders of the French-speaking community have supported the idea of a fusion between the Walloon Region and the French-speaking Community. It's the argument of the “French-speaking Nation” defended at the time by the president of the PRL, Jean Gol, and others who blamed the regionalists of “falling back on” a Walloon identity. Recently a Brussels regionalism has arisen, in particular through the association “Manifesto” which advocates the development of educational and cultural policies adapted to the needs of the Brussels Region. The Walloon and Brussels regionalists privilege an institutional system based on three Regions with equal levels of autonomy and power. The Flemish movement has always preferred a system composed of two main regions, Flanders and Wallonia, for the joint rule of the Brussels Region.

Solidarity

Notion that has often been brought up in the Belgian Community debate. To express solidarity for someone means to feel co-responsible for his destiny and to help him when in need. This solidarity can be based on an explicit commitment (a contract) or on a common affiliation to a social or political entity (a nation, a Community, a Region, an ethnic community, a social class or a religion). Traditionally, in a State-nation, the solidarity between citizens is not challenged. It is generally accepted that the underprivileged benefit from transfers from the wealthier, whether it be through public services financed by taxes or via the social security system; and reciprocity is expected when possible. But even if this is a legal obligation, in practice it is not necessarily so. No one can be excluded from such solidarity on the grounds that he will not be able to return it in the future; the fact is he because he belongs to a common entity and this affiliation suffices to justify his rights and obligations in terms of solidarity. In most federal states, it is frequent to observe financial transfers between citizens and between regions and these transfers are rarely contested.

We can not say that this is the case in Belgium. The unconditional, interpersonal solidarity, such as it is defined in the social security system, has gradually lost its legitimacy (principally for the Flemish) and is replaced by an idea of interregional solidarity. The majority of the Flemish parties believe that the way the solidarity is organized does not allow Wallonia to recover and that it should integrate a system of “accountability”. This “accountability” is supposed to guarantee the effective use of the transfers towards a recovery of the Walloon situation. Even if no French-speaking politician has ever defended this position in public, the “average” French-speaking position considers that the Flemish approach of solidarity is unfair as is the denial of the transfers from Wallonia to Flanders which existed until the 1960s. The Flemish community generally replies to this by minimizing the extent of these transfers and considers that they were paid for the lack of recognition of the Flemish cultural rights.

Transfers

Solidarity implies that transfers exist between members of a same political entity. For these transfers to cease, all members should contribute to and receive the same level of expenses and resources, which is theoretically possible but very unusual in practice. Or one could imagine a completely unequal system without any sort of redistribution. Maybe some are thinking of such a system. Nevertheless, today, two big types of transfers can be observed in Belgium, corresponding to the two big concepts of solidarity (interpersonal and interregional) mentioned above. On the one hand, there are the transfers between citizens at the base of the social security system and on the other, the transfers between Regions and Communities that are carried out thanks to the tax system, the VAT, individual income tax, as expressed in law for the subsidization of the Regions and the Communities of 1989. It is clear that what Wallonia and Brussels receive today is superior to their contribution and the opposite is true for Flanders. But we encounter this in all federal states. The transfers which occur between Wallonia, Brussels and Flanders are not proportionally more important than the ones existing in other states. But in these other states, the transfers are carried out with a greater consensus than in Belgium. Nevertheless, other European states are experiencing similar tensions between contributing regions and beneficiary regions, the former being tempted to apply the “fair return” principle in which they expect to receive in return at least the equivalent of their contribution to the collective subsidization. Generally, the transfers are referred to in economic terms where the advantages of all participants are examined. This approach does not take into account the very symbolic dimension and the pre-conceived ideas that are created in these exchanges. Giving is not only giving, it is also creating subtle and complex systems of obligations, ideas and recognition that anthropology could help us to better understand.¹²

Union

¹² Benoît Lechat, “Sortir de la fosse aux Wallons », La Revue Nouvelle, August 2004

“L’Union fait la force” (Strength lies in unity) is the Belgian national motto. Still today, a survey would show that most Belgians believe that it refers to the union between the French-speaking community and Flanders as it would also prove the ignorance of most Belgians about their own history; as also in the inability of certain Belgians to sing the national anthem. Of course, this motto does not refer at all to an ideal that aims to overcome the community and linguistic tensions. When Belgium was founded, these tensions were inexistent or at least, they were latent. At that time the rift that dominated the political class, represented by the French-speaking bourgeoisie thanks to the income-based voting system, divided the liberals and the Catholics on the role of the Church in public affairs and in education. Having learnt from the failure of the Brabant revolution of 1789, they decided to unite their forces to fight the common enemy, the Dutch Royal authority. This alliance gave birth to Unionism, a political current that led Belgium until 1839. So the union referred to in the Belgian motto, designates the union between liberals and Catholics. The paradox is that throughout its history, Belgium has compromised, which far from achieving a fusion between the opposite political or social approaches, has led to a form of coexistence between the different communities, albeit partitioned; as for example in the education and hospital system. Union, in the Belgian sense of the word, is the organization of everyone for himself.

Violence

When we compare the police repression that many Belgians experienced during the social upheaval at the end of the 19th century (and until the middle of the 20th), the Belgian community rifts have never really been physically violent. Of course, the Fourons issue in the 80s was the cause of very violent demonstrations organized by the extremist Flemish groups, called the ‘flamingants’. Also in 1970, a FDF militant, Jacques Georquin, was beaten to death by extreme-right flamingant militants. Until today, the conflicts have always been settled in a pacific way, which is not the case in many countries with internal rifts. However, the Belgian dispute can be the stage for symbolic violence. And not only when the flamingant protesters burn the Belgian flags. For example when the media of one community constantly depicts the other community as being full of freeloaders, lazy and selfish people refusing any kind of solidarity, or when the federal ministers are incapable of expressing themselves in the language of one of the other main Communities.

Wallonia

Region of Europe, part of the Belgian State, having its own democratic institutions since the second half of the 20th century. Although the adjective Walloon has been used since the mists of time and refers to the non-Germanic population from North Europe of Roman language, it is only in the 19th century that the name Wallonia appeared. During that period, a Walloon cultural, social and democratic movement gradually developed. Its constant growth throughout the 20th century resulted in today’s democratic institutions

characterized by the concern to redress its economy undermined by the ageing of the traditional industry which had made Wallonia one of the wealthiest regions of the world during the 19th century. This wealth enabled an extraordinary emancipation of the working class. From the beginning of the Wallonia concept, its creators and intellectuals insisted on the importance of culture in the Walloon project. In 1983, they signed the “Manifeste pour la Culture Wallonne” (Manifesto for the Walloon Culture) which claimed their conviction that *“the ascension of Wallonia celebrating the personality of its people and its political maturity must have a cultural project that goes hand in hand with its economic project”*. At the time, a number of hard criticisms were formulated against the Manifesto, accusing it of “turning in on itself” although the signatories explicitly promoted openness in the last lines of the text: *“As a human community, Wallonia wants to emerge as an expression of itself that will be open to the rest of the world”*

Xenophobia

Fear and hostility to foreigners and strangers. A concept that is very often inherent in any nationalism, particularly in nationalism that builds on ethnic identification, blood relationships and kinship. In Belgium, the Flemish nationalism is also supported by a racist far-right movement that makes the fight against immigration its main point. However, mixing the entire nationalist Flemish movement to racism and xenophobia would be totally abusive. Since 2003, the pilgrimage to Yser has brought about the secession of the extreme right organizations under the wing of the Ijzerwake, an association close to the Vlaams Belang.

Yoyo

As in most historical processes, the relationship between the Belgian Regions and Communities, the evolution of the State and nationalist approaches, have had their ups and downs, their moments of tension and of appeasement, their serious and minor crises. It is just like a yoyo, it goes up and down, but its movement can be missed and the yoyo will crash to the ground. Putting into perspective the lack of historical knowledge of Belgian history can lead to ignoring the specific characteristics of the current crisis that began after the elections of June 10th 2007. Of course, the Royal crisis of 1950, the Leuven crisis of 1968, the White March of 1996, represent all time highs on the Belgian political scene. Maybe one of the specificities of the current crisis is the difficulty to identify the political players that could overcome it. To overcome the community quarrel will demand imagination and especially courage, the sort of courage needed to get off the beaten track, the courage needed to integrate the other’s point of view. Without empathy and open dialogue, the Belgian dispute will never turn into a positive project for Belgium and its Regions.

Zwanze

Word originating from the Brussels' dialect, referring more to an attitude than a language or a way of speaking. To *swanze* means to mock someone who takes himself seriously. Belgians often pride themselves on their sense of self-mockery. But the real question is to know where contempt of the other stops and self-mockery starts.