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The Partition of Belgium

- The struggle facing a linguistically divided country



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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

PROBLEM AREA

Belgium is often characterized by its linguistic divide. The country's official languages are French, Flemish and German. As a result, it is divided geographically, linguistically, culturally and politically (Pincon, 2010: 758). Out of the eleven million residents that populate Belgium, an estimated 76 thousand are German-speaking, 4 million are French-speaking and a majority 5 million speaks Flemish. Official borders, characterized by language, run throughout the country (Levy, 2009). As a means of having all official languages represented in official terms, regions and language communities were established in 1980. From then on, Belgium was divided up into the Flemish, Brussels-Capital and French regions as well as French, German and Flemish communities. As of the year 1989, all three regions rule their own parliaments and governments under the Federal state (Beaufays, 1988: 66). Since the German community is so small and more of an observer than a participant within the conflict, our project will be focused on the divide between the two main languages.

Given the knowledge we have of how divided Belgium is in government alone, the question arises of how united the country can be when the population is split up into regions and communities and there isn't a shared, official language, which the majority would be able to communicate in. A shared language is key to forming a national identity, which is why Belgium's future may be at risk. A language binds a nation together because everyone has at least one thing in common: they speak the same language. Only the nation's capital, Brussels, is bilingual, as both French and Flemish are official languages. This is, however, only in official terms, as the vast majority of the Brussels population is French-speaking (brussels.info, 2014). People usually vote in elections with the hope that politicians will improve upon issues that affect them as individuals, but many would also hope that their policies will improve upon their country as a whole, so they can be proud of it.

Politicians often play on individuals' national sentiments in order to gain support by using everyday expressions of nationalism, which may include things such as celebrating national holidays and supporting a national team (Barabantseva, 2014: 246). This, however, does not seem to be the case in Belgium, as for instance Yves Leterme, the Prime Minister between 2009 and 2011 (electionresources, 2014), was famously not able to sing the Belgian national anthem. He has also referred to Belgium as "an accident of history" and stated that Belgium is united solely



by "the king, the national football team and certain brands of beer" (Waterfield, 2007). Our aim is to discover if Yves Leterme was right in his statements or if Belgium does in fact have a shared, national identity, and if so, what cultural symbols and values are agreed upon by Belgians in its creation.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

Given the linguistic divide in Belgium, to what extent does the country have a national identity?

SUB-QUESTIONS:

1. How is Belgian national identity constructed?
2. How does the linguistic divide affect Belgium's national identity?
3. What factors contribute to national identity in Belgium?
4. What obstacles weaken Belgium's national identity?



CONCEPTS

This section will clarify the concepts that come up throughout our project. These are the most important to define in order to understand the chapters that will follow.

NATIONAL IDENTITY

National identity is the state of “belonging” in a country. It is the core values, norms and images that most residents of a nation are able to identify themselves with. Also, it is the overall image that is projected to foreigners and by which they view the country. The Oxford dictionary defines it as “a sense of a nation as a cohesive whole, as represented by distinctive traditions, culture, and language” (oxforddictionaries.com, 2014). Although national identity cannot be precisely defined or confined, some would deem it necessary for a country to reach a certain degree of shared national identity in order to work together to form social and political unison.

IMAGINED COMMUNITIES

Imagined communities is a theory developed by Benedict Anderson, that describes a nation as a community imagined by its people. The theory is based on the impossibility of all people in a state knowing each other, and how people, even without knowing each other, identify with each other based on a shared emotion that fits the way we think of a sovereign nation. The nation is created based on its shared consciousness. Therefore, the nation is not ‘true’, but imagined. (Anderson, 1991: 6-7)

CULTURAL SYMBOLISM

National symbols are symbols that help define and create a national identity. These symbols include national flags, the monarchy, national sports and food. National symbols create and bind social values within a population, which results in a feeling of belongingness and national unity. (Cerulo, 1995:3)



CHAPTER 2 - RESEARCH METHODS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the choices our group has made with respects to our use of research methods. Here, we will discuss our methodological approach in obtaining our findings, as well as the theory and empirical data we'll use to guide our research. The chapter will conclude with a summary of our methods of operationalization, i.e. how we'll use these tools in answering the overall research question.

METHODOLOGY

Our aim is to discover how much of a shared national identity exists, despite the linguistic divide in Belgium. We believe that theory and data on this topic are equally relevant, one should not guide the other. This is why we have decided to take an iterative approach in our research, meaning that we go back and forth between using our data to guide the theory and alternatively our theory guiding the data (Bryman, 2012: 26). When analyzing our findings, we'll discuss how our chosen theory can be applied to the data, and vice-versa.

In order to inform our discussion, the chapters that precede the analytical chapter will provide the reader with a background knowledge of Belgium, contributing factors to its national identity and academic theory that can be applied to the topic. This will all be a "build-up" that informs the discussion that takes place in Chapter seven, the analytical chapter.

Certain limitations are unavoidable in our project. We cannot make the argument that our research will be completely value free; as personal interests, such as wanting to discover more about our home country, were part of the initial motivations in choosing this topic. We have chosen concepts that, according to extensive research, are the most relevant in discussing national identity. As national identity is so difficult to define, and in many ways a very loose term, others might have placed more significance on different theories and concepts to us.

However, although bias to an extent may be unavoidable, the value-laden sociological school of thought argues that the way of compensating for this is to be overt about one's personal values, as a means of cautioning the reader as well as oneself (Moore et. al, 2009: 317). This serves in making us aware of our preconceived notions and feelings towards the topic, so that



we know not to let them guide us in our research. As a result, our findings should become more objective.

CHOICE OF THEORY

We have chosen theory that is of the most relevance when understanding the feelings and attitudes that are instilled by society into individuals through which they feel a sense of belonging and collectiveness. This is with the exception of our choice of minority theory, which shows how society can render smaller populations into creating subcultures, thus no longer contributing to a shared, national, one. We have chosen to rely our minority theory on two scientists which validates our theory and makes it more reliable.

We knew we wanted to discuss the topic of nationalism, as this refers to extreme pride in a country, sometimes to the extent of xenophobia. Upon researching the topic, we found that Benedict Anderson's theory on "imagined communities" was most relevant to our topic, as it provides theory on how nations are built, united by something shared, this being national identity.

Our presentation of national symbols are especially important, as these are the images people have in their minds when they picture their nation. National symbols also play an important role in how foreigners view the country as well as inhabitants own views of the country.

Although it was not an obvious choice at first, upon reading several articles and journals we found that minority theory was of significant relevance to our topic. Several authors have theorized that both sides of the linguistic divide in Belgium feel as though they are minorities in their own country, each for their own reasons. The chosen theory on the subject, is well-investigated and the theory is supported by a study of minorities in Malaysia, and a rapport on the current situation in Belgium, that validates the theory.

The choice to discuss the mass media in Belgium came latest in the process. We decided that it would be useful to balance out institutional division in another light than solely in the political context. Media messages are very relevant to a portrayal of national identity.

USE OF EMPIRICAL DATA

Given that we will not be able to conduct our own research in the field, all collected data will be secondary sources. In order to present a well-rounded view of national identity in Belgium,



we have chosen to employ the use of triangulation. This means that we'll be using more than one research method, i.e. the use of both quantitative and qualitative data (Moore et. al, 2009: 294). We believe quantitative and qualitative data are both equally important and work best by one reinforcing the other.

Our aim has been to source the most information possible from books and journals, as these are the most politically and sociologically relevant, as well as being the most reliable. Our theory chapter specifically has almost exclusively used academic sources from books and journals.

We have used newspapers articles in order to reveal in Belgium and in order to understand the Belgian medias and to get the most updated picture on the political situation in Belgium. We do not rely our project on any newspaper articles, because such articles are not always reliable and can be biased, which we are aware of, when using such articles.

The use of reports and conference proceedings have provided us with very clear, quantitative data, such as general election results in Belgium. These are of great use as trends and sentiments among the population are very evident, all the while quantifiable. They are the closest we can come to conducting surveys of our own.

OPERATIONALIZATION

The research question focuses on characterizing how Belgium can create or preserve a national identity, when taking the linguistic divide into account. To allow understanding of the term national identity, the theoretical framework in this project is used to guide the study of relevant phenomena in Belgium according to national identity and the problems according to this term. The phenomena discovered in both theory and empirical material are not treated as isolated episodes or phenomena with no relations to others, but are being used in context of the others phenomena discovered.

Our project starts in chapter three by examining the chosen theory, which makes it applicable to the Belgian case. In chapter four we investigate the historical factors, while using literature from Cook, Beaufays and Wagstaff. In chapter five the political situation in Belgium is investigated. This is done by examining the political crisis in 2007-2011 and voting data, and by the empirical data examined accurately assess the political situation in Belgium. Chapter 6 examines the media picture in Belgium, and media division based on the linguistic division. The chapter furthermore investigates the media's role regarding national identity. Chapter seven



contains of the findings revealed in the previous chapters, analyzing how these effects the national identity in Belgium.



CHAPTER 3 - THEORY & CONCEPTS

THE MASS MEDIA

Theory on mass media is of relevance when discussing the topic of national identity, as media productions and publications serve in influencing people's symbolic views of their country as well as their political views of how it should be governed. We will specifically be presenting theory surrounding content selection, audience reception and ownership of the news.

The news are unavoidably biased, as McQuail points out; many events happen in the world, but only few are selected and reported on. This process of selection makes the news a social product, as they are based on the judgments of editors and journalists that report upon them. These creators of media content are coined as "gatekeepers", as their selection of news is based on their judgments, hereby disregarding news that they personally view as irrelevant and uninteresting to their audience. The end result is that loaded information is presented to national audiences based on interpretations or motivations of select interest groups. (McQuail, 1992 as cited in Collins et al, 2009: 155)

Sociologists that criticize the media argue that the news is biased due to constraints of bureaucracy, the availability of news to an organization as well as the ownership's general ideology. (Collins et al, 2009: 155) Furthermore, news content that is selected and the style by which they are presented are driven by the characteristics of the consumer, aiming to please them. (Collins et al, 2009: 156)

The negative connotations of the majority of news stories may influence the consumer's overall view of their country. Bad news are seen as the most exciting and entertaining to larger audiences. (Collins et al, 2009: 158) If reporting within a country always brings up its negative aspects, society's view of it may become tainted.

Media owners play a major role in controlling images and national discourse in a country. Some may directly instruct media producers on how they must approach their presentation of the news. They might also have a direct influence on how the news is collected. In addition, the news that is presented may be motivated by ownerships views on politics or business, especially as journalists and other media producers are inevitably made aware of the dominant ideology of their news corporation. Employees aim to please their employer, these views will reflect in their work. (Collins et al, 2009: 159)



Knowing these factors that contribute to bias in reporting the news, we must look at how audiences receive and interpret the messages conveyed. Chandler argues that tv news is constructed in a way that makes audiences trust it as the most reliable source. This is done by presenting newsreaders and tv studios that imply neutrality (Chandler, 1994 as cited in Collins et al, 2009: 155). This argument is supported by Buckingham, who conducted research by interviewing and discussing with 12 to 15 year olds on the topic of tv news. He concluded that respondents rarely challenged the reliability of these news sources. (Buckingham, 1996 as cited in Collins et al, 2009: 155) Surveys indicate that a great deal of adults view the news similarly. (Collins et al, 2009: 155)

When audiences are not questioning the reliability of the news that is presented to them, a great deal of the construction of national identity is put in the hands of major corporations. We will discuss whether this is the case in Belgium in our analytical chapter.

IMAGINED COMMUNITIES

Benedict Anderson describes a nation as *"imagined political communities, because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in minds of each lives the image of their communion"* (Anderson, 1991: 6). The national identity is, according to Anderson, a construction and an emotional feeling among the people, that fits with the way we think of the nation, which is often *"imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign"* (Anderson, 1991:6).

Anderson argues that, *"The nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations."* (Anderson, 1991: 7)

In other words, members of a nation share the community and the idea that they are in some way connected to each other, even though most people do not know each other. Anderson describes this: *"it is imagined as a community because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may occur in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship"* (Anderson, 1991: 7)

This is equal to the nation being *imagined* and therefore the nationalism must come before the nation and somehow create the nation. This thought is shared by Ernest Gellner, who argues that *"nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist"* (Gellner as quoted in Anderson, 1991: 6). The communities are there-



fore created based on the population realising that they have something in common. The communities are imagined because no communities are real, but created because of it's members believing in it's existing (Anderson, 1991: 6).

Anderson shares the idea that nationalism helps create the state, but Anderson criticizes Gellner's definition of nations. Gellner's definition assumes that "true nations" can exist, while Anderson believes that all nations and communities are "imagined communities", which have been created.

Anderson's development of imagined communities as a concept was a paradigm shift in a time defined by religious communities, where it was believed that everyone could join a universal community such as Christianity. *"No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind. The most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation in the way that it was possible, in certain epochs, for, say, Christians to dream of a wholly Christian planet"* (Anderson, 1991: 7)

MINORITY THEORY

Both sides feel as though they are underrepresented minorities, the Wallonians due to their smaller population and lesser means and the Flemish as a result of the perceived cultural and linguistic superiority of the French-speaking. This may hinder Belgium from obtaining a national identity. The Dutch side of the division has taken measures in making the french-speaking feel as though they are minorities in dutch communes of Brussels, where they implemented language legislation that made obtaining official documents in their own language more difficult for french-speakers. (assembly.coe.int, 1998)

According to a study performed by Christine Chen, minorities have a tendency to discriminate against other minorities. Prejudice is created based on the negative evaluation of a group or individual on the basis of group membership (Crandall, 2002 as cited in Chen, 2010: 3), while discrimination is described as the act of expressing the created prejudice towards each other. According to Fein and Spencer (1997) prejudice can work as a "self-esteem maintaining mechanism" (Chen, 2010: 3) by which one minority group lashes out at another in order to boost it's owns self-esteem. This self-esteem boost could be seen as a means for the minority group to protect themselves (Kunda & Sinclair, 1999; Kunda & Spencer, 2003 as cited in Chen, 2010: 3). In other words, viewing others in a negative light is a method for a group to feel better about themselves as a whole. This theory is closely related to the general idea that bullies bully to feel better about themselves.



We can compare Belgium's situation to that of Malaysia, in which many ethnic groups and minorities exist. The three main ethnic groups are the Malays, Chinese and Indians. Despite the presence of such a diverse population, the country has ruled one official language, Malay (Ghazali, 2010: 17). Malaysia has had a great deal of success in overcoming language differences through implementation of language planning policies. Its government has made sure that all members of the population speak a certain level of the national language (Ghazali, 2010: Abstract), which eases their chances for open communication in the country and thus an unspoken agreement of a certain national identity.

In contrast, research shows that only 15 percent of Belgians at present use both Flemish and French on a daily basis (Grosjean, 1982: 12). In 1984, only 57.9 percent of Dutch speakers in schools chose French as their second language, whereas 90.7 percent of the French-speaking chose to study Dutch. Many Flemish chose English instead (Courrier Hebdomadaire du CRISP, 1984 cited by Swing, 1988: 78). The same research showed that students from secondary through to university level of both linguistic backgrounds valued English as a more important modern language than any of their own official languages. (Courrier Hebdomadaire du CRISP, 1984 cited by Swing, 1988: 79)



CHAPTER 4 - BACKGROUND ON BELGIUM

A SHORT HISTORY OF BELGIUM

Belgium became an independent country following its revolution in the 1830's (Cook, 2004: 62). The country was founded as a Catholic, French-speaking state under King Leopold I. In 1830, the Northern Flemish region in Belgium was combined with the southern Walloon region. Despite the fact that the majority spoke Flemish, French was deemed the official language, as the entire voting elite in Flanders spoke French. French had functioned as the administrative language for centuries. (Cook, 2004: 81)

Belgium was one of the first countries to experience an Industrial European Revolution in the 19th century (Cook, 2004: 52). This industrial revolution is one of the main causes of the partition today. The industrialization, especially in form of iron and steel industry, based on coal, primarily took place in French-speaking Wallonia along the rivers Maas and Sambre. This meant that Walloons became the wealthy, while the agriculture remained the main occupation in the Dutch-speaking Flanders (Cook, 2004: 52). The industrial development created a large Flemish working class with very poor working conditions. This industrial development led the workers to form trade unions, and resulted in the formation of the socialist party in 1885 (Cook, 2004: 80).

At the end of 1800's, certain reforms were introduced, and by 1898 Dutch became formally equivalent with French; meaning that it became the administrative and teaching language in the Flemish region (Cook, 2004: 83).

The "language question" has dominated Belgian politics ever since. An anecdote from the first world war serves to illustrate this. Almost the entire Belgian corps of officers was French speaking and the foot soldiers Flemish speaking. (Wagstaff, 1999: 78) This led to deadly misunderstandings, in particular at the battle of "Ipres", where many soldiers were killed because they did not understand the orders of their officers. (Wagstaff, 1999: 79)

Over time, the Flemish economy saw positive developments. When resources in the late 1960's ran out in Wallonia economic roles switched; the Flemish region became the wealthier



region. At present, the Walloon region produces only 24 % of the GDP, although they represent 33% of the population (Tradingeconomics, 2014). This economical change, in addition to other factors, indicates a clear increase in the level of partition between the regions.

Belgium is a constitutional monarchy, and a federal parliamentary democracy. In 1989, Belgium became a federal state divided into three regions and three language communities. The three regions are comprised of Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels and the communities consist of the Flemish, the French and a minor German-speaking area. (Cook, 2004: 144)

In 1980, the Flemish regions merged with the Flemish community, which means that they share one government and council. The French community however, has not merged with the predominantly French-speaking region of Wallonia. The main responsibility of the communities is to address issues speakers of their language are faced with.(Becker,2011:253)

The federal state of Belgium truly became a reality as a result of the fourth state reform in 1993, from then on; the first clause of the first article in the Belgian constitution reads: *"Belgium is a Federal State which consists of Communities and Regions"* (rosadoc.be, 2000: 4)

The core objective of the Belgian federal government structure should be to overcome differences and conflicts presented from a linguistic divide and in turn, form a unified country. The question is whether the current political structure as well as the dealings between politicians succeed in doing so, which would result in shared norms and values, and thus a national identity.



CHAPTER 5 - POLITICAL PARTIES & ELECTIONS IN BELGIUM

INTRODUCTION

The linguistic struggle Belgium faces is reflected in its current political situation. The divide has become even more evident due to the growing economic imbalance between the two main language communities. In this chapter, we'll be showing how separated the wallonians and Flemish are in politics. This will inform us of how significant the divide is, prohibiting a formation of national identity.

THE POLITICAL CRISIS FROM 2007-2011

As of 2007, Belgium was confronted with an ongoing political crisis. The crisis broke out soon after the electoral victory of the alliance of the Flemish Christian Democrats and the New Flemish Alliance on June 10th 2007. (Electionguide.org, 2014)

This crisis came about as a result of disagreement in the reform of state and continued disagreement on the subject of the electoral district Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde, BHV (Halberstam, 2013: 149). The BHV district is the only district in Belgium where the citizens have the opportunity to choose between Dutch or French-speaking parties and politicians. Parts of the Flemish speaking community were generally interested in a division of the BHV district into two separate areas, while the French speaking community was interested in keeping things as they were (Halberstam, 2013: 149).

The two Flemish parties, the Flemish Christian Democrats and the New Flemish Alliance had previously promised voters that the BHV would be split into a smaller bilingual district and one larger solely Dutch-speaking district (Hooghe, 2011: 2). However, this proposal was deemed unacceptable by French political parties as it would result in a loss of political rights for the French-speaking inhabitants of the Dutch municipalities in the Halle-Vilvoorde region (Hooghe, 2012: 136).

In addition to the BHV conflict, the Flemish also accused Walloons of being too dependent on the subsidies of the Flemish economy. In response, Walloons accused the Flemish of placing



too much focus on segregation, and enforcing too strong of a language policy in the Flemish region (Representation, 2012).

After the general election was held on 13 June 2010, the Belgian government started to form the cabinet (Hooghe, 2012: 134). However, the ongoing political discussions and disagreements among the coalition partners, concerning the borders of the BHV district, resulted in 589 days without an elected government between 2010 and 2011; this set the world record of the duration of time a democracy has gone without a government. (Hooghe, 2012: 137)

New general elections were called to on the 13th of June, where 11 parties were elected to the Chamber of Representatives (Electionguide.org, 2014.). The New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) won 27 seats with 17.40% of the votes, and the Socialist Party (PS) won 26 seats with 13.70% of the votes. (Electionguide.org, 2014).

MAY 2014 ELECTIONS

General elections were held in Belgium on the 25th of May, 2014. Results indicated growing support among Flemish-speaking voters of right-wing, nationalist parties. The New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) won the majority vote, gaining 33 seats in parliament, an increase of 6 seats compared to the June elections of 2010. The Flemish Democratic Christian party (CD&V) came second in the number of votes gained by a Flemish party, obtaining 11,65% of votes and 18 seats. Among French-speaking parties, the Socialist party continues to hold the majority vote, with 25 seats in parliament. However, the election's voting patterns suggest French-speaking voters are beginning to lean more towards right-wing politics, as the socialist party lost 2 seats, whereas the Reform Movement (MR) gained 1 additional seat in parliament (Deloy, 2014b: 1).

OCTOBER 2014 FORMATION OF COALITION GOVERNMENT

Following a five-month period of negotiations without a government, an agreement was finally reached in forming a coalition. This new coalition is dominated by Flemish parties, with only one Wallonian party, the reformist movement, taking part. The remaining three parties that form the coalition are N-VA, the Flemish Christian Democrats and VLD, the Open Flemish Liberals and democrats. The leader of the Wallonian reformist movement was appointed prime minister of Belgium as a result of these negotiations. This new government is the most right-



wing Belgium has seen in recent history, as it is the first to have been formed without the French Socialists in 26 years (dw.de, 2014). The ever-increasing power of the N-VA, a nationalist party with motivations to separate Belgium (The Economist, 2014), is less promising with regards to the notion that Belgium could become a united country, brought together by a shared national identity.

DOMINANT PARTIES IN BELGIAN POLITICS

NEW FLEMISH ALLIANCE (N-VA)

The Belgian political party N-VA “New Flemish alliance” is a Flemish center-right nationalist and conservative political party in the Flemish region. The party was founded in 2001 by Geert Bourgeois, and has seen significant growth ever since (N-VA.be, 2014). The new Flemish Alliance became the biggest Belgian/Flemish political party in the European Parliament after the may 2014 elections (Elections.belgium.be, 2014). The party has 4 members in the European parliament, where it sits in the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) parliamentary group (Parties-and-elections.eu, 2014).

N-VA’s core values centre on Flemish nationalism, separatism, regionalism, and liberal conservatism (N-VA.be, 2014). Their main political goal is to gradually dissolve Belgium and establish an independent Flemish state. The party is very positive and engaged in the EU, which is reflected in their tagline; “Necessary in Flanders, useful in Europe”. (N-VA.be, 2014). According to the N-VA, the best way to guide Belgium through some of the 21st century problems is through strong communities, and well-developed international co-operation.(N-VA.be, 2014)

At the federal elections in 2003, the N-VA received 3.1% of the votes , but gained only one seat in the federal parliament (Parties-and-elections.eu, 2014). In February 2004, the N-VA received a total of 6 seats, by forming an electoral alliance with the Christian Democratic and Flemish (CD&V) party (Parties-and-elections.eu, 2014). Bart de Wever became new party leader, and Geert bourgeois became minister, after the two parties joined the Flemish government, lead by CD&V leader Yves Leterme (electionresources, 2014).

However, in 2008, the cartel of CD&V and N-VA ended due to lack of development in state reform matters and different approaches on future negotiations. The N-VA lost it’s faith in the federal government and as a result minister Geert Bourgeois resigned (Hooghe, 2012: 134).

In the regional election of June 2009, the N-VA obtained 13% of votes, and 16 seats (Elections.belgium.be, 2014) in the Flemish Parliament; one in the Brussels Parliament and one in



the European Parliament. This election made them winners of the elections, along with their old electoral alliance partner CD&V. Afterward, the N-VA joined the government lead by Kris Peeters (CD&V) (Brack, 2010: 557). Later on in 2010, N-VA became even more powerful, when became the largest party in Flanders and Belgium overall in the federal elections. The N-VA won 18.65% of the votes and took 28 seats in the Chamber of representatives (Elections.belgium.be, 2014).

Following the recent federal elections in 2014, the N-VA has become the leading party of the 2014-2019 Flemish Government, taking 20.33% of the votes and 33 seats (Elections.belgium.be, 2014).

SOCIALIST PARTY (PS)

The socialist party "PS" is the largest francophone political party in Belgium, lead by Paul Magette, the successor of Elio di Rupo, who was Prime Minister of Belgium in 2011. The party was created in 1885 by hundreds of workers and democratic associations, at that time under the name of "POB" (Le Parti Ouvrier Belge). Since the very beginning, the party has always wanted to remain faithful to the "Charte de Quaregnon", a declaration of principles adopted by the Belgian Labour party at its 10th Congress in Quaregnon in 1894. This declaration introduced 3 main areas of concern in the party; the political, economic and communal. The values presented in the "Charte de Quarengnon", (lcr-lagauche.be, 2014) still remain the core to the party, and are based on equality, solidarity, justice, brotherhood and freedom (ps.be, 2014).

The POB" turned into "PS" in 1978, due to the process of federalization in Belgium; The "Parti socialiste(PS)", in the Wallonia region, and the "Socialistische Partij(SP) in the Flemish region. Since 1978, the French and the Flemish socialists have had little to do with each other (Hooghe, 2012: 137).

The socialist's priorities within the government focus on efficiency in spending public finances, the protection of the social security system and the federalization of Belgium. According to the statutes of PS, their goal is to "organize in the midst of the class struggle, all the socialist forces of Belgium and Wallonia, without any distinction as to race, sex, language, nationality, religious or philosophical beliefs, in order to conquer power and consequently to realize the complete emancipation of the workers" (Ps.be, 2014).

PS had a positive outcome in the 2003 election, but were overtaken as the largest Franco-phone party in the 2007 general election, by the Reformist Movement (Elections.belgium.be, 2014). After the 2010 elections, the PS became the second largest and most influential party,



with 20 out of 150 seat in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives, and 4 out of 40 seats in the Senate. (Elections.belgium.be, 2014)

MOUVEMENT RÉFORMATEUR (MR)

The reformist movement, *Mouvement Réformateur* (MR), is the only french-speaking political party in the current government coalition. The former chairman of MR, Charles Michel, has been appointed prime minister as a result of negotiations within this coalition (dw.de, 2014). MR is a centre-right political party that favours free market economics, much like their Flemish partners in the coalition. However, MR reject the nationalist views of their Flemish counterparts, such as N-VA (Deloy, 2014a: 6). The Party's official manifesto criticizes Flemish nationalism's desire to break up Belgium and take control over Brussels (Ducarme, 2002: 10), as Flemish government have often come under fire for restricting linguistic facilities in Flemish communes within Brussels (Columberg, 2014). MR ranks second in popularity amongst french-speaking voters in Belgium, and aim to strengthen the relations within their language community, specifically the ties between Wallonia and Brussels. Their aim is to create balance in power between the two main language communities that govern the Belgian state (Mouvement Réformateur, 2002: 10). As is the case with other French-speaking political parties, MR are heavily reliant on votes from the Brussels region in order to compete with the Flemish-speaking majority within the country. MR stress that Wallonia and the majority of Brussels share a common heritage and culture, due to the simple fact that they all speak French (Mouvement Réformateur, 2002: 21). Although the party does reject the prospect of separatism in Belgium, it may be solely for functional and economic reasons, as MR are clearly emphatic in strengthening French-speaking bonds, rather than employing measures to unite Belgium as a whole.

CHRISTEN-DEMOCRATISCH EN VLAAMS (CD&V)

The Christian-democratic and Flemish party (CD&V) take part as junior partners in the coalition that currently governs Belgium (dw.de, 2014). Similar to many other Flemish parties, CD&V favour confederalism as a means of governing the country. However, they dismiss separatist motivations and rather submit the notion of "positive confederalism". According to the party, executing positive confederalism would purely be a means of creating a harmonious political system, as opposed to it being a step towards splitting up Belgium (Deloy, 2014a: 4). CD&V originally formed one party along with the french-speaking Christian democratic party, PSC. However, due to conflict within this party, based on linguistic differences, it split in 1968



(Grabow, 2011: 26). CD&V's popularity has fluctuated in recent years, the party has been most successful in gaining support in local elections (Grabow, 2011: 27), it's prominence in the federal government is less significant than in the party's heyday in the 1970's (Grabow, 2011: 26). CD&V was, however, represented in federal government through to the end of 2010, by prime minister Yves Leterme (electionresources, 2014).



CHAPTER 6 - THE MASS MEDIA AND NATIONAL SYMBOLISM

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to showcase the representations of national identity that Belgium's population receive. This is done by going into more detail on the specific national symbols that unify Belgians and the main medium through which these are enforced, this being the mass media.

THE MASS MEDIA

Given the linguistic and cultural divide of Belgium, there is no such thing as a national TV channel, radio or newspaper. Belgium has no public sphere, meaning that there is no overall public media coverage in Belgium as a whole, i.e. the communities don't watch the same TV programs or read the same newspapers, which divides the country even further (Voltmer, 2007: 2). Both regions, Flanders and Wallonia, have their own radio and TV channels. The public radio in the Dutch-speaking region is controlled by VRT, and in the French-speaking region by RTBF (CIM, 2014).

The linguistic divide of the Belgian media began in the early 1900s, the idea was motivated by theory that a linguistic separation was necessary in order to cover cultural affairs effectively. As a result, the national public media service NIR-INR was split into French and Dutch branches (Ugarriza, 2014: 40); the "Radio Télévision belge de la Communauté française (RTBF)", the "Belgischer Rundfunk(BRF)", and the "Vlaamse Radio en Televisieomroeporganisatie (VRT)" (Alternative Francophone, 2013: 1). This media separation meant that Wallonians did not have access to Flemish VRT's public broadcasting and similarly the Flemish weren't able to watch that of RTBF, their French equivalent. Even though the production site of both Dutch and French-speaking channels are found in the same building in Brussels, they have complete autonomy on what concerns their agendas and their programming (Belgian TV news mirrors, 2010).



One of the biggest problems in a separation of public media is that political issues may be presented in differing ways. One-sided media coverage can easily lead to misperceptions of political differences, and thus prevent a common public sphere.

Some research opposes the view that the Belgian media influences individuals on how they view political affairs, arguing that it doesn't hold much power in determining political motivations. "In Belgium, the mass media plays only a limited role in the determination of the political agendas. They observe that the correlations between the media agenda on one side and the agendas of the parliament and of the government on the other side are very low, mainly because they all have their own logic and that the themes they focus on are not shared" (Walgrave, 2005; Voltmer, 2007: 3).

An example of the public media's impact on national identity in Belgium can be seen in a broadcasting in December 2006, where the French-speaking TV-channel RTBF interrupted regular programming to show a satirical news story announcing that Flanders had unilaterally declared its independence from Wallonia (Bye bye Belgium, 2014).

In the broadcast, RTBF's journalists discussed the partition of the country with Flemish politicians and academics as if it were true news story (Bye bye Belgium, 2014). The fact that the broadcast included the speaker of the Chamber of Representatives Herman Ducroo and prominent Flemish senator Jean-Marie Dedecker, both members of VLD, made it seem reliable and trustworthy, making 89 percent of the viewers believe it was true (wsws.org, 2006). Many politicians expressed their anger towards the broadcast, especially towards journalists and executives of RTBF.

The program aimed to present the fear of Flemish nationalism facing Belgium, it had no intention of creating a bigger linguistic divide. The broadcast was meant to expose Belgians to the reality of a possible partition of the country before the impending general of elections in 2007; "We made this broadcast in order to show Belgian viewers the intensity of the issue of the future of Belgium and the real possibility of Belgium no longer being a country in a few months" (wsws.org, 2006). Regionalists from both Wallonia and Flanders, however, used the broadcast to justify and reinforce their political statements about the federal structure of Belgium. (wsws.org, 2006)

NATIONAL SYMBOLISM



National symbols such as the national flag, the monarchy and the football team hold a place of pride among Belgians, it could be argued that these are the few things that provide them with a distinct national identity. Although the world is becoming increasingly globalized, sharing common symbols in a nation is still highly valued and amplified in many countries.

National symbols create and bind social values in the population. Every culture has its own set of symbols associated with different experiences and perceptions, conveying a country's overall ideological views and its population's history and traditions. According to Karen A. Cerulo, symbols are often used "to direct public attention, integrate citizens, and motivate public action" and in "creating bonds and reinforcing goals among . . . citizens." (Cerulo, 1995: 3)

Many sociologists argue that national symbols have a unique effect on sociological and social processes. Extensive evidence shows that people have a strong and fundamental psychological need to belong to social groups (Baumesiter, 1995; Maslow, 1954; Butz, 2009: 784). Nations are among one of the largest of social groups to which people can identify themselves and feel a sense of belonging.

People's feelings of belonging and identification with their nation are reinforced by these symbols (Sakano, 1997; Butz, 2009: 782). Schatz and Lavine proved that people who appreciate and take interest in national symbols and ceremonies achieve a greater sentiment of national identification. (Schatz and Lavine, 2007: 330)

National symbols do not solely represent the "nation" as a larger entity, but also condense knowledge, values, history, and memories associated with one's country (Firth, 197; Butz, 2009: 780). "Further, it is clear that national symbols also hold the potential to represent the strong emotional attachments felt for one's nation" (Billig, 1995; Firth, 1973; Butz, 2009: 780).

National symbols can be found in popular sports teams. The United Nations Report on the International Year of Sport and Physical Education 2005 (un.org, 2005) highlights the many benefits of sport in building a national identity. Sport usually provides nations with a positive image, and can contribute to strengthening the national pride, thus forming a cohesive national identity.

The Belgian national football team presents a rare example of national unity and pride, consisting of both Flemish and Wallonian players. It's presence as a national symbol has been reinforced recently, as the team reached the quarterfinals in the world cup of the summer 2014 (fifa.com, 2014). The Football team's success was reported on by both Flemish and French-speaking media outlets alike. For instance, the Flemish television network "Eén" broadcasted a docu-series in May 2014 titled "Iedereen Duivel", translated "Everyone Devil", referring to the



national team's nickname, The Red Devils. (voetbalkrant.com, 2014) This series portrayed the team players as well as the fans of the football team, both Flemish and Dutch (canvas.be, 2014). As a result of this extensive media coverage, both the Flemish and Wallonians are being told to value a team in which players speaking both languages take part.

In addition to the national football team, the Belgian monarchy also plays a very important role in the country's public life. As Bart Maddens, a professor of politics at the University of Leuven states "the Royal Family is certainly perceived as the last cement that keeps Belgium together". "This is a perception that is very strong, especially in the Francophone part" (The Independent, 2013). It is also worth noting that the Belgian team's official stadium is named after Belgium's former King Baudouin (prosportevent.be, 2014). This combines and reinforces the two most shared national symbols in Belgium.



CHAPTER 7 - DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

The following chapter serves to interpret the data and theory we have collected, making sense of what these say about the national identity of Belgium.

ANALYSIS

POLITICS

We have presented the results of the May 2014 elections as well as the subsequent formation of a coalition government in Belgium in order to understand which political parties are most popular, thus allowing us to identify which core values motivate voters. In order to reach an in-depth understanding of these values, we've presented brief overviews of the top four political parties, two from each side of the linguistic divide.

The results of the 2014 general elections indicated growing support of right-wing views from both Flemish and French voters. Although the socialist party still won the dominant vote among French speakers, the data indicates a slight bump in support for their right-wing counterpart, the reformist movement (MR). The socialist party experienced a small decline in support (Deloy, 2014b: 1). Although it is too soon to know for sure whether this indicates the beginning of a move towards a preference for right-wing politics among the French-speaking, what we know is that MR, a party that aims to strengthen ties in their linguistic communities in order to compete with the Flemish (Mouvement Réformateur, 2002: 10), remain the second most popular party in French-speaking politics (Deloy, 2014b: 1). This may suggest that, although most do not support separatism, the French are moving towards wanting to become more unified within their own community, similarly to the majority of Flemish-speakers. If this is the case, the discussion of a national identity in Belgium will become even more complex, as the linguistic divide becomes more evident.



It is clear when analyzing data on Flemish parties that nationalism and support of separatist movements are on a constant rise. It has taken the nationalist party New Flemish Alliance a mere eleven years to go from holding only 6 seats in government, in allegiance with CD&V, to becoming the most powerful party in Belgian politics (N--VA.be, 2014) (Elections.belgium.be, 2014). This has happened thirteen years after its establishment. Their aim is to eventually form an independent, Flemish, state (N--VA.be, 2014). What we can conclude from this is that if they wish for an independent Flanders, then they have no desire to construct a Belgian national identity. This ties into our use of minority theory, as minorities generally are not part of the overall image of a country. This is very problematic, as it is rare that the majority of a population do not wish to contribute to its national identity. However, this is not to say that national identity to an extent isn't inevitably constructed, it may just have negative connotations. Members of the population as well as foreigners tuned in to European news might identify Belgium solely as a nation of conflict.

Although the major presence of right-wing politics in Flanders is unavoidable, there are certainly degrees to which parties and people wish for this to lead to a dissolve of the Belgian state. It could be argued that CD&V's political motivations are not as specific to the conflict in Belgium, but rather fairly classic right-wing politics that exist in any nation. CD&V disregard the idea of a centralized government and wish for executive power to be handed out to communities and regions as much as possible (Deloy, 2014a: 4). These views are comparable to countries such as the US, that have implemented a system that aims to do just that, i.e. handing over much legislative power to individual states and their districts. Although the United States is a much larger and powerful country than Belgium, it is worth noting that they are still known for their national pride and identity. This is possible despite the fact that many political decisions affecting individuals are not made in a centralized, national, government. Hence, the dominance of some right-wing Flemish politics in Belgium isn't necessarily a hindrance of national identity construction.

The major source of conflict between the Flemish and Wallonians is the fight for political power over Brussels, which was one of the main causes of Belgium's collapse in government in 2010 (Halberstam, 2013: 149). The capital of a country is a quintessential part of its national identity, as it is meant to represent what characterizes the nation, especially to foreigners. Seeing as the vast majority of inhabitants are French-speaking (brussels.info, 2014), it is possible to argue that Brussels is heavily represented by what the French-speaking value in their Belgian culture. Nationalists are motivated to gain power over Brussels, as it would make a huge difference in their chances to separate if they held legislative power in the capital city (Halberstam, 2013: 149). As mentioned in previous chapters, Flemish parties have taken



measures in order to increase the size of their communities by restricting the ease for French-speakers obtaining documents in their own language in the Flemish communes of Brussels (assembly.coe.int, 1998).

MASS MEDIA

McQuails theory on news as a social product suggests that the fact that the news goes through a process of selection and interpretation by journalists results in a presentation of loaded information to audiences (McQuail, 1992 cited in Collins et al, 2009: 155). If this statement holds true in the case of Belgium, the institutional divide of the media (Voltmer, 2007: 2) would mean that their mass media may possibly be conveying an even wider variety of loaded information, to be understood and deciphered by audiences. Ways in which loaded information may differ on Flemish and French sides may come about as a result of the difference in backgrounds between the journalists on either side.

Bureaucratic constraints and media ownership's general ideology is believed by many to come in to play in producing the news in all formats (Collins et al, 2009: 155), the characteristics of the audience to which these news are presented also influence how they are presented (Collins et al, 2009: 156). We now know that voting patterns in Flanders suggest favouring separatism, and that the majority of the French-speaking vote goes to the socialist and the reformist movement party (Deloy, 2014b: 1). If political news were to be presented on either side of the divide with aims to please the views of their audience, Flemish news may be more driven to present news that pleases their audiences' views on separatism. In which case, these news do not aid in creating a national identity of Belgium as a whole, but rather one of Flanders. In addition, if french-speaking news were to target voters of the reformist movement in broadcasting, they would also place focus on progress and strengthening the french-speaking community (Mouvement Réformateur, 2002: 10).

This would also result in less of a national identity being presented by the media on the French-speaking side.

Theory also suggests that bad news is preferably presented, as it is deemed more entertaining (Collins et al, 2009: 158). Belgium is characterized by their language divide, which means that a great deal of news on issues concerning the divide will be presented. If the mass media have a



preference for presenting bad news, the divide may be continuously spun in a negative light, more than needed. This could make Belgians less hopeful for their national identity.

The fact that sociologists suggest that many do not question the reliability of television news specifically (Collins et al, 2009: 155) would suggest that a majority of Belgian media consumers inadvertently accept the ideology, which might not present their national identity in a positive light, that is presented to them.

MINORITY

A great deal of theory on the subject of minorities suggests that hatred is a common emotion that occurs between opposing minority groups. The belittling of other minorities, in order to gain a boost in self-esteem (Chen, 2010: 3), can be exemplified on both sides of the linguistic divide. The language communities may speak ill of one another, feeling this could reinforce their own identity. By doing so, Belgians are only separating themselves off from each other even further and preventing a national identity from being formed.

We have shown how language planning policy in Malaysia has taken significant measures to unify all minorities and ethnic backgrounds in the country. They have done this by making sure that the official language is taught to all to a certain level of oral proficiency. This allows the country to communicate values and cultural symbols that pertain to their national identity openly and clearly in a shared language (Ghazali, 2010: Abstract).

In Belgium, the fact that there are three official languages is already an obstacle. Bilingualism would be the best way for the country to move in the same direction as Malaysia in constructing national identity. However, it does not seem likely that this lies in the near future for Belgium. The research on Belgian students' choices of foreign languages as subjects show that the Flemish take less interest in learning French than would be expected (Courrier Hebdomadaire du CRISP, 1984 as cited by Swing, 1988: 78). It also indicates that students of both linguistic backgrounds place little value on their national languages, as they view English as the most important modern language to learn (Courrier Hebdomadaire du CRISP, 1984 as cited by Swing, 1988: 79). This exemplifies how little motivation each side of the divide has to understand how the others view their national identity. It is difficult to see how they would be able to reach a form of unspoken agreement of what they value the most when they do not understand the each other's languages.



SYMBOLISM

If Cerulo's statement on the use for symbols holds true, directing public attention and bringing people together proves difficult to do in a divided country (Cerulo, 1995: 3). Our research on Belgium's politics and the mass media has shown how few ideological institutions are shared by both Flemings and the French-speaking alike. Both sides have each their own regional and communal governments and political parties (Cook, 2004: 144), and media organizations are also split (CIM, 2014). If shared national symbols are needed in order to form a national identity, the question is whether this is possible, given that institutions on either side do not convey the same messages.

What we know is that the media messages that portray national symbols are inevitably fragmented. The importance for them to be somewhat cohesive is stressed by Firth, as national symbols transcend "knowledge, values, history and memories" all of which are characteristics that tie back into national identity (Firth, 197; Butz, 2009: 780). This awakes concern for Belgium's national identity, as separate media outlets and political parties based on language perpetuate symbolic images received by the public (CIM, 2014).

Although, this is not to say that some national images, at least in the country's media, do not overlap. This is certainly the case with the national football team, as media coverage on both sides is extensive, particularly due to their recent success in reaching the quarter finals in the world cup of 2014 (fifa.com, 2014). The documentary broadcasted on Flemish television, *ie-dereen duivel*, shows promise for shared national symbols, as the football team are presented in a very positive light (canvas.be, 2014). Seeing as the national team's home games take place in the *Roi Baudouin* stadium, named after the country's former king (prosporevent.be, 2014), both the national team and the monarchy are reinforced as national symbols.

However, our research has not found that there are other significant overlaps of national symbols being heavily represented on both sides of the linguistic divide. This could support the argument that Belgium's former prime minister Yves Leterme made, that Belgium is "united solely by the king, the national football team and certain brands of beer" (Waterfield, 2007).

We are aware that our presentation of these symbols are a result of observations we have made when researching the Belgian media, and that real content analysis would be needed to make definitive statements on whether no other national symbols significantly overlap in coverage.

BENEDICT ANDERSON



As previously mentioned in other chapters, national identity is often created based on national symbols and the emotions these create in a state's population (Cerulo, 1995:3). Anderson argues that the populations in any nation imagine that they live in a communion, even though the members of the nation will only know a very small number of their fellow members. A nation is a product of its member's imagination, and can only exist because the members created it. (Anderson, 1991: 6)

When looking at Belgium as a nation, national symbols are crucial in order to obtain national unity, especially because of the linguistic divide. If looking at Belgium as purely a country and not a nation, national symbols would not necessary, because the country-status would be a legal construction only and not emotionally based. Former prime minister of Belgium Yves Leterme, is cited for saying that Belgium is nothing else than the "king, the national football team and certain brands of beer" (The Telegraph, 2006), and Bart Madden stated that "the Royal family is certainly perceived as the last cement which keeps Belgium together"(The Independent, 2013). According to Madden and Leterme the national symbols can be seen as "the last glue that holds the country together".

A national symbol like the Royal family can potentially evoke strong emotions towards Belgium and can help create the national identity that Belgium is lacking because of political distance and the linguistic divide. "Further, it is clear that national symbols also hold the potential to represent the strong emotional attachments felt for one's nation". (Billig, 1995; Firth, 1973; Butz, 2009: 780).

A national institution such as the monarchy can create a communion between members of the population, as feelings towards the the royal family become a combining element and a symbol that the whole population has in common. According to Anderson a common national symbol, and the idea that the population share something, creates a communion between the people of the country, and that such communions can create nations, "*even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in minds of each lives the image of their communion*". (Anderson, 1991: 6)

The national football team in Belgium creates a rare unity between the regions, as the team consist of both Flemish and Wallonian players. Recently the national team reached the quarterfinals in the 2014 World Cup (fifa.com, 2014). As the team is interregional it has become a national symbol that both Wallonia and Flanders could be proud of and feel attached to. According to Schatz and Lavine, people who appreciate and take interest in national symbols will achieve a greater national identification (Schatz and Lavine, 2007: 330). This summer the football team and its achievements were something that the people of Belgium could take interest



in and when the team reached the quarter-finals (fifa.com, 2014), this may have reinforced the football team as a national symbol.

According to Anderson, a such communion can help create the idea of a national identity and the common adoration of the football team and national pride it can create, can create a nation. Gellner believes that *“nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist”* (Gellner as quoted in Anderson, 1991: 6) and the pride that the Belgian feel towards the football team, can be translated into a vague form of nationalism. A nation, or an imagined community, can therefore create a nation, because of the realization of the greatness lying in the football team.

Anderson believes that a national identity, will makes differences unimportant, because of feeling of a community. *“it is imagined as a community because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may occur in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship”* (Anderson, 1991: 7) The linguistic divide is a hindrance for Belgian national identity and ruins the idea of a communion and deep horizontal comradeship. As discovered previously, there has been a rise in independence parties in Belgium (Deloy, 2014b: 1), which also prohibits a great deal of comradeship, because the political goal of independence parties is to divide the country and thereby ruin the comradeship.



CONCLUSION

Our goal has been to answer the research question "Given the linguistic divide in Belgium, to what extent does the country have a national identity?". This asks of us to present factors that create national identity both generally and applied in the case of Belgium. These include cultural symbols and the mass media. In addition to this, we also present factors that could be considered possible obstacles in creation of national identity in Belgium. Here, issues presented were the mass media, the politics of Belgium, minority theory and Benedict Anderson's theory on imagined communities.

This question is not one that can be answered definitively. However, it is clear that the complexities that arise as a result of a linguistic divide make Belgium's national identity very unclear. As mentioned in our analysis, it is difficult to see how a country that is so institutionally divided can share a national identity.

Additionally, the fact that separatist political parties garner so much support among Flemish-speakers is also a significant drawback. It is not a good sign for Belgium's national identity to have such a large portion of the population that do not wish to be a part of the country, as it makes for a less unified one.

It is certain that an abundance of political will is needed to resolve the difficulties in Belgium. Our comparison to the case of Malaysia has emphasized how little effort has been put into implementing legislation that holds the population to a certain proficiency in each of the main official languages in Belgium. This results in little communication and general understanding between the two sides.

Our research on national symbols has shed the most positive light on Belgium's national identity, as it has shown that the Flemish and Wallonians do share the monarchy and football team as symbols. However, we would argue that this certainly isn't enough to construct a strong overall national identity.



We can conclude that national identity is much stronger and distinctive on each side of the main linguistic division, but in the case of Belgium as a whole, attributes that constitute national identity are lacking.

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