

Christian Democratic Parties in Belgium

Lieven de WINTER

Université du Louvain la Neuve

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I. RELEVANCE OF STUDYING CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTIES IN BELGIUM

Studying Christian Democratic parties in Belgium is mainly interesting for three particular reasons. First, in the post-War period, most of the time the Christian Democrats have been the strongest political formation in Belgium. It reached the peak of its post-War electoral strength in 1950, by capturing 48% of the national vote (and an absolute majority in parliament), while its lowest score occurred in 1981 (26%). The CVP, the Christelijke Volkspartij (Christian People's Party) has always been the strongest party in Flanders (its vote varying between 60.4% in 1950 to 31.4% in 1987). But in Wallonia the PSC, the Parti Social Chrétien, is only the second or the third party (with a maximum of 34.2% in 1958 and a minimum of 20.1% in 1971).

Second, the CVP-PSC is the most important governmental party of the post-War period. It became the pivotal coalition party after the 1950s, the hard core of each coalition from 1958 on. It has always been in government, (apart from the 1945-1947 and the 1954-1958 period), usually choosing its partner between the Socialist and the Liberal parties. Thus, it has strongly dominated cabinet policies and provided most ministers. In addition, nearly all post-War prime-ministers have been Christian Democrats, usually belonging to the CVP. Through this permanent participation, it has also strongly "occupied the state" and semi-public institutions.

Finally, the CVP-PSC is the political representative of the Catholic pillar and its wide variety of organisations, which in itself has undergone major changes in the post-War period (deconfessionalisation, secularisation, professionalisation, etc.) It is thus an interesting case as far as the relations between party, pillar and societal changes are concerned.

II. CREATION AND RECENT HISTORY (SHORT VIEW)

1. From the 19th century until World War II

At its creation in 1830, the Belgian Kingdom was a hybrid state. In the North there was a Catholic, conservative, largely agricultural Dutch-speaking Flanders, and in the South the more free-thinking, progressive, largely industrialised French-speaking Wallonia. The creation of the Belgian state was the result of the collaboration of Catholic and Liberal bourgeoisie in opposition to the Dutch King. Thus the first 16 years of the existence of the Belgian state were characterised by "unionist" government, i.e. coalitions of Catholic and Liberal notables. The first political tendency which organised itself as a national political party were the Liberals in 1846, and the Catholics started organising national congresses from 1863 on, but

only in 1879 the Catholics began to organise themselves seriously as a political part, bringing the local catholic electoral associations under one roof. At first, the party was mainly a bourgeois, conservative organisation, interested mainly in defending the interest of the Church and the Catholic schools. The working class wing, representing the Catholic workers organisations which were set up (after the enlargement of the franchise in 1893) in order to offset the attraction of the Socialist pillar organisations, grew in strength within the party, together with the peasant's league. Thus by 1914, the Catholic Party consisted of three distinct wings: the conservative, Fédération des Cercles, the working-class Ligue Démocratique Belge, and the peasants Boerenbond ("Farmers League").

In the Interbellum, these three "standen" ("estates") or "familles" (to which was added an estate representing the so-called middle classes (i.e. shopkeepers, artisans and small entrepreneurs) became more important than the actual party organisation. People could not join the Union Catholique directly, but only by one of its factions. In fact, the Union Catholique was only a federation of four distinct estates, each enjoying a large autonomy. There was no common political programme, only collaboration at the moment of the composition of the electoral lists for the parliamentary elections. In 1936, a reorganisation took place, creating the Bloc Catholique Belge, with a Flemish and a Walloon wing (with individual membership), which reduces somewhat the impact of the factions.

2. From World War II until 1968

The new Christian Democratic party, the CVP-PSC, was created in 1945, and was a party quite different from its predecessors. It terminated its formal links with the Church, organised itself on the basis of individual membership instead of indirect membership through the standen (although it did not abolish the standen); it became an interclass party, aiming at the realisation of social and economic justice for all citizens. It had two wings, a Flemish (CVP) and a Walloon (PSC), but kept an unitary structure. The formulae soon became very successful and the party obtained an absolute majority in 1950 in both chambers and in 1958 in the Senate.

3. The post-1968 period

The party split up along linguistic lines due to the growing linguistic conflict between Flemish and Francophones in the 1960s. The divorce was triggered off by the question of the division of the Catholic University of Louvain, whereby the French-speaking sections were forced to move out of the Flemish-speaking city of Leuven into new campus on French-speaking territory. This demand was strongly supported by Flemish public opinion, but resented by the French-speakers as

discriminatory and insulting. The government of the PSC-prime minister Vanden Boeynants could not reach an agreement on this issue and resigned, lost considerably in the subsequent general elections, and consequently both wings opted to act as autonomous parties, leaving some coordination structures (national president, praesidium, national headquarters and secretariat) in existence, but these organs slowly became inoperative or were split later on. Since the split up, both parties have drifted apart considerably, in terms of organisation, functioning, ideology and electoral evolution. Therefore we cannot consider the PSC and the CVP as one party "disguised" for electoral reasons as two parties, but two competitive actors in a partially overlapping political arena (electorally, they only compete in the electoral circumscription of Brussels Halle Vilvoorde, (Louvain and Nivelles), in the cabinet and in parliament they operate as fully independent and often competitive actors). On the other hand, since their creation as two independent parties, they have always been in government, thus asymmetrical coalitions (one party in the majority, the other in the opposition) have not arisen yet (which is also the case for the other traditional parties -Socialist and Liberals which also split up along linguistic lines in the 1970s).

III. PRESENT CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CVP AND THE PSC.

What are the characteristics of both parties in terms of internal structure, leadership, factionalism, ideology, and governmental participation? These aspects could be approached in several ways: one could offer a snapshot of the party at a given moment in its history, one could adopt a historical approach, stressing changes over time; one could stress the differences between the CVP and the PSC, or between these two parties and the other (traditional) parties in Belgium, or between the CVP-PSC and the features of other Christian Democratic parties in comparable political systems (such as the Netherlands, Italy, Austria, Luxembourg, the German Federal Republic, etc.).

We prefer to adopt a more flexible approach which basically refers to the features of the CVP and the PSC in the most recent situation (1980s), but in case of major changes over time differences between the present situation and the situation in previous decades will be shortly touched upon. Occasionally, some specific differences in comparison with other Belgian parties and other Christian Democratic parties in Europe will be highlighted. At the end of my expose, we will touch upon some major problems which the Belgian Christian Democrats are facing.

A. The internal party structure of the CVP and the PSC

The CVP and the PSC have basically three organisational levels: the national level, the constituency level ("federal", "arrondissemental"), i.e. the level of the

circumscription for the parliamentary elections; and the local level (the comunes) (in both parties there also exist a provincial organisational structure, but this level is not operational in all provinces. In some cases there is even a specific organisation at the sub-constituency level (the "cantons"), and the local sections can also- create subdivision ("sections").

1. Party organisation at the national level

At the CVP national level, we find basically the following organs:

a) the National Party Congress

The National Party Congress is mainly composed of representatives of the local parties, and officeholders within the constituency and national party structures. In principle, the congress is the highest decision-making body of the party: it establishes the party statutes, the party program and the policies to pursue. In practice, it decides on the adoption of the party's electoral manifesto, on governmental participation (by approving the governmental agreement reached between coalition parties), and the party's basic ideological positions. It elects the national party bureau and the national party president. It also holds conferences on specific themes which are on the political agenda (like the environment). It has to meet at least once a year. It usually draws about one thousand participants.

b) the National Party Bureau

The National Party Bureau is composed of the party president and vice-presidents, 10 non-MPs, the leaders of the parliamentary parties in the Chamber, the Senate, the European Parliament and the Flemish Council (regional parliament), the prime minister and vice-prime ministers of the national cabinet and the Flemish Executive, eventually the chairman of the House and the Senate, the president of the party youth organisation, and of the party women's organisation. The national secretary, the head of the party research centre and of the political formation institute and the party spokesman have an advisory vote. It counts about 40 members (1986). It is responsible for the daily leadership of the party organisation: it coordinates the initiatives and positions of the parliamentary groups, and defines the positions of the party on current issues in between congresses. It meets at least once a week.

In between the congress and the party bureau, there is the National Party Board ("Partijbestuur") (N=37, 1986): it is mainly responsible for party discipline, party rules and the general party organisation and management, party finance and electoral campaigns, party nominations in the public sector, etc. It meets less

frequently (once a month). It can call for a National Party Council, which includes the members of the national party board, of the parliamentary parties, the presidents of the constituency and local parties, and some representatives of the women and youth organisation. Usually a party council is held when there is not enough time to call for a congress and the party leadership still wants to sound a party basis wider than the relatively narrow party bureau and board (such as for the election of an interim party president and a modification of the coalition agreement).

The FISC is organised more or less in the same way as the CPV: at the top we find the Président National (assisted by the Sécretariat National), the daily leadership is exercised by the Comité Directeur. The Congrès National however is open to all party members, and deals basically with ideological matters. In between the Comité Directeur and the congress, we find the Conseil Général, a body similar to the CVP National Party Council, and which gathers only when the Comité Directeur wants to sound a larger audience, without calling for an all-member congress, such as for the approval of governmental agreements, or recently the composition of the candidate list and programme for the 1989 European elections. The main difference with the CVP national party organisational structure is the selection mechanism for the national party president.

c) the National Party President

Until the fall of the Vanden Boeynants government over the division of the Catholic University of Louvain, the unitary party elected a national president, and also two vice-presidents ("wing"-presidents), who were appointed separately by the Flemish and the Francophone wings.

The statutes of the CVP stipulate that the National Congress elects the party president, from a candidate list composed by the Party Council. The PSC introduced in 1969 an entirely different selection system, i.e. a direct, secret vote by all party members. The revolutionary idea of a direct member election of the party president was promoted since 1965 by the party youth organization of the PSC and other renovating forces, in order to stop the cooptation of the post-War veterans by their fellows. It was meant to facilitate the renovation of the party by increasing the chances of the following generation for seizing the presidency and other party offices. In fact, the new 1969 statutes did not only render the selection of the national president more democratic: on all party levels, leadership positions were to be accorded by a secret vote of the members.

The CVP-statutes concerning the selection of the party president suggest a fully democratic electoral process while practice strongly deviates from the statutory model. First, within the CVP (and the unitary party), there was very rarely more than one candidate (three times out of 33). No incumbent president was ever challenged

in the unitary party and in the CVP. The single candidate is usually elected by an overwhelming majority.

The selection of the PSC presidents displays quite a different picture. First, in most cases there was more than one final candidate. At contested elections, the winner's majority ranged between 46% and 77% (average = 66%), which does indicate that a real competition between the candidates was going on. In addition, twice an incumbent president was challenged. The official participation figures range between 54% and 29% of the members, and it seems the participation rate is in decline.

While the PSC-procedure is obviously more democratic, it allows discontent of the rank-and-file members with a president in office to manifest itself more easily. In addition, the secrecy of the voting procedure renders opponents to the leadership less identifiable, and therefore less vulnerable to leadership reprisals. This is another incentive to manifest disagreement in the vote. The fact that the PSC presidency changed hands seven times since 1969 seems to indicate that the democratization of the procedure jeopardized the stability of the office, as well as the authority of the president. Even when up until now no incumbent president has been ousted by member votes, a close reelection, such as the mere 60% of Deprez in 1988, clearly does not strengthen the president's internal and external authority.

The party leader is responsible for the daily political leadership of the party. He chairs the meetings of the party bureau and acts as the main party spokesman towards the media. He is also responsible for the management of the party as an organisation, and sometimes he *de facto* controls the secretariat (which is not always the case in other Christian Democratic parties, like in the Italian Democrazia Cristiana).

But in a system of "partitocrazia", as the Belgian political system is often defined, party leaders exercise additional influence over the national political processes. First, party presidents play an important role in the selection of ministers. Constitutionally ministers are nominated by the King. By now, the role of the King in the selection of ministers is reduced to his appointing the cabinet "formateur", who will have to negotiate between parties in order to elaborate a governmental program. Hence the selection of ministers is delegated to the formateur. But also here we notice an evolution in the post-War period. Until the beginning of the sixties, the formateur himself looked for capable people in each coalition party (taking factional equilibria within these parties into account). By now, the selection procedure is totally controlled by the coalition parties, and in particular by their presidents and the party bureaus. At the end of the coalition negotiations, the number of ministerial posts and the departments each party acquires is decided, and party presidents fill these vacancies according to their wishes.

Party leaders do not only decide on the question of who will govern, but also on the how of governing. Governmental agreements in Belgium tend to be very extensive and very detailed, and serve as a "supreme guide" or "the bible" for the governmental actions to be taken by a cabinet once started. Party leaders (and some party experts) play a predominant role in the elaboration of these agreements.

But the impact of party presidents is not only limited to the creation phase of a cabinet. Each week, the ministers of CVP and the PSC dine with their party president (and sometimes the leaders of the parliamentary groups) in order to discuss the cabinet agenda and define the positions ministers should adopt.

Finally, party presidents are usually potential challengers to the position of the ministers or even of the prime minister. Most CVP and PSC party presidents became minister or even prime minister (some became chairman of a legislative body). Hence, the president's office in the CVP and the PSC serves as a springboard to the highest public offices.

d) Coordination between CVP and PSC

After the official split of the unitary party into two autonomous parties in 1969, some foreign authors still continue to consider the CVP and PSC as one party. In fact, just after the break-up, several interparty decision-making structures were maintained or created, but slowly they became inoperative. For instance, in 1969 a national party president was elected (while each party elected also their own president), but already in 1972, this function was not filled up anymore. There used to be a Permanent Political Liaison Committee (composed of the members of the party bureau of each party), and a Praesidium (composed of the presidents of the parties, the national secretary, leaders of the parliamentary parties, and some ministers), but also these contacts slowly faded away, and by now the presidents of the CVP and the PSC do not see each other more than they meet with presidents of other coalition parties. Also the institutionalised collaboration between parliamentary groups (as far as the representation in committees is concerned) has vanished. The national secretariat has also split into two. The only real remainder of the old unitary party is the party research centre, the Centre d'Etudes Politiques, Economiques et Sociales (CEPESS), but in practice the dutch-speaking collaborators conduct research for the CVP and the Francophone researchers for the PSC (but MPs of both parties still have the occasion to meet each other at the joint subject meetings of the CEPESS research groups). Thus, at the end of the 1980s, the CVP and PSC have to be considered as fully autonomous parties (just like the other traditional parties -Socialists and Liberals- which split up in the 1970s along linguistic lines). Gradually they dropped all institutional forms of collaboration and joint-decision-making.

In addition, at the governmental level, competition between CVP and PSC is sometimes as fierce as the competition with the other coalition parties. For instance, in 1987 Gérard Deprez, the president of the PSC, provoked the resignation of the Martens VII government, because he wanted a change in coalition, dropping the Liberals for the Socialists, while the CVP was strongly opposed to any coalition with the Socialists. And with regard to regionalist and linguistic issues, CVP and PSC ministers are as strong advocates of the (self-) interests (or group egoism) of the Flemish or Walloons as the ministers of the more radical Parti Socialiste or the Flemish Nationalists. Thus at the cabinet level, clashes between CVP and PSC ministers over regional and linguistic issues are relatively frequent.

2. Party organisation at the constituency and the local level

At the local and constituency level, the party is organised according to the same framework as the national party: congress, (board), bureau and president. The local party organisation plays a certain role in the selection of candidates for the local elections. The selection of candidates for the general parliamentary elections is decided by the constituency party (infra).

The CVP and the PSC have by now reasonably active local sections in all, communes (there are 308 communes in Flanders, 262 in Wallonia, and 19 in the Brussels region). In a majority of the Flemish communes (56.5%), the major belongs to the CVP (N=174), and in 62% of the Flemish communes (N=192) (1983-1988) the CVP is participating in the local government. The CVP scores in general better at the local elections than at the national elections, especially in those communes in which it participates in the local majority. Being only the second or third Francophone party, the PSC is of course less represented in the executive organs at the local level.

3. Party management, membership and political personnel

The CVP has about 140.000 members (1987), a membership which constitutes nearly 12% of its electorate. The PSC has only 43.000 members, or about 8% of its electorate. The degree of organisation (i.e. the ratio members/voters) of the CVP-PSC lies around the national average, but far behind the best "encadré" electorate, i.e. the electorate of the Parti Socialiste (which 18% of its voters being party member in 1985).

In Belgium, the CVP is probably the best professionally organised party, with a highly reputed research centre (CEPESS), and Institute for Political Formation (IPOVO) for the party cadres, an organisation for elected office holders, a specific women's and party youth organisation, and a wide range of publications (including a

weekly magazine). The CVP was also the first party to professionally work on its public relations (organization of electoral campaigns by commercial marketing bureaus, specialized TV-training of the party's spokesmen, etc.).

The CVP and the PSC have also instituted a quota system in order to guarantee a fair representation of women and the young amongst its intraparty political personnel. The CVP statutes stipulate that at least 1/5 of the position holders in party offices should be women, with the effect that in the CVP women hold more leadership positions than in the other traditional parties. At least one third of the members of CVP leadership organs has to be younger than 35. With regard to the representation of women in the PSC, the statutes stipulate that if in an electoral circumscription the PSC can count on three effectively elected candidates, one candidate has to be a woman. This rule is effective for all types of elections. On the other hand, no special provisions exist as far as the representation of the young in the PSC are concerned.

B. Factionalism within the CVP and the PSC

Contrary to the more personalised factions (as in the Italian Democrazia Cristiana) or the denominational factions (as in the Dutch Christian Democratic Appeal), the factions in the CVP-PSC are primarily based on the socio-economic interest groups linked with the party (like the österreichische Volkspartei).

Factionalism is institutionalized mostly within the Flemish Christian Democrats. As already mentioned, the CVP is a Flemish Catholic catch-all party which appeals to workers, middle classes and farmers. These three socio-economic categories are highly organised. The Algemeen Christelijk Werkersverbond (General Christian Workers Association, ACW) represents the workers, the National Christelijk Middenstandsverbond (National Christian Middle Classes Association, NCMV) the middle classes, and the Boerenbond (Farmers' League, BB) the farmers. All consider the CVP to be the sole political representative of their interests. All three have active sections at the constituency level and are represented as "standen" (estates) in the local and the constituency parties and the national party. Each tries to maximise its power within the party, through controlling the selection of political personnel at all levels, and through permanent lobbying of this personnel, including their representatives in Parliament and in the Cabinet.

1. The parliamentary representation of the factions

As religion became politically less salient in the sixties, the socio-economic cleavage gained in importance and increasingly divided the three interest groups. On

the eve of elections all groups try to secure as many safe places on the electoral lists as possible. By now, leaders of these interest groups on the constituency level almost entirely control the candidate selection process, which secures them an important tool for the enforcement of conformist political behavior on the part of their representatives, both inside and outside Parliament. This control is highly institutionalised. Delegates of the three interest groups in the constituency party committee come to an agreement regarding safe places which they can reserve for their own candidates. In most constituencies an enduring agreement has been reached.

So nearly all CVP-parliamentarians obtained their seat because one of the factions offered them a safe place on an electoral list. In 1985, 46.9% of the CVP Representatives belonged to the ACW group, 12.3% to the BB, 26.5% to the NCMV and 8.2% were backed both by the BB and the NCMV. Only a few were not backed by any of the groups. These "sans familles" CVP-parliamentarians are usually national party leaders or Cabinet members, with a strong electoral appeal. They cannot be neglected in the bargaining process between the groups.

The distribution of parliamentary seats has undergone some evolution in the 1945-1985 period. The ACW parliamentary representation remained stable (about one third) until 1958, then it progressed until it captured nearly half of the seats in 1974 and held this level of representation from that moment on. In the 1946-1958 period the BB and the NCMV (added together) saw their representation rise from one third to one half. In the next ten years their share decreased to 44% and since then it remained around that level. The share of the "sans familles" decreased continuously in the 1946-1978 period, from 33.9% to 7.41%. Then it stabilised around this minimum. Hence, the period after 1974 is characterised by a consolidation of the distribution of parliamentary seats among the three factions and the "sans familles".

The factions do not only exert a predominant influence on the selection of parliamentary candidates. Once elected, the parliamentary representatives of the factions keep in close touch with their stand. The ACW-parliamentarians are invited to assist the ACW National Bureau each time political matters are on the agenda. In addition a contact committee exists in which ACW-parliamentarians and the ACW leaders meet monthly. Within the constituency, ACW-parliamentarians also keep in close contact with the constituency leaders of the ACW.

The BB-parliamentarians are member of the CCLT (Centraal Comité voor Land- en Tuinbouwbelangen - Central Committee for Agricultural and Horticultural Interests), in which the BB leadership discusses with their parliamentary representatives the political actions to be taken to defend BB interests. It meets three times a year. But BB-parliamentarians meet also once a month in order to prepare their parliamentary work. CCLT-committees function also on the provincial level.

Generally, the national BB-leadership scrutinizes closely whether political actions of their political representatives follow their guidelines.

The NCMV-parliamentarians are organised in the NCMV Political Committee, whose role is to coordinate political activities and to define a strategy for the elaboration and the follow-up of legislative initiatives regarding the middle classes. Members of the Committee are also invited to attend the NCMV General Assembly and are member of the research committees of this Assembly. NCMV Political Committees also operate on the constituency level.

In the PSC, socio-economic interest groups are less well organised than in the CVP. In addition, many changes occurred in the institutionalised representation of the three social categories within the party framework. French-speaking Catholic workers are organised in the Mouvement Ouvrier Chrétien (MOC). The MOC factions seeking political representation by the PSC are (since 1972) organised in the Démocratie Chrétienne (DC). At the constituency level these factions have their representatives in the constituency "Comité Directeur". They recognize parliamentary candidates as their political representatives in the PSC and promote their candidates' selection by the Comité Directeur and also sponsor their election.

The MOC sought political representation solely into the PSC until 1972. At that time it decided that also parliamentarians of other parties (especially the Rassemblement Wallon and the Front Démocratique des Francophones) could act as their representatives. The political representatives within the PSC were grouped into the DC, in which a Political Committee was constituted, including all DC-parliamentarians. In 1977 the MOC created the Fondation Politique (with MOC representatives within the PSC (DC), the RW and FDF) in order to coordinate concertation with regard to the political strategy and actions of the MOC.

The representation of the Catholic middle classes in the PSC has undergone many organisational changes. The right wing of the PSC was first organised in the Movement des Indépendants et les Cadres (MIC). In 1972, the PSC recognized the Centre Politique des Indépendants et Cadres Chrétiens (CEPIC) as the sole representative of the middle classes, the cadres and the liberal professions within the PSC. In 1981 the PSC broke with the CEPIC because intraparty left-right conflicts were about to threaten the very existence of the party. Finally, the CEPIC-parliamentarians abandoned the CEPIC, and constituted with some "sans familles" the Rassemblement du Centre (RDC). Yet, the disappearance of CEPIC has not decreased the impact of middle class and right-wing factions on the PSC in a significant way.

The French-speaking Catholic farmers' organisation, the Alliance Agricole Belge, is not officially recognised by the party as an intraparty "famille", but it does

have individual representatives defending agricultural interests. Finally, there also exists an unstructured group of "sans familles" PSC-politicians unrelated to the DC or CEPIC.

Stable institutionalised agreements between the representatives of the socio-economic interest groups within PSC constituency parties are less common than in the CVP. In many constituencies there is no tradition of bargaining or seat-sharing. Consequently conflicts between the DC and CEPIC on the eve of elections have been more frequent, and usually more bitter than in the CVP. Since the PSC is also smaller than the CVP, it can count only on one safe seat in most constituencies, so often there is no package of seats to share between the tendencies. This usually results in the selection of a neutral, "sans familles" candidate, acceptable to all factions.

In 1981, the DC accounted for 32.4% of the PSC parliamentary seats, the "sans familles" 47.1% and the CEPIC 20.6%. This distribution, as in the CVP, has undergone some important changes in the 1946-1981 period. Initially, the share of the DC was rather weak, remaining under 20% until 1958. It rose to 40% in 1977 and then declined again to 32%. The CEPIC representation remained rather stable in the period of its existence (slightly above 20%). The "sans familles" scored around 40% in the 1974-1978 period, but they grew to 47% in 1981.

2. The ideological diversity of the factions' representatives

Quite often the CVP-leadership states that although the party is indeed supported by separate "families", that this does not lead to a strong ideological heterogeneity. In this view the factions are only means of organisational encadrement of the different social categories belonging to the Catholic world.

Data collected from interviews with all Christian-Democratic members of the Chamber does not support this vision. On some issues, CVP MPs differ considerably in opinion. Most controversial issues within the CVP are situated on the left-right dimension, like repatriation of migrant workers, reduction of income differences, economic state intervention, and "mittbestimmung". And most of these issues are controversial because MPs of the three factions differ in opinion on these issues.

3. The parliamentary government support of the three CVP-factions

The same research revealed that the ACW-parliamentarians prefer a centre-left coalition (with the Socialists) to a centre-right coalition (with the Liberals). The parliamentarians of the BB and the NCMV preferred just the opposite.

4. The ministerial party

Factionalism within the CVP and PSC does not only manifest itself on the level of the parliamentary party. The factions and the "familles" are also very well represented on the ministerial level.

Of the 168 CVP Cabinet members (ministers and secretaries of state) in the 1958-1985 period, 41.1% belonged to the ACW, 14.0% to the BB, 16.4% to the NCMV and 28.6% were not affiliated to any faction. Hence, on the ministerial level we find more "sans familles" than in the parliamentary party (=11.8% for the same period). The ACW is represented in the Cabinet in more or less the same way as in the parliamentary party (42.4%), and the BB and the NCMV are clearly underrepresented in the Cabinet (21.5% and 24.3%). Contrary to representation of the factions in the parliamentary party, there is no clear evolution on the ministerial level.

Of the 114 PSC Cabinet members 29.0% were affiliated to the CEPIC, 29.8% to the MOC, and 41.2% were "sans familles" (the high percentage of the latter is due to the fact that the CEPIC has only manifested itself after 1971, leading to the classification of right wing Cabinet members before 1971 as "sans famille"). If we consider only the 1971-1985 period, the CEPIC Cabinet members represent 39.3% of the PSC cabinet delegation, the MOC 37.5%, and the "sans familles" only 23.2%. Compared to the parliamentary representation of the "familles" in the relevant period (1974-1985), the MOC is more or less equally represented (36.8%) and the CEPIC is strongly overrepresented (21.7%). Contrary to the CVP, the "sans familles" are strongly underrepresented at the cabinet level (41.6%).

Another point of interest is the kind of departments ministers of different factions administer. Are they spread at random over the different type of departments, or do factional ministers have reserved domains? Looking at it department-wise, some departments seem to be the exclusive hunting ground of one faction. For instance, the Prevoyance Sociale department has always (in the period 1958-1985) been directed by a ACW or MOC minister (unless it was given to a minister of another party). The same goes for the department of Labor and Employment, and also Family and Public Health (with one exception). Other reserved domains for the ministerial representatives of the Catholic workers factions are Public Works, Transport & PTT, and Civil Service.

The Agriculture department has most of the time been directed by a BB minister, and sometimes by a representative of the CEPIC or a SF. Hence, the Boerenbond virtually "owns" the department. They never had to give it out of hand to

another faction or another party (contrary to the workers factions, who sometimes have to leave their favorite departments to the Socialists). The Classes Moyennes Department has been most of the time in "safe hands" as well (=NCMV, CEPIC or SF) but sometimes it had to be left to the Liberals.

Interior is shared by the right factions (NCMV, CEPIC) and the "sans familles", and the same goes for the Foreign office, the Justice Department and Institutional Reforms portfolio. Finance has nearly always been directed by a "sans famille". Departments which are not monopolised by one of the factions include the prime ministerial office, Budget, Defence, Economy, Education and Culture and Regional Policies.

5. Factionalism and the selection of party presidents

As far as factional affiliation of the party presidents is concerned, a vast majority of presidents did not belong to any faction. This is remarkable, since the number of "sans familles" within the party leadership declined steadily, especially in the CVP. Although the number of "sans familles" politicians within the CVP has declined considerably, it has clearly not jeopardized their chances to become president. On the contrary, the increased role of the factions has made it unlikely to find a faction-affiliated candidate who would be fully acceptable to the other factions. Hence the factions reach more easily a compromise over a neutral "estateless" candidate.

C. Ideological evolution and position on the three basic cleavages

The most recent ideological manifest of the CVP (1986) states the party's four basic concepts are: personalism, responsibility, solidarity, and intendancy. From these four principles many policy orientations and political values are deduced. Of course, many of these do not belong to the monopoly of Christian Democratic parties (democracy, human rights, full employment, etc.). The more specific policy positions which differ from (some) other parties are prohibition of abortion, euthanasia, the preservation of the Flemish cultural character, the support for private initiatives in the sector of education, public health, socio-cultural work, etc. The state should refrain from taking initiatives in these sectors (unless the private sector is obviously defective). On the other hand, the state should finance these private -usually pillarized- organisations active in these sectors (principle of subsidiarity). All types of voluntarist social activities are supported. The party stresses the importance of the small and medium enterprises, the market, but also strongly supports the neocorporatist arrangements between the representative organisations of the workers, the employers, middle classes and the farmers (which is quite

understandable given the strength of the Christian Democratic economic pressure groups). Workers should participate in the decision-making within their enterprises for all vital matters (investments, employment, incomes, technology). It supports a maximal version of federalism, where the regions would get all competences, with the exception of those which are vital for the functioning of the Belgian state. The party pays particular attention to the family, favouring a tax system which is favorable for the families.

On the socio-economic cleavage, the CVP is in practice to the left of the Liberals and to the right of the Socialists. The PSC stresses its centre position on the socioeconomic left-right dimension and preaches solidarity between different social classes. With regard to denominational issues, the CVP and the PSC proclaim to be a deconfessionalised party, but they act as the strongest defenders of Catholic schools and other pillar organisations (the debate with other parties turns around the question "how much should be given", and not "whether" they should be subsidised). In addition, on many moral issues, the CVP and the PSC are at the extreme of the political spectrum (on that dimension). Finally, the CVP is more sensitive to linguistic issues than the Flemish Liberals and Socialist, but of course less federalist than the Flemish Nationalists (Volksunie). On the other hand, the PSC is reputed to be the strongest unitarist party, nostalgic for the "Belgique à papa", the heyday of the unitary Francophone bourgeois state. It favors a "fédéralisme d'union", or a rather minimal interpretation of federalism. Recently, under the presidency of Deprez, the federalists have gained ground in the PSC, and for the moment, the old grade of unitarists seems to have lost predominance.

D. The impact of the CVP and the PSC on government policy

P. De Grauwe, a neo-liberal economist concerned with the enormous increase in the role of the Belgian state in the economy, found that the political composition of the governmental majority has little if any impact on the rates of increase in governmental spending in the 1960-1983 period. He distinguishes between centre-left (Christian Democrats and Socialists) and centre-right governments (Christian Democrats and Liberals). In the period under consideration, growth of governmental spending vis-à-vis the GNP is higher under centre-right governments (3.4%) than under centre-left coalitions (2.5%).

In a second analyses, the author looked at "functional" expenses (for the 1960-1982 period), and came to some remarkable findings, especially as far as the ideology-sensitive categories are concerned. For instance, defense spending decreases more under a centre-right government than under a centre-left. Also categories with a "social" character such as social security, public health and public housing increase less fast under a centre-left government than under a centre-right

one.

The author also analysed the "political economy" of tax burdens in Belgium. In the 1960-1983 period, the overall tax burden increased by 2.6% per year. Under centre-right governments, the average annual increase amounted to 13.3%, and under centre-left it was only 2.2%. In addition, deficit spending seems to be more a habit of centre-right governments than of centre-left.

De Grauwe concludes that "the evolution of the total governmental expenses and its composition nearly never reflects the ideological preferences of the consecutive governments" and that "in some partial domains of governmental finances plays a perverse effect". The author explains these phenomena by using the hypothesis of the median voter. Governments that want to stay on have an interest in directing their actions towards the profile of the voter who is situated in the middle of the political spectrum. In order to cover the midfield, governments will sometimes even tend to "overshoot". For instance, centre-right governments will tend to move even to the left of the centre, in order to compete with the left opposition. They will be accused by the left opposition (and the left of the centre-right coalition) of favouring the rich and neglecting the poor. In order to satisfy the left within the majority and the left of the centre voters, a centre right government will adopt a number of policies advocated by the left opposition. And vice versa for a centre-left government. In coalition government, the party most likely to "overshoot", is of course the party closest to the centre, because it is particularly the right or left flank that is threatened by the opposition. The analysis of the evolution of the structure of government expenditures in Belgium suggests that the CVP-PSO has been "overshooting" systematically.

Another explanation for the lack of policy variation in terms of governmental expenditures structures can be derived from the analysis of Klingemann and Hoffenberg of the impact of the German parties on governmental expenditures. They found that the changes in the governmental expenditures structure is much more determined by the policy preferences expressed in the FDP programme (the smallest coalition partner) than the programmes of the CDU or the SPD. The authors explain this strong FDP policy impact by referring to the pivotal power of the FDP in the coalition. The hypothesis stating that in coalition government the pivotal party determines more the governmental policy than the other coalition parties, could explain the lack of variation between centre-right and centre-left governments in Belgium. First, the pivotal party in the Belgian party system, i.e. the CVP-PSC is the party at the centre of the political universe (at least on the socio-economic left-right dimension), and therefore centrist policies will tend to be dominant. In addition, the pivotal-centrist party is also the largest party in terms of parliamentary strength. Both factors, strength and pivotal position, explain the very centrist, stable and immobile character of Belgian governmental policies (in terms of expenditures).

Another factor which strengthens the impact of the CVP-PSC on government policy is party patronage. The Belgian civil service is highly politicised, in the sense that all university trained personnel is promoted through party-political patronage. The quota of nominees of each coalition party is negotiated during the cabinet formation talks. Hence, administrative elites are composed of nothing but party recruits. Given the fact that the CVP and the PSC have been permanently in government since 1958 and have been usually also the largest coalition party, they always managed to nominate more civil servants than their electoral strength would allow for (between 50 and 80% of the nominations). This patronage favours a Christian Democratic policy "outlook" of the administrative elites, and thus adds to the stability of the governmental policy in spite of changing coalitions (this permanent and profound "occupation of the state" allows the CVP and the PSC also to operate a well oiled clientelist machinery, which is essential for the maintenance and recruitment of party voters (infra)).

IV. PROBLEMS OF CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY IN BELGIUM

1. Ideological ambiguity and lack of coherence

Up until the end of the 1950s, the conflict dimension between the Catholics and the non-Catholic part of the population was very salient, and most clashes between the two groups occurred over the issue of the financing of Catholic schools. This dimension was a strong factor for the ideological and organisational cohesion of the CVP-PSC. However, in 1958 a pact (the "Schoolpact") was signed between the leaders of the Christian Democrat, the Socialist and the Liberal parties, which solved in a satisfactory way the problem of the financing of the schoolsystem. Thus the strongest "cement" of the Christian-Democrats (the interests of the Catholic pillar), faded away. Thus space was created for the other two important conflict dimensions to become more important. In the sixties, the linguistic problem became very overt. The federalist parties in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels broke through electorally, becoming a serious threat to the traditional parties. This eventually led to the split of the unitary CVP-PSC in 1968 (which also made the Liberals and the Socialists split in the 1970s), and this problem remained on the political agenda since then. But with the economic crisis of the 1970s, also the economic left-right opposition became more salient. The Socialists pleaded for a progressive front between Socialists and the workers wings of the Christian Democrats, opening their ranks to Catholics of the left. The Liberals, who had opened their ranks to Catholic conservatives already in the 1960s, became an interesting alternative for the right wing of the party. For a short while, in the middle of the 1970s, the CVP and the PSC managed to cope with this centrifugal tendencies, primarily due to professional party management of the

party by president Martens, the replacement of the post-War political generations by a relatively young generation, and the charismatic leadership of Prime Minister Tindemans. But in 1981, the CVP and the PSC lost a quarter of their voters, and they remained more or less on that level since then. The CVP-PSC have thus a serious problem in defining the specificity of their ideological programme as being more than a pragmatic compromise between the positions of the parties at its right and its left. In addition, in the 1980s the Ecologists became an important threat to the party's electoral strength as well. At the European Elections of 1989, the Greens scored over 12% in Flanders and over 16% in Wallonia, most votes coming from former Christian Democratic voters (voting intentions for the parliamentary elections reveals a electoral strength of about 10% for the Greens).

2. The growing impact of factions in the party organisation

The growing impact of factions in the party organisation decreases the flexibility of the party as an organisation, and the necessity to find compromises between the factions outside the formal party structures. This reduces the official party organs to something like "phantom" decision-making bodies, who officially endorse decisions taken outside the formal party structures. This jeopardizes the democratic operation of the party, and discourages participation of the party militants. It sometimes leads to discontent of the rank-and-file expressed at party congresses or more frequently to revolts amongst the backbenchers in parliament. These revolts make it difficult for ministers and party leaders to fully respect the agreements made with coalition parties at the moment of the creation of a government. This leads to nervousness and distrust by the other parties and in the end to cabinet instability. "What does the CVP want?" is a question that occupies strategists of the coalition parties permanently. They harbour a constant fear that the CVP will "pull a trick on them", making the government fall over on a issue that favours the Christian Democrats, and then call for a general election. Belgian governments usually fall because one (or more) faction (s) of the Christian Democrats withdrew its support for the cabinet (and usually calls for a change in coalition).

3. Leadership competition and factionalism

Being a factionalised party, strong leadership within the CVP and the PSC is difficult to arrive at. The emergence of a strong leader would jeopardize the power of the factions. Every faction tries to boost the popularity and power of its trustees in government and in the party leadership, and play down the qualities of the leaders of the other factions.

The prime minister can not fully play the role of a strong leader. First, he is

not always the most important leader of his party, but often the result of a compromise (between the factions, or because he is more acceptable to the coalition partners). He usually does not have enough power to have the policy of his coalition cabinet fully accepted by all the factions of his party as the best policy alternative. Finally, usually the party president is or becomes a virtual challenger to his position as the real leader of the party, and even a potential successor to his position as prime minister. So, in practice, the CVP and the PSC, which in the post-War period nearly always provided for the prime minister, have consumed many prime ministers. Many prime ministers have been disavowed by their own party. Some were put in a "quarantine" for a while (G. Eyskens, VDB, Martens) and were allowed to make a come-back after a couple of years. Gaston Eyskens was for instance prime minister in 1949-1950, 1958-1961 and 1968-1973, and in between these periods he was "sent into the desert".

4. The decreasing electoral strength of CVP-PSC

The analysis of the socio-demographic and political characteristics of the Christian Democratic electorate reveals some important structural weaknesses, which might reinforce the already considerable electoral decline of the parties (the CVP-PSC represented 48% of the national electorate in 1950, and by now (1987) it has fallen back to 27%).

The CVP and the PSC have growing difficulties to attract young voters: in the age category of 15-25 the CVP and the PSC only attract two thirds of its overall share of the electorate, while in the age group of +55, the CVP is overrepresented by 21.3% and the PSC 59%. Thus the electorate of the CVP and the PSC is growing old, and eventually will die out, while the recruitment of new voters is insufficient to compensate the natural disappearance of the old voters.

As far as the socio-economic composition is concerned, the CVP and the PSC are overrepresented amongst the non-active (housewives, pensioners). The CVP is in general normally represented amongst all professional categories, which illustrates the interclass character of the party. However, the PSC is strongly underrepresented amongst workers, and slightly overrepresented amongst the employees and the higher cadres.

The CVP and the PSC are overrepresented amongst those with the lowest educational backgrounds, while the PSC is also overrepresented amongst those with university training.

Finally, with regard to church practice, 44% of the CVP-voters and 46% of the PSC-voters attend church services weekly, against 21.3% % of the overall

population. Only 16% of the CVP and 12% of the PSC voters do not attend church services at all, against 39% of the overall population. In spite of the officially proclaimed deconfessional nature of the party, the CVP and the PSC remain predominantly a party of Catholics, and up until now, religion is the strongest statistical determinant for predicting the Christian Democratic vote.

When we look at the more direct motivations for voting for the CVP and the PSC, we find that of the CVP voters that cast a list vote on the party, 59% declare to vote for the party out of tradition (PSC 55%). This is the highest score amongst the traditional Belgian parties. Only 27% (PSC 24%) say they vote for the party because of the policies it pursues (against an overall average of 38%). In general, we notice that the longer a party in Belgium has participated in government, the less its electorate votes for that party because of the policies it pursues. The explanation is simple. Belgian governments are always coalition governments, and every coalition party has to make compromises. Thus there is always a gap between what the party wants, or promises during its electoral campaign, and what it realises in the government. This gap between reality and what is desired grows the longer a party participates in government. It becomes very large in the case of a party like the CVP and the PSC, who are always in government. The Liberals and the Socialists have from time to time the occasion to get an ideological "face lift" in the opposition. Thus, within the CVP, regularly some secondary party leaders plead for an "opposition cure" in order to reassert the party's ideological specificity.

On the other hand, the permanent participation in government also has positive aspects for attracting voters. The demands of voters for government jobs, the acceleration or the clearance of a citizen's dossier by the public administration (in Belgium, all types of social transfers, like for instance a pension, are subject to political interventions, etc.), can more easily be "arranged" by MPs of the CVP and the PSC than the MPs of other parties. More than a quarter of the PSC and CVP voters who cast a preference vote on a specific candidate (for the legislative elections), say to do this as a way of gratifying the candidate for the individual services he has payed to the voter. At the local government level, where the CVP is even more strongly represented in the executive, clientelism as a determinant for the CVP vote is even more stronger. Thus, an opposition cure could cut both ways, it could improve the party's ideological profile, but also damage the electorally beneficial clientelist networks.

Anyway, an opposition cure would imply that the Socialist and the Liberals would form a coalition, which is very unlikely in terms of policy vicinity. On the socio-economic conflict dimension, it would mean a coalition of the Left and the Right, against the Centre. Such a coalition is very unlikely as long as the socio-economic conflict dimension remains salient. Thus, the CVP-PSC is more or less doomed to remain the pivotal party for ever, with all its electorally negative

consequences.

5. The monopoly of the political representation of the Catholic pillar organisations by the CVP and the PSC

The decreasing electoral attraction of CVP-PSC towards voters of the Catholic pillar in spite of the strength of Catholic pillar organisations poses the problem of the monopoly of the political representation of these Catholic interest groups by the CVP-PSC. In spite of the decreasing church practice and a general secularisation of society after Vaticanum II, the Catholic pillar organisations have lost little strength, in terms of membership and viability.

On the contrary. As far as trade unionism is concerned, Belgium has one of the highest degrees of syndicalisation in the world. About 80% of the workers and employees are member of a trade union. The strongest trade union organisation in terms of membership and votes in social elections is the Christian Democratic trade union (ACVCSC), with 51% of all trade union members (against 41% for the Socialist trade union). At the social elections, they score about the same percentages.

Second, the Christian health mutual insurance organisations ("mutualités") represent nearly half (44% in 1977) of all citizens which fall under this system (against only a little over a quarter for the Socialist "mutualités").

Third, in the socio-medical sector, more than half (52%) of the general hospitals (and 74% of the psychiatric hospitals) are associated with Caritas Catholica, the Catholic association of socio-medical organisations.

Catholic organisations also have a predominant (and usually majoritarian), position in the sectors of retreat houses for the aged, the disabled, homes for juvenile readaptation, family consultancy centres, home medical care, family and aged care, sociocultural organisations (like adult education), youth organisations, etc.

In the politically sensitive sector of education, we find that in Flanders, 70% of the school and university going population goes to Catholic institutions. In Wallonia it is 50%.

Most Catholic pillar organisation managed to keep up their organisational strength and membership in spite of the decreasing church participation and deconfessionalisation of the public at large, by strenghtening the service character of their organisations and by somewhat deconfessionalising their activities at the grass roots level. On the other hand, the personal life style of those working in these organisations (teachers, medical personnel, socio-cultural workers, etc.) still have to

conform to Catholic moral values. Thus unmarried mothers, divorced, unmarried couples, and in many cases persons openly active in other political parties are not tolerated as personnel.

In addition, most Flemish newspapers sympathise with the CVP. They cover about 70% of the newspaper market (the Liberal newspaper cover about a quarter of the market, and the Socialist only 4% (1987)), in Wallonia only 30% of the newspapers are of Catholic tendency (but about 40% proclaim themselves to be neutral in party political terms). Thus on the national level, Catholic papers cover 54% of the readers market, while the CVP-PSC electoral strength only amounts to half of that proportion (27.5%).

Finally, even when by now only a fifth of the population attends weekly church services, the Belgian population remains quite religious. More than four out of five say that they feel most closely attracted by the Catholic (or Christian) religion, more than half find that religion takes an important place in their life (1987), 79% of the children are baptised, 69% of the marriages are also concluded in church, and 82% of the deceased are buried after a religious ceremony.

Thus, in comparison to the strength and viability of the Catholic pillar, the CVP-PSC perform badly and are considered as the "weakest" sector of the Catholic pillar. In the long run, this might question the role of the CVP and the PSC as the sole political representative of these organisations. As already mentioned, the Francophone workers organisation MOC has already adopted a system of pluralism in terms of political representation, recognizing also some politicians of the Walloon and Brussels regionalists as defenders of their interest. Within the Flemish Liberals, some leaders would like to withdraw the party's exclusive support for public schools and defend the interests of the Catholic schools as well. The Flemish Nationalists, who largely draw their vote from the Catholic population, are not hostile towards the interests of (some) Catholic pillar organisation. Thus in the long run, if the CVP-PSC vote and political power continues to decline, some Catholic organisations might start to adopted a system of pluralistic political representation. This pluralism would of course lower the electoral support of the Catholic population for the CVP-PSC even more.

6. The future of the PSC-CVP intergarty relations

The permanent governmental participation of the PSC is more a result of the pivotal power of the CVP as the strongest party in Flanders, than of its own strength. In Wallonia, the PSC is only the second or even third party (with only 22% of the vote). This rather comfortable link with the CVP has also many disadvantages. In Wallonia, there is an increasing feeling that the national state is being colonised by

the Flemish especially by the CVP. One speaks of "l'état Belgo-Flamand" and the "CVP-state". The link with the CVP makes the PSC a complice of this "état Belgo-Flamand" in the eyes of many Francophone voters. Thus, the PSC has tried to profile itself as a party that defends the interests of the Francophone population as much as the other Francophone parties, which of course increase the tensions between the PSC and the CVP. In addition, as already mentioned, the coalition preferences of the CVP and the PSC do not always coincide. In 1987, the PSC party president forced the breakdown of the Martens VII government and made the CVP "swallow" a coalition with the Socialists, against the will of the CVP party leadership and rank-and-file (who strongly opposed a coalition with the Flemish Socialists). Thus within the CVP, the possibility of an "asymmetrical" coalition (for instance CVP + Flemish and Francophone Liberals + Walloon Socialists, and thus without the PSC), starts to find more and more supporters. This would seriously damage the PSC, who profited strongly from its permanent government participation in terms of cabinet seats and policy influence in the national and regional governments, patronage, etc. Thus the PSC has to balance between a specific ideological identity which would optimise the party's electoral attraction, and becoming unacceptable as a coalition partner in the eyes of the CVP.