

Centre d'étude de la vie politique

Les Cahiers du
Cevipol

Racism and the belgian State

2000 / 1

Paul MAGNETTE

e-mail : pmagnet@ulb.ac.be

Cevipol

39 av. F.D Roosevelt

1050 Bruxelles

<http://www.ulb.ac.be/soco/cevipol>

1. INTRODUCTION

Recent opinion polls have revealed that Belgium is one of the European countries where racism is the most widespread (Eurobarometer 47) : while 33% of Europeans asked affirmed that they are "very or quite racist", this proportion reached 55% in Belgium, the highest score¹. Many commentators have been surprised by these results. Belgium is indeed a rich and peaceful country, which has experienced the coexistence of different « nations » within the same state for more than one and a half century now. Some ten percents of its population is of foreign origin and rough estimations indicate that one on four Belgian citizens has got at least one foreign grand-parent (Morelli 1992). Extreme-right parties have known important electoral successes in the last ten years, but they remain much weaker than their Austrian or French homologues (Delwit, De Waele & Rea 1998).

In order to understand why racism has become such a commonplace in Belgium, it then appears necessary to replace the « migrant question » within a broader political framework. This article will first give a brief account of the nation-building process that took place in Belgium from 1830 onwards, and of the curious political system to which it gave birth. It will then come back to the immigration policies, in order to show how far they were determined by the peculiarities of the political system. After having described the present situation of racism and ethnic discrimination, it will finally try to explain why racism has become a central feature of the contemporary Belgian civic culture. The hypothesis underlying this article is that, though the political system may not be seen as the source of racism, it certainly plays an important role in the transformation of racist attitudes into racist behaviours.

2. ONE STATE, TWO NATIONS

Belgium is often seen, in political science literature, as a case study. One of the oldest parliamentary regimes in Europe, it has invented a peculiar mode to make coexist different nations within the same political framework. But this « model » emerged gradually, and mainly after the second world war. During the whole XIXth century and the first half of the XXth, Belgian élite's strove to make their country a united and modern nation. And it is because they failed to do so that the « Belgian model » needed to be invented.

The age of nation-building

After they had proclaimed their independence, in 1830, and after it had been accepted by the great powers of the time, Belgian élite's felt the necessity to bypass their divergences to build a « national feeling ». Catholic and liberal politicians disagreed on everything, except the preservation of their bourgeois privileges and the absolute necessity to preserve their independence. The 1830s were a decade of romanticism in Europe, and the Belgian bourgeoisie was willing to be proud of its *Volksggeist* as all other European nations, small or large, new or old, were at the time (Deprez & Vos 1998). Painters and writers were required to create « Belgian schools » in order to spread the prestige of the young nation among the élite's of the continent (Pil 1998).

This classic nation-building process, based on the invention of traditions and rewriting of a long and glorious history (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983), proved to be efficient as far as the leading class was concerned. Emile Verhaeren and Maurice Maeterlinck, among many others, felt « Belgian » enough to write patriotic poetry in praise of the fighting nation during the first world war. But

¹ Though comparison is always difficult and Eurobarometer opinion polls are usually considered as poorly reliable.

these noble feelings remained unequally spread among the working classes. Those politicians, artists, intellectuals and businessmen who agreed on the necessity to promote their Belgian identity, inside and outside the territory, were all part of the French-speaking élite, whether they lived in Brussels, in the Flemish or Walloon part of the country. They thought that French had to be the only official language, replacing the old Walloon and Flemish dialects spoken in the country and suburbs. French remained, until the Language Acts of the 1930s, the sole language of Belgian parliament, higher courts, central administration and army. But since education was not compulsory during the nineteenth century, this policy of linguistic homogenisation failed. Flemish peasants were unable to understand the decisions applied to them in courts or administration, and some of them died on the battlefields of the Great War, the legend says, because they could not understand the orders of their French-speaking officers.

Subnational building

This linguistic opposition of classes led to the emergence of the Flemish movement. As soon as in the 1840s, Flemish writers tried to promote a national language to express the *Volksgeist* of the « Flemish people ». Political movements followed. According to Hroch's classic law (Hroch 1985), the intellectual minority concerned with the study and defence of the language of an oppressed nationality progressively turned into an active political movement. It initially required a bilingual status for the Flemish regions. But the repeated refusals of the leading class led to the radicalisation of some segments of the movement. During the first world war, some Flemish nationalistic groups even chose the collaboration with the German invader — because they thought they shared the same ethnic identity. Though this largely discredited their claims, extreme-right Flemish parties grew during the inter-war period — and led to collaboration again during the second war.

But these radical segments are only a minor element of the « Flemish National Question » (Vos 1998). While most Flemish Belgians have remained

loyal citizens of the state since then, the « separatists » remaining a tiny minority (Maddens, Beerten & Billiet 1998), the quest for regional autonomy has gained ground after the second world war. Regionalist parties emerged in the fifties, asking more cultural independence for their region, and traditional parties have progressively converted themselves to these requirements in the sixties. A Walloon movement, though initially much weaker, grew parallelly. The sixties were a crucial decade in the « national » history of Belgium. The great strikes of the early 1960s revealed that Walloon and Flemish leaders were facing growing disagreements as far as economic policies were concerned. These, and other divergences, eventually became so deep that political parties split at the end of the sixties, and began to organise the federalisation of the state. The linguistic frontier, symbolically cutting the Flemish from the French-speaking part of the country, and creating two territories within one state, had already been officially defined in 1963.

At the end of the sixties, it was clear that Belgium had, as the legal scholar and regionalist politician François Perin put it, « one state for two nations ». The first one is the Flemish nation. From the seventies onwards, all Flemish political parties have become soft or radical regionalists. They have chosen to promote, inside and outside their region, their « Flemish identity », rather than their Belgian one. Political debates have often focused, in their language, on the differences between dynamic « Flanders » and a lethargic Wallonia. The second nation is the Belgian one. Though most French-speaking parties have included regionalist claims in their programmes from the seventies, the « subnation-building process » has never been so strong in Wallonia as in Flanders. Most Walloon citizens and leaders continue to feel Belgians rather than Walloons, like those who live in Brussels.

The consociative compromise

This hybrid situation has given birth to the well-known « Belgian model » of consociative democracy. Its origins, however, do not lie in the national divide

but in a historically anterior and equally powerful cleavage, the one which opposes catholic and non-confessional citizens (Seiler 1999).

In the nineteenth century, when « democracy » was limited to 40 000 of the four million Belgian « citizens », politics was a permanent conflict between the right-wing catholic and the left-wing liberal segments of the bourgeoisie. Later on, when the worker movement emerged and the civic body was gradually enlarged, at the end of the 1880s, the catholic right-wing reacted through the organisation of its own « worker movement ». While the socialists were creating their trade-unions, co-operatives, organisations of mutual help..., the catholic élite followed the same strategies. After the second world war, social security and public services were built on these elements : this means that those crucial structures of the Welfare State were, from their origins, split into two « pillars ». From their birth to their death, citizens were part of one of these two sub-societies : they were born in a catholic or in a non-confessional hospital ; they went to catholic or public school and university ; they were members of catholic or non-confessional trade-unions and « mutuelles » ; and they voted for catholic or non-confessional parties.

This crucial cleavage crosses the national divide : there are Flemish and French-speaking catholic sub-societies, as well as there are Flemish and French-speaking non-confessional organisations. This peculiar situation creates a highly complex society, which can not be ruled peacefully according to the classic majoritarian Westminster model of democracy. Proportional representation was chosen in 1899 precisely to avoid a permanent confrontation between Flanders, which was mainly a supporter of the catholic pillar, and the largely non-confessional Wallonia. A « proportional style of government » emerged after the second world war. Large coalitions were built, uniting Flemish and French-speaking Catholics and Flemish and French-speaking socialists or liberals. In other words, opposed segments tend to prefer compromise, sharing the public good between them, rather than frank opposition. Those sub-societies recognise and respect each other, and all agree on a principle of self-organisation : just to take an example, after the clashes of the fifties, governments did not interfere in the regulation of the two

« networks » of education anymore, and left their organisation to the catholic and the non-catholic structures. The same occurred with health services and other aspects of social security. As the Dutch political scientist Arend Lijphart lucidly stated in the seventies, Belgian government is based on a principle of mutual recognition of the segments, and permanent compromises between them to spread over public goods (Lijphart 1977). A civic culture which is close to the Italian tradition of « *lotizzazione* » or the Austrian logic of « *Poporz* » emerged to deal with the divisions of Belgian society.

The federalisation of the state, made step by step during the seventies, eighties and nineties, is an other consequence of the dual Belgian nationhood. It follows the same logic : regionalist movements succeeded in convincing traditional political parties to give ever larger competencies to the regions, so that they can rule their problems themselves, as pillars have done since the second world war. The state in Belgium has gradually become an empty framework. Decisions are actually taken, and policies implemented, by regions and pillars limited to segments of the « nation », while central administration concentrates on some general powers (defence, finances, security...) which are themselves growingly limited by the process of European integration (Magnette 1997b).

Is there, finally, a Belgian identity ? Certainly not if, by identity, we mean ethnic cohesion. Belgium is a precarious set of linguistic and cultural minorities who have invented several institutional techniques to avoid oppressing each other too patently. But beyond these differences, there is a certain « Belgian spirit », based on common social values and political habits. There has always been, in Belgium, a consensus on the importance of social solidarity at work and the organisation of social security systems, which makes it a sort of Scandinavian country. Similarly, Belgian citizens agree that the state should not be too visible and should give autonomy to all « communities », whether they are cultural, religious or ideological. Flemish and French-speaking citizens share this civic culture of social self-organisation and the idea that compromise is more valuable than open conflict. The proportional structure of the political system reflects this deep feature of the Belgian society. These old

traditions of division and resourcefulness may help to understand why the « migrant question » has never been clearly answered in Belgium, and why racism has become a commonplace.

3. POLITICS AND (NON-)POLICIES OF MIGRATIONS IN BELGIUM

Belgium became a country of immigration at the beginning of the XXth century. During the last decades of the XIXth, Belgium had rather been a country of emigration. Though they are not comparable to the Irish or Italian cases, flows of Belgian workers to the United States of America, and to closer countries, were important until 1900 (Stengers 1992).

The political economy of immigration policies

The situation was reversed after the second world war. Belgium was then one of the most important industrial countries, particularly in the sectors of coal and steel industries which remained at that time the heart of the « industrial revolution ». After 1918, employers of these sectors convinced public authorities that demographic trends created a gap in the available manpower, and that it was necessary to recruit foreign workers. During the early 1920s, « commissions of recruitment » were sent to Italy, Germany and Central Europe, at the initiative of employers and with the official support of public authorities. In 1923 already, ten percents of miners were foreign workers, coming from Poland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Hungary and even Morocco and Algeria. This trend was interrupted in the thirties, when the international economic crisis engendered massive unemployment. Immigration was then seen as the source of a hard competition between national and foreign workers, and trade-unions eventually required that national workers be protected by the state.

This logic of ebb and flow, determined by employers with the passive support of public authorities, has been constant until nowadays (Martens

1976). A work permit was created in 1936, which was delivered by the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs when employers asked it. This document strictly defined the sectors in which foreign workers were allowed to work and the length of their authorised residence, so that immigration could be stopped when the evolution of the economic conjuncture tended to create unemployment. Immigration was not understood as a process of permanent residence, but as a temporary flow bound to economic evolutions.

It soon became, however, quantitatively important. In 1937, 20-25% of miners were foreign workers, and foreign citizens amounted to 4% of the total population. Political migrations had also played a certain role, though it was much more limited in scope : about 30 000 Italians arrived in Belgium because they were persecuted by the fascist regime in the 1920-1930s (Morelli 1992) as did 65 000 to 70 000 German or Austrian Jews (Steinberg 1992).

The same logic governed the immigration policies of the immediate post-war period. The reconstruction of national industries in Belgium, as in most other Northern European countries, required manpower resources which were not available in the country. As immigration had already been experienced in the inter-war period, it was seen as a natural solution to this problem by economic and political leaders of the time. The « coal battle » (reconstruction of coal industries and other related sectors) would have been impossible without massive immigration. Belgium passed bilateral agreements with Southern European countries which had a problem of unemployment : with Italy first (1946) with Spain (1956) and Greece later (1957) — after the « tragedy of the Casier », a mine incident where 262 miners, among which 136 Italians, were killed and which revealed to public opinions the terrible work conditions of miners.

These agreements stated that Belgium would give coal in exchange of manpower to emigration countries, and that foreign workers would be granted some social advantages, and notably the same working conditions and wages as Belgian workers. After 1957, those principles were translated in the Rome Treaty which organises the circulation of manpower and adopts

the principle of « equal treatment » between national and other European workers (Magnetite 1997b).

This does not mean, however, that immigration was permanent during this period. The ebb and flow trend continued, immigration being opened and closed by public authorities according to the situation of the national economy and the requirements of the employers of the sectors where foreign workers were recruited (Martens 1976). Between 1958 and 1961, immigration was stopped, with the support of trade-unions. But after 1962, new flows were organised, from further areas : agreements were signed with Turkey and Morocco in 1964 and with Tunisia and Algeria in 1969 and 1970. The Rome Treaty had indeed given more or less the same wages and social advantages to European migrants, so that they had become as « expensive » as Belgian manpower : employers were looking for workers who were ready to accept those hard and low-paid jobs that Italians were becoming to refuse (Magnetite 1997b).

The major source of immigration was, in this period, economic calculation. Foreign manpower was understood in abstract terms as an interesting « factor of production ». In periods of low activity, latent racism of employers and political leaders led them to think that foreigners might accept jobs which were not taken by Belgians or ancient migrants (Deslé 1995). As the capitalist economy is an unstable dynamic, immigration must follow its trends. Until the 1960s, and though many migrants had been living in Belgium for twenty or thirty years, migrations were not understood as permanent installation of foreign citizens but as temporary economic movements of factors of production.

The situation changed in the 1960s. A report of the famous French demographer Alfred Sauvy argued that the Belgian, and particularly the Walloon, population was declining, and concluded that permanent immigration might be a long-term solution to this problem. This argument progressively altered immigration policies. Civil servants and political leaders began to understand that immigration could be durable. Measures were taken to favour the installation of their families — who were granted attractive

social advantages. But the question of their « integration » in Belgium remained unclear. Most politicians of the time thought that if they had a job and social advantages for their families (housing, education, health services and social security), foreigners would naturally become part of the Belgian society. The question of their civil and political rights was not open at that time, since it seemed natural that foreigners remain « denizens ».

The rise of the « migrant question »

Immigration and its social consequences became a political issue at the end of the sixties. The « problem » first arose in work environments. Trade-unions, which had sometimes been hostile to foreign workers in the past, denounced persisting discriminations between national and non-national workers. European migrants had been given the same social rights as Belgians in the sixties, but non-European migrants had to wait until 1970 to be granted industrial citizenship (rights to vote and be elected in work councils). All migrants continued to be excluded from political citizenship, and moreover their residence often remained unsure.

The migrant question emerged when social movements and university students mobilisation claimed the attribution of a stable civil and political status to foreigners, at the beginning of the seventies (Rea 1997b). A political commission was created as a consequence of these movements, which was supposed to suggest a « code of foreigners » defining their rights and status. Integration was understood, in these spheres, through social and political citizenship. But political hesitations were so deep that laws on the residence of foreigners and prohibiting racism were only adopted in 1980. The government established in 1979 had suggested to grant some political rights to foreigners (Alaluf 1997), but a new version of the « migrant question » emerging at that time blocked this proposition ².

²The Council of State (Conseil d'Etat), one of the highest courts of the country, had moreover stated that the constitution needed to be modified before political rights be granted to non-nationals. Since modifying the constitution requires a two-third majority, this legal argument turned into a strong political obstacle,

From the mid-seventies onwards, racism indeed entered political spheres (Delwit, De Waele & Rea 1998). Nationalistic movements had already spread racist and anti-Semitic arguments in the thirties, but these discourses had been deeply discredited by the Nazi experience after the second world war. When immigration was massively stopped in 1974, as in most other European countries facing economic crisis and growing unemployment, the old argument that foreign workers « steal » Belgian citizens' bread and jobs re-emerged. It was initially limited to small extreme-right wing groups, but spread, in more « politically correct » terms, in traditional parties in the seventies and eighties. Biological racism was not defensible anymore at that time, given the vulgarisation of scientific works demonstrating the falsity of so-called « scientific racism ». But a new version of racism succeeded to the former one : if it were true that there was no biological superiority or differences between races, the racists argued, there remained deep cultural differences between ethnies. These were so important, they continued, that groups coming from remote regions and cultures could not be integrated in Western societies (Taguieff 1992 ; Rea 1997b). This was the implicit « reasoning » underlying the « argument » that Belgium had bypassed the « point of toleration » as far as integration of foreigners was concerned. At the end of the seventies, this neo-racist discourse was so largely spread in Belgium that politicians of all parties, from the socialists to the right-wing liberals, could publicly support this point of view. This cultural climate was at the source of the first deliberate policy of immigration.

The three ages of the « migrant question »

The policy-mix elaborated during the first half of the eighties, by a conservative government, to answer this migrant question was deeply ambivalent. Its official line, defined by the Minister for Justice Jean Gol, was the following : immigration must be stopped, and integration of those who

which could only be bypassed by the necessity to ratify the Maastricht Treaty — granting political rights to European citizens — in 1999 (Magnette 1999).

reside in Belgium and intend to stay there must be strongly promoted. Different measures were supposed to contribute to this objective : first, immigration flows had to be controlled more severely and limited ; secondly, those immigrants who did not want to integrate themselves in the host country had to be financially encouraged, or legally constrained for offenders, to go back to their country of origin ; thirdly, municipalities which had a high concentration of foreigners would be authorised to refuse new migrants, to avoid the creation of ethnic ghettos ; and fourthly, the access to nationality would be made easier for those who wanted to integrate themselves, and proved it.

These measures were inspired by two different motivations : on the one hand, they confirmed the racist argument that integration is not always possible, and is only possible where the proportion of foreigners is not too high ; on the other hand, they were based on the republican idea that integration must be a strong process, and that it is an individual matter that may be dealt with by legal means (granting rights through nationality). This policy gave rise to intense public debates. Left-wing movements strongly opposed the more restrictive aspects of it, and its underlying racist reasoning ; extreme-right-wing parties and some elements of traditional parties denounced its permissiveness. In the academic spheres, it was generally seen as an incoherent set of measures, showing that there was no clear doctrine of integration and social cohesion in Belgium.

These debates led to the creation, by the centre-left government established in 1988, of a « Commissariat royal à la politique des immigrants » (Royal Department for migrants policy) which was conceived as a consultative organ for governmental measures. This new organ would, during its five-year life, produce large reports describing the state of discriminations in legal, social, cultural and political sphere, and suggest, for the first time, a precise doctrine of integration.

The definition the first report gives deserves to be quoted integrally because it was the result of a long reflection, and could have been the basis of a coherent policy : « The concept of integration : 1/ derives from the notion of

insertion, defined by the following criteria : a) assimilation as far as is required by public order ; b) support for strong insertion according to the fundamental social principles underlying the culture of the host country, *viz. modernity, emancipation and confirmed pluralism*, in the sense given to the modern Western state ; c) unequivocal respect of cultural diversity considered as mutual enrichment in other spheres. 2/ is coherent with structural involvement of minorities within the activities and objectives of public powers » (CRPI 1989 : 38-39). In other words, integration was understood as a reciprocal process : it meant the absolute respect of constitutional principles by foreigners (a sort of constitutional patriotism, embodying the fundamental principles of Western humanism) ; and respect of cultural differences and active social policy of integration by the state. It can be seen as a synthesis between the French model (republican integration through citizenship and social equality) and the Anglo-Saxon one (respect of the rights of the minorities).

This report was adopted by the Parliament in 1990, and it was supposed to be the major reference of the future migrant policies. But after the ages of restriction (1984-1989) and of reflection (1989-1994) came the time of hesitation (1994-1999). This is partly due to the unexpected successes of extreme-right parties, particularly in Flanders, at the general elections of 1994. Though many measures based on a coherent notion of integration were adopted at that time, many politicians thought that the best means to fight racism and extreme-right parties was to come back to a discourse of restriction and toughness.

The present period is thus marked by a schizophrenia between positive actions of integration, usually not or weakly echoed in the media's, and highly publicised discourses of restriction and security-based policies. Among the positive measures taken since 1994 may be quoted : the strengthening of laws prohibiting public expression of racism and limiting the rights of racist parties ; the modification of nationality laws enlarging access to it ; « positive discrimination » measures in education, employment, social services ; equalisation of social rights... But these long-term policies, based on the idea that the state must give foreigners the same rights as those granted to

nationals, and that it has a duty to promote positively, through concrete social programmes, the integration of foreigners, is generally hidden by a largely spread discourse of negative action. The Flemish socialist Ministers of Internal Affairs have, between 1994 and 1999, promoted a restrictive policy as far as host of refugees and asylum-seekers was concerned. And they have presented « security policies », based on the strengthening of police and legal means to combat crime, as an implicit element of their migrant policy. The frequent amalgam between police, security, asylum policies (Bigo 1992) has been particularly patent in Belgium in the last five years, and has given, once again, a sort of official acknowledgement of racist feelings.

The state of discriminations and racism : some data

At the end of this century of massive migrations, integration of foreign persons remains an open question in Belgium. Some 900 000 foreigners live in Belgium today, a small 10% of the whole population (see table 1)³.

Most of them are Europeans : Italian citizens, mainly living in Wallonia (205 782), Spanish (47 415), Greek (19 216) and Portuguese citizens (25 726) mainly installed in Brussels, and derived from economic migrations. But also French (103 536) and Dutch citizens (83 200), living in the frontier areas or following national enterprises and international institutions, as do Germans (33 220) and British subjects (26 095). Non-European foreigners amount to ca. 140 000 persons, including Moroccans (132 831) and Turkish citizens (73 818) mainly installed in Brussels and Flanders.

The geographical structure of this immigration follows a classic pattern (Kesteloot *et al.* 1997) : most foreigners live around the industrial centres where they or their parents arrived, and in the capital city, host of many international companies and institutions. There are 280 000 foreigners in Brussels, on a

³ Those tables are drawn from the annual report of the Centre for equal opportunity and opposition to racism. They can be found, along with many other quantitative data, on the website of the centre : <http://www.antiracisme.be/>

global population of 950 000 persons (29.3%) ; nearly the same amount of foreigners living in Flanders, whose population is six times larger (5.1%) ; and about 335 000 in Wallonia, 11.2% of its ca. three millions inhabitants. This means that while Flanders is close to the Dutch or Scandinavian proportions, the French-speaking regions are closer to the French and German cases.

The proportion of immigrants is declining in the end of this decade. Immigration is now limited to short-term periods in well defined sectors (agriculture, tourism, households). Negative trends are partly due to the fact that many migrants come back to their country of origin after they have retired — followed by many Belgians, retiring in the South of France, Spain or Italy — and more largely by the fact that many foreigners are given access to Belgian nationality (see table 2). Since economic immigration is declining, the arrival of foreigners is mainly related to asylum. In 1998, about 22 000 persons have asked the status of refugee in Belgium, 29% of which have been accepted. Most of them come from Turkey, the former socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe and from Congo, one of the former Belgian colonies.

The social stratification of immigration also follows a classic pattern. Foreigners are over-represented in household, tourism, steel industries and seasonal jobs, while they are under-represented in public services and enterprises and in services (Wrench, Rea & Ouali 1999). The proportion of foreigners among unemployed (20,4%) is nearly twice as important as their weight in the general population. Moreover, studies have showed that in spite of legal progresses, discriminations at work, notably as far as wages are concerned, remain important (Ouali 1997).

Policies conceived and implemented to combat these discriminations often prove inefficient in short term, though a large set of measures have been taken to improve the employment of foreigners at all levels of power (simplification of administrative procedures and suppression of restrictions, positive support through quotas and financial support, education programmes, ...).

The high level of overt or implicit racism also shows that discriminations remain even more important in mentalities than it is in practices. An opinion poll made by Eurobarometer at the end of 1997 (Eurobarometer 48) has revealed that Belgium is one of the least tolerant countries to immigration. Asked whether they thought foreign workers should be accepted in the European Union, 60% on a European average said that workers coming from the South of the Mediterranean should be accepted with restrictions, while 21% thought they should not be accepted. In Belgium, only 50% thought they should be accepted with restrictions, and 38% they should not be accepted — the highest score. Similar results were reached for workers coming from Eastern Europe. Belgium also appears in this poll as the least open country to political asylum : only 10% would accept refugee-seekers without restrictions, 51% with restrictions and 32% would not accept them at all (against 20, 55 and 18% on a European average). 60% of the persons asked in Belgium thought there were too many foreigners in Europe (45% in European average), the second score after Greece (71%). And 22% said, in Belgium, the presence of persons of another nationality was disturbing (13% in Europe) ; the presence of persons of another race was thought even more disturbing : 30% in Belgium and 15% in Europe. Only Greece, once again, reaches highest scores in both cases.

Legislation against racism has recently been strengthened in Belgium. A 1981 law prohibiting racism has been revised to include new forms of expression, tougher sanctions and enlarge to associations the categories of those who can complain on these basis. Parallely, legal measures have been taken against racist parties, that can be deprived of public financing and refused access to public TV and radio (Bribosia & Juramie 1999). But it remains difficult to apply these measures. The number of decisions taken against public expression of racist opinion amounted to eleven in 1998, nearly as much as the fourteen decisions taken between 1981 et 1991. This is partly due to the fact that the Centre for equal opportunities and opposition to racism (a public organ which succeeded to the Royal Department in 1994) has been very active in the last years in helping victims to reach courts. But implicit

racism is much more difficult to combat : when an employer refuses to give a job to a foreign worker, it is very difficult to give evidence of the racist motivations of the employer — the same is true for housing. New solutions are looked for : some suggest that statistics might be taken as an evidence, as in the Netherlands, in companies where foreigners are apparently not recruited ; some sectors choose to create their own code of conduct to prevent discrimination or to establish organs of mediation to avoid going to court in case of conflict (Martens & Sette). But the statistics quoted earlier show that these measures are far from curbing implicit racist discrimination. Moreover, antiracist legislation may have vicious consequences : extreme-right wing politicians indeed tend to develop a politically correct racist discourse to avoid prosecution and, so doing, help diffuse racist arguments among the population.

Why has Belgium, this rich and peaceful country with an old tradition of immigration, become one of the most racist countries in Europe ? This is the difficult question I will try to answer in the third and last point of this article.

4. RACISM IN A MULTI-NATIONAL DEMOCRACY : SOME EXPLANATIONS

In the first part of this article, I recalled that Belgium has known a curious nation-building process, which has led to a dual national identity within the same state, and to the organisation of a consociative mode of democracy. In the second part, I briefly described the peculiarities of immigration policies in Belgium, underlying the role racist representations played in their definition. I will try, in this last part, to see how far these policies and their results can be explained by the peculiarities of the social and political system.

Three elements of the multi-national Belgian democracy seem to be important in this respect : the fact that ethnic identities have always played a crucial role in Belgian politics ; the latent racism, or eurocentrism of Belgian leaders and the absence of a coherent doctrine of national identity.

The ethnicisation of politics

When the Flemish movement grew at the end of the nineteenth century, it thought of itself as an ethnic group fighting for the respect of its cultural and linguistic identity. This was a typical case of nationalistic movement, part of the romantic wave of the time. These claims were directed against the French-speaking élite of the country. The peculiarity of this movement is that, though this conflict had obvious socio-economic bases, it was understood in cultural terms. In other words, Flemish peasants saw themselves as « Flemings » oppressed by the « Fransquillons » rather than as peasants oppressed by the bourgeoisie. As already mentioned, the most radical segments of these movements even went so far as to collaborate with the Germans during the two world war, arguing that they had the same ethnic identity. Later on, the Flemish movement re-directed its claims against « the Walloons », who were supposed to be lazy and cheat, and to benefit from the resources of the state produced by the courageous Flemish people. Though it is expressed in economic terms of « North-South financial transfers » nowadays, this remains a commonplace in large sectors of the Flemish political class. Similarly, some segments of Walloon movements reacted against « the Flemings » who oppressed them and used the state machinery to promote their region. These discourses, of which Brusselers are absent — or criticised as pretentious inhabitants of the capital city —, might be one of the sources of racism in Belgium. When politics are expressed in terms of social groups, or ideological affinities, there normally is no room for ethnic identification. But when politics are based on a permanent conflict and search for compromise between ethnies and minorities, the way is paved for a stigmatisation of all ethnic groups. In other words, the importance of ethnic identities in the Belgian civic culture might be seen as a pre-condition for racist expression : why should people not refuse « the Italians » or the « Moroccans » when politicians oppose the Walloons or the Flemings ?

Latent racism of leaders

The use made of immigration between the 1920s and the late sixties shows that « foreign workers » were seen by employers and public officials as an inferior social category : this population might be housed in the camps built during the war for German prisoners, sent to the mines where the Belgians did not want to go anymore, paid with lower wages and granted less social advantages... With few exceptions, political leaders found it normal, and most of them still find it normal, to deprive them from some civil and all political rights and to limit their access to public employment.

It would be too simple to say that those racist attitudes were limited to the leading class : there are many evidences of discrimination and hard conflicts between workers. But it needs to be underlined that policies of immigration were made by economic and political leaders without public debate, and that initial discrimination may have played a role in the formation of broader racist opinions. Studies of labour conflicts have shown that forms of solidarity between foreign and national workers have been at least as important as racist conflicts (Rea 1997b). While discrimination was first organised by economic and political leaders, the first movements against discrimination emerged in the working class and the « moral minority » of university students. These political acts have, at least, help transform latent into patent racism.

The absence of a coherent idea of national identity

Political debates on immigration, asylum, political rights of migrants... all show that there are fundamental differences between the Flemish and French-speaking conceptions of what the « nation » means and of the place foreign citizens can find within it. This is also apparent in academic debates : while most French-speaking scholars defend the « republican » model of individual integration through citizenship, most Flemish scholars plead for the Anglo-Saxon model within which minorities are recognised as such and given an *ad hoc* status within the nation (Morelli & Schreiber 1998).

As we have seen in the second part, until the end of the eighties, there were no elaborate doctrines of integration, and immigration policies were governed by pragmatic arguments or demagogic motivations. During the nineties, after the federalisation of the state had given each region large autonomy in policies related to the « migrant question » (education, housing, employment...), differences more clearly appeared.

In Flanders, two competing logics interfere. On the one hand, the promotion of the Flemish identity by political leaders and public powers, has led to policies of cultural integration, close to the German « ethnic » model. Measures were taken to help foreigners learn Dutch, and integrate themselves in the « nation » through its language. These policies also apply to French-speaking Belgians living in Flanders : administrative facilities are limited, French-speaking TV channels are forbidden, some social housing are reserved to Flemish-speaking persons... Since there is no real « ethnic » discourse, but rather a linguistic one, this can be seen as a new version of the French process which turned « Peasants into Frenchmen » : a process of linguistic homogenisation and « tradition-building » designed to create loyalty to the Flemish nation. There is no real ethnic closure of this nation, since linguistic conversion seems to be considered as a test of integration. On the other hand, Flemish leaders may also be more open than French and French-speaking Belgians to minority protection. Though Belgium has not ratified the Convention of the Council of Europe which protects the minorities — because some Flemish political leaders refuse to consider French-speaking groups living in Flanders as minorities — several measures promote the identity of « cultural communities » : multi-cultural teaching, bilingual (Flemish-Turkish) official indications in towns, financing of self-organised migrant groups... are some elements of these Flemish policies. They are inspired by the Anglo-Saxon model, within which cultural communities are recognised as such and invited to find, collectively, their place in the composite nation.

In the French-speaking regions of Belgium, measures have so far been much more pragmatic. The recent official doctrine of Wallonia - defined e. g. in an unofficial « constitution » of the Walloon region, written by a group of left-

wing politicians and intellectuals - is the pure republican model : the Walloons are all those who live on the territory, and they should all be given the same rights. This argument is based on the fact that the Walloon region has been largely built through industrialisation, with populations coming from abroad, so that most Walloons have a foreign origin. The *jus soli* doctrine of identity leads to a conception of individual integration through social and political citizenship. But Walloon leaders are also ready to accept discriminative action in favour of immigrants, contrary to republican French leaders who denounce this contradiction with the principle of equality between citizens.

These divergences have been particularly clear in a recent debate on nationality and political rights of migrants (Magnette 1999). While most Flemish leaders defended the integration through nationality — the most conservative wing adding that signs of cultural or at least linguistic integration were needed —, most French-speaking members of parliament supported the idea to grant political rights to foreigners. A similar divide was visible during the parliamentary debates on the prohibition of racist movements : while most French-speaking MPs were willing to deprive these parties of public funding, large parts of the Flemish political class was opposed to this measure — finally adopted with conditions.

Given the federal nature of the state, there is no such thing as one migration policy in Belgium. There is a federal policy of immigration and asylum, which is a hybrid compromise between Flemish and French-speaking doctrines, based on the European consensus that immigration should be strictly limited ; and there are Flemish, Brusseler and Walloon social policies of integration, poorly co-ordinated and supported by federal funds.

This diversity is certainly one of the sources of the inefficiency of integration policies, long delayed by political disagreements. It might also be one of the sources of racist opinions : in a country where political élite's do not agree on what the « nation » is and on how foreigners should be integrated within it, where MPs oppose themselves on what racism is and on how it should be combated, the « migrant question » is frequently opened and never

Référence : MAGNETTE, Paul, « Racism and the belgian State », *Les Cahiers du Cevipol*, Vol. 2000, n°1, 23 p.,
<http://www.ulb.ac.be/soco/cevipol/cahiers/cahiers99-2.htm>

answered. How could citizens, in these conditions, have a clear conception of what a universalistic society means ?

REFERENCES

- Alaluf, M. (1997), « Les droits politiques des étrangers : débats dans le monde politique belge », in Magnette, P. (1997) : 65-76.
- Bigo, D. (1992), *L'Europe des polices et de la sécurité intérieure* (Bruxelles : Complexe).
- Bribosia, E. & Juramie, M. (1999), « Restrictions légales aux libertés et droits des partis liberticides », *Revue du droit des étrangers*.
- Centre pour l'égalité des chances et la lutte contre le racisme (1998), *Rapport annuel 1997* (Brussels : Inbel).
- Coenen, M.-T. & Lewin, R. (1997) (eds.), *La Belgique et ses immigrés, Les politiques manquées* (Brussels : De Boeck).
- Commissariat royal à la politique des immigrés (1989), *L'intégration : une politique de longue haleine* (Brussels : Inbel).
- Delpérée, F. (1999), « Le fédéralisme de confrontation » in Delwit, P., De Waele, J.-M. & Magnette, P. (1999) : 53-70.
- Delwit, P., De Waele, J.-M. & Rea, A. (1998) (eds.), *L'extrême-droite en France et en Belgique* (Brussels : Complexe).
- Delwit, P., De Waele, J.-M. & Magnette, P. (1999) (eds.), *Gouverner la Belgique, Clivages et compromis dans une société complexe* (Paris : Presses universitaires de France).
- Deprez, K. & Vos, L. (1998) (eds.), *Nationalism in Belgium, Shifting Identities, 1780-1995* (London : MacMillan).
- Deslé, E. (1995), « Racism and the « Foreign Labour System » : An Exploration of their Mutual Relationship Based on the Experience of Belgium in the Immediate Post-War Period », in Van der Linden, M. & Lucassen, J. (1995) : 537-561.
- Hobsbawm, E. & Ranger, T. (1983) (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press).
- Hroch, M. (1985), *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press).
- Kesteloot, C., Peleman, K. & Roesems, T., « Terres d'exil en Belgique » in Coenen & Lewin (1997) : 25-43.

Kesteloot, C. (1998), « The Growth of the Walloon Movement », in Deprez, K. & Vos, L. (1998) : 139-152.

Lijphart, A. (1977), *Democracy in Plural Societies : a comparative exploration* (New Haven : Yale University Press).

Mabille, X. (1997), *Histoire politique de la Belgique* (Brussels : CRISP).

Maddens, B., Beerten, R. & Billiet, J. (1998), « The National Consciousness of the Flemings and the Walloons : an Empirical Investigation », in Deprez, K. & Vos, L. (1998) : 198-208.

Magnette, P. (1997) (ed.), *De l'étranger au citoyen, Construire la citoyenneté européenne* (Brussels : De Boeck).

— (1997b), « La mobilité des personnes et la construction politique de l'Europe », in Magnette (1997) : 33-51.

— (1997c), « La recomposition de l'Etat dans l'Union européenne », *Revue internationale de politique comparée*, 4/3 : 733-754.

— (1999), *La citoyenneté européenne, Droits, politiques, institutions* (Brussels : Editions de l'université de Bruxelles).

Martens, A. (1976), *Les immigrés. Flux et reflux d'une main d'œuvre d'appoint* (Louvain : Evo).

Martens, A. & Sette, K. (1997), *Compendium d'exemples significatifs de lutte contre le racisme sur le lieu de travail* (Leuven : Afdeling Arbeids- en Bedrijfs sociologie KUL).

Martiniello, M. & Poncelet, M. (1993), *Migrations et minorités ethniques dans l'espace européen* (Brussels : De Boeck).

Morelli, A. (1992) (ed.), *Histoire des étrangers et de l'immigration en Belgique* (Brussels : EVO).

Morelli, A. & Schreiber, J.-P. (1998), « Are the Immigrants the Last Belgians ? », in Deprez, K. & Vos, L. (1998) : 249-257.

Ouali, N. (1997), « Emploi : de la discrimination à l'égalité de traitement ? », in Coenen & Lewin (1997) : 145-165.

Perin, F., Meynaud, J. & Ladrière, J. (1963) (eds.), *La décision politique en Belgique* (Paris : Armand Colin).

Pil, L. (1998), « Painting at the Service of the New Nation State », in Deprez, K. & Vos, L. (1998) : 42-50.

Rea, A. (1997a), « Les immigrés italiens : des européens socialement intégrés en quête de citoyenneté politique », in Magnette, P. (1997) : 77-100.

—, (1997b), « Mouvements sociaux, partis et intégration » in Coenen & Lewin (1997) : 45-72.

— (1998) (ed.), *Immigration et racisme en Europe* (Brussels : Complexe).

Seiler, D.-L. (1999), « Un Etat entre importation et implosion : consociativité, partitocratie et lotissement dans la sphère publique en Belgique » in Delwit, P., De Waele, J.-M. & Magnette, P. (1999) : 15-52.

Stengers, J. (1992), « L'immigration de 1830 à 1914 » in Morelli, A. (1992) : 13-34.

Steinberg, M. (1992), « La tragédie juive en Belgique : un ravage de la xénophobie », in Morelli (1992) :

Taguieff, P.-A. (1987), *La force du préjugé, Essai sur le racisme et ses doubles* (Paris : La découverte).

Vandemeulebroucke, M. (1997), « Sous le regard des médias », in Coenen & Lewin (1997) : 203-220.

Van der Linden, M. & Lucassen, J. (1995) (eds.), *Racism and the Labour Market, Historical Studies* (Bern : Peter Lang).

Vos, L. (1998), « The Flemish National Question », in Deprez, K. & Vos, L. (1998) : 83-95.

Wrench, J., Rea, A & Ouali, N. (1999), *Migrants, Ethnic Minorities and the Labour Market : Integration and Exclusion in Europe* (London : Macmillan).