

Pillars and Operational Models of Belgian Party Politics

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Abstract

The hybrid Belgian constitutional monarchy was a compromise between the Ancien Régime and modern liberal democracy. The union of two ideologically different nation-building driving forces, Liberals and Catholics, was facilitated by their common wish to seek full emancipation from Dutch rule. This pragmatic and compromise-oriented model is again in the formation of the Belgian political multiparty system. This has led to the so-called *compromis à la belge* and consociational democracy in the daily operation of the Belgian party system. Another characteristic is the “*verzuiling*,” a process in which political parties and their affiliated agencies permeate society to such an extent that civil society is mainly carved up by the three different parties of the Catholics, Liberals and Socialists.

This paper aims to discuss the above-mentioned features in the Belgian multiparty system by exploring contextual elements like nation-building, historical crises and the impasse in the 2007 federal government formation. The Belgian state structure has been constantly questioned, and its incessantly self-regulating management system *à la belge* serves the country’s stability amidst ideological and political conflicts, and causes disputes between the two major linguistic communities.

Keywords: consociational democracy, multiparty system, *verzuiling*