

# Chapter 7

## Communauntary Problems: An Argumentative Analysis of the Belgian Political Crisis

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### Abstract

In 2011, Belgium broke the world record for longest time without a government. 249 days had passed since the 2010 elections, and still the victorious parties – the New-Flemish Alliance (N-VA) and the Socialist Party (PS) – had not succeeded in the formation of a new government.

This paper presents an argumentative analysis of the above political crisis. It seeks to clarify this crisis by means of mapping the most important arguments presented, so that the argumentative bottlenecks may be identified and analyzed. The arguments and claims examined in this paper are those of the N-VA; a nationalist Flemish party. The reason for focusing on the N-VA is that the political deadlock that can be identified as the cause for the relevant crisis stemmed from one of their party goals; namely to transfer authority from the federal government to the regions of Flanders and Wallonia, so effectively separating the two politically. By focusing on this argument, it is investigated what the different premises are and whether these are legitimate. Eventually, this culminates in a final judgment as to whether the N-VA's argument is sound.

### 1 Introduction

On January 23<sup>rd</sup> 2011, the streets of Brussels were filled with a crowd of angry protestors. No less than 34,000 Belgians had grouped together in their capital to protest against the political deadlock their country had been in for several months.<sup>1</sup> About a month later, on February 17<sup>th</sup>, a national feast was organized in Gent to celebrate 249 days

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<sup>1</sup> “Belgen Protesteren Tegen Politieke Impasse (Belgians Protest Against Political Deadlock),” *NOS*, January 23, 2011, accessed May 23, 2011, <http://nos.nl/artikel/213633-belgen-protesteren-tegen-politieke-impasse.html>.

without government – a new world record.<sup>2</sup> Both the protests and the national feast were an outcry of the Belgian population to the Belgian politicians to finally form a new government. Today, July 2011, more than a year after the elections of June 13<sup>th</sup> 2010, Belgium still does not have a government.

“What is going on in Belgium?” It is this question that I asked myself after seeing these events on the news, and so I became curious to find out more about the Belgian political crisis. My curiosity was driven partly by being Belgian myself (though living in the Netherlands) and wanting to know what was going on in my home country, but also by the amazement about the fact that a Western, developed country that is part of the European Union has been unable to form a government for such a long time.<sup>3</sup> This paper is the result of that curiosity, and in it I present an analysis of the aforementioned crisis. Given that the origin of the crisis is political, I went about investigating political debates and relevant discourse in order to locate the exact problem that caused the political deadlock. The method I used to do so is that of Analytical Discourse Evaluation as developed by Teun Dekker.<sup>4</sup> Using Analytical Discourse Evaluation (ADE), I came across a very important argument made by a Flemish party (the N-VA) that could be labeled as the cause of the ongoing political crisis.

Before presenting this argument, however, I first take the time to explain more in-depth the context of the crisis at hand as it will give the reader a better understanding of the matters that will be discussed. This involves an explanation of the Belgian electoral system. Second, the argument – which I call the “communautaire” argument – will be explained, subjected to ADE and evaluated. Third and finally, I review the presented argument and its evaluation. From these I draw some concluding remarks regarding my findings and their meaning for the Belgian political crisis.

## Context of the Belgian Political Crisis

Before I delve into the relevant political events that occurred in Belgium between a year ago and now, it is helpful to first gain an understanding of the Belgian electoral system.

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2 “Volksfeest In Gent Als België Wereldrecord Regeringsformerer Verbreekt (National Feast In Gent When Belgium Breaks World Record for Longest Time Without Government),” *De Standaard*, January 31, 2011, accessed May 27, 2011, [http://www.standaard.be/artikel/detail.aspx?artikelid=DMF20110131\\_041](http://www.standaard.be/artikel/detail.aspx?artikelid=DMF20110131_041).

3 Truth be told, this was certainly not the first time Belgium had to deal with a political crisis, in fact, there seem to be political crises in Belgium on a regular basis. However, it was the exceptional magnitude and duration of the mentioned crisis that awoke my curiosity to investigate it further.

4 Teun J. Dekker, *Paying Our High Public Officials; Evaluating the Political Justifications of Top Wages in the Public Sector* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

When looking at a map of Belgium (See Figure 7.1), one can see that the country consists of two major regions: Flanders in the north, and Wallonia in the south.<sup>5</sup> In Flanders the people speak Flemish (which closely resembles the Dutch language), and in Wallonia the people speak French. Because of Belgium's bilingual nature, the electoral districts are divided into Flemish districts and Walloon districts. The result is that in Flanders the people vote for a Flemish party to represent them, and in Wallonia the people vote for a Walloon party. After the elections, the victorious Flemish and Walloon parties cooperate so as to form a federal government that will govern both regions.

Figure 7.1 Map of Belgium



German-speaking Community

Flemish Community

French Community

Br. = Brussels

Source: Map retrieved from Flags Of The World (FOTW), July 4, 2011, [www.fotw.us](http://www.fotw.us).

<sup>5</sup> There is in fact also a minor German region, east of Wallonia, but this does not play a role in our concerns here.

On April 22<sup>nd</sup> 2010, then prime-minister Yves Leterme offered his resignation to King Albert II after the federal government had fallen over the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde issue.<sup>6</sup> After King Albert II had accepted Leterme's resignation, new elections were held on June 13<sup>th</sup> 2010. The outcome was a convincing victory for the Flemish N-VA and the Walloon PS. The N-VA (the New-Flemish Alliance) is a liberal political party led by Bart de Wever, which has as its initial concern the promotion of the interests of the Flemish nation, and the protection of the Flemish identity.<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, the goal of the N-VA is to turn Flanders into an independent member-state of the European Union. The Walloon PS (Parti Socialiste), with as its party chairman Elio Di Rupo, is a social-democratic party that aims for a mixture of traditional state interventionism, combined with a modern electoral marketing.<sup>8</sup>

So, it was now up to the N-VA and the PS to collaborate and form a new federal government – up till this day, they have not succeeded. A small army of informateurs, pre-formateurs, formateurs, mediators, “clarifiers” and negotiators (including de Wever and Di Rupo themselves) has not been able to progress the formation in any noteworthy way, and future prospects are that the status quo will continue to drag on. The cause for the political deadlock must thus be a fundamental conflict between the N-VA and the PS. In order to identify, clarify and analyze this conflict, the method of Analytical Discourse Evaluation is of great help.

## Context of Selected Arguments

Before tending to the reconstruction of the arguments, it is fruitful to first make clear whose arguments they are, why I chose to analyze these particular arguments and what I hope to achieve by analyzing them. The arguments chosen are those made by the N-VA, which – as I described above – puts the interests of Flanders up front and ultimately hopes to turn Flanders into an independent member-state of the European Union. Achieving this goal requires that Belgium ceases to exist (at least as we know it today) as Flanders would separate itself from Wallonia and the small German region in the east. It is this wish for a separation of the regions that the PS strongly opposes. They would rather see that Belgium remains a unity, be it with more state intervention. It is in the conflict of interests between the N-VA

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6 The issue is about the electoral district of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde (BHV), where Walloon citizens are able to vote for Walloon parties on Flemish soil. Many Flemings regard this as being unfair, since Flemish citizens are unable to vote for Flemish parties on Walloon soil. The BHV-issue has frequently led to political uproar and crises.

7 “Waar Wij Voor Staan (What We Stand For),” N-VA, accessed March 13, 2011, <http://www.n-va.be/waar-wij-voor-staan>.

8 “Notre Identité (Our Identity),” PS, accessed March 15, 2011, <http://www.ps.be/leps/notreidentite/>.

which pleads for a (as they themselves say) “Copernican turnaround”, and the PS who desire the complete opposite, that I believe to have found the major cause for the political deadlock Belgium is in today: the N-VA refuses to negotiate with the PS as long as it is not prepared to give Flanders more autonomy, while the PS refuses to negotiate with the N-VA as long as they do not give up on their ideal of a separated Flemish state. The result is that nothing has been achieved for over a year as the parties simply refuse to talk to one another.

The main problematic factor in this situation seems to be the N-VA’s desire for changing the Belgian status quo. Therefore, I chose to focus on the argument of the N-VA, as the outcome of an analysis of their argumentation can be two things: either the N-VA presents a coherent, acceptable and altogether legitimate argument, in which case implementing the changes they desire indeed is the best thing to do, or, they fail to provide a legitimate support for their case which means that their proposal is not the way to go. Focusing on the N-VA in my analysis will thus most likely produce the most direct and conclusive result.

What I hope to achieve is to, first of all, come to either one of the possible conclusive results and in addition, if the arguments should turn out to be false, investigate what could be the N-VA’s motives to argue for their case.

## 2 Reconstructing and Evaluating the Communautaire Argument

This argument the N-VA puts forward is a defense of the first and crucial step to their ideal of a separated, independent and autonomous Flanders: getting rid of the federal government and letting the regions (Flanders, Wallonia) decide for themselves. If this argument can be tackled, their goal loses its reasonability and legitimacy. Before delving into an analysis of the argument, it is necessary to first gain an understanding of what is meant with the concept “communautaire”.

“Communautaire” generally means “concerning the community”. However, in the case of Belgium, an additional meaning is added that is rather case-specific:

In Belgium the word “communautaire” indicates everything that has to do with the relations between the country’s two major language communities: the Dutch-speaking and the French-speaking people.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> “Communautaire,” Online Encyclopedie, accessed March 13, 2011, <http://www.encyclo.nl/begrip/communautaire> (“In België duidt het woord “communautaire” op alles wat te maken heeft met de verhoudingen tussen de twee grote taalgroepen van het land: Nederlandstaligen en Franstaligen.”).

The relationships between the regions, Brussels and the local communities are legally recorded in, and arranged by, the language-legislation-act of 1962 and have been incorporated into later state reforms.<sup>10</sup> Nowadays, the term “communautair” has come to be redefined through its increasingly negative use. With that I mean that the word pops up everywhere where there is a conflict between a Flemish party and a Walloon party, and every time that the Flemings complain about anything Walloon, and vice versa. Indeed, “communautair” seems to have turned into a synonym for “linguistic conflict”, and at the same time has also become a referent to all problems that the ongoing linguistic conflict supposedly brings about – especially the inability to agree on any political matters. If anything, this is certainly the sense of the word in which the N-VA uses it:

We conclude that Belgium has become the sum of two different democracies that keep on growing in opposite directions. [...] Everything in this country has become communautair.<sup>11</sup>

Belgium at this point is not a federation, not a confederation but a “contra-federation”: it is nearly impossible to find a political theme on which people in both parts of the country can agree.<sup>12</sup>

At this point, we are able to commence our analysis of the argument. The core of the argument is constructed as follows:

[Data]	Belgium is communautair.
[Warrant]	If a country is communautair, then the different linguistic regions should decide for themselves.
[Claim]	The regions (Flanders, Wallonia) should govern themselves independently.

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10 “Welke Taal Wanneer (Which Language When)?” Steunpunt Taalwetwijzer, accessed May 4, 2011, <http://brussel.vlaanderen.be/taalwetwijzer.html>.

11 “Staats hervorming (State Reform),” N-VA, accessed March 13, 2011, <http://www.n-va.be/standpunten/staats-hervorming> (“We stellen vast dat België de optelsom is geworden van twee verschillende democratieën die alsmaar meer uit elkaar groeien. [...] Alles in dit land is communautair geworden.”).

12 N-VA, “Manifest van de Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (Manifest of the New-Flemish Alliance),” (2001), 2 (“België is nu geen federatie, geen confederatie, maar een “contra-federatie”: het is haast onmogelijk om een politiek thema te vinden waarover men het in beide landsgedeelten eens is.”).

What the N-VA is doing here basically are two things: first, they point out that there is a problem, namely that Belgium is *communautaire*. Second, they provide a solution to the problem, namely to let the regions decide for themselves:

It is time to put things right both financially and institutionally. [...] A major state reform has to assign important homogeneous authority packages to the federal states.<sup>13</sup>

The Flemish politicians therefore have to finally be honest with the people and tell them what they have known for years: the Belgian structures no longer work. [...] We must pull ourselves out of this chaos and finally realize the reforms of which we all have known for years that they are necessary. [...] We must transfer all socio-economic authority to Flanders and Wallonia now. Let each community spread its wings to the greatest possible extent.<sup>14</sup>

Before elaborating on the [Warrant] and [Claim], we must first take a closer look at how the N-VA goes about to prove or conclude that Belgium supposedly is *communautaire*.

## Data and Verifiers

Everything in this country has become *communautaire*. There is a totally different vision regarding migration, the judiciary is slow, the prison system is hopelessly outdated. The Belgian budget deficit increased again because the federal budget derailed [...].<sup>15</sup>

The Arena administration (Marie Arena was premier of the Walloon community from 2004 to 2008) [...] symbolizes the [...] lack of responsibility that is caused by the system.<sup>16</sup>

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13 “Staatshervorming” (“Tijd om financieel en institutioneel orde op zaken te stellen. [...] Een grote staatshervorming moet belangrijke homogene bevoegdheidspakketten toekennen aan de deelstaten.”).

14 “Tijd Voor Vlaams Staatsmanschap (Time For Flemish Statesmanship),” N-VA, accessed March 15, 2011, <http://www.n-va.be/nieuws/persberichten/tijd-voor-vlaams-staatsmanschap> (“De Vlaamse politici moeten daarom eindelijk eens eerlijk aan de bevolking zeggen wat ze al jaren weten: de Belgische structuren werken niet meer. [...] We moeten ons uit deze chaos trekken en eindelijk de hervormingen doorvoeren waarvan we al jaren allemaal weten dat ze noodzakelijk zijn. [...] We moeten nu alle sociaal-economische bevoegdheden overhevelen naar Vlaanderen en Wallonië. Laat elke gemeenschap maximaal de eigen vleugels uitslaan.”).

15 “Staatshervorming.” (“Alles in dit land is *communautaire* geworden. Er is een totaal verschillende visie rond migratie, Justitie draait vierkant, het gevangeniswezen is hopeloos verouderd. De Belgische staatsschuld steeg opnieuw omdat de federale begroting ontspoorde [...].”).

16 N-VA, “Stop Transfers, Start Solidariteit (Stop Transfers, Start Solidarity),” (2005), 3 (“Het kabinet Arena [...] staat symbool [...] voor het gebrek aan verantwoordelijkheidszin die wordt veroorzaakt door het systeem.”) (Text between brackets added by author).

In order to evaluate the Data of the argument, we must turn to the Verifier, which is formalized as follows:

[Data\Data]	In Belgium, there is no consensus regarding migration (a), the judiciary is slow (b), the prison system is hopelessly outdated (c), the budget deficit has increased (d) and there is a lack of responsibility (e).
[Data\Warrant]	If (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) are the case, then a country is communautair.
[Data\Claim]	Belgium is communautair.

This certainly is interesting logic at work here, and what is perhaps even more interesting is how the progression from [Data\Data] to [Data\Claim], as expressed in the [Data\Warrant], can be defended. However, we should not rush, but deal with the Verifier separately first. When looking at the Verifier as it stands on its own, there are some remarks that cannot help but be made. Why take (a) through (e) as indicators of a communautaire crisis?<sup>17</sup> Does the fact that the Belgian judiciary is slow, or the prison system is outdated really indicate that there is an ongoing linguistic conflict within the federal government? Furthermore, if those are the qualifiers for a communautaire crisis, any country in which (a) through (e) are the case – and those will undoubtedly be numerous – would have to qualify as communautair. Using the logic expressed in the final [Claim] of the argument (i.e. separating into autonomous language communities), those countries would have to decentralize their governments and let all linguistically differing regions decide for themselves. In a country like Suriname for instance, which could be classified as having (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e), this would result in dividing the country into almost ten different regions, governing themselves independently from one another. On a different note, how does one even measure responsibility, let alone prove that there is none? And as far as (d) goes, a lot of countries will qualify, given the global economic turmoil.

Obviously, the logic expressed in the Verifier is rather questionable. The Verifier stands or falls depending on the answer to the question: “Are (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) legitimate qualifiers of a communautaire crisis?” Given that all five indicators can be the case in a country while that country is not necessarily communautair (i.e. in a linguistic conflict) – like Suriname – the answer would definitely be “no”. Nonetheless, perhaps if we delve

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17 I deliberately use the formulation “communautaire crisis” to stress that the N-VA uses the term “communautair” as indicating that there is a constant linguistic conflict going on and that it has negative consequences on politics, such as the inability to agree – so creating a deadlock or crisis. The whole political crisis can thus also be captured under the term “communautaire crisis”.

into the argument a little further we might understand how the N-VA has to come to the [Data\Warrant] expressed in the Verifier. So, let us take a look at the logical step preceding this statement:

[Data\Warrant\Data]	If (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) are the case, then these are the result of constant linguistic conflict.
[Data\Warrant\Warrant]	If there is constant linguistic conflict in a country, then that country is communautaire.
[Data\Warrant\Claim]	If (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) are the case, then a country is communautaire.

Here, in the Backing for the Verifier, the [Data\Warrant\Warrant] certainly makes sense: if communautaire implies the existence of an ongoing linguistic conflict, then it is absolutely valid to conclude from the observation that there is an ongoing linguistic conflict in a country that the country is communautaire; it is a matter of definition. Further, the Backing of the Verifier explains that if there is a constant linguistic conflict, certain consequences follow (such as (a) through (e)) and thus that if a country is communautaire (which implies constant linguistic conflict) that we should be able to locate (a) through (e) in that country as they are the very result of the country being communautaire in the first place. Using this line of reasoning, it is clear why the N-VA comes to the “if P then Q; Q therefore P”-logic in the Verifier: “If a country is communautaire, then (a) through (e); (a) through (e), therefore the country is communautaire.” On a purely logical level, this type of reasoning certainly works. That is, if P and Q share a necessary relationship, i.e. if P then necessarily Q, and if Q also necessarily P. This is not the case in examples as: “If it rains, then the streets are wet; the streets are wet, therefore it rains” (after all somebody could have washed his/her car, or watered the plants and spilled etc. etc.). There is no doubt that if there would be a country dealing with a communautaire crisis, some negative consequences will be experienced in society as a result of policies not being decided on, debates being postponed etc. because of the crisis – thus, if P (communautaire crisis) then Q (negative consequences). The other way around – Q (negative consequences) therefore P (communautaire crisis) – does not work that way, as many of the negative consequences experienced as a result of a communautaire crisis (such as trains not riding on time, bad traffic regulations or, again, (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e)) can also be the result of just bad policies. Or yet even more importantly, that they are simply there because the parties cannot agree as a result of their ideological differences. But we will return to that later. The bottom line is that the logical step “Q (negative consequences) therefore P (communautaire crisis)”,

cannot legitimately be made. In addition, even the first step – “if P (communautaire crisis) then Q ((a) through (e))” – is not a valid one as (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) are not necessarily the case if there is P; P can exist without (a) or (b) or (c) or (d) or (e) to occur, i.e. there is no necessary relation between P being the case and Q occurring.

Having located this flaw in this branch of the argument, I would say that the argumentation given in support of the [Data] (Belgium is communautaire) is not valid, and as a consequence I dismiss the [Data] itself as being legitimate too. Yet, before concluding this section, I would like to point out an unspoken premise that unveiled itself in the process of “Toulminizing” (see figure 7.2, top right):

[Data\W\D\D\D\Data]	The Flemings and the Walloons speak different native languages.
[Data\W\D\D\D\Warrant]	If people speak different native languages, then there will inevitably be repeated linguistic misunderstanding.
[Data\W\D\D\D\Claim]	There repeatedly are linguistic misunderstanding between the Flemings and the Walloons as a result of them speaking different native languages.

It does not require a lot of logical evaluation to prove this line of argumentation wrong, since, if it were true, any interaction between people of any different native languages would have resulted in a misunderstanding between them. In fact, we would have never been able to correctly communicate with people of another language than our own. How could international schools ever function, or the European Union, the United Nations, or how could I – as a non-native English speaker – be communicating by means of this paper if this were true? It is understandable that when people communicate through adapting to the language of the other, or by both using a more common language to communicate (such as English) that there are misunderstandings on a more frequent level than in the communication between two persons talking in their native tongue. Yet, claiming that misunderstandings result inevitably and are inherently constant if two people speak a different language, cannot be defended. The premise that builds on this premise goes even further by concluding that a constant linguistic conflict must arise between people speaking different languages as a result of the inevitable, repeated misunderstandings:

[Data\W\D\D\Data]	There repeatedly are linguistic misunderstandings between the Flemings and the Walloons as a result of them speaking different native languages.
[Data\W\D\D\Warrant]	If there repeatedly are linguistic misunderstandings, then this will result in constant linguistic conflict.
[Data\W\D\D\Claim]	There is a constant linguistic conflict between the Flemings and the Walloons.

If the logic presented here would be correct, we would have to be able to locate an ongoing linguistic conflict in countries such as Switzerland, Canada, Suriname or Singapore, to name a few examples. Clearly, this is not the case, and we have to conclude that the basis for the N-VA's argument that Belgium is *communautaire* is illegitimate.

### Warrant and Claim

Now that we have explored the upper branch of the *communautaire* argument (see Figure 7.2), I would like to turn the attention towards the [Warrant] of the main argument: "If a country is *communautaire*, then the different linguistic regions should govern themselves independently."<sup>18</sup> The premise on which this statement rests is as follows:

[Warrant\Data]	If a country is <i>communautaire</i> , then the federal government (consisting of political parties that speak different native languages) is paralyzed.
[Warrant\Warrant]	If the federal government is paralyzed as a result of the country being <i>communautaire</i> , then the different linguistic regions should each govern themselves independently.
[Warrant\Claim]	If a country is <i>communautaire</i> , then the different linguistic regions should govern themselves independently.

For a moment, we will not focus specifically on Belgium, but rather discuss the consequences for a country that finds itself struck by a *communautaire* crisis, and consider the solution offered by the N-VA: decentralizing the federal government to the linguistically dissimilar regions. So, let us imagine a country in which two major

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<sup>18</sup> Although we have not found concluding evidence that Belgium indeed is *communautaire* in the Data, I nonetheless proceed with a discussion of the rest of the *communautaire* argument to analyze whether the Warrant and Claim of the argument are valid (supposing that the Data would be correct).

populations live in their own region and each speaks a different language. In this country, the federal government is paralyzed as a result of a linguistic conflict between the two populations.<sup>19</sup> Consequentially, there is a political deadlock without the prospect of things getting resolved within a reasonable period of time. It would not be unreasonable to think that some politicians might say in this case: “Well, things seem to not be working out between both parties, and we should really be tending to policies regarding x and y, so why not stop this and each decide on policies regarding our regions separately?” On the other hand, changing the political structure of a country like that is not a minor operation, and for that reason it is more likely that in such a situation the conflict would instead be waited out or put aside. After all, the conflict cannot be everlasting if it is of a linguistic nature, as we have dismissed the N-VA’s premise that speaking different languages leads to an inevitable and constant conflict. If the nature of the conflict is linguistic, it can at most be based on an unfortunate translation or misunderstood linguistic custom and will eventually be resolved.<sup>20</sup>

This short illustration, first of all, questions whether decentralizing the federal government is the way to deal with a crisis of linguistic origin, and second, it becomes apparent that the term “communautair” needs to be juggled with in order to still be applicable. In thinking about whether the solution to a real communautair crisis would actually be to let the regions decide for themselves, I had to redefine “communautair” from “inevitable, constant linguistic conflict that results when two parties speak different languages”, to “possible and temporary conflict that arises as the result of a linguistic misunderstanding between parties”. This redefinition of the term was unavoidable if the term was to be used further in the argument at all, since the N-VA’s definition is – as we already discussed – unacceptable. So, we meet the N-VA halfway by not directly dismissing their complete argument, but instead help them through a redefinition of their key concept. However, the consequence is that their Claim becomes illegitimate, as it has proven that with the new definition of “communautair”, letting the linguistically different regions govern themselves is by far not the easiest, nor the best solution.

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19 Please mind that I do not claim this conflict to be the inevitable consequence of the populations speaking different languages, nor that it is constant – as is both suggested by the N-VA, but are invalid statements. Rather, let us imagine there to be a conflict of longer duration as a result of a misunderstanding.

20 I am aware of the fact that, in history, misunderstandings have been left unresolved and have led to major changes and events. What I try to point out is that a misunderstanding is only temporary in that it has the potential to be resolved, in binary opposite to N-VA’s idea of an inherently irresolvable linguistic conflict.

What to do now with the *communautaire* argument? I can imagine that a critic of my evaluation might say: “Very well, the N-VA’s definition of *communautaire* is unacceptable, but I disagree on you continuing with your own definition, as it might possibly not be a definition the N-VA would agree with.” Although I believe that my redefinition is the closest possible definition to the old one, I concur with the possible critique of the N-VA not agreeing with my definition. That leaves us with one other possibility, and that is to use the original meaning of “*communautaire*” with which we began:

In Belgium the word “*communautaire*” indicates everything that has to do with the relations between the country’s two major language groups: the Dutch-speaking and the French-speaking people.<sup>21</sup>

Given that – as I pointed out above – the relationships between the regions, Brussels and the local communities are legally recorded in, and arranged by, the language-legislation-act of 1962, the term “*communautaire*” therefore also refers to the mentioned language-legislation-act.<sup>22</sup> If we accept this formulation, the N-VA does make a valid point in claiming that if a country is *communautaire* – that is, when the relations between linguistically different regions are arranged by some law(s) – a constant conflict is the result if that law is bothersome to such a degree that cooperation becomes impossible. The N-VA’s following premise can then be labeled as valid to a certain extent (Figure 7.2, bottom right):

[Warrant\Warrant\Data]	If the federal government is paralyzed as a result of the country being <i>communautaire</i> , then co-governance between linguistically dissimilar regions becomes impossible.
[Warrant\Warrant\Warrant]	If co-governance between linguistically dissimilar regions is impossible, then those different regions should each govern themselves independently.
[Warrant\Warrant\Claim]	If the federal government is paralyzed as a result of the country being <i>communautaire</i> , then the different linguistic regions should each govern themselves independently.

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21 “*Communautaire*.”

22 “*Welke Taal Wanneer (Which Language When)?*”

The logical structure here is:

- [i] If A (the federal government is paralyzed as a result of the country being *communautaire*), then B (co-governance is impossible).
- [ii] If B (co-governance is impossible), then C (the different linguistic regions should each govern themselves independently).
- [iii] If A (the federal government is paralyzed as a result of the country being *communautaire*), then C (the different linguistic regions should each govern themselves independently).

The logical step “if A, then B” is valid only if the *communautaire* laws describing the relations between the regions indeed hinder cooperation. Assuming that this might very well be the case in Belgium, we can continue. A solution to the problem could then be, according to the N-VA, to let the regions govern themselves, as described in the step “if B, then C”. Yet, there is an obvious flaw here: if the *communautaire* law is the problem, why not get rid of that law? Or revise it, or create a new one? These options are not considered. As we encountered in the evaluation of the [Data] in the upper branch of the argument, there is a double lack of a necessary relation here. First of all, we only accepted the progression “if A, then B” if it fulfilled the condition that the current *communautaire* laws posited problems or caused a conflict. However, laws arranging the relation between linguistically different regions need not per se lead to conflict or other problems, they could actually be fruitful to that relation. Because “if A, then B” needs to fulfill a non-necessary condition, there is a non-necessary relation between A and B (as in the example if the streets being wet above). Additionally, “if B, then C” also has no necessary relation, as we pointed out that changing the law is a better alternative than directly proceeding to getting rid of the central government and letting the regions govern themselves.

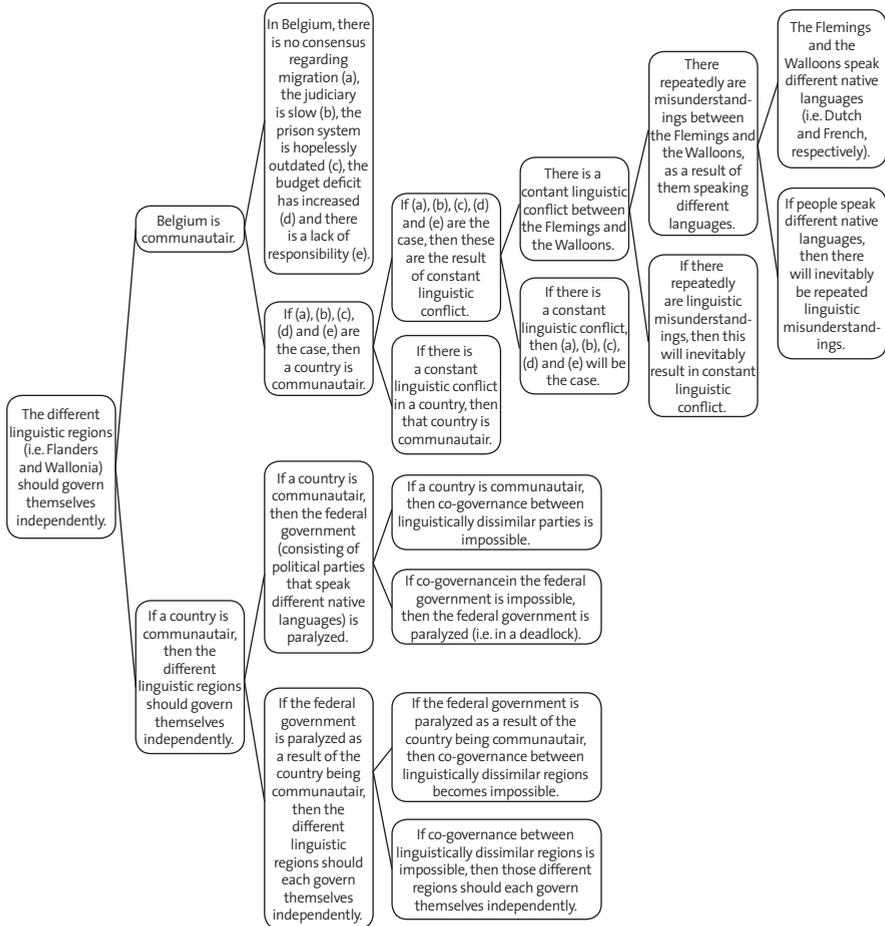
Nonetheless, the N-VA does not even consider changing the 1962 law. And there even is another, perhaps even better, alternative: undoing the 1993 state reform (the Saint Michaels-agreement) that turned unitary Belgium into a federal state.<sup>23</sup> Why would the political turmoil in Belgium have to be the result of the Flemings and the Walloons speaking different languages – as the N-VA claims – and not the consequence of a state reform that made the regions more separate? Perhaps problems such as a slow judiciary, out-dated prison systems, and such are the outcome of Flanders and Wallonia already operating too much individually, and the solution is to cooperate more, not stop cooperating. Indeed,

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23 Jan Clement et al., *Het Sint-Michielsakkoord en Zijn Achtergronden (The Saint-Michaelsagreement and Its Backgrounds)* (Antwerpen: MAKLU, 1993).

maybe the solution is to turn Belgium into a unitary state again – quite the opposite of what the N-VA proposes.

Figure 7.2 The Communautaire Argument



### 3 Conclusion

Having analyzed the N-VA's line of argumentation, what can we now say about its validity, and perhaps about the motivations behind it?

We have seen that the N-VA's conclusion that Belgium is *communautaire* is fragile. Supposedly, when two parties speak different languages, this would result in inevitable and repeated linguistic misunderstandings between them. Arguing that repeated linguistic misunderstandings lead to constant linguistic conflict, the N-VA locates the "problem of Belgium" in the Flemings speaking Flemish and the Walloons speaking French. An interesting – yet false – line of reasoning. If not defeated by common sense, then the argument is invalidated by there not being constant linguistic conflict in other bilingual or multilingual countries such as Canada, Switzerland and Suriname – which according to the presented line of reasoning would necessarily have to be the case. It is not at all considered that the differences that are there might just be the result of different ideologies, and that the conflict between Flemish and Walloon political parties is thus a purely ideological conflict. Also notable is the absence of a proposal for changing the language-legislation-act of 1962 or the 1993 state reform that could very well be the source of the political problems.

Now that we know that, we might ask ourselves why the N-VA has not approached the political crisis in this way. I believe it is safe to say that the party is able to conclude the above for themselves as well, but that they rather chose to blame it on the linguistic differences between them and the French speaking parties. What could be their motivation to blame it on language instead of ideology? I believe that a reasonable possibility is that this move is of a strategic nature, as it allows the N-VA to make their proposal seem to be the only solution to the problem of the conflict between the Flemish and Walloon parties. One cannot change (at least reasonably) that the Flemings speak Flemish and the Walloon speak French. If one takes this given fact, and concludes that existing problems are the cause of linguistic difference, one is able to say: "The problems we have are caused by us speaking different languages, therefore we cannot work together; there can be no compromises – we have to govern ourselves, independent from our linguistically different neighbor." Keeping in mind that the N-VA is an openly Flemish-nationalist party that desires Flanders to become an independent member-state of the European Union, and thus separate itself from Wallonia, the conclusion to be drawn is obvious enough: the *communautaire* argument is made by the N-VA to realize its own goal by making it appear to be the only solution to the political problems of Belgium. However, as we have evaluated their argument and found it to be invalid, the party cannot legitimately make

it. I have now come to one of the conclusive results I set out to achieve in the introduction, and in this case it is that the N-VA's argument is illegitimate and that the changes they seek to implement are not the way to go.

I believe that our analysis and its results thus leave us with one, overarching conclusion. That conclusion is that the N-VA makes these arguments to secure the promotion of their interests and goals, but that they are, however, invalid. Can we blame the N-VA for trying to realize its goals? No, I think not, as any good political party will strive to realize its goals. Nonetheless, it is the means by which the party tries to do this that bothers me. I would rather have that the N-VA would be straightforward and say something like: "We are a nationalist party; we wish to decide for ourselves rather than working together with those Walloons and we don't want to pay for them if they won't let us do what we want."<sup>24</sup> Of course, this is anything but graceful politics, yet it is clear what they want and the party does not try to hide behind false argumentation. Nevertheless, the N-VA has experienced a rise in popularity in Flanders, as the people that vote for them see the party, and especially party chairman Bart de Wever, as bravely fighting for the Flemish cause against the stubborn Walloon.

In any case, the political deadlock does not seem to be dissolved anytime soon. What this means for the future of Belgium, well, that is anybody's guess.

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24 I do not claim that the N-VA does not like the Walloons. Yet, the whole feel of the discourse and the arguments do seem to suggest it.