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# Immigrant Integration Policies in Belgium: Three-Levels Governance and the shrinking Role of the Federal State

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## **INTRODUCTION**

**MAIN POINT OF THE PRESENTATION:  
AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
THE FLEMISH NATION-STATE BUILDING  
PROCESS, IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION HAS  
BECOME A MATTER OF THREE-LEVELS  
GOVERNANCE (EU, FEDERATED ENTITIES,  
CITIES) CORRESPONDING TO A SHRINKING  
ROLE OF THE BELGIAN FEDERAL STATE**



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## INTRODUCTION

5 parts of the presentation:

1. The political and economic context
  2. Migration Trends and Immigrant Origin Population
  3. “Philosophies” of integration in a disuniting society
  4. Immigrant Integration Policies: three-levels governance
  5. Conclusion: How to reinvent Belgian pluralism?
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## 1. The Political and Economic Context

- Finally a new federal government since December 2011
  
- The economic and social crisis hits harder and harder:
  - unemployment and underemployment on the rise.
  - homelessness including asylum-seekers homelessness increases.
  - increase of poverty and social precariousness
  
- 2012: Very important local elections in which migration and integration issues will be a highly politicized in many towns and cities
  
- Racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia on the rise ? Rise of euphemised hatred discourse ?



## 2. Migration Trends and Immigrant Origin Population

- Migration Data : problem of access and lack of easily accessible integrated data.
- “Ethnic” statistics, integration and anti-discrimination: here too, a North-South divide: no federal census, no cooperation on statistics between the Regions
- Different migration patterns in the 3 regions
- The number of asylum-seekers relatively stable between 2002 and now



## 2.Brussels

- A small global city-region: 1.100.000 people
- 1/2 of the residents are not born in Brussels.
- 40% born abroad
- 50% immigrant origin
- The world is present but Moroccan origin only : 13%
- “new” migrants: Eastern part of Europe, Sub-Sahara Africa, Latin America
- Francophones: 90-95%; Flemish: 5-10%
- Unemployment: + de 20 %
- MAJOR POINT OF ENTRY OK NEW MIGRANTS



### **3. “Philosophies” of integration and public debates on immigration and integration in the federated entities**

- Explicit and clear vision of the ideal immigrant integration in Flanders VS No explicit structured, coherent vision in Wallonia
- Authoritarian approach in Flanders VS more flexible approaches in Wallonia
- Interesting debates in Brussels on cosmopolitanism and the emergence of new encompassing Brussels identity
- Rising of the discourse about diversity but no thorough discussion about the meaning of diversity. Light diversity or deep diversity ?
- The opposition between a multiculturalist Flanders and an assimilationist Wallonia belongs to the past
- Quest for cultural conformity in both regions
- Conformity to what ? Clear in Flanders, less in Wallonia



## 4. Immigrant Integration Policies: three-levels governance

- In terms of immigration and integration, competences are in theory shared by the four levels:
  - The EU
  - Federal, communities and regions
  - Provinces
  - Communes (cities)
- Flanders is engaged in a nation-building process
- No Walloon nation-building process as such
- Brussels: the struggle for autonomy and equality of a diverse city-region



## 4. Immigrant Integration Policies: three-levels governance

- In practice, integration policies are dealt with by 3 main institutional levels:
  - The EU
  - The federated entities (communities and regions)
  - Cities
- The role of the federal state is shrinking and its legitimacy is de facto questioned by the Flemish government but also by the other regions
- Illustration:
  - The “intercultural sessions” launched by a Federal minister in 2009
- Facts and problems of the three-levels governance processes



## 4. Immigrant Integration Policies: three-levels governance

- The type of interaction between the EU level and the level of the federated entities varies:
  - Flanders on line with the EU developments since the CBP
  - Wallonia is reluctant
  - Brussels in between
- The interaction between the EU level and the cities: the importance of funding through for example, the EIF: Flemish cities are more active in trying to get EU funding in the area of integration than Walloon cities and the 19 Brussels communes (HYP)



## 4. Immigrant Integration Policies: three-levels governance

- The type of interactions the level of the federated entities and the cities varies:
  - In Flanders, cities implement the regional plan and develop their own specific projects in that framework
  - In Wallonia, there is no clear and coherent integration plan: no regional leadership; importance of the sub-regional and local specificities
  - Brussels: differences between the 19 communes



## 4. Immigrant Integration Policies: three-levels governance

- Almost no dialogue, no cooperation between federated entities:
  - EU conference on Integration on the added value of a regional and local approach, Gent, 25-26 November: no francophone guest
  - Seminar on transversal policies and local approach to integration, Namur, 8-9 November: 1 Flemish guest
  - -BUT the Walloon administration examines the Flemish experience and “policy transfers” are not excluded
  
- Recent: “Wallonia must develop a compulsory “inburgering” programme”  
(Erik Van Rompuy-CD&V): Flemish pressures on Wallonia and Brussels in the name of Flemish sovereignty



## 4. Immigrant Integration Policies: three-levels governance

- Almost no dialogue, no cooperation between cities of the different federated entities.
- Recent: cooperation between cities from one federated entity with another federated entity: Verviers, the local integration plans and the Flemish region.



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## **5. CONCLUSION: HOW TO REINVENT BELGIAN PLURALISM**

- Beyond the integration debate
  - What do we still want to do together and how ?
  - What is the place of immigrant origin minorities in all this ?
  - Dialogue between the federated entities and Immigrants is not organized in the same way in the different parts of Belgium:  
Minderheden Forum VS local participation in the regional integration centres
  - Brussels: immigrant origin politicians !!!!
  - Competition to attract the “wanted” migrants
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## **5. CONCLUSION: HOW TO REINVENT BELGIAN PLURALISM**

- Policy proposals to move from a rather chaotic three-levels governance system to a more efficient four-levels governance system by bringing the federal system back in ?
- Difficult without a shared political will to cooperate between the different institutional stakeholders

