

Mémoire en science politique[BR]- "The projection of the Flemish national identity on the international stage: a discursive analysis"[BR]- Séminaire d'accompagnement à l'écriture

Auteur : Houard, Solenn

Promoteur(s) : Debras, François

Faculté : Faculté de Droit, de Science Politique et de Criminologie

Diplôme : Master en sciences politiques, orientation générale, à finalité spécialisée en relations internationales

Année académique : 2023-2024

URI/URL : <http://hdl.handle.net/2268.2/20825>

Avertissement à l'attention des usagers :

Tous les documents placés en accès ouvert sur le site le site MatheO sont protégés par le droit d'auteur. Conformément aux principes énoncés par la "Budapest Open Access Initiative"(BOAI, 2002), l'utilisateur du site peut lire, télécharger, copier, transmettre, imprimer, chercher ou faire un lien vers le texte intégral de ces documents, les disséquer pour les indexer, s'en servir de données pour un logiciel, ou s'en servir à toute autre fin légale (ou prévue par la réglementation relative au droit d'auteur). Toute utilisation du document à des fins commerciales est strictement interdite.

Par ailleurs, l'utilisateur s'engage à respecter les droits moraux de l'auteur, principalement le droit à l'intégrité de l'oeuvre et le droit de paternité et ce dans toute utilisation que l'utilisateur entreprend. Ainsi, à titre d'exemple, lorsqu'il reproduira un document par extrait ou dans son intégralité, l'utilisateur citera de manière complète les sources telles que mentionnées ci-dessus. Toute utilisation non explicitement autorisée ci-avant (telle que par exemple, la modification du document ou son résumé) nécessite l'autorisation préalable et expresse des auteurs ou de leurs ayants droit.

The projection of the Flemish national identity on the international stage: a discursive analysis

Author:

Solenn Houard

S190245

Supervisor:

Dr. François Debras

Readers:

Pr. Sebastian Santander

Dr. Nicolas Baygert

Master's degree in Political Science with a major in international relations

Academic year 2023-2024.

Acknowledgements

This work would not have been possible without the help of all the people who have contributed in one way or another. I would like to thank all of them.

First of all, I would like to thank Dr François Debras for having agreed to be the supervisor of this work. I would also like to thank him for his advice and his responses to my numerous requests to guide me in this work.

I would also like to thank my readers, Professor Sebastian Santander and Mr Nicolas Baygert, for agreeing to be part of the jury for this thesis. I would particularly like to thank the Professor Santander, who helped me greatly in determining the structure of this work.

I also thank my godmother, Sophie Vrancken, who kindly agreed to proofread and edit this work with me.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends who supported me throughout the various stages of the writing process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
II.	THEORETICAL EXPLORATIONS	2
1.	THE POST-WESTPHALIAN INTERNATIONAL ORDER: INCLUSION OF NON-STATE ACTORS?	2
2.	THE CHANGING STRUCTURE OF THE BELGIAN STATE: A FACILITATOR FOR FLANDERS?.....	5
3.	THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE FEDERATED ENTITIES: TOWARDS MULTILEVEL DIPLOMACY?	9
3.1.	Theoretical conceptions	9
3.2.	Identity paradiplomacy: concepts and manifestations	10
3.3.	The Flemish diplomacy.....	11
4.	CONCEPTIONS OF IDENTITY: BEYOND A UNIFORM NATIONAL IDENTITY?	13
4.1.	Constructivist and post-structuralist perspectives on identity: differences and similarities ...	13
4.2.	Conceptions of the national and regional identities	14
4.3.	The Flemish identity	16
4.4.	The role of language in identity construction	19
III.	METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK: THE RELEVANCE OF DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS	21
1.	DEFINITION OF THE RESEARCH SCOPE	22
2.	DATA COLLECTION METHOD	24
3.	DATA ANALYSIS METHOD	24
3.1.	Lexicometric analysis	25
3.2.	Content analysis	25
3.3.	Relevance of the two approaches.....	26
4.	METHOD CRITICISMS AND LIMITATIONS.....	26
IV.	DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: DISCOURSES AS A VECTOR OF IDENTITY?	27
1.	PRESENTATION OF THE THEMES	27
2.	DISCOURSE OF DELEGATIONS IN EUROPE	28
2.1.	Quantitative analysis	28
2.2.	Qualitative analysis	30
i.	<i>Development and innovation</i>	30
ii.	<i>International cooperation and partnerships</i>	31
iii.	<i>Economy and trade</i>	32
iv.	<i>Education</i>	33
v.	<i>Culture, history and heritage</i>	35
3.	DISCOURSE OF DELEGATIONS OUTSIDE OF EUROPE	37
3.1.	Quantitative analysis	37
3.2.	Qualitative analysis	38
i.	<i>Development and innovation</i>	38
ii.	<i>International cooperation</i>	39
iii.	<i>Economy and trade</i>	40
iv.	<i>Education</i>	42
v.	<i>Culture and heritage</i>	42
4.	DISCOURSE OF THE FLEMISH POLITICAL INSTANCES	44
4.1.	Quantitative analysis	44
4.2.	Qualitative analysis	46
i.	<i>Development and innovation</i>	46
ii.	<i>International dimension and partnerships</i>	47

iii.	<i>Education</i>	49
iv.	<i>Culture, history and heritage</i>	50
5.	COMPARISON OF DISCOURSES	52
5.1.	Quantitative analysis	52
5.2.	Qualitative analysis	56
i.	<i>Development and innovation</i>	56
ii.	<i>International cooperation and partnerships</i>	56
iii.	<i>Economy and trade</i>	57
iv.	<i>Education</i>	58
v.	<i>Culture, history and heritage</i>	59
5.3.	Comparative analysis	60
V.	CONCLUSION.....	61
VI.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	64
VII.	APPENDICES	71
1.	DISCOURSES OF THE DELEGATIONS IN EUROPE	71
i.	<i>Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 1</i>	71
ii.	<i>Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 2</i>	72
iii.	<i>Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 3</i>	74
iv.	<i>Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 4</i>	75
v.	<i>Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 5</i>	76
vi.	<i>Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 6</i>	78
vii.	<i>Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 7</i>	81
viii.	<i>Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 8</i>	83
ix.	<i>Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 9</i>	84
x.	<i>Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 10</i>	85
xi.	<i>Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 11</i>	86
xii.	<i>Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 12</i>	88
2.	DISCOURSES OF THE DELEGATIONS OUTSIDE EUROPE	90
i.	<i>Discourse of the Delegations outside Europe, DOE 1</i>	90
ii.	<i>Discourse of the Delegations outside Europe, DOE 2</i>	92
iii.	<i>Discourse of the Delegations outside Europe, DOE 3</i>	94
iv.	<i>Discourse of the Delegations outside Europe, DOE 4</i>	95
v.	<i>Discourse of the Delegations outside Europe, DOE 5</i>	98
vi.	<i>Discourse of the Delegations outside Europe, DOE 6</i>	100
vii.	<i>Discourse of the Delegations outside Europe, DOE 7</i>	103
viii.	<i>Discourse of the Delegations outside Europe, DOE 8</i>	105
ix.	<i>Discourse of the Delegations outside Europe, DOE 9</i>	107
3.	DISCOURSES OF THE FLEMISH POLITICAL INSTANCES	108
i.	<i>Discourse of the Flemish Political Instances, FPI FlandersDay 2021, 2021</i>	108
ii.	<i>Discourse of the Flemish Political Instances, FPI FlandersDay 2022, 2022</i>	111
iii.	<i>Discourse of the Flemish Political Instances, FPI FlandersDay 2023, 2023</i>	114

I. Introduction

In federal Belgium, the regions and communities enjoy a high degree of autonomy, enabling them to act on the international stage. Among these, Flanders which is considered to have a strong and distinctive identity of its own. This raises the question of how this identity manifests itself and influences international interactions. Indeed, the expression of Flemish identity beyond national borders raises questions about the image that Flanders tries to promote of itself abroad.

The question addressed by this research is the following: *What are the characteristics of Flemish identity projected onto the international stage through the discourses of Flemish diplomats?* This question invites us to explore the constitutive elements of Flemish identity as they are conveyed through the international relations maintained by this federated entity.

To provide an answer, the question will be divided into several sub-questions to enable us to investigate its various facets in depth.

First, we will look at the presence of non-state actors on the international stage and their scope for action. Next, we will explore the structure of the Belgian state and its federalisation process through constitutional revision. Third, the concepts of paradiplomacy and identity paradiplomacy will be studied and applied to the Flemish case. The last part of our literature review will be devoted to questions of identity and the role of language in the construction of this identity. Finally, we will expose the methodology applied to this work, namely the discourse analysis method. The discourse of Flemish diplomats will then be analysed quantitatively and qualitatively to extract the recurring themes that emerge, and our analyses will be compared in order to establish conclusions.

To avoid any ambiguity, it is important to specify that in this thesis when using the words Flemish diplomats, we are referring to diplomats sent by the Flemish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and not to Belgian diplomats from Flanders.

II. Theoretical explorations

1. The post-Westphalian international order: inclusion of non-state actors?

Since the Westphalia treaty in 1648 the world was dominated by a territorial logic, and the state was the only actor with ability to conduct diplomacy and foreign relations, and with authority over its territory and population, excluding all other actors.¹ For a long time, the state was considered as the only sovereign entity on the international stage. That means that only sovereign states that fulfill the statehood criteria's have the possibility to foster relations with other states. This conception of the international relations (IR) is embedded in a realist paradigm.²

Some scholars have rejected this conception of IR because it is considered too limited. By attributing the same status to all entities, it is assumed that they are all identical. This approach greatly simplifies reality, since it assumes that all players on the international stage have the same characteristics. It does not take into account the complexity of the real world. Moreover, we can have a broader view of the international stage and politic if we consider a broader range of actors that play a role and interact with governments. Different entities can have an impact on international relations through the relations that they develop with governments: « [...] *all types of actors can affect political outcomes. It is an unacceptable analytical bias to decide, before research starts, that only states have any influence* ».³

In the light of criticism of stato-centric approaches, new conceptions of international relations have emerged that are broader and accept a greater variety of actors. Among these, we can mention multilevel governance and multinational federalism, which are particularly relevant to this work.

Multilevel governance emerged as a result of the federalisation and deconcentration of powers that took place within states from the end of the 1970s onwards as part of the national

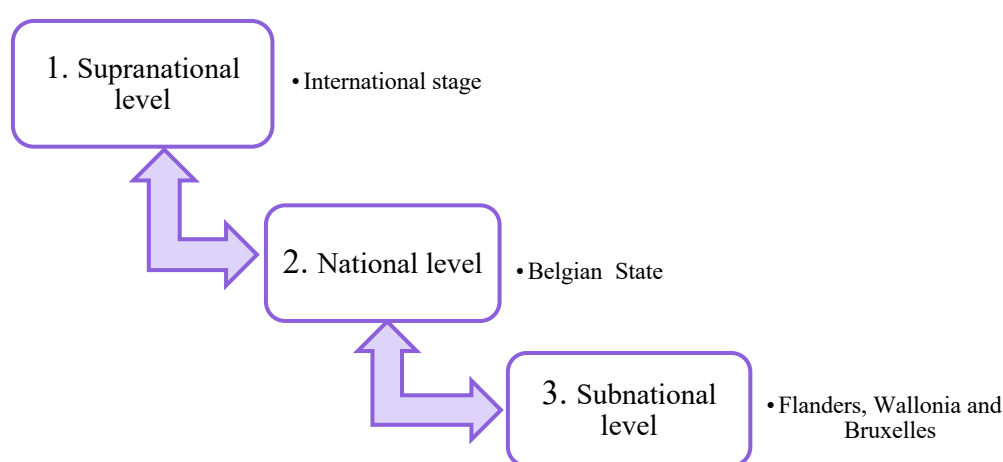
¹ BADIE, B., « De la souveraineté à la capacité de l'Etat », in *SMOUTS Marie-Claude (dir.), Les nouvelles relations internationales : pratique et théorie*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 1998, p. 43, Chatterji, R., & Saha, S., "Paradiplomacy », 2017, *India Quarterly*, 73(4), p.376

² Braillard, P., Djalili, M-R., « Les grandes conceptions des relations internationales », in *Braillard, P., Djalili, M-R., Les relations internationales*, Paris, PUF, 2012, p. 13

³ Willetts, P., « Transnational Actors and International Organizations in Global Politics », in *Baylis John, Smith Steve and Owens Patricia, The globalization of world politics*, second edition, Oxford et New-York, Oxford university press, 2001, p. 360

affirmation movements, which required a reconfiguration of space both within states and on the international stage.⁴ At the international level, the world was presented as having three different levels: (1) international, (2) national, and (3) subnational. According to the realist paradigm, the subnational and international levels were presented as having no direct interaction, using the national level as an intermediary.⁵

Fig. 1. Schema of interactions between the different levels of power according to the realist paradigm applied to Belgium



Because federalisation has brought about different levels of power within the States, each of which has a say in the final political decision⁶, the multilevel governance school argues that this vertical hierarchical scheme has lost its usefulness, and that the subnational and supranational levels can now interact directly with each other.⁷ The aim of the new model is to reflect actual practice on the international stage.⁸ Multilevel governance challenges the boundaries that are virtually created, but also hierarchy, since it is based on systems in which all actors have equal

⁴ Gagnon, A-G., “Multilevel Governance and the Reconfiguration of Political Space”, in Lachapelle, G., Oñate, P., *Borders and Margins : Federalism, Devolution and Multi-Level Governance*, Verlag Barbara Budrich, pp. 77-90

⁵ Philippart, E., “Gouvernance à niveaux multiples et relations extérieures : le développement de la « para-diplomatie » et la nouvelle donne belge”, 1998, *Études internationales*, 29(3), p.633

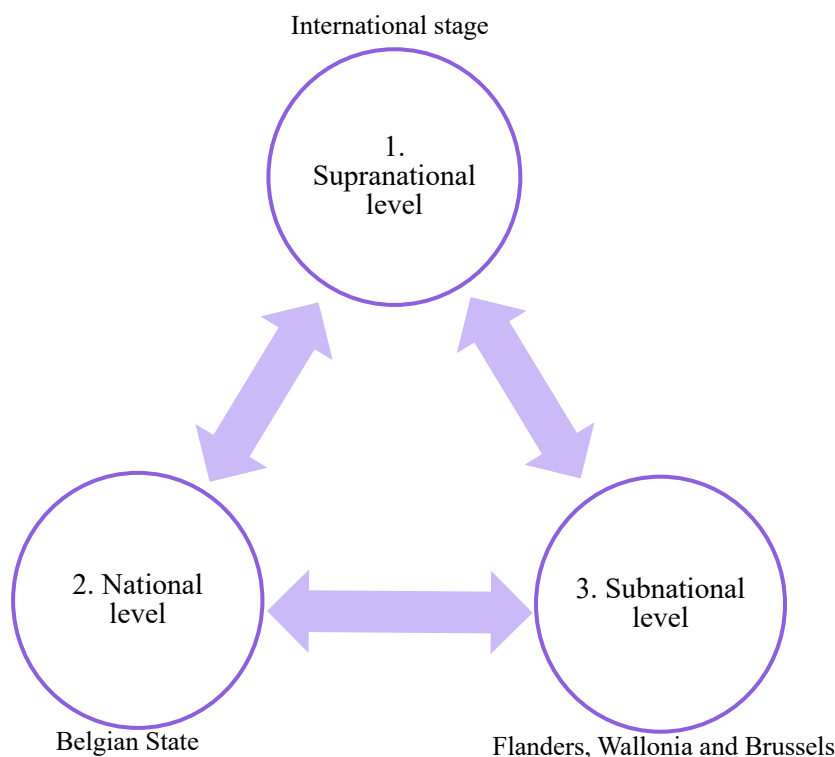
⁶ Lachapelle, G., Oñate, P., “Introduction”, in Lachapelle, G., Oñate, P., *Borders and Margins: Federalism, Devolution and Multi-Level Governance*, Verlag Barbara Budrich, p. 17-18

⁷ Philippart, E., “Gouvernance à niveaux multiples et relations extérieures : le développement de la « para-diplomatie » et la nouvelle donne belge”, *op.cit.*, p 633

⁸ Gagnon, A-G., *Multilevel Governance and the Reconfiguration of Political Space*, *op. cit.*

importance.⁹ In the case of Flanders, the schema of interactions between the different levels would then resemble the following:

Fig. 2. Schema of the interactions between the different levels of power in a multilevel governance system applied to Belgium



At the national and regional levels, Gagnon has reservations about this theory. Indeed, he considers that the approach as presented in the literature does not take sufficient account of the « *issues related to national diversity or the question of dual legitimacy in a multinational context* »¹⁰ that contributed to the emergence of this theory. His criticism focuses mainly on multilevel governance at national level and does not contest the interactions with the different levels as presented above. He then proposes an alternative version of multilevel governance called the "multinational approach". It emphasises the coexistence of different national identities within a single state. This approach also assumes that sovereignty is shared between the different levels and that the legitimacy of this sovereignty emanates from the federated entities as well as from the central state.¹¹

⁹ Christiansen, T., *Reconstructing European Space: From Territorial Politics to Multilevel Governance*, 1996, EUI Working Paper, RSC 96(53), pp.13-16

¹⁰ Gagnon, A-G., *Multilevel Governance and the Reconfiguration of Political Space*, *op. cit.*

¹¹ *Loc.cit.*

2. The changing structure of the Belgian state: a facilitator for Flanders?

The Belgian state is relatively recent, having been created in 1830 by the secession of French-speaking Belgium from the Netherlands. After Belgian independence, although they were in the majority, Dutch-speakers in Belgium enjoyed only a weak status within the new state.¹² The Flemish movement was born ten years after Belgian independence, and the Walloon movement followed a few years later. The idea of a federated state came from a member of the Walloon movement.¹³ It was with the establishment of universal suffrage in 1919 that the voices of the Flemish began to be heard and that the desire for linguistic autonomy was coupled with a desire for political autonomy.¹⁴

Due to tensions between French and Dutch speakers and a division of political activity between the two "camps", the Belgian state, which was a unitary state at the time of its creation¹⁵ became federal and granted more and more autonomy to the Communities and Regions. The process of federalising Belgium began in 1970 with the first reform of the State.¹⁶ This first reform created the three cultural communities, which would henceforth be responsible for cultural cooperation on the international stage. Following this, the special law of 21 July 1971 more specifically determined the powers of these new entities.¹⁷

The second state reform took place in 1980, creating the Flemish and Walloon Regions and increasing the powers of the Regions. The Brussels-Capital Region would be created later on.¹⁸ The decision to create both Communities and Regions arose from a desire to reconcile Flemish and Walloon preferences. The Flemish were in favour of creating two cultural and linguistic

¹² Dalle Mulle, E., Bieling, M., "Autonomy Over Independence: Self-Determination in Catalonia, Flanders and South Tyrol in the Aftermath of the Great War", 2023, *European History Quarterly*, 53(4), p.647

¹³ Bernard, N., Lys, M., and Romainville, C., « Cinquante années de fédéralisation en Belgique : évolutions politiques et institutionnelles », in *Xhardez Catherine, Counet Maxime, Randour François, Niessen Christoph (dir.) 50 ans de fédéralisation de l'Etat belge. Institutions, acteurs, politiques publiques et particularités du fédéralisme belge*, Louvain-la-Neuve, Académia L'Harmattan, 2020, p.25

¹⁴ Lagasse, N., *Le fédéralisme belge : un exemple de fédéralisme de dissociation*, 2001, International Forum on Federalism in Mexico, p.2

¹⁵ Izquierdo, J. M., "Belgian identity politics: At a crossroad between nationalism and regionalism", Master's Thesis, University of Tennessee, 2014, p. 8

¹⁶ Deschouwer, Kris, "La dynamique fédérale en Belgique" in *Fournier, B., Reuchamps, M., Le fédéralisme en Belgique et au Canada, Comparaison sociopolitique*, De Boeck Supérieur, 2009.

¹⁷ Loi spéciale du 21 juillet 1971, *M.B.*, 23 juillet. see Verjans, P., *Histoire politique belge. Aide mémoire*, Liège, Presses universitaires de Liège, 2019, pp. 159-160.

¹⁸ Bernard, N., Lys, M., and Romainville, C., « Cinquante années de fédéralisation en Belgique : évolutions politiques et institutionnelles », *op.cit.*, p.28

communities, while Wallonia wanted to create three distinct Regions based on the economy.¹⁹ The Flemish Region will then transfer the powers of the Region to the Flemish Community so that there would be a single entity.²⁰ In the early 80s, the federated entities still had no international powers. However, they were present on the international level since in 1984, the cultural attachés in the diplomatic missions were authorised by the Minister for Foreign Affairs to become representatives of the Communities.²¹

During the third reform of 1988, the competences of the federated entities were distributed more coherently and extended. This reform also saw the creation of the Brussels-Capital Region, which became responsible for bicultural issues. The French-speaking and Dutch-speaking Communities could then only exercise their powers over French-speaking and Dutch-speaking citizens respectively, while Brussels capital was competent for the bilingual matters.²²

The Saint-Michel agreements of 28 September 1992 formalised the federal structure of the Belgian state by writing into Article 1 of the Constitution: « *Belgium is a federal state composed of the Communities and Regions* ». ²³ Belgian federalism is described as "dissociation federalism", since the Communities and Regions have their own competences and work for their own interests in these matters rather than collaborating with the federal state for common interests.²⁴

The following year, legislation was introduced on the international relations of the federated entities and an inter-ministerial conference on foreign policy was established. This forum enabled the different ministers to cooperate on external policies.²⁵ Since certain powers were attributed to both the federated entities and the federal government, a rotation system had been put in place to establish which entity would sit on international organisations.²⁶

¹⁹ Deschouwer, Kris, "La dynamique fédérale en Belgique" in Fournier, B., Reuchamps, M., *op.cit.*, p.68

²⁰ Bernard, N., Lys, M., and Romainville, C., « Cinquante années de fédéralisation en Belgique : évolutions politiques et institutionnelles », *op.cit.*, p.28

²¹ Feyt, A., « Les Communautés et les Régions peuvent-elles se doter d'une diplomatie propre? », *C.D.P.K.*, 2002, p.28

²² Bernard, N., Lys, M., and Romainville, C., « Cinquante années de fédéralisation en Belgique : évolutions politiques et institutionnelles », *op.cit.*

²³ Art. 1. *Constitution of the Kingdom of Belgium*, 2024 version, original text : *la Belgique est un Etat fédéral qui se compose des communautés et des régions*

²⁴ Lagasse, N., *Le fédéralisme belge : un exemple de fédéralisme de dissociation.*, *op.cit.*

²⁵ *Ibid.* p.12

²⁶ Paquin, S., « Paradiplomatie identitaire et diplomatie en Belgique fédérale: le cas de la Flandre », 2003, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 36(3), p.629

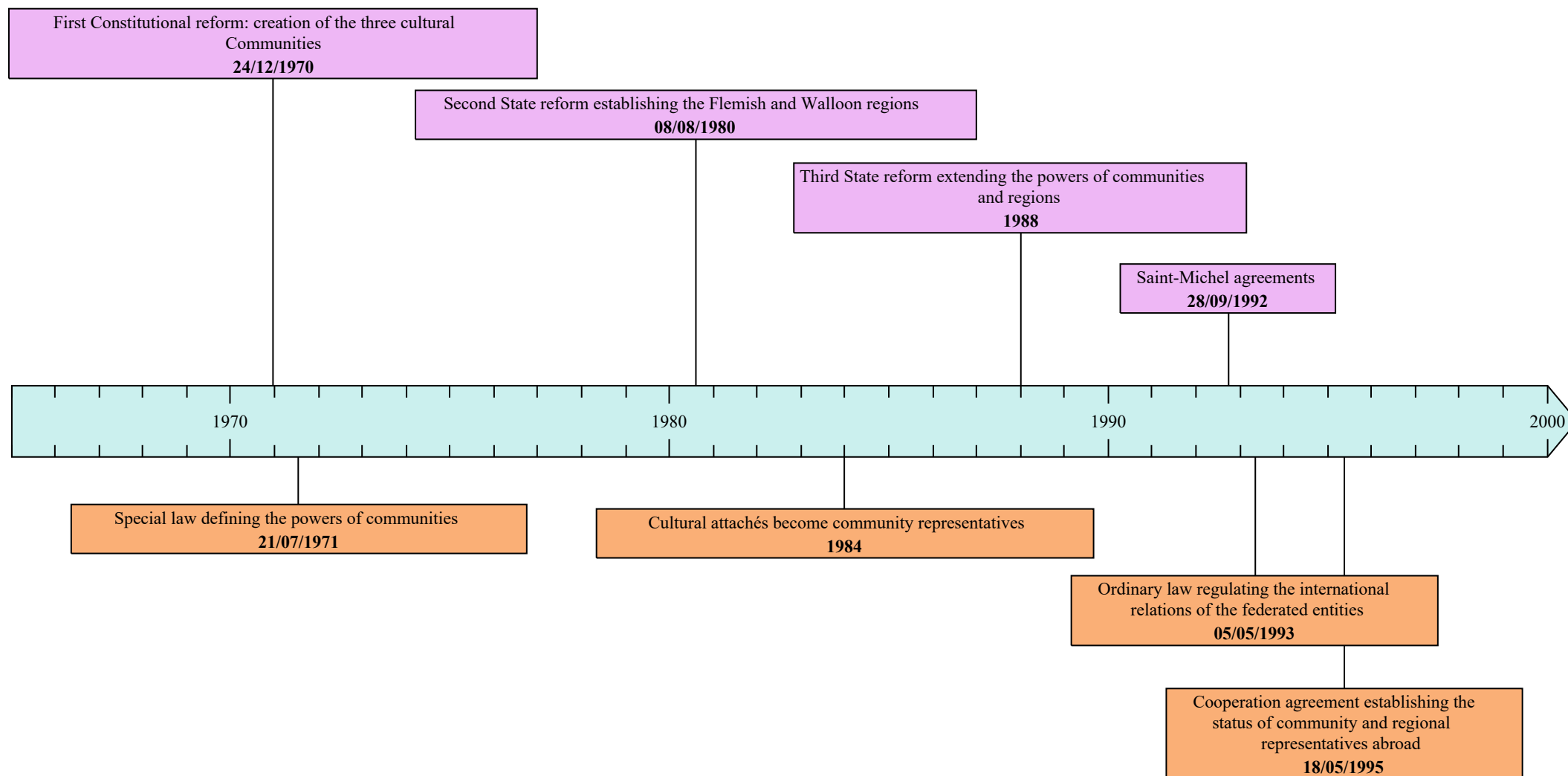
Finally, a cooperation agreement signed on 18 May 1995 regulated the status of representatives of federated entities abroad within diplomatic and consular posts. All the provisions relating to the powers of the Communities and Regions were compiled in a single text.²⁷

Competences in Belgium are governed by the principle of « *in foro interno, in foro externo* », which means that the competences of the federated entities within the State also extend beyond the State borders. Under this principle, they have the right to enter into international treaties and to send their own representatives. Another principle is that of fundamental equality, which states that there is no hierarchy between central government and the federated entities. These two principles combined give the Belgian federated entities unprecedented power in international matters.²⁸

²⁷ Lagasse, C-E., « Le système des relations internationales dans la Belgique fédérale », 1997, *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, 4-5(1549-1550), p. 20

²⁸ Crikemans, D., *How subnational entities try to develop their own 'paradiplomacy'. The case of Flanders (1993-2005)*, 2006, International Conference Challenges for Foreign Ministries: Managing Diplomatic Networks and Optimising Value p.7 ; Izquierdo, J. M., "Belgian identity politics: At a crossroad between nationalism and regionalism", *op. cit.*, p.16.

Fig. 3. Evolution of the Belgian State structure



3. The foreign policy of the federated entities: towards multilevel diplomacy?

3.1. Theoretical conceptions

The Vienna Conventions govern diplomatic and consular relations. These were adopted respectively in 1961 and 1963.²⁹ The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations states in Article 2 that there are two conditions for an entity to enjoy diplomatic relations on the international scene: international legal personality and recognition by the State with which it wishes to establish diplomatic relations.³⁰ Unlike the Montevideo Treaty that enshrines the Westphalian vision by restricting the scope of international relations to entities that meet state criteria: « *The federal state shall constitute a sole person in the eyes of international law* »³¹, the Vienna Conventions do not reserve diplomatic relations to States alone, but to any actor capable of meeting the two above-mentioned conditions.

The term paradiplomacy is a combination of the words "parallel" and "diplomacy". It refers to a form of diplomacy that operates in parallel with the traditional diplomacy of sovereign states.³² It differs from diplomacy in the sense that it refers to a process whereby the federated entities of a sovereign state maintain independent diplomatic relations with a third sovereign state.³³ This new approach to diplomatic relations calls for a rethinking of international relations linked to the previously mentioned Westphalian order. The State would thus share its sovereignty with another entity within it.³⁴ Philippart does, however, express one nuance to this ability of non-state actors to intervene on the international scene: approval of the validity of their actions is subject to the judgement of their state partners.³⁵

Subnational entities have always been involved in international relations to a greater or lesser extent. However, none of the entities had full powers over international jurisdiction and only acted if their interests were not in line with those of the federal government. Paradiplomacy has

²⁹ Convention on Diplomatic Relations, adopted in Vienna on 18 April 1961, *R.T.N.U.*, 1964 ; Convention on Consular Relations, adopted in Vienna on 24 April 1963, *R.T.N.U.*, 1967.

³⁰ Article 2 de la Convention de Vienne du 18 avril 1961 sur les relations diplomatiques, *op.cit.*.

³¹ Convention on the Rights and Duties of States adopted by the Seventh International American Conference, Article 2, Montevideo, 26 December 1933

³² Crickemans, D., *How subnational entities try to develop their own 'paradiplomacy'. The case of Flanders (1993-2005)*, *op. cit.*, p.3

³³ Chatterji, R., & Saha, S., "Para-diplomacy », *op.cit.*, p.375

³⁴ *Ibid.* p.376

³⁵ Philippart, E., "Gouvernance à niveaux multiples et relations extérieures : le développement de la « para-diplomatie » et la nouvelle donne belge", *op.cit.*, p.643

now taken a new turn, giving the federated entities more latitude. These entities now maintain international relations in their own interests and, in some cases such as Quebec or Flanders, to project their own identity and manage cultural differences.³⁶ These federated entities even have their own international legal personality.³⁷

David Crikemans explains that paradiplomacy should not be seen as a process that is totally independent of the traditional diplomacy of sovereign state actors, but rather as a process involving several actors, both inside and outside the national framework.³⁸ Paquin, by contrast, considers that the role of national diplomacy in the era of multilevel governance is ineffective, since it is unable to reflect the interests of the actors making up the nation, but simply a power struggle between the actors involved.³⁹

3.2. Identity paradiplomacy: concepts and manifestations

In the context of Flanders, we can talk more specifically about identity paradiplomacy. This concept is described by Stéphane Paquin as follows “*a sub-state foreign policy whose fundamental objective is to strengthen or build the nation within the framework of a multinational country*”⁴⁰. The author stresses that the aim of this form of paradiplomacy is not to achieve independence but to obtain the resources they need to function properly and to promote their national identity abroad. The successful mobilisation of this subnational identity can provide these actors with international legitimacy.⁴¹

This category of paradiplomacy is also referred to as cultural paradiplomacy since it promotes the culture of the sub-state entity on the international stage. However, the term identity paradiplomacy, unlike cultural paradiplomacy, refers to the notion of nation. The search for recognition is the driving force behind the policies of nationalist sub-state entities. It is for this reason that they seek to enter into relations with actors from outside the state and develop a

³⁶ Chatterji, R., & Saha, S., “Para-diplomacy”, *op.cit.*, p.378-380

³⁷ Paquin, S., « Paradiplomatie identitaire et diplomatie en Belgique fédérale: le cas de la Flandre », *op.cit.*, p.626

³⁸ Crikemans, D., *How subnational entities try to develop their own ‘paradiplomacy’. The case of Flanders (1993-2005)*, *op. cit.*, p.3

³⁹ Paquin, S., « Les nouvelles relations internationales et la paradiplomatie identitaire », 2001, *Bulletin d’histoire politique*, 10(1), p.23

⁴⁰ Paquin, S., « Paradiplomatie identitaire et diplomatie en Belgique fédérale: le cas de la Flandre », *op.cit.*, p.622 : original text : « *une politique étrangère subétatique dont l’objectif fondamental est le renforcement ou la construction de la nation dans le cadre d’un pays multinational* »

⁴¹ *Loc. cit.*

fervent paradiplomacy. Moreover, nationalism is characterised by the definition of national needs and interests, sometimes in contradiction with those of the central state. The definition of these same national interests will influence the chosen partners.⁴²

3.3. *The Flemish diplomacy*

Flanders maintains diplomatic relations with various countries and regional entities. This parallel diplomacy to that of the Belgian State is defined as « *political contacts with distant nations that bring non-central governments into contact not only with trade, industrial, or cultural centers on other continents... but also with the various branches or agencies of foreign national governments* ». ⁴³ This allows the federated entities to have direct access to the international scene and to participate actively in the development of policies that affect their areas of competence. Both Wallonia and Flanders can conclude treaties with various entities.⁴⁴ Belgium's subnational entities are well known on the international scene and their partners cooperate with these entities rather than with the federal state in a wide range of areas.⁴⁵ Over time, they have acquired "quasi-state" status.⁴⁶

However, various mechanisms have been put in place at national level to ensure consistency in the foreign policy pursued by Flanders, Wallonia and Belgium. In 1994, a cooperation agreement was signed between the various entities, giving them a power of scrutiny over the policies pursued within the European Union (EU).⁴⁷ Within the EU, each of the Belgian subnational entities is required to ratify the treaties, so the entities carry considerable weight since they have a right of veto.⁴⁸

Flanders acquired this international autonomy in a process that lasted some twenty years (see point 3). The initial aim was to protect the Flemish culture and language by giving full control

⁴² Paquin, S., « La paradiplomatie identitaire : Le Québec, la Catalogne et la Flandre en relations internationales », 2004, *Politique et Sociétés*, 23(2-3), pp.212-213

⁴³ Reuchamps, M. (ed.), *Minority Nations in Multinational Federations: A comparative study of Quebec and Wallonia*, 2015, p. 4.

⁴⁴ Reuchamps, M. (ed.), *Minority Nations in Multinational Federations: A comparative study of Quebec and Wallonia*, 2015, p. 5, 14-15

⁴⁵ Izquierdo, J. M., "Belgian identity politics: At a crossroad between nationalism and regionalism", *op. cit.*, p.13

⁴⁶ Philippart, E., "Gouvernance à niveaux multiples et relations extérieures : le développement de la « paradiplomatie » et la nouvelle donne belge", *op.cit.*, p.362

⁴⁷ Reuchamps, M. (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 18

⁴⁸ Izquierdo, J. M., "Belgian identity politics: At a crossroad between nationalism and regionalism", *op. cit.*, p.13

to a Flemish authority, which led to the creation of Belgium's Regions and Communities.⁴⁹ Originally, the purpose of the Flemish government's paradiplomacy was to promote Flanders internationally and publicise its ability to sign agreements with different partners, which arose from the structure and law of the Belgian State. Indeed, when Flanders acquired autonomy on the international stage, the Region was largely unknown beyond its borders.⁵⁰ Another interest of Flanders is the "*protection of its territorial integrity*"⁵¹. We can also mention the fact that Flanders can find added value in maintaining international relations for each of the competences it possesses.⁵²

In Flanders, foreign diplomacy is managed by a central body, namely the Flemish Government and its agencies.⁵³ On the Flemish government's website (*Vlaamse Overheid*), the federated entity's international relations with countries or Regions are justified by Flanders' historical place in world trade and by the Flemish characteristics that they consider to be intrinsically international: "*Vlaanderen is internationaal*".⁵⁴ Cooperation and dialogue with foreign governments is seen as essential to the successful pursuit of Flemish political ambitions.⁵⁵

Since the Flemish Region has limited resources, the choice of its presence in certain countries was carefully considered: « [...] *the partners which Flanders chose were mostly in those areas in which the Belgian federal government at that time had only limited contacts, or did not prioritize its existing bonds* »⁵⁶. Flanders chose to develop its relations mainly with states with which it shared cultural affinities, in particular the Netherlands and South Africa. The Region refused to intervene in areas of French influence in Africa. Instead, it seeks to promote its cultural identity through a variety of initiatives, including « *maisons de la culture à l'étranger* »⁵⁷.

⁴⁹ Crieckemans, D., *How subnational entities try to develop their own 'paradiplomacy'. The case of Flanders (1993-2005)*, *op. cit.*, p.4

⁵⁰ Paquin, S., « Paradiplomatie identitaire et diplomatie en Belgique fédérale: le cas de la Flandre », *op.cit.*, p. 632 ; Crieckemans, D., *How subnational entities try to develop their own 'paradiplomacy'. The case of Flanders (1993-2005)*, *op.cit.*, p.8

⁵¹ Paquin, S., « Paradiplomatie identitaire et diplomatie en Belgique fédérale: le cas de la Flandre », *op.cit.*, p. 632

⁵² Crieckemans, D., *How subnational entities try to develop their own 'paradiplomacy'. The case of Flanders (1993-2005)*, *op. cit.*, p.16

⁵³ Reuchamps, M. (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 6

⁵⁴ Vlaamse overheid, *Over ons*, site internet Vlaamse overheid "*Flanders is international*".

⁵⁵ Bynens, J., *Vlaanderen is internationaal*, 2022, p. 11.

⁵⁶ Crieckemans, D., *How subnational entities try to develop their own 'paradiplomacy'. The case of Flanders (1993-2005)*, *op.cit.*, p.11

⁵⁷ Paquin, S., « La paradiplomatie identitaire : Le Québec, la Catalogne et la Flandre en relations internationales », *op.cit.*, p.213.

4. Conceptions of identity: beyond a uniform national identity?

4.1. Constructivist and post-structuralist perspectives on identity: differences and similarities

The theories of identity that seemed pertinent to us are constructivist and post-structuralist theories. Although these theories have a different conception of identity, we can find similarities in these two theories which could both be relevant to this work.

Constructivist and post-structuralist theories have in common that they both give an important place to identity and self-definition. Identity is considered as a very important concept in the social sciences, since individuals and states need it to define themselves and others.⁵⁸ The 'sense of self' enables them to act in accordance with what they feel is consistent with their identity.⁵⁹

Both theories agree that identity is socially constructed by individuals. However, the source of this identity has not the same origin. For constructivists, it is institutions, the environment and social structures that construct identity. This constructed identity then influences the individual and his or her behaviour.⁶⁰ Poststructuralists, on the other hand, argue that institutions and social structures are not able to determine an agent's identity and the way he or she acts. Identity is not the product of institutions alone, but also of external factors, and does not govern the individual's behaviour, but rather is created by that behaviour.⁶¹

In the context of international relations, according to the constructivist view, an actor's identity and his belief in that identity influence his behaviour on the international stage.⁶² The post-structuralist theory, on the other hand, postulates that identity is constructed on the international scene in interaction with the various actors. The characteristics of identity that are emphasised will vary according to the actors and the situations in which language is used.⁶³ For

⁵⁸ Versluys, E., "The notion of identity in discourse analysis: some 'discourse analytical' remarks", 2007, *RASK: internationalt tidsskrift for sprog og kommunikation*, 26.

⁵⁹ Reckinger, R., Wille, C., "Researching identity constructions", in *IPSE - Identités Politiques Sociétés Espaces (ed.)*, *Doing Identity in Luxembourg: Subjective Appropriations - Institutional Attributions - Socio-Cultural Milieus*, transcript Verlag, 2011, p. 14-15.

⁶⁰ Braspenning, T., «Constructivisme et réflexivisme en théorie des relations internationales », in *AFRI*, volume III, 2002, p.319

⁶¹ Panizza, F., Miorelli, R., "Taking Discourse Seriously: Discursive Institutionalism and Post-structuralist Discourse Theory", 2013, *Political Studies*, 61, p.309

⁶² Braspenning, T., « Constructivisme et réflexivisme en théorie des relations internationales », *op.cit.*, p.320

⁶³ Panizza, F., Miorelli, R., "Taking Discourse Seriously: Discursive Institutionalism and Post-structuralist Discourse Theory", *op.cit.* p.307

constructivists, the phenomena of international politics can be explained by the values and identity of the actors, which are intrinsic pre-social characteristics of the actor. Post-structuralists, on the other hand, seek to see which characteristics, identities and values have been mobilised and how they have been mobilised in the context of a specific phenomenon⁶⁴

Both theories agree, however, that identity is versatile. It can fluctuate according to internal and external factors.⁶⁵ When a state's identity is confronted with the identities of its neighbours, it can test the construction of this identity and modify it if necessary. The identity projected onto a state by others does not necessarily reflect the state's idea of itself.⁶⁶ *“A state only understands others through the identities it attributes to them. So you are not necessarily the master of your own identity. You can even become a slave to it. Only daily practice can give the State the opportunity to consolidate or correct its identity, its image: the intersubjective structure is the judge of meaning. Interaction enables the players to test the constructed identities that they have attributed to each other.”*⁶⁷

4.2. Conceptions of the national and regional identities

The notion of identity in relation to a people generally refers to the concept of nation. Identity is often perceived as unique and indivisible within a nation state. Once the concept of the nation state is deconstructed, there are two distinct concepts: the state and the nation. The notion of the State covers the political system, the public authorities and the actors who gravitate around this political and administrative structure.⁶⁸ The concept of nation, on the other hand, refers to the various characteristics that bind individuals together. This bond may be created by the history, culture or traditions shared by these individuals.⁶⁹ Ernest Renan defined French national

⁶⁴ Hansen, L., “Discourse analysis, post-structuralism, and foreign policy”, *op.cit.*, p.100

⁶⁵ Wendt, A., *Social Theory of International Politics*, 1999, University of Chicago, p.336 ; Norton, B., Morgan, B., “Poststructuralism”, in Chapelle C. A (ed.), *The encyclopedia of applied linguistics*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2013

⁶⁶ Braspenning, Thierry, « Constructivisme et réflexivisme en théorie des relations internationales », *op.cit.*, p.320

⁶⁷ Braspenning, Thierry, « Constructivisme et réflexivisme en théorie des relations internationales », *op.cit.*, p.320
Original text : “Un État ne comprend les autres que via les identités qu’il leur attribue. On n’est donc pas forcément maître de son identité. On peut même en devenir esclave. Seule la pratique quotidienne peut donner à l’État l’occasion de consolider ou de corriger son identité, son image : la structure intersubjective est l’arbitre du sens. L’interaction permet aux acteurs de tester des identités construites qu’ils se sont mutuellement attribuées.”

⁶⁸ CRISP website

⁶⁹ Perspective monde, Nation politique, brève définition, Perspectives monde website

identity as being « *the logic of the 'roots', the soil, the customs of the French Regions, which shape the true French people over the long term* »⁷⁰.

In a more comprehensive sense, we define national identity as the articulation of a shared history, culture and values as a means of legitimising the identity of a people.

With a growing number of actors within states, who have developed different and sometimes contradictory identities, it is not uncommon for individuals to identify with their Region rather than with an identity that relates to the state.⁷¹ According to Epstein, in the case of a subnational identity, it is a question of *identification* rather than identity. This highlights the fact that identity is not static and imposed but is rather a process that changes and is deliberately chosen by individuals.⁷² Reckinger and Wille endorse the idea of a process of identification. In their view, collective identity does not exist by itself, but through the affiliation of individuals to that identity.⁷³

Regional identity is intrinsically connected with social identity, a type of identity that binds individuals together on the basis of the community to which they belong.⁷⁴ The concept of regional identity is fairly recent, dating back to the 20th century.⁷⁵ The stronger the group identity, the more members feel attached to that group, which can lead to exclusion from another group.⁷⁶ The common characteristics reside in the cultural heritage that needs to be safeguarded and perpetuated.⁷⁷

Following Reckinger and Wille's model, there are two types of identity: attributed identities and appropriated identities. Attributed identities can be seen as identities based on social norms or stereotypes, such as social class or gender. Appropriated identities, on the other hand, are chosen

⁷⁰ Meyran, Régis, « Les historiens face à l'identité nationale », in Halpern Catherine, *Identité(s)*, Editions sciences humaines, 2016, p.268 « *la logique des 'racines', du terroir, des coutumes des régions françaises, qui modèlent sur la longue durée les véritables Français* »

⁷¹ Paquin, S., « Les nouvelles relations internationales et la paradiplomatie identitaire », 2001, *Bulletin d'histoire politique* p. 20

⁷² Epstein, C., "Who speaks? Discourse, the subject and the study of identity in international politics", 2010, *European Journal of International Relations*, 17(2), p.337

⁷³ Reckinger, R., Wille, C., "Researching identity constructions", *op. cit.*, p.18

⁷⁴ Brigeivich, A., « Eurosceptic Regionalists: Flemish and Walloon Identities Compared », 2016, *L'Europe en formation*, 1(379), p. 97.

⁷⁵ Izquierdo, J. M., "Belgian identity politics: At a crossroad between nationalism and regionalism", *op. cit.*, p.24.

⁷⁶ Brigeivich, A., « Eurosceptic Regionalists: Flemish and Walloon Identities Compared », *op. cit.*, p. 97.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p. 100-101.

and claimed by individuals. These identities are more likely to be cultural or religious.⁷⁸ Regional identities generally belong to the second category, although we do not deny the influence of the first category on the choice of appropriated identities.

Alexander Wendt identifies four forms of identity: personal identity, role identity, type identity and collective identity.⁷⁹ These are "*the values, beliefs, norms and ideas that are collectively produced and reproduced intersubjectively and that affect decision-makers in their definition of the state's interest and in their conception of what is legitimate or illegitimate to undertake on the international scene*".⁸⁰ This fourth form of identity, collective identity, is of particular interest in the context of regional identity. Wendt defines this identity as "*a common in-group identity*".⁸¹ Collective identity enables an individual to identify himself as part of a larger group.⁸²

Identity therefore only exists through the individuals who construct it. Outside this prism, this reality does not exist.⁸³ This demonstrates the specific perception that individuals have of themselves and their environment.⁸⁴

4.3. The Flemish identity

Although identity has often been linked to a uniform national identity, when coupled with the term *Flemish*, the notion of identity appears to be more an identity in its own right - distinct from the Belgian national identity, a regional identity - than an identity linked to a unitary conception of the State.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ Reckinger, R., Wille, C., "Researching identity constructions", *op. cit.*, p. 22

⁷⁹ Wendt, A., *Social Theory of International Politics*, *op.cit.*, p.198

⁸⁰ Eiffing, V., « Constructivisme, identités et rôles : analyse comparative des réponses apportées par l'Iran et la Turquie au Printemps arabes », *Communication réalisée dans le cadre du colloque ISPOLE (UCL)*, 2014, p.3

⁸¹ Wendt, A., *Social Theory of International Politics*, 1999, *op.cit.*, p. 338

⁸² Reckinger, R., Wille, C., "Researching identity constructions", *op. cit.*, p.16

⁸³ Versluys, E., "The notion of identity in discourse analysis: some 'discourse analytical' remarks", *op.cit.*, p.91

⁸⁴ Reckinger, R., Wille, C., "Researching identity constructions", *op. cit.*, p.18

⁸⁵ Brems, E., « A Flemish tale: Flemish roots-literature and the dismantling of Flemish identity », 2006, *Dutch Crossing*, 30(2), p. 296

In the case of Flanders, the shared characteristics of a common heritage are based on the Dutch language⁸⁶ as well as *cultural deprivation*, while the Walloon identity for its part relies on *economic deprivation*.⁸⁷

According to Jamin, Flemish identity is characterised by a negative identity, in other words, an identity that is constructed in opposition to other identities.⁸⁸ The Flemish identity creates a collective (we) that is supposed to oppose to others in a variety of cultural fields.⁸⁹ Pestieau explains that the identities of minorities and peoples derive from historical factors. When Belgium was created in 1830, the Belgian people rose up against the Netherlands, advocating a French-speaking identity. Following this, a Flemish nationalism based on the Dutch language emerged. The reason for this is that people identify themselves according to their political and historical context. Thus, identity is formed primarily in opposition to the identity from which the people wish to distinguish themselves.⁹⁰ According to Kerremans, the question of identity is intrinsically linked with the fact that the institutions of the new federated entities draw their legitimacy by referring to a strong nation that is unique and distinct from the nation of the parent State.⁹¹ A distinction would then be made between the Flemish identity and the 'non-Flemish' identity.⁹² However, Tourret considers that it is the Walloon identity that is "reactionary" as opposed to the much more pronounced Flemish identity.⁹³ For some authors, the strength of the Flemish identity has been overestimated. Originally, this identity was neither politicised nor opposed to a Belgian identity.⁹⁴

Nonetheless, the very existence of the Flemish identity is being questioned. According to Kerremans, this identity reflects European and Belgian values rather than values specific to Flanders.⁹⁵ This feeling of belonging to a Flemish nation is not to be found among the

⁸⁶ Laborderie, V., Couture, J., *Les déterminants de la volonté d'indépendance : Identité régionale et soutien à l'indépendance dans quatre entités subétatiques (Québec, Écosse, Catalogne et Flandre)*, 2014, 23^{ème} Congrès mondial de l'Association Internationale de Science Politique, p. 7

⁸⁷ Izquierdo, J. M., "Belgian identity politics: At a crossroad between nationalism and regionalism", *op. cit.*, p.23.

⁸⁸ Jamin, J., « L'ethnie flamande », *Politique*, 17 novembre 2010.

⁸⁹ Kerremans, B., « The Flemish Identity: Nascent or Existent ? », 1997, *Res Publica* 39(2), p. 308

⁹⁰ Pestieau, J., « Minority rights: caught between individual rights and peoples' rights. », 1991, *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence*, 4(2), pp. 365-366.

⁹¹ Kerremans, B., « The Flemish Identity: Nascent or Existent ? », *op.cit.*, p.303

⁹² Dalle Mulle, E., Bieling, M., "Autonomy Over Independence: Self-Determination in Catalonia, Flanders and South Tyrol in the Aftermath of the Great War", *op. cit.*, p.654

⁹³ Tourret, P., « Les identités culturelles et leurs territoires en Belgique », 2001, *Hommes et Terres du Nord*, 4, p.195

⁹⁴ Dalle Mulle, E., Bieling, M., "Autonomy Over Independence: Self-Determination in Catalonia, Flanders and South Tyrol in the Aftermath of the Great War", *op. cit.*, p.654

⁹⁵ Kerremans, B., « The Flemish Identity: Nascent or Existent ? », *op.cit.*, p.306.

population but rather among the elites, some of whom try to stimulate it, some of whom try to deny it and some of whom try to demonstrate its existence by mentioning the specific features of this identity.⁹⁶ Brigeovich agrees with him on the link between elite and identity, arguing that it is politicians who give substance to regional identities.⁹⁷ Izquierdo agrees with this view, claiming that it was after the constitutional reform of 1970, when the traditional national parties no longer had a *raison d'être*, that political parties began to define themselves around a specific identity, i.e. French-speaking, Dutch-speaking or German-speaking.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, he disagrees with Kerremans on the notion of Flemish values, since he believes that the Flemish elites act according to Flemish rather than Belgian values, which means that values specific to Flanders do exist.⁹⁹ Tourret, for his part, believes that although the existence of this collective identity is debatable among Dutch speakers, for French speakers it is very real and reminds them of the powerlessness of the Walloon identity.¹⁰⁰

However, surveys show that the inhabitants of the Flemish Region feel both Belgian and Flemish, although this identity is not exclusive, the Flemish identity is very much present. It is interesting to note that as many Walloons as Flemish (43%) identify with the national identity as well as the regional identity.¹⁰¹ The way in which the dominant identity is determined is generally linked to context. It depends on the individual and his or her experiences, on "the general situation" and on "the immediate context".¹⁰² It is important to stress, however, that the Belgian state has never attempted to promote an identity common to the Belgian nation. The Belgian identity is an "*identity of non-identity*".¹⁰³ The latter is considered by Bart de Wever to be "*too weak to form the basis of a fully-fledged citizenship*"¹⁰⁴.

With regard to the political parties mentioned above, an analysis of identities in the discourse of the Flemish parties in favour of independence was carried out by Maxime Counet, Geoffroy

⁹⁶ Kerremans, B., "The Flemish Identity : Nascent or Existent ?", *op.cit.* p. 304 & 308

⁹⁷ Brigeovich, A., « Eurosceptic Regionalists: Flemish and Walloon Identities Compared », *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁹⁸ Izquierdo, J. M., "Belgian identity politics: At a crossroad between nationalism and regionalism", *op. cit.*, p.17

⁹⁹ Izquierdo, J. M., "Belgian identity politics: At a crossroad between nationalism and regionalism", *op. cit.*, p.28

¹⁰⁰ Tourret, P., « Les identités culturelles et leurs territoires en Belgique, *op. cit.*, p.196

¹⁰¹ Laborderie, V., « La fin de la Belgique et ses impossibilités L'hypothèse d'une indépendance flamande à l'épreuve des faits », 2014, *Outre-Terre*, vol.4, n°40, p. 121 ; Brigeovich, A., « Eurosceptic Regionalists: Flemish and Walloon Identities Compared », *op. cit.*, p. 104.

¹⁰² Jacquemain, M., et al., « Introduction. Les racines de l'identité collective ». In Jacquemin, M., *Affiliations, engagements, identités : l'exemple wallon*, p.3-4.

¹⁰³ Izquierdo, J. M., "Belgian identity politics: At a crossroad between nationalism and regionalism", *op. cit.*, p.20

¹⁰⁴ Counet, M., Matagne, G., Verjans, P., « Identité et priorités nationalistes flamandes : Évolution des discours de leaders autonomistes (VU/1992 – N-VA/2019) », 2020, *Fédéralisme*, p.7

Matagne and Pierre Verjans. It would seem that Flemish nationalism stems from a territorial factor. The VolksUnie (VU) advocates an open identity that protects the singularity of the inhabitants of the Flemish territory and not simply those who are Flemish by blood. Bert Anciaux contrasts this vision with that of the Walloons, who would rather apply the principle of the right of blood.¹⁰⁵ In this same analysis, the speeches of the N-VA (Nieuwe Vlaams Alliantie) are more eloquent when it comes to the values of Flemish identity. Bart de Wever, the party's president, mentions Enlightenment values such as "*freedom, equality, solidarity, separation of church and state, rule of law, popular sovereignty*"¹⁰⁶. He also mentioned the Christian values of society that are embedded in Flemish morality, pointing out that "*it is a Christian morality without God*"¹⁰⁷.

Luc Van den Brande, who was Minister-President of Flanders in 1992, emphasised the link between Flemish identity and two main areas: the economy and culture. The Flemish Region was presented as better built and better prepared for innovation, with the capacity to be an "economic motor". Culture, for its part, justified Flanders' position in the economic sector.¹⁰⁸

4.4. *The role of language in identity construction*

International relations and domestic politics are not based on objective characteristics but are shaped through discourse and practice. For poststructuralist thinkers, the practice of language is not simply the reporting and transmission of facts, but a practice that actively contributes to the conception of social reality.¹⁰⁹ Language does not simply define institutional practices, it also plays a crucial role in the construction of our identity.¹¹⁰

Identity is conceptualised as being « *the 'linguistic construction' of group membership* »¹¹¹ and is seen as resulting from an act of self-definition. Language is the main prism through which identities are created or modified, and the definition of 'self' is shaped by interactions. Social

¹⁰⁵ Counet, M., Matagne, G., Verjans, P., « Identité et priorités nationalistes flamandes : Évolution des discours de leaders autonomistes (VU/1992 – N-VA/2019) », 2020, *Fédéralisme* p.6

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p. 8

¹⁰⁷ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁰⁸ Crieckemans, D., *How subnational entities try to develop their own 'paradiplomacy'. The case of Flanders (1993-2005)*, *op. cit.*, p.8

¹⁰⁹ Hansen, L., "Discourse analysis, post-structuralism, and foreign policy", in Smith S., Hadfield A. & Dunne T., *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, Oxford University Press, 2017, p.96

¹¹⁰ Norton, B., Morgan, B., "Poststructuralism", *op. cit.*

¹¹¹ Versluys, E., "The notion of identity in discourse analysis: some 'discourse analytical' remarks", *op.cit.*, p.93

realities are intrinsically linked to language, and they do not exist in themselves: language is the means by which social realities are created and given meaning.¹¹²

Discourses are built on a number of fundamental principles that presuppose the relationship between language, identity and action. First of all, language has a performative role, meaning that to speak is to act. It is not simply a matter of describing reality, but of shaping it through language. Then, « *social actors are first and foremost speaking actors* »¹¹³, this means that language is essential to their actions and the way they position themselves. The behaviour of these actors is governed by the discourses and social representations that circulate in society.¹¹⁴ “[...] *language and communication often provide important and sometimes crucial criteria by which members both define their group and are defined by others.*”¹¹⁵

According to the post-structuralist approach, discourses are fundamentally political. They are therefore linked to the construction of power and power relations. By establishing political borders and generating antagonisms, discourses help to shape the different dynamics within society. Discourse is therefore a constituent of power and not simply a tool that serves power.¹¹⁶ This perspective challenges the constructivist view that institutions can determine the identity of agents, but instead postulates that individuals have an active role to play in defining their identity.¹¹⁷ Like individuals, states adopt certain discourses depending on their interlocutors. These discourses operate as guidelines that influence the state's actions towards other states on the international stage.¹¹⁸

In the context of foreign policy, it is considered that actions and decisions do not simply meet national interests. Rather, they are shaped by political discourses, historical narratives, ideologies and other factors that influence the way in which foreign policy is established. According to post-structuralists view, « *foreign policy is a discursive practice* ».¹¹⁹ Post-

¹¹² Versluys, E., “The notion of identity in discourse analysis: some 'discourse analytical' remarks”, *op.cit.*, p.93

¹¹³ Epstein, C., “Who speaks? Discourse, the subject and the study of identity in international politics”, *op.cit.*, p.343

¹¹⁴ *Loc. Cit.*

¹¹⁵ Kroskirty p.111

¹¹⁶ Panizza, F., Miorelli, R., “Taking Discourse Seriously: Discursive Institutionalism and Post-structuralist Discourse Theory”, *op.cit.*, p.315

¹¹⁷ Panizza, F., Miorelli, R., “Taking Discourse Seriously: Discursive Institutionalism and Post-structuralist Discourse Theory”, *op.cit.*, p.315

¹¹⁸ Epstein, C., “Who speaks? Discourse, the subject and the study of identity in international politics”, *op.cit.*, p.341

¹¹⁹ Hansen, L., “Discourse analysis, post-structuralism, and foreign policy”, *op.cit.*, p.96

structuralism then broadens the scope of foreign policy practice, arguing that it is not motivated solely by interests, but also by considerations of discourse and identity.¹²⁰

According to Epstein, discourse analysis is one of the most effective methods of apprehending identity.¹²¹ Collective identity is a relevant subject for discourse analysis because this identity does not exist in itself, it exists only through « *social and cultural performativity* », it is built through interaction with the external world.¹²² Since identitarian considerations are found on the international scene through foreign policy, it seems relevant to study this identity through political discourse aimed at other states. However, analysing discourses through a constructivist prism would mean seeking out the characteristics of identity constructed in political structures and the way in which these characteristics are reflected on the international stage. Eline Versluys believes that most discourse analyses are simply limited to demonstrating that identity is a construct, without attempting to look beyond this assertion.¹²³ Our analysis postulates instead that it is discourses that create this identity through the performative nature of language and will therefore investigate the characteristics of this identity on the international scene directly.

III. Methodological framework: the relevance of discursive analysis

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the characteristics of Flemish identity as presented on the international stage. To do this, it is necessary to use a methodology that enables us to study Flanders' international relations. In order to combine the construction of identity and the international dimension, the most relevant approach is that of an analytical theory: in our case we have chosen discourse analysis.

¹²⁰ Hansen, L., "Discourse analysis, post-structuralism, and foreign policy", *op.cit.*., p.101

¹²¹ Epstein, C., "Who speaks? Discourse, the subject and the study of identity in international politics", *op.cit.*., p. 328

¹²² Reckinger, R., Wille, C., "Researching identity constructions", *op. cit.*, p.17

¹²³ Versluys, E., "The notion of identity in discourse analysis: some 'discourse analytical' remarks", *op.cit.*, p.93

1. Definition of the research scope

The aim of this work is to address the issue of Flemish identity on the international stage. Within this framework, the chosen methodology is that of discourse analysis, since it allows us to analyse how identity is created through language, as well as the aspects of identity that are emphasised in different situations.

In the context of discourse analysis, several types of discourse can be analysed. The analysis can focus on spontaneous speeches as well as on speeches prepared in advance. The latter may be addressed to the general public, a political leader, a smaller committee such as a political party, etc. The initial question to ask is: *who speaks?* in order to take account of the different actors involved. In this sense, discourse analysis allows a degree of flexibility, since it does not presume which actors are relevant, nor does it impose a particular level of analysis.¹²⁴

In order to combine identity with the international dimension, we chose diplomatic speeches. Diplomats are the spokespersons of the entity that appoints them to represent and promote it on the international stage. It therefore seemed appropriate to analyse the discourses of the 'paradiplomats' sent by the Flemish sub-state entity as part of this work.

The relevance of analysing the speeches of diplomats lies not only in the desire to explore the international dimension of Flemish identity, but also in the performative aspect of language and its normative character.¹²⁵ The performative aspect implies that discourses have the capacity to produce an action in the real world. They construct a reality. The normative nature of language means that the same term can be given different definitions depending on the context in which it is uttered and the intention behind the utterance. As explained in the previous section, ideas, interests and identities materialise when they enter the public arena, particularly through discourse. In order to observe the characteristics of Flemish identity outside the national 'political bubble', it is necessary to observe this identity in interaction with the outside world, in our case the international stage.

¹²⁴ Epstein, C., "Who speaks? Discourse, the subject and the study of identity in international politics", *op.cit.*, p.342

¹²⁵ Morin, J-F., *La politique étrangère : Théories, méthodes et références*, 2013, Paris, Armand Colin, p.131 ; Debras, F., *Le chant des sirènes : quand l'extrême droite parle de démocratie*, 2023, Editions Peter Lang, pp. 23-26

*“Discourses may be ambiguous, but they are nevertheless structuring. Their rules determine what can be thought and stated. By attributing a certain meaning to an object and situating that meaning within a larger context, a discourse sets parameters for the possibilities of thinking and acting in relation to that particular object.[...] Discourses are productive. They do more than simply impose constraints on thought and perception; they directly construct reality by generating subjects, objects and the relationships that link them”.*¹²⁶

The speeches analysed are those of Flemish diplomats from the various delegations of the department of the *Kanselarij & Buitenlandse zaken* (Chancellery and Foreign Affairs). Although mentions of Flanders in the speeches of diplomats representing Belgium could also have been relevant, we considered it more appropriate to focus on paradiplomacy in the sense that it enables 'nation building and recognition'¹²⁷ in the sense of “*a large body of people, associated with a particular territory, that is sufficiently conscious of its unity to seek or to possess a government peculiarly its own*”.¹²⁸

In order to have a broad analysis, the speeches analysed will not be limited to a single Flemish delegation to a country or institution. A maximum number of different diplomatic speeches will be analysed in order to cross-reference the variables and analyse the changes in the speeches depending on the speakers and the locations.

Flanders currently maintains international relations with 11 countries and is a member of 3 multilateral forums. The 13 Flemish delegations are as follows:¹²⁹

Localisation	States/Institutions
The Hague	Netherlands
Copenhagen	The Nordic countries
Berlin	Germany
Paris	France

¹²⁶ Morin, J-F., *op. cit.*, p.133 : “*Si les discours sont ambigus, ils sont néanmoins structurants. Leurs règles déterminent ce qui peut être pensé et énoncé. En attribuant à un objet une certaine signification et en situant cette signification dans un ensemble plus vaste, un discours définit des paramètres à propos des possibilités de penser et d’actions en relation à cet objet.* ». « [...] les discours sont productifs. Ils ne font pas qu’imposer des ornières à la pensée et aux perceptions, mais ils construisent directement la réalité en générant des sujets, des objets et des relations les liant.”

¹²⁷ Paquin, S., « Paradiplomatie identitaire et diplomatie en Belgique fédérale: le cas de la Flandre », *op.cit.*, p.622, original text : « construire et faire reconnaître la nation »

¹²⁸ Collins online dictionary, Nation, Collins website

¹²⁹ Vlaamse overheid website

Paris	UNESCO, OECD and European Council
London	The United Kingdom and Ireland
Rome	Italy
Madrid	Spain
Warsaw	Poland and the Baltic state
Vienna	Austria, Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Czech Republic
New-York	United States
Pretoria	South Africa
Geneva	The United Nations

2. Data collection method

Collecting data for this analysis has been a rather complicated task. As diplomacy is a "discreet" activity and negotiations a "behind the doors" practice, the speeches were not freely available on the internet.

However, each of the delegations identified in the previous section has its own email address and a dedicated website. We managed to obtain diplomatic speeches by contacting the representatives of each delegation by email. Thanks to the collaboration of the Flemish representatives, we have gathered 21 speeches from 7 different delegations and 3 speeches from the Flemish political instances. Although obtaining speeches from each of the delegations would have been preferable, this seems to represent a sufficient sample to carry out a valuable analysis. However, since the representatives were not able to provide us with discourses of the previous delegation, our analysis will focus on the current projection of the Flemish identity on the international stage, and we will not be able to conduct a comparative temporal analysis.

3. Data analysis method

As regards the analysis itself, several stages are necessary in order to carry out a qualitative detailed analysis:

3.1. Lexicometric analysis

A lexicometric analysis is a statistical analysis of the vocabulary used in a text. It is an approach that was developed in the 1970s and which enables us to analyse the frequency of use of a word in a text, as well as its utilisation. With this approach, discourse can be examined in greater depth and the relationships between words can be analysed.¹³⁰

Firstly, our analysis will examine the twenty words with the highest occurrence in the discourses of delegations in Europe, outside Europe and Flemish political bodies. We will observe what these recurring terms relate to and whether they are relevant to our analysis. Then, the words selected for the qualitative analysis will be subjected to a second quantitative analysis by comparing the number of occurrences with the average number of occurrences per speech. This analysis will show whether some of the terms studied are used to a greater or lesser extent by one delegation or another, and to what these delegations relate them.

To this end, we will be using Hyperbase a lexicometric analysis software which can be used to automate some of the tasks, in particular word counting. To establish the list of the most occurring words, we decided to exclude pronouns and determiners, except “we” and “us” which can be useful to our research once replaced in their context of appearance. Therefore, we applied the following search in Hyperbase : NOUN (= noun), ADJ (= adjectives), PROPON (= proper noun), We, we, Us, us.

3.2. Content analysis

*“A content analysis [...] is a technique for analysing textual (or visual) material in combination with any type of research strategy. It can be defined as a ‘coding or classification technique aimed at discovering the meaning of a message in a rigorous and objective manner’.”*¹³¹.

To deepen the analysis, we will proceed to a more precise analysis of the different contents we can extract from the discourses included in this work. This analysis will be built on the

¹³⁰ Deroubaix, J-C, Gobin, C. « Dépassement de la Belgique unitaire en 45 ans de déclarations gouvernementales », in Perrez, J., Reuchamps, M. (dir.), *Les relations communautaires en Belgique : approches politiques et linguistiques*, Louvain-la-Neuve, Academia – L’Harmattan, 2012.

¹³¹ Techniques en science po p.150 original : « *L’analyse de contenu [...] désigne une technique permettant d’analyser du matériel textuel (ou visuel) en combinaison avec tout type de stratégie de recherche. Elle peut être définie comme une ‘technique de codage ou de classification visant à découvrir de manière rigoureuse et objective la signification d’un message’.* »

keywords previously identified in the quantitative analysis as being relevant. In some cases, we may add certain keywords that were not part of the quantitative analysis but which we felt relevant to our work. These keywords will be selected because, in our opinion, they belong to the lexical field of identity or Flanders, and their analysis would therefore enable us to come closer to a conception of Flemish identity. It is important to note that these terms were chosen based on our personal judgement; someone with a different theoretical conception of identity from the one we have chosen might have selected different terms. We will then carry out a thematic analysis to show how the keywords are used in certain contexts and how this relates to our topic. The content analysis will therefore enable us to discover the different representations and underlying values that lie behind the meaning of the words extracted.

3.3. *Relevance of the two approaches*

These two analyses seem to complement each other in the context of the analysis of discourses. The lexicometric analysis is valuable because it provides a direct, objective and measurable analysis of the number of words and the use of vocabulary.¹³² In addition, it allows easy comparison between the different delegations in terms of word occurrence. However, this analysis alone does not shed any light on the message conveyed by the discourse¹³³ and has no meaningful significance in terms of the image of Flemish identity. A qualitative analysis is therefore essential to understand how Flemish identity is articulated and projected onto the international stage through the discourses, since it enables an analysis of the content of the speeches. After these two steps, a comparative analysis will finally be conducted to compare the word occurrences and the use made of the different words and themes by the delegations.

4. Method criticisms and limitations

This research encountered a methodological difficulty during the data collection phase. Indeed, since the various diplomatic speeches are not freely available on the internet and the discourses were obtained via direct contact with the delegations, they only reflect a tiny proportion of the speeches made by the delegation currently in place or their predecessors. It was therefore not possible to establish a chronology in order to study whether there has been an evolution in the Flemish identity as presented internationally. In addition, the analysis may be somewhat biased

¹³² Debras, F., *Le chant des sirènes : quand l'extrême droite parle de démocratie*, op.cit., p.79

¹³³ Debras, F., *Le chant des sirènes : quand l'extrême droite parle de démocratie*, op.cit., p.81

since the speeches were chosen by the delegations themselves, so they represent what each delegation agreed to share. However, it still seemed valuable to carry out the analysis with the material as received. The aim here is not to 'find a universal truth' but to initiate a reflection on Flemish identity and its characteristics on the international stage, since no study of this kind is currently available. This is therefore an initial study which could subsequently be completed by other studies applying a different methodology.

Given the restricted access to the data for the wider public and in order to preserve the 'secrecy' of the diplomatic profession, the speeches will not be published or disclosed as such in this research, but some passages will be quoted if they are necessary for the analysis. The name of the representatives will not be mentioned, and to respect their anonymity, the speeches will not be directly linked to their original delegation. We have decided to create the following categories: delegations in Europe (ED), delegations outside of Europe (DOE), Flemish political instances (FPI), in order to allow an anonymous analysis but also the possibility of comparing the image conveyed in the discourses according to their audience.

IV. Discourse analysis: discourses as a vector of identity?

1. Presentation of the themes

Although guided by the keywords, our analysis is structured in the form of different themes covered in the various discourse. Keywords will therefore be analysed based on the identified themes. This method will allow an optimal and detailed analysis by avoiding theme repetitions which would have been unavoidable with a word-structured analysis.

Among the discourses of the delegations and political bodies, we have identified the following five main themes that will structure the analysis: (1) development and innovation, (2) international cooperation, (3) economy and trade, (4) education and (5) culture and heritage.

These themes are defined as follows:

- (1) Development and innovation: this category includes all references to research, innovation and development in the discourses.

- (2) International cooperation: this theme covers Flanders' partnerships abroad and the mention of international projects. This category also includes the way in which Flanders presents itself to its partners.
- (3) Economy and trade: this category encompasses Flanders' trade and economic relations, the region's economic situation and references to entrepreneurship.
- (4) Education: this category touches on the various aspects of education and educational systems. It focuses on learning, school programmes and transmission through education.
- (5) Culture and heritage: this thematic area refers to culture, history and heritage. It involves preserving, promoting and passing on heritage and traditions, as well as highlighting emblematic figures.

2. Discourse of delegations in Europe

2.1. Quantitative analysis

In the speeches given by the delegations in Europe, the words with the highest occurrence are the following:

		Total
1	We	176
2	Flanders	108
3	Us	48
4	Flemish	36
5	Projects	25
6	Culture/cultural	23
7	Government	22
8	Dutch	32
9	European	27
10	Language	21
11	Economy	20
12	Cooperation	17
13	Work	17
14	World	16
15	Belgium	15
16	Europe	12
17	Culture/cultural	23
18	Artists	11
19	Colleagues	11
20	People	11

Not surprisingly, the words *Flemish* and *Flanders* refer respectively to the Flemish population and the Flemish region. The word *artist* is also used to refer exclusively to Flemish people.

In twenty-four of its twenty-five occurrences, *project* refers to projects set up collaboratively between Flanders and the partner countries. Only in one case does it refer to a project that Flanders wants to export.

The words *culture* and *cultural* are divided into four categories: they refer either to Flemish culture, or to cultural links with partners, or to organisations and agencies involved in preserving and exporting culture, or to foreign cultures, namely Ukrainian and Korean culture.

Among the twenty-two occurrences of the word *government*, it refers thirteen times to the Flemish government. On two of the occasions when it does not refer to the Flemish government, it refers to the Belgian federal government, and on the other seven occasions it refers to the government of the partner country.

The word *Dutch* is pronounced thirty-two times and systematically refers to the Dutch language. The word *language*, on the other hand, refers once to a foreign language: Korean.

Economy is associated fourteen times with a responsible and environmentally-friendly economy.

The word *cooperation* refers to Flanders' cooperation with both governments and international organisations. The word *work* is also used on certain occasions to refer to cooperation, since it can denote the desire to work together in certain areas.

Most of the time, the word *people* refers to people in general. It rarely refers to Flemish people and twice refers to the Ukrainian people.

The terms *world* and *colleagues* are less interesting, since the word *world* refers to the world. The word *colleagues* is used most of the time to refer to the collaborators of Flemish diplomats and in some cases to partner countries.

The word *Belgium* has little use other than to designate Flanders' parent state. The word Europe, for its part, is mentioned six times out of the twelve times to describe Flanders as a successful player in Europe.

2.2. Qualitative analysis

For the purpose of this qualitative analysis, the words to be studied are: (1) Flanders, (2) Flemish, (3) government, (4) cooperation, (5) identity, (6) language/Dutch, (7) culture/cultural, (8) Belgium.

i. Development and innovation

Keywords used in this field: (1)Flanders, (2)Flemish

“Flanders is currently the European leader with regard to R&D spending relative to GDP, with more than 3,6% channeled to research and development - but we want to put the bar even higher. Strengthening Flanders’ innovation ecosystem by connecting to [partner] countries, is also central to the mission of my delegation in [the EU partner country] and in the mission of the Flanders Investment & Trade Agency.”¹³⁴

This extract demonstrates Flanders' commitment to its ambitions in terms of research, development and innovation and its determination to strengthen its cooperation in this field. We can see that although it already enjoys an advantageous position, the Region does not want to rest on its laurels and aims to go even further, both for its internal development and to serve as a model for other Regions by showing the way towards greater innovativeness.

Flanders is also highlighting the fact that during its Presidency of the EU Council it will be guided by three key concepts, one of which is innovation. Flanders explains this focus by the fact that the Presidency coincides with the Flanders' technology and innovation initiative, a project aimed at creating a new stimulus for research and innovation. They also emphasise that Flanders wants to engage with other partners in terms of innovation to strengthen its position and competitiveness, even though it is already proud to claim to be one of the biggest investors in research and development in the EU.

¹³⁴ Discourse ED5

ii. *International cooperation and partnerships*

Keywords used in this field: (1) Flanders, (3) government, (4) cooperation, (7) culture and cultural (8) Belgium

Flanders presents itself as a partner of choice on the international stage. It is seeking to continue and strengthen existing partnerships and to develop new ones. In these uncertain times, with the current conflicts, it emphasises the importance of having international partners and the values of "dialogue, cooperation and openness" that guide international action. They are counting on long-term collaborations with different governments in order to set up projects that will have an impact on the future.

It should be noted that in these discourses, many references are made to the current Flemish government and to the important place that Flanders holds as an autonomous Region in Belgium. They highlight Flemish ambitions for the Region, which aims to be open so that everyone can have opportunities and invite all those who wish to do so to "write this story with her". They stressed Flanders' current strengths, such as low unemployment, cultural improvements, social progress and high productivity. The speeches also underline the Flemish government's determination to keep the Region open to the world by implementing an ambitious international policy.

The discourse also discusses Belgium's presidency of the Council of the EU, and more specifically the role of Flanders in this presidency:

*"The European Union, that Belgium is currently presiding, was born just after World War II out of a desire for peace and security. It is now adapting to a new reality, not just in the area of security and defense, but also in reducing its strategic dependencies. In the federal country of Belgium, international cooperation and an EU Presidency are a team effort. My Government, the Government of Flanders, proactively partakes in the EU Presidency and Ministers of my government will be chairing several council configurations. Through our Presidency, we want to prepare the Union for the future, strengthen it and make it more resilient."*¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Discourse ED10

This extract highlights Flanders' contribution to the Belgian Presidency of the EU. The Region is determined to play a central role in this task, which currently belongs to Belgium, and wishes to implement new projects during this presidency to enable the EU to make considerable progress on certain subjects. These include Flanders' desire to make the transition to an economy that takes into account environmental constraints, notably by mentioning the fact that during its presidency of the EU in 2010, the Region has already succeeded in putting environmental issues on the agenda. This demonstrates Flanders' leadership within Belgium in a number of areas and its desire to make this Flemish lead shine on the international stage, as well as the importance of the Flemish Region within the EU.

iii. *Economy and trade*

Keywords used in this field: (1) Flanders, (2) Flemish, (3) government, (4) cooperation, (6) language/Dutch, (8) Belgium.

The economic theme highlights the openness of the Flemish economy and the fact that many Flemish entrepreneurs are active abroad, helping to develop or improve certain cities and countries. They also emphasised the importance of the historical ties that unite them with their partners, particularly the trade links that have their roots, in some cases, over a century ago.

In the discourse of the Flemish delegations in Europe, we can detect a new dimension: the environmental dimension. This dimension is intrinsically linked to the economy:

*“The hub and inspiration for the circular economy with us is Flanders Circular, whose primary goal is to achieve the transition to a circular economy in Flanders by 2050. The current Flemish government's ambition is to transform Flanders into a frontrunner in circularity, with the concrete goal of reducing the material footprint of our consumption by 30% by 2030. [...] Moreover, it is a deliberate choice that the responsibility for the transition to a circular economy within my government rests on the shoulders of two ministers, namely both the Minister of the Environment and the Minister of Economy and Innovation. This emphasises that this transition is not only an ecological necessity, but also opens doors to a resilient (knowledge) economy. After all, a circular economy is almost inherently a collaborative economy.”*¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Discourse ED2. Original : “Het knooppunt en de inspirator voor de circulaire economie bij ons is Vlaanderen Circulair, met als primair doel om de overgang naar een circulaire economie in Vlaanderen te bewerkstelligen tegen 2050. De huidige Vlaamse Regering heeft de ambitie om Vlaanderen te transformeren tot een koploper op circulair gebied, met als concrete doelstelling het verminderen van de materiaalvoetafdruk van onze consumptie

This extract shows that Flanders is not lagging behind when it comes to reconciling its economy with environmental requirements. Flanders is positioning itself as an enterprising Region and is clearly expressing its ambitions to be a leader in the field of the circular economy. The Region also demonstrates its willingness to work in collaboration with other governments, as well as other actors within the Member States, in order to adopt the integrated approach needed to achieve the objectives set. It is also worth noting that the Flemish Region is encouraging cooperation within the region, as they mention interministerial collaboration, which means that the transition is being coordinated by the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of the Economy. This approach demonstrates a willingness to put in place the resources needed to define a coherent policy that concerns both ministries. The reference to the need for a transition to ecology coupled with a 'resilient economy' sheds light on Flanders' vision of protecting its economy by taking the lead to ensure continuous growth and avoid being vulnerable to future changes.

iv. Education

Keywords used in this field: (1) Flanders, (6) language/Dutch, (7) culture/cultural.

The educational aspect is not very present in the various discourses of the Flemish delegations in Europe. However, we have been able to extract this passage which demonstrates the Flemish priorities in this area:

“It is also no coincidence that the first chapter of the coalition agreement is about education, which will undoubtedly become one of the priorities in the coming years. Education in Flanders is doing well, but we must not rest on our laurels and there are 5 major challenges that the government wants to tackle: the quality of education, the teacher status but also the teacher shortage, the proper guidance of children, the capacity shortage and the duration of studies in higher education. Quality education is the key here, including the mastery of a rich Dutch language. This knowledge of Dutch will also become an

met 30% tegen 2030. [...] De kracht van onze aanpak schuilt in het feit dat we met 'Vlaanderen Circulair' een integraal partnerschap hebben opgebouwd, waarin alle hoeken van de samenleving vertegenwoordigd zijn: overheden, bedrijven, het maatschappelijk middenveld, de academische wereld en financiële instellingen werken zij aan zij aan deze complexe transitie. Het is trouwens een weloverwogen keuze dat de verantwoordelijkheid voor de overgang naar een circulaire economie binnen mijn regering rust op de schouders van twee ministers, namelijk zowel de minister van Omgeving als de minister van Economie en Innovatie. Hiermee benadrukken we dat deze transitie niet enkel een ecologische noodzaak is, maar tevens deuren opent naar een veerkrachtige (kennis)economie.”

absolute priority in primary education, as well as in secondary, higher and adult education. In doing so, due attention will also be paid to supporting Dutch as a science language.”¹³⁷

This passage underlines the importance attached to education by the Flemish Government. Indeed, it mentions the fact that in the government agreement signed by the Flemish ministers, education is one of the central points to which they wish to attach particular importance. The discourse recognises that education in the Region is doing well but encourages greater efforts to maintain and improve it. They also mention the importance of the Dutch language in education and a desire to promote the language in academic and scientific contexts, which underlines an attachment to Flemish linguistic roots.

The promotion of the Dutch language is not restricted to Dutch-speaking territories. The discourses emphasise the implementation of Dutch language programmes abroad as a passport that opens the doors to cultural exchanges between Flanders and the partner countries whose universities have set up these programmes.

We can deduce from the above that Flanders is trying to develop education for its population and advocates continuous improvement, both of this area and of the individuals through their education. This investment by the government is a long-term investment, since the students who are trained with 'Flemish values' today are the professionals who will make the Region even more influential tomorrow, whether by conveying these values through cultural exchanges or by contributing to the various sectors that are the pride of Flanders.

¹³⁷ Discourse ED6 : “*Het is ook geen toeval dat het eerste hoofdstuk van het regeerakkoord over onderwijs gaat, dat zonder meer een van de prioriteiten zal worden in de volgende jaren. Het gaat goed met het onderwijs in Vlaanderen, maar we mogen niet op onze lauweren rusten en er zijn 5 grote uitdagingen die de regering wil aanpakken: de onderwijskwaliteit, het lerarenstatuut maar ook het lerarentekort, de juiste begeleiding van de kinderen, het capaciteitstekort en de studieduur in het hoger onderwijs. Kwaliteitsvol onderwijs is daarbij de sleutel, inclusief de beheersing van een rijke Nederlandse taal. Die kennis van het Nederlands wordt ook in het basisonderwijs een absolute prioriteit, net als in het secundaire onderwijs en het hoger en volwassenenonderwijs. Daarbij wil men ook de nodige aandacht schenken aan de ondersteuning van het Nederlands als wetenschapstaal.*”

v. *Culture, history and heritage*

Keywords used in this field: (1) Flanders, (2) Flemish, (5) identity, (6) language/Dutch, (7) culture/cultural.

On the historical aspect, the Battle of the Golden Spurs is mentioned. This battle, which took place in the 14th century, gave its date to the Flemish National Day. During this battle, the Flemish troops dominated the French soldiers and, after their victory, collected the golden spurs left behind by the French cavalry, hence the name Battle of the Golden Spurs.¹³⁸ However, although this battle is the pride of the Flemish region, since it is considered to be « *a significant moment in Flemish identity building* »¹³⁹, they also refer to other, less bloody moments in history, such as the many partnerships they have been able to establish over the centuries in various fields, as well as their shared history as allies and defenders of common values, i.e. democratic values. They endeavour to recall that Flemish cultures and those of their partners are linked.

They also emphasise the artistic dimension. For years, Flanders was home to great painters who earned the international title of Flemish 'masters'. Today, Flanders continues to promote art in its region, both classical art and new forms of art such as digital art. This artistic branch has enabled and continues to enable numerous international exchanges. They call for “[...] *recall the many exchanges and special links that artists in Flanders have always maintained with their colleagues - and very often friends – [...]. It's a tradition that we're obviously keen to perpetuate, in the arts as in so many other fields.*”¹⁴⁰.

We can analyse here the use of a historic building in a partner country to hold one of the receptions for the Flemish National Day:

“Our decision to hold this evening within the historic walls of the Collège des Bernardins is not an insignificant one. The question of the use and reuse of many of our heritage sites, particularly churches, abbeys and other religious buildings, is a topical one in [partner country]. Some of you may

¹³⁸ Hérodote, 11 juillet 1302 - La « bataille des éperons d’or », 27 novembre 2018, Herodote.net website

¹³⁹ Discourse ED11

¹⁴⁰ Discourse ED7 : « [...] *rappeler les nombreux échanges et les liens privilégiés qu’ont toujours entretenus les artistes en Flandre avec leurs collègues - et très souvent aussi amis – [...]. Une tradition que nous tenons évidemment à perpétuer, dans les domaines artistiques comme dans tant d’autres.* »

know that this magnificent building has had an eventful history, and that thirty years ago this medieval nave was still being used as a fire station, with the lorries parked where we are today. The highly successful renovation and conversion have made this site an example that serves as inspiration for other projects, particularly in Flanders. Proof of this are the contacts established over several years between the College and various Flemish institutions [...]”.¹⁴¹

Symbolism is very important here, because it's not so much the location that's interesting but rather the reasons why the building was chosen. This historic building echoes Flemish concerns such as the preservation and enhancement of the historical heritage associated with a Region or country. They congratulate the renovation of this building as well as the exchanges between the Region and partner countries in terms of heritage preservation. The use of this building, especially for the celebration of Flemish National Day, demonstrates Flanders' attachment to history and cultural heritage, but also to international collaboration in this and many other areas. The preservation and promotion of the Dutch language is also a subject discussed on many occasions. Several projects are being set up in collaboration with the Netherlands. The aim is to strengthen the image of Dutch-speaking Regions abroad, but also because the Dutch language is considered essential for facilitating trade relations with partners and for academic exchanges. It is a tool for understanding each other and fostering communication. Language therefore takes on different dimensions: strengthening the image abroad, preserving the language, facilitating commercial relations and increasing academic exchanges.

Finally, it is worth mentioning in the context of this analysis that Flanders is not only defending its history and culture, but is trying to defend all cultures, as illustrated by the mention of a festival highlighting Ukrainian culture. Flanders thus sees itself as a defender of regional and cultural identities and would like to promote a position of openness towards history and culture with a view to preserving them. The cultural dimension reflects a cooperative and supportive approach to promoting and preserving both tangible and intangible heritage.

¹⁴¹ Flandersdag : « Si nous avons décidé d'organiser cette soirée au sein de ces murs historiques du Collège des Bernardins, ce n'est pas un choix anodin. La question de l'affectation, de la réaffectation de nombre de nos sites patrimoniaux, et notamment les églises, abbayes et autres bâtiments religieux, est d'actualité chez nous comme en [pays partenaire]. Certains d'entre vous savent peut-être que ce magnifique bâtiment a connu une histoire bien mouvementée et qu'il y a trente ans cette nef médiévale servait encore de caserne de pompiers et que les camions étaient garés là où nous nous trouvons aujourd'hui. La rénovation et la reconversion très réussies font de ce site un exemple qui sert d'inspiration pour d'autres projets, notamment en Flandre. Preuve en sont les contacts établis depuis plusieurs années entre le Collège et différentes institutions flamandes [...]. »

3. Discourse of delegations outside of Europe

3.1. Quantitative analysis

In the speeches given by the delegations outside of Europe, the words with the highest occurrence are the following:

		Total
1	We	138
2	Flanders	88
3	Africa	53
4	Government	43
5	Development	36
6	Projects	33
7	Heritage	28
8	Cooperation	31
9	Cultural	26
10	Flemish	23
11	African	17
12	Business	16
13	Partnership	16
14	Education	15
15	Belgium	14
16	Dutch	14
17	Us	14
18	Support	13
19	Countries	12
20	Culture	12

The words *Flanders* and *Flemish* refer to the Flemish region and its inhabitants. Similarly, the words *Africa* and *African* refer to the African continent and its inhabitants.

The word *government*, used forty-three times, refers both to the Flemish government and to the government of the partner country or governments in general when referring to the need to bring the government closer to the people.

Project refers to projects set up by Flanders and the partner country or an international organisation. *Cooperation* and *partnership* also refer to the various mechanisms and projects implemented by Flanders and its partners, but also to the need and desire to maintain and strengthen these.

Among its fourteen occurrences, *Dutch* refers to the Dutch language, the Flemish people and the Dutch-speaking Community. The word *heritage* designates the Flemish heritage as well as the cultural heritage of the partner country. The word *culture* for its part is used to describe the cultural identity of Flanders and its partners, as well as the cultural links that Flanders has forged over the years.

The word *people* here is often used in conjunction with the word *young*, emphasising the importance of youth. Otherwise, it highlights initiatives that benefit the population. In the idea of investment in the population, the word *business* occurs sixteen times, highlighting the development of businesses among the population.

We can note that the term *identity* is used four times and only in two of the nine speeches given by Flemish delegates outside the EU. Once during a discourse given on the occasion of Flemish National Day on 11 July. We can notice an increase in the frequency of use during a discourse given on the occasion of the launch of a project in collaboration with an international organization where the word was used three times.

3.2. Qualitative analysis

For the purpose of this qualitative analysis, the words to be studied are: (1) Flanders, (2) Flemish, (3) government, (4) heritage, (5) identity, (6) culture/cultural, (7) Belgium, (8) Dutch.

i. Development and innovation

Key words used in this field: (1) Flanders, (3) government.

In the discourse of Flemish delegations outside Europe, the Flemish Region appears to be at the very forefront of technology and innovation, investing heavily in research and development. “*The Region is described as one of the most innovative in Europe. Flanders’ prosperity is intricately linked to the power and potential of our minds. For two consecutive years, the European Commission has recognised Flanders as an ‘Innovation Leader’ within the European Union. Investing 3,65% of its GDP in R&D, Flanders leads other EU Regions in R&D spending.*”¹⁴²

¹⁴² Discourse DOE3

Presently, Flanders ranks third in Europe for innovative SMEs collaborating with others, second for R&D spending in business, and first in terms of the share of companies engaged in innovation activities. Collectively, these factors position our economy as the third most innovative in the world. It is important to note that the Government of Flanders allocates around 160 million euros each year to cover the various aspects of its foreign policy.

The focal point of international cooperation for Flanders is said to be investment in sustainable development. The Region claims to be extremely prosperous and therefore has the capacity to provide development aid to ensure the inclusion of all interested parties. This development aid is described as being deployed in several countries (4), all outside the European continent. The aim of this project is twofold: to stimulate socio-economic growth and to reduce poverty.

Flanders refers to fundamental values such as “*good governance, respect for human rights, and equal opportunities for women and men*”¹⁴³ as being essential conditions for sustainable development, and follows on from the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development. The term “*no-one is left behind*”¹⁴⁴ refers here to the inclusion of the various players in the development process without discrimination, but also to the fact of putting the individual first and ensuring that he or she is involved and decides for him or herself in the process. This highlights the values of equality, but also of empowerment and autonomy.

ii. International cooperation

Keywords used in this field: (1) Flanders, (2) Flemish, (3) government, (6) culture/cultural, (7) Belgium.

The discourse highlights Flanders as being intrinsically international, due to the different nationalities within its territory, but also the fact that Belgium hosts international organisations and the fact that Flanders has long been a crucial hub for international politics.

Flanders presents itself as a preferred partner on the international stage and reaffirms its desire to strengthen relations with its current partners. Flanders is committed to future-oriented partnerships with third countries. The partnerships are therefore conceived as being for the long

¹⁴³ Discourse DOE8

¹⁴⁴ Discourse DOE8

term and will benefit both partners : “[...] Flanders reaffirms its dedication to being a flexible, innovative, and dependable partner [...]”¹⁴⁵.

It also stresses its objective of developing partnerships and dialogue in various areas such as « *social entrepreneurship, renewable energy, human rights, arts and culture, and economic cooperation* »¹⁴⁶ and with different layers of society. The Region is affirming its desire to work not only with governments, but also with civil society, local businesses, etc.

One of the discourses quotes a poem written by a Flemish poet which is used as a symbol of the dialogue between Flanders and its partners: “*It represents a conversation between equals, a story they tell together that is necessarily unfinished and constantly unfolding. It is precisely in such a story that fruitful collaborations emerge*”¹⁴⁷. This demonstrates a willingness to continue working with partners who see themselves as equals and who are willing to share part of their history together in order to develop the partnership and lead to successful outcomes.

The mention of the word Belgium in itself in the context of these discourse does not shed any light on the projection of Flemish identity internationally. However, when put back into the context in which it was pronounced, it is interesting to note that when diplomats address a wider audience than just their usual partners, they are tempted to refer to Belgium as Flanders' parent state and to resituate Flanders in this context in order to justify their competence in terms of international policy.

iii. *Economy and trade*

Keywords used in this field: (1) Flanders, (2) Flemish, (3) government, (6) culture/cultural, (7) Belgium.

Flanders is depicted as having a thriving economy and companies that export massively abroad compared with other European-based businesses. In Belgium, most new companies are headquartered in Flanders rather than in another Region and business in the Region is

¹⁴⁵ Discourse DOE1

¹⁴⁶ Discourse DOE4

¹⁴⁷ Discourse DOE7; Traduction : “*Het vertegenwoordigt een gesprek tussen gelijken, een verhaal dat ze gezamenlijk vertellen en dat noodzakelijkerwijs onvoltooid is en zich voortdurend ontvouwt. Het is precies in zo'n verhaal dat vruchtbare samenwerkingen ontstaan.*”

responsible for « 72% of the country's GDP »¹⁴⁸. The Region promotes an open economy and is therefore dependent on economic exchanges with foreign countries. « *It is a narrative where Flanders truly stands out as the economic powerhouse of Belgium – a story in which the significance of foreign trade for the prosperity of our Region cannot be overstated* »¹⁴⁹.

Abroad, Flanders presents itself as a partner not only for governments but also for other stakeholders, particularly the private sector, in projects focused on economic development. In some countries, it « *has already provided support to more than 100 cooperatives and companies to help them access markets, diversify their products, and enhance their business capabilities.* »¹⁵⁰. The objectives of Flanders are multiple and include the promotion of trade and investment. Through its various projects implemented, it has succeeded in boosting job creation. It is also trying to open the doors of international trade to Flemish companies and, conversely, to enable foreign companies to trade with Flanders.

“*I’ll be honest. I’m not an entrepreneur and probably never will be. I don’t have the skills nor the guts to be one. But watching these young girls and boys set up shop on the beach and running a business taught me interesting lessons about youth entrepreneurship and the impact it can have on a local community. What I saw were resourceful young entrepreneurs fostering local innovation, skills development and ultimately, I believe, resilience. [...] Flanders is leading the way with student entrepreneurship programs in higher education, and with dedicated support schemes for start-ups. In this effort, Flemish universities are also cooperating with their [...] partners, benefitting both Flanders and [partner country]. For example, Ghent University has collaborated with University [in partner country] to tackle graduate unemployment by setting up student entrepreneurship programs and business development tools.*”¹⁵¹ The spirit of entrepreneurship is therefore particularly highlighted in the discourse. The Region itself is home to many new entrepreneurs who are progressively less afraid of failure and more willing to embrace opportunities. The Region is also developing policies to support entrepreneurial culture in partner countries and encouraging young people in this field.

¹⁴⁸ Discourse DOE3

¹⁴⁹ Discourse DOE3

¹⁵⁰ Discourse DOE1

¹⁵¹ Discourse DOE6

iv. Education

Keywords in this field: (1) Flanders, (4) heritage, (6) culture/cultural, (8) Dutch.

Education here refers to two different dimensions: the first dimension is the exchange of students and staff between Flemish universities and those of their partners, as well as joint research programmes, in order to represent and promote diversity. The second dimension refers to the reform of education in the partner countries to promote local culture and heritage in the classroom from the primary school level.

This second dimension is discussed extensively in one of the discourses : *“Respect and understanding of intangible cultural heritage must begin with the younger generations. It is vital that our children and youth understand the tenuous nature of intangible heritage and that they grasp how imperative it is that we safeguard these treasures. By bringing heritage into the classroom we not only foster respect and enthusiasm, but the learning itself is enhanced. This is because learners can make a connection between the abstract contexts of “education/learning” and the concrete aspects of their everyday lives. This makes learning more enjoyable, more relevant, more inclusive, and ultimately, more effective.”*¹⁵² It highlights the importance of knowing and understanding one's heritage, and education can play an important role in raising awareness of one's own history and teaching respect and curiosity about other people's cultures. *« Education becomes increasingly relevant because to understand one's intangible cultural heritage is to take pride in one's cultural, communal and collective identity.”*¹⁵³ There is also a brief reference to the government's intention to promote Flemish culture and, more specifically the Dutch language, by introducing Dutch language and culture programmes at the partner universities.

v. Culture and heritage

Keywords in this field: (1) Flanders, (2) Flemish, (3) government, (4) heritage, (5) identity, (6) culture/cultural, (8) Dutch.

One of the main objectives defended by Flanders in its cultural policy is the preservation of heritage and the promotion of cultural diversity. It therefore shares common objectives with UNESCO, of which it is a member, and is proud to point out that UNESCO has included

¹⁵² Discourse DOE5

¹⁵³ Discourse DOE5

Flemish games on the list of heritage to be preserved. The goal of Flemish policy is to safeguard heritage by raising awareness of its existence and educating people about history and culture, because « *[i]ntangible cultural heritage is such a rich repository of history, of identity and of humanity as a whole.* »¹⁵⁴

“*The cultural ties between Flanders and [partner country] have always been strong, and during the previously mentioned Joint Committee, it was agreed that arts, culture and language will continue to be an important focus of our partnership. We have had the privilege of working on diverse cultural projects, exchanges and capacity building in various disciplines, such as literature, music, street art, contemporary dance and children and youth theatre. We are therefore happy that tonight we can offer you an excellent example of a Flemish-South African cultural partnership. However, this cooperation is built on love, rather than on bilateral government relations.*”¹⁵⁵ The discourses highlight the cultural links between Flanders and its partner countries. Language and culture remain important points of attention in Flanders' foreign policy. The Region is developing a number of projects, including artistic exchanges. Flanders' support for the cultural sector is not new, as it has been implementing support policies for over 20 years now. Through various mechanisms, the Region promotes the arts and particularly projects with 'dual nationality', Flemish and that of the partner country. They enhance the artistic practices of both countries and, by doing so, seek to promote the culture and heritage of both sides.

In terms of Flemish culture, the discourses highlight festivals and celebrations as traditions that have been embedded in Flemish culture for centuries. As evidence of this, they cite artworks such as the paintings of the famous Flemish painter Brueghel, who was already painting festive moments in his time. The fair is interpreted as « *at the same time an expression of a shared cultural identity and of diversity* »¹⁵⁶. There is also mention of the creation of a chair to promote Netherlandic studies in collaboration with the Netherlands, in order to promote the Dutch language and culture, but also the desire to promote them outside the academic sphere.

¹⁵⁴ Discourse DOE5

¹⁵⁵ Discourse DOE2

¹⁵⁶ Discourse DOE2

4. Discourse of the Flemish political instances

For the purposes of this discourse analysis, we were provided with three speeches by Flemish political representatives to the diplomats from the *Kanselarij en Buitenlandse zaken* department as well as their partners present in Brussels. It therefore seemed appropriate to analyse these speeches alongside those of the delegations in order to compare whether the content of these speeches was similar to or different from those of the diplomats through the identity portrayed. These three discourse were delivered on 11 July, Flemish National Day, and date from three consecutive years, namely 2021, 2022 and 2023.

4.1. Quantitative analysis

In the speeches given by the Flemish political instances, the words with the highest occurrence are the following:

		Total
1	Flanders	107
2	We	42
3	Government	25
4	World	22
5	International	19
6	Flemish	14
7	New	14
8	People	14
9	Year	14
10	Innovation	13
11	Region	13
12	Us	13
13	Collaboration	12
14	Partner	12
15	Policy	11
16	Europe	10
17	Initiative	10
18	Today	10
19	EU	9
20	Cooperation	9

As in the delegations' discourse, the words *Flanders* and *Flemish* refer to the Flemish territory and its population. *World* and *international* are also referring to what they mean. There is no difference in the way these terms are used. *Europe* and *EU* also, designate the European Union and Europe as a region.

Among the fourteen times it is used, the word *new* in itself is not particularly interesting to analyse as its context is not significant. However, the fact that it occurs so frequently indicates an attraction to novelty and innovation. Incidentally, we note the frequent use of *innovation*, which is always linked to Flemish. *Initiative* for its part relates to Flemish initiatives that are generally considered to be innovative.

The word *people* is used fourteen times in the three discourses. It appears most frequently in 2023, with seven occurrences. Firstly, the term people is used in its most general sense, referring to everyone. The second use of the word is to refer more specifically to Flemish people. Finally, the term people is used to refer to the people, the men and women living in the same country or region, a population.

The word *government* was used twenty-five times in the three discourses, eighteen of which were in conjunction with the name Flanders. Only on three occasions the word government was not used to refer directly to the Flemish government.

Collaboration and *cooperation* have similar meanings. However, collaboration is used to refer to the partnerships built up by the Region, whereas cooperation relates to more specific matters such as development cooperation or regional cooperation. *Partner*, on its twelve appearances, refers both to Flanders' partners and to Flanders as a partner.

The terms *region* and *regional* can have several meanings. They can refer to a geographical area within a State or to the governments of the other Belgian regions but most of the time, in discourses by Flemish political bodies, the term regional is used to refer to the Flemish region.

The pronouns *we* and *us* in these discourses are mainly used to refer to Flanders and Flemish people, although they are sometimes used to refer to the world population or to the people present at the event at which the discourses were delivered.

We can also note the absence of certain terms. The word *Belgium* was only mentioned once in the three discourses and was used to refer to the National Bank of Belgium rather than the Belgian State. The name *Brussels* was also used only once.

4.2. Qualitative analysis

Among the terms studied in the previous section, we selected the following for further analysis. Seven of these terms were chosen because, besides belonging to the lexical field of Flemish identity, they are among those with the highest occurrence. The three remaining terms, namely heritage, culture and identity, were chosen after reading the discourses because they seemed to shed light on an aspect of Flemish identity.

The ten terms selected are: (1) Flanders, (2) Flemish/Flandrien, (3) government, (4) history, (5) heritage, (6) region/regional, (7) culture/cultural, (8) identity, (9) people, (10) We/Us. These terms will be analysed in context to determine what they refer to.

i. Development and innovation

Keywords involved in this field: (1) Flanders, (2) Flemish/Flandrien, (3) government, (4) history,, (6) region/regional, (10) We/Us

In the discourse of the Flemish political institutions, Flanders is presented as a Region renowned for its knowledge. It is considered as a leader in terms of innovation and research, as well as being at the forefront of technology. This Flemish advance can be explained by the figures which are regarded as emblematic by the region, and which have enabled Flanders to make great strides. « *Thanks to pioneers [...], Flanders gradually evolved into an international trade Region and renowned centre of technology and innovation. Our prosperity is inextricably linked to the power and potential of our minds.* »¹⁵⁷ Flanders' history is therefore interpreted in terms of innovation and technology, since the Region is considered to have one of the most innovative economies in the world. This is a direct result of the region's history, which has always been marked by innovative technologies, and which will continue to progress in this direction. Technology is therefore an important part of the Flemish identity, as it is considered, along with progress, to be part of the Flemish DNA. The government has appointed new envoys to represent the Flemish technology industry abroad in order « *to boost the international reputation of Flemish innovation* »¹⁵⁸.

¹⁵⁷ Discourse FPI 2023

¹⁵⁸ Discourse FPI 2022

In these discourses, there are frequent references to the image of Flanders as a Region of knowledge, innovation and technology, and to the export of this knowledge abroad. This image is essential for maintaining relations with international partners and trading with them. Flanders is presented as “*a small region, [with] an abundance of grand ideas.*”¹⁵⁹. Flanders' education system also plays a role in promoting Flanders as a prosperous and innovative region.

They also refer to a post-COVID society with a recovery plan that will, in particular « *invest in people and talent* »¹⁶⁰. This means emphasising the individual abilities of the Flemish people and focusing on development to build a post-pandemic world. The pronouns we and us are also mainly used to refer to Flanders and Flemings. They mainly refer to Flemish people in research and development contexts. In fact, they are used to emphasise Flemish knowledge and their capacity to position themselves among the major players in technology and research on the international scene.

ii. International dimension and partnerships

Keywords used in this field: (1) Flanders, (3) government, (4) history, (7) culture/cultural, (9) people, (10) We/Us

The final theme concerns the international nature of Flanders. Flanders' presence on the international stage is repeatedly justified by various mechanisms. « *Flanders must be international, or it is not Flanders. Flanders is international* ».¹⁶¹ Flanders enjoys international legitimacy as it strives to take part in an increasing number of international projects and has throughout its history played an important role abroad. Flanders' foreign network is one of its greatest assets when it comes to collaborating with foreign partners. The internationalism of Flanders is justified by the fact that there are 191 different nationalities within its territory, « *we are international at heart* »¹⁶².

The discourse proclaims the Flemish region's desire for greater autonomy and power, as well as its determination to diversify its partners and fight against protectionism. This demonstrates

¹⁵⁹ Discourse FPI 2023

¹⁶⁰ Discourse FPI 2021

¹⁶¹ Discourse FPI 2022

¹⁶² Discourse FPI 2022

a desire to open up to the world and echoes the desire to maintain a prosperous Flanders: *“Throughout world history, isolationism has led only to poverty and misery and to endless and all - consuming conflicts.”*¹⁶³. It also highlights the Flemish government's desire to work with other federated states on the international stage and to give these states the opportunity to become more involved in international issues. The government mentions various international partnerships to strengthen its position on the international stage, in particular a new Asian partnership to promote their interests in this region. However, although Flemish foreign policy is exported well beyond Europe, the political authorities point out that the European level is the most important for Flemish foreign policy, since it is at that level that the decisions that have a direct impact on Flemish and Belgian national policy are taken.

Partnerships with foreign countries include a cultural dimension. The 2021 discourse stresses the importance of certain partners, in particular the Netherlands, with which Flanders shares cultural elements and wishes to *“continue to focus on the revaluation of [their] shared language.”*¹⁶⁴. However, partnerships also have other dimensions, such as the sharing of knowledge: *« We here in Flanders want to share our knowledge with partners at home and abroad »*¹⁶⁵. To maintain its international status, the Region must continue to engage with third countries that share other cultures. The Flemish government's new partnership with Morocco illustrates this tendency to broaden areas of cooperation. This partnership is not so much interesting in itself but it does shed light on Flanders' choice of theme-based partnerships. Indeed, the main theme of this partnership will be migration, which, according to the Flemish political authorities, enables them to cover several areas of cooperation for which the Flemish Region has exclusive competences.

Flanders is presented as more than the product of a rich history and a flourishing economy. It is also the sum of the ambitions of its people and enjoys an important central location. It is therefore vital to develop international relations to enable Flemings to develop their full potential in the future. By multiplying the number of foreign partners and international opportunities to defend Flemish interests, the Flemish population and businesses can benefit from a wider 'field of possibilities'. External partners are essential to building a common future: *“While we celebrate the rich history of Flanders, let us not forget that our future is*

¹⁶³ Discourse FPI 2022

¹⁶⁴ Discourse FPI 2021

¹⁶⁵ Discourse FPI 2022

interconnected. The challenges we face transcend borders and demand collective action and innovative solutions.”¹⁶⁶

On a different point, the Flemish political authorities explain that they want to be more visible on the international stage: *Flanders wants the world to see what is happening in our region.*¹⁶⁷ To this end, they have launched a new English-language media aimed at informing third countries about Flemish news.

When it comes to referring to the governments of other Belgian Regions, particularly in the context of the Presidency of the Council of the EU, Flanders use the words “*other regional governments*”.¹⁶⁸ They never specifies that it refers to the other Belgian regional governments, which also enjoy autonomy. It seems that the Region is seeking to assert its international status and its importance through its future presidency of the EU Council, without explicitly pointing out that the other Belgian Regions enjoy the same status and can therefore also act on the international stage.

iii. Education

Keywords used in this field: (7) culture/cultural, (8) identity.

The paragraph highlighting the word *identity* focuses on education and equal opportunities in this area. This demonstrates the region's commitment to high-quality education. The reference to « *no one is left behind* »¹⁶⁹ emphasises the inclusive dimension of identity. We can note the desire to implement these values through concrete actions such as the launch of a study scholarship so that any Flemish student wishing to study abroad has the opportunity to do so. This desire to make education more accessible can be explained by the important role Flemish students play in Flanders' cultural influence. Indeed, intellectual connections can provide Flanders with an opportunity to export its culture and values. In this sense, Flemish students studying abroad are seen as new vectors for spreading Flemish culture. “*We consider these students to be a new kind of public ambassador, who will help highlight Flanders' image as a*

¹⁶⁶ Discourse FPI 2023

¹⁶⁷ Discourse FPI 2022

¹⁶⁸ Discourse FPI 2021 and 2023

¹⁶⁹ Discourse FPI 2023

top innovative Region even more. With this objective in mind, they will be introduced to all relevant diplomatic, economic, academic and cultural networks in their respective study countries."¹⁷⁰.

iv. *Culture, history and heritage*

Keywords used in this field: We/us (1) Flanders, (2) Flemish/Flandrien, (3) government, (4) history, (6) region/regional, (7) (8) identity, (9) people.

The historic thematic also recurs on several occasions. The values of Flanders are said to be intertwined with historical traditions and emblematic personalities who are the pride of the Region such as “[...]the remarkable story of Marie-Elisabeth Belpaire, a trailblazer ahead of her time, who dedicated herself to advocating for the rights of girls and women. Born in Antwerp in 1853, at a time when women had little to no access to quality education, Belpaire tirelessly fought to provide educational opportunities for girls and campaigned for women’s access to higher education. Belpaire’s legacy teaches us the importance of education and equal opportunities for all, highlighting the immense value of ensuring that no one is left behind. It is a principle that underpins our prosperity and defines our Flemish identity”. From this point of view, the spirit of the people of Flanders is presented as an overlap with the values of « *resilience and determination* »¹⁷¹. It is specified that Flanders is not only defined by its past, but also by the skills of its current population that will enable it to build a future. It is also pointed out that, since globalisation has made us interconnected, Flanders' future, despite its capacities stemming from its rich past, cannot be built without external partners.

The cultural theme also raises the question of « *what it truly means to be flemish* »¹⁷² and brings us back to the image of the *flandrien*. *Flandrien* here refers to the adjective used to describe cyclists with a winning mentality.¹⁷³ The qualities of this type of cyclist are linked to Flemish qualities. These are: hard-working, persevering, determined, tireless and able to overcome any obstacle: “*the hard-working cyclist who perseveres through hardship, never giving up and always striving for victory, serves as a metaphor for the resilience and determination that defines the people of Flanders.*”¹⁷⁴. This 'Flemish state of mind' is referred to as the state of

¹⁷⁰ Discourse FPI 2023

¹⁷¹ Discourse FPI 2023

¹⁷² Discourse FPI 2023

¹⁷³ Cardoen, B., “What is a Flandrien?”, Cycling in Flanders website

¹⁷⁴ Discourse FPI 2023

mind that guided the great Flemish icons to achieve extraordinary things. This observation is supported by an analysis of the pronouns *we* and *us*, which also shed light on the Flemish mentality: « *we tackle the obstacles that lie ahead* »¹⁷⁵. We can understand this as the fact that the people of Flanders, as a unit, demonstrate a collective determination to overcome challenges in order to achieve their goals. Finally, we can add to these the principles of openness and commitment, which are presented as fundamental principles that are taught to those who would like to represent Flanders abroad.

The word *identity* in the discourses is directly linked to the term *Flemish*. It appears in the context of the Flemish Canon, a historical work recently published at the request of the Flemish government, which commissioned a committee of experts to set up a reference in terms of "the history of Flanders", based on various historical anchoring points.¹⁷⁶ « *[I]t aims not to create a fixed image of Flanders, but rather to challenge and inspire our perceptions of what it truly means to be Flemish* »¹⁷⁷. In the discourse, Flemish identity refers more specifically to equality in these words « [...] *highlighting the immense value of ensuring that no one is left behind. It is a principle that underpins our prosperity and defines our Flemish identity.* »¹⁷⁸. Identity is therefore embedded in fundamental values and principles that are considered essential to the development of Flanders. Reference is also made to the notion of historical cultural heritage, by mentioning 'historical figures' who contributed to the foundation of cultural values.

Flemish cultural references refer both to tangible heritage, such as works of art and architecture, as well as to intangible heritage, which refers to Flemish values and traditions and to emblematic figures. The political authorities insist on the fact that the Flemish Region has a rich heritage and enjoys a privileged location at the centre of Europe, but also that the Region is inclusive and is divided between diversity and traditions. Behind these themes lies a vision of the future. In fact, in one of the speeches, when heritage was mentioned, the guests were invited to think about the future, their own, that of Flanders and that of cooperation with the region. This underlines the desire to maintain a connection with the past and the Flemish heritage in order to transmit it to future generations, while moving forward and envisaging a bright future for Flanders.

¹⁷⁵ Discourse FPI 2023

¹⁷⁶ Canon van Vlaanderen, "Hoe is de Canon van Vlaanderen opgebouwd?", Canon van Vlaanderen website

¹⁷⁷ Discourse FPI 2023

¹⁷⁸ Discourse FPI 2023

The Ukrainian crisis, which began following the Russian invasion in 2022¹⁷⁹ is also mentioned in the discourse. Some of these passages shed light on Flemish priorities. The importance of the self-determination of peoples and their empowerment is emphasised, and a parallel is drawn between Flanders' right to self-government and the situation in Ukraine. When reference is made to Flanders' support for this war, they deplore not only the casualties and the material losses, but also “[...] *They risk being left displaced, losing their parents and grandparents, and not knowing their own canon, history, culture and language. They risk losing their place in the world.*”¹⁸⁰. This demonstrates Flanders' attachment to the culture and history of its people, as well as its desire to maintain and defend a national identity and its language. « [...] *losing their place in the world*” supports the assertion that Flanders is attached to the right of the soil.¹⁸¹

5. Comparison of discourses

5.1. Quantitative analysis

In this quantitative analysis, we decided not to base our comparison on the twenty words with the highest occurrence that were analysed previously, but to compare only the words that were chosen for the qualitative analysis in the previous sub-sections.

Once these data compiled and sorted by delegation, we obtain the following table:

		Total Discourses ED	Total Discourses DOE	Total Discourses FPI
1	Flanders	98	89	107
2	We	79	78	42
3	Government	40	26	25
4	Flemish	34	23	14
5	People	12	9	14
6	Region/regional	5	11	13
7	Us	21	10	13
8	Cooperation	16	33	9
9	Culture/cultural	20	46	6
10	Identity	1	4	1
11	History	5	1	7
12	Heritage	3	28	2
13	Belgium	13	16	1
14	Language	27	13	5
15	Dutch	32	14	3

¹⁷⁹ Visual Journalism Team, “Ukraine in Maps: Tracking the War with Russia,” May 2024, BBCnews website

¹⁸⁰ Discourse FPI 2023

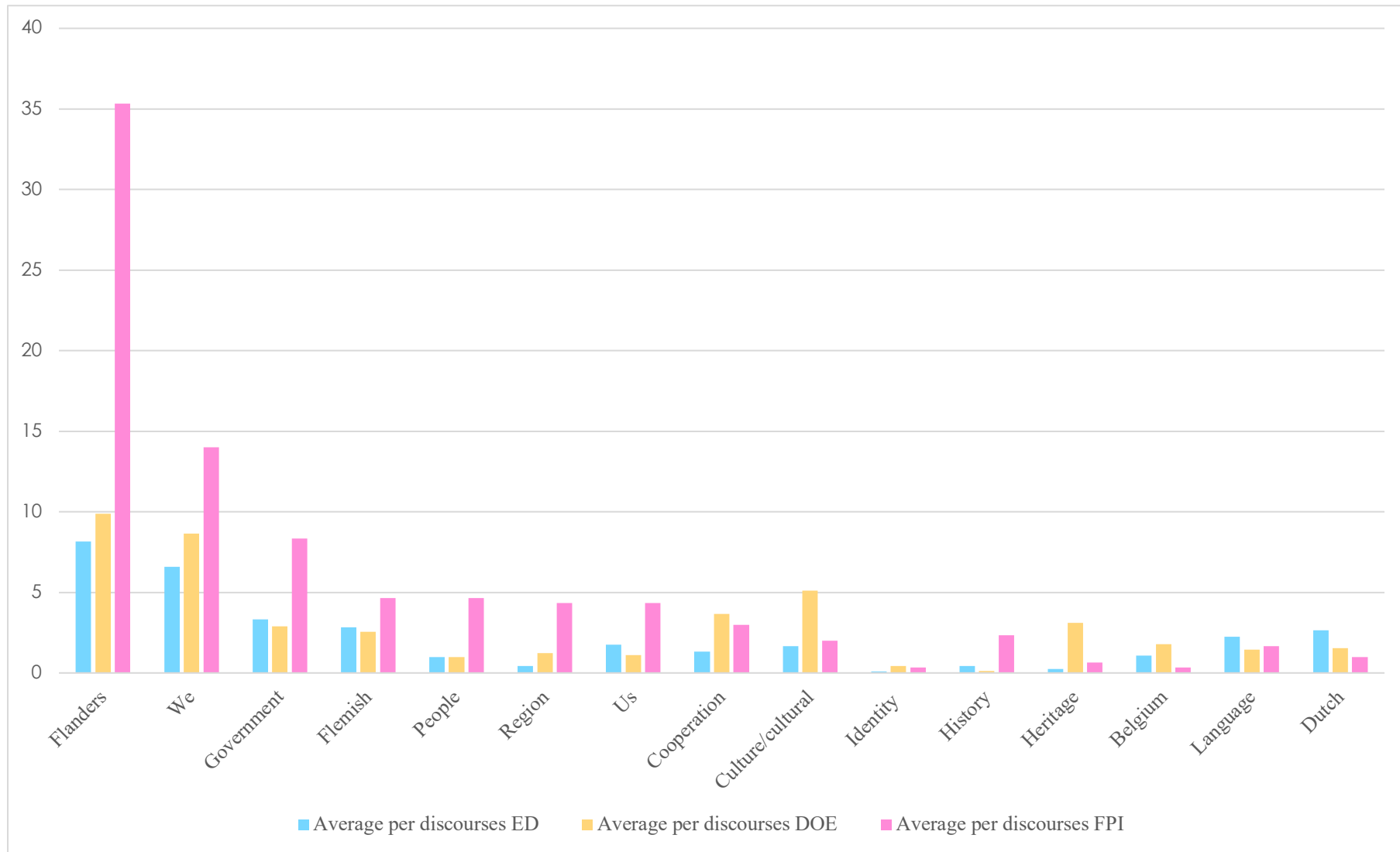
¹⁸¹ Counet, M., Matagne, G., Verjans, P., « Identité et priorités nationalistes flamandes
Évolution des discours de leaders autonomistes (VU/1992 – N-VA/2019) », *op.cit.*, p. 8

This table view is not particularly enlightening. Since our analysis does not include the same number of speeches per delegation, we decided to compare the occurrence of words by reporting the number of times the word is pronounced on average per discourse. This will allow us to see whether one delegation uses a word more often than another. For this purpose, our formula is as follows: $\frac{\text{number of occurrences}}{\text{number of delegation discourses}} = \text{average per discourses}$. For example, our calculation applied to the word Flanders in the case of delegations in Europe gives: $\frac{98}{12} = 8,16$

This method enables us to obtain the following table:

		Average per discourses ED	Average per discourses DOE	Average per discourses FPI
1	Flanders	8,16	9,88	35,33
2	We	6,58	8,66	14
3	Government	3,33	2,88	8,33
4	Flemish	2,83	2,55	4,66
5	People	1	1	4,66
6	Region	0,42	1,22	4,33
7	Us	1,75	1,11	4,33
8	Cooperation	1,33	3,66	3
9	Culture/cultural	1,66	5,11	2
10	Identity	0,083	0,44	0,33
11	History	0,42	0,11	2,33
12	Heritage	0,25	3,11	0,66
13	Belgium	1,083	1,77	0,33
14	Language	2,25	1,44	1,66
15	Dutch	2,66	1,55	1

Fig. 4. Chart of average word occurrences by discourse



We can generally observe a greater occurrence of keywords in the discourses of Flemish political bodies. This tendency is particularly noticeable for the words Flanders, We, Government, People, Flemish, Us, Region and history. The word Flanders, for example, is used 107 times in only 3 speeches, which represents an average number per speech almost four times greater than that of delegations outside Europe and almost five times greater than that of delegations in Europe.

However, when it comes to the keywords that designate the language, i.e. language and Dutch, we can see that these words are used more often by delegations in Europe. Out of the 32 times the word Dutch was used by these delegations, there were only three occurrences when it did not refer to the Dutch language. In the discourses of delegations outside Europe, out of the 14 times the word Dutch appeared, it did not refer to the language on three occurrences. Finally, it is worth noting that the speeches by the Flemish political bodies contain the word Dutch the fewest times; it is mentioned only three times, two of which do not refer to language.

The speeches delivered by the delegations outside Europe, on the other hand, contain the highest number of mentions of the words cooperation, culture/cultural, identity, heritage and Belgium. This demonstrates the cultural dimension that is very much present in discourses outside Europe, reflecting a strategic emphasis on cultural diplomacy and the projection of a rich, distinct identity.

We can also note the very low rate of occurrence of the word identity in all the discourses. This indicates that Flemish identity is not presented on the international stage as such but is distilled through various dimensions that are mentioned in the speeches. The discourses by the delegations outside Europe are those with the highest rate of occurrence of this word (4). They only link it once to the word 'Flemish'. Otherwise, the word is used to talk about the importance of preserving identity in general. In the case of delegations in Europe and Flemish political bodies, the word identity is always linked to the word Flemish.

Finally, the limited number of references to the name Belgium in all the discourses may indicate a desire of Flanders to assert itself as an independent nation and detach itself from its parent State.

5.2. Qualitative analysis

i. Development and innovation

We can observe that the delegations in Europe, as well as the delegations outside Europe and the Flemish political bodies, refer to development and innovation in their discourses. Although development and innovation often seem to refer to Flanders' position in these areas, there are differences in the way this theme is exploited.

The discourses of delegations outside Europe focus on development cooperation and aid that the Region can provide to partner countries through its position as a leader in these areas. In this discourse, it is therefore the prism of development aid that is put in the spotlight.

In the European delegations' discourses, on the other hand, it is Flanders' ambitions and its desire to strengthen its relations or join forces with new partners to reinforce its position that predominate. The speeches also pointed the fact that, with its role in the EU presidency, Flanders is particularly well placed to provide the impetus for new policies in terms of development and innovation.

The Flemish political bodies' discourses also underline the Region's importance in terms of new technologies and research but highlights a historical dimension that is not present in the delegations' discourses. In fact, they explain Flanders' lead in these areas by the great Flemish pioneers who have raised the Region to the rank of leader in terms of development and innovation. They believe that progress is part of the Flemish DNA and they want to represent this expertise abroad. They therefore highlight Flemish knowledge, but also the individuals behind Flanders' success.

ii. International cooperation and partnerships

The international dimension firstly stresses the intrinsically international nature of Flanders, with its many nationalities but also its many partnerships and the region's history, which according to the discourses has always been a central Region as far as international policy is concerned.

When it comes to presenting Flanders, there are two quite different dynamics: make reference to Belgium or overlook it. On the one hand, the European delegations emphasise Flanders' position in Europe and in Belgium and stress the ambitions of the current Flemish government and the Region's important contribution to the EU presidency. The delegations outside Europe, for their part, also highlight the fact that Flanders is an autonomous Region but contextualise it within its parent State Belgium in order to legitimise its position on the international stage. On the other hand, Flemish political authorities make no mention of Belgium at all and put the spotlight on Flanders in the context of the EU Presidency, trying to overlook the contribution of the other governments of the federated Regions by mentioning them very briefly as "*other regional governments*"¹⁸².

The discourses all emphasise the desire to expand partnerships both with governments and with local businesses and populations, and to remain a Region open to the world. However, only the discourses of the political bodies are more specific about the objectives in terms of partnerships. They mention the desire to work in collaboration with other federated entities and to enable them to play a greater role on the international stage to ensure that the voice of the federated entities is more widely heard. In addition, they explain that developing foreign partnerships benefits not only the institutions but also the population, who would benefit from more opportunities abroad. Finally, they explain that collaboration is mainly guided by a general theme that enables them to develop collaboration with their partners in different dimensions in which they are competent.

iii. Economy and trade

This economic and commercial dimension is mainly present in the delegations' discourses and is barely present in that of the Flemish political bodies, apart from the mention of an open economy opposed to protectionism. Therefore only the delegations' discourses will be included in this section.

The discourses emphasise an open economy that needs foreign partners in order to survive. Partnerships are also important for entrepreneurs based in Flanders so that they can easily export.

¹⁸² Discourse FPI 2021 and 2023

In the speeches by the delegations outside Europe, it is the contribution that Flanders can make that is highlighted. They present the Region as prosperous, with good economic results, and as the source of many new businesses. They emphasise the desire to export this entrepreneurship spirit abroad to enable countries to develop economically, but also to enable the population of less-favoured countries to shape their own future.

In the speeches made by the European delegations, it is the environmental aspect that is highlighted. Flanders presents itself as one of the pioneer Regions of the circular economy and wants to highlight the environmental dimension on the international stage and during its presidency of the EU. Flanders is determined to develop an economy that takes account of current constraints and can cope with changes over the long term.

iv. Education

The educational dimension plays a greater or lesser role in the studied discourses.

The delegations as well as the political bodies of the Flemish Region all stress the importance of university exchanges and joint research programmes that they are setting up with the partner countries, and the richness resulting from these exchanges.

The speeches underline the importance of the language, and more specifically the Dutch language. For the delegations in Europe, it is important to promote the use of the Dutch language and present it as a living language in which people create, invent and build a better future. Both delegations in Europe and the delegations outside Europe are promoting the creation of Dutch language study programmes in universities.

Although generally defending the same thing: better education for all and promotion of the language, the delegations do not present it in the same way. For the delegations in Europe, it is the Flemish Region that prevails. They advocate improving the education system, which is already considered to be performing well. The motto is improvement of the system and of the population's skills. Delegations outside Europe, on the other hand, are more focused on the help they can provide to their partners to reform their education systems and to make them more

efficient, and to include culture and heritage in the school curriculum to raise awareness of their importance.

As mentioned, for delegations outside Europe the educational dimension is intertwined with the cultural dimension. They explain that it is through culture-based education that heritage can be preserved and minds opened to understanding the culture of others. The Flemish political authorities also connect these two dimensions. However, they see this through the prism of the representation of Flemish culture and values abroad. They assume that a solid education will lead to intellectual exchanges between the Region and partner countries. In this way, they believe that students educated in Flanders will be able to export regional culture and values abroad.

A major focal point is the notions of equality and inclusiveness that are distilled in the education dimension. The discourses highlight the importance of quality education for all. The importance of "*no one is left behind*" which is often mentioned in the discourses demonstrates the desire to ensure everyone is included. Some of the speeches even mention Flemish initiatives that give substance to this vision and enable students to study at the best universities.

v. Culture, history and heritage

When it comes to emphasising history and culture, Flemish delegations and political bodies usually use the same symbols.

They link the greatness of Flanders with great historical achievements. For foreign delegations, it is the Battle of the Golden Spurs against France that is mentioned, whereas in the case of political bodies, it is the Flemish canon and the various great figures that the Region has counted.

Art also plays an important role in the various discourses. The importance of artistic exchanges from immemorial times is mentioned, whether it be the great Flemish masters of the time, bi-national collaborations or new forms of art such as digital art.

The most frequent theme in the discourses was the importance of preserving our heritage. Both the delegations and the political bodies refer to this, whether in terms of helping to establish an

education system that teaches local culture and traditions, recognising the importance of preserving historic buildings, or demonstrating its attachment to the culture and history of peoples by showing its support for Ukraine. This desire to safeguard also demonstrates a commitment to transmitting values, culture and history to future generations.

As far as the values of Flanders and the characteristics of the Flemish people are concerned, only the political institutions' discourse expresses them clearly. They emphasise the image of the Flandrien and a winning and determined mentality, as well as the principle of openness.

5.3. Comparative analysis

The following observations can be drawn from these quantitative and qualitative analyses:

We can note in a general manner that in the various fields, delegations from outside Europe tend to emphasise the dimension of assistance and development aid. They present Flanders as a prosperous nation that has nothing to be envious of the great powers and that can be beneficial for the development of cities and countries. They also emphasise the importance of working with different representatives of the society and not just the government and try to encourage people to get involved and take part in the process of change so that they can have an impact on their future.

The delegations in Europe and the Flemish political bodies, for their part, highlight Flemish successes in various areas and the desire for improvement. In the case of the many projects, they express how Flanders is an excellent partner and highlight the region's qualities in many areas. The partnerships focus more on the governing bodies of a country or region.

In the discourse of the delegations in Europe, the words Dutch and language are used frequently. This underlines the emphasis on language and its promotion, as well as the image of Flemish people. They referred to language as an essential means of communication, but also as a strong symbol of the region's culture and autonomy. Although the discourses of the delegations outside Europe and those of the Flemish Political Instances also demonstrate this emphasis on culture, the delegations in Europe put even more emphasis on the functional side of the Dutch language, which is very much alive and spoken by millions of people throughout the world.

In the discourses of Flemish political bodies, there is an emphasis on the individual. Indeed, they highlight the talents and knowledge of the Flemish population, refer to the pioneers who enabled Flanders to develop and highlight the benefits of international cooperation for the Flemish people. This emphasis on the individual is indicative of a desire to elevate the individual as a pillar of society and to underline the fact that the nation's strength lies in its citizens.

We can also highlight a notion of the future reflected in the discourses. On several occasions, we can see a notion of the long term advocated by Flanders, particularly in partnerships that are intended to last over time. In addition, they emphasise Flanders' desire to play an even greater role on the international stage in the future and to maintain its prosperity in the future. Finally, whether in education, the economy or other areas, we can see that Flanders is willing to invest now to reap the benefits later. A concrete example is the fact that the Region is investing massively in its population so that later, through cultural exchanges, this population will spread Flemish values and culture abroad.

Flanders, through the development of the individual and the promotion of Flemish values and culture, is seeking to build a prosperous and dynamic society, capable of meeting the challenges of the future while honouring its rich cultural heritage and broadening the horizons of its people.

V. Conclusion

This research seeks to answer to: *What are the characteristics of Flemish identity projected onto the international stage through the discourses of Flemish diplomats?*

After having conducted our literature review, we were able to demonstrate that state actors are no longer the only relevant actors on the international stage and that sub-national entities have a contribution to make. We then shed light on the Belgian context in which Flanders is evolving by retracing the historical process of the federalisation of the state. We then highlighted the concepts of paradiplomacy and identity paradiplomacy and applied them to the case of Flanders. We demonstrated that different conceptions of national identity exist, in particular the idea of an identity that is not uniform within a state. This identity can be conveyed by individuals

through different vectors, in particular language. Finally, we explained our discourse analysis methodology and proceeded to the analysis of the discourses.

As we emphasised in section 4.2, national identity can be defined as “*the articulation of a shared history, culture and values as a means of legitimising the identity of a people*”¹⁸³. According to the post-structuralist approach, this conception of identity can be reflected on the international scene through language.

If we apply this definition to our analysis, we obtain:

Shared history - The history presented in the discourses is different from the history of the Belgian state born in 1830, which would have witnessed the emergence of a Flemish nation as opposed to the French-speaking community. It is a much older history rooted in the successes and achievements of the Flemish over the centuries. We can cite, for example, the Battle of the Golden Spurs, where the Flemish defeated the French cavalry, but also the artistic collaborations of the Flemish master painters. This perspective aims to highlight an identity and heritage that are firmly rooted in a long tradition of significant contributions to the construction of that identity.

Shared culture – The Flemish culture that is being highlighted is a diversified and dynamic one, divided into several dimensions: entrepreneurship, language, festivals and heritage. The first dimension, entrepreneurship, emphasises an entrepreneurial spirit that is deeply rooted in Flemish culture, notably because of the Region's position in this field. As for Flemish heritage, it is particularly stressed as a testimony to a long and rich history. It is therefore particularly important to preserve it, but also to make it known abroad. The language dimension is one of the founding pillars of Flemish culture. It is considered particularly important, and its preservation is a central element of foreign policy. Finally, festivals and celebrations are mentioned as traditions in Flanders, but also as privileged moments to express the Flemish identity.

Shared values – With regard to the values considered intrinsic to Flanders and the Flemish people, we can note the following: principle of resilience, openness, leadership, cooperation, inclusion, equality, and individualistic values. The principle of resilience is an essential value

¹⁸³ Voy. supra

for the Region. It is highlighted in the discourses by the image of the Flandrien who perseveres and never gives up. This resilience is reflected in the ability of the Region and its people to overcome challenges, innovate and adapt. Openness is omnipresent in the discourses of both delegations and political bodies. This openness applies to various fields: the economy, culture, but also open-mindedness. The Region presents itself as open to the world and ready to welcome new partnerships and commit to new projects. This principle is reflected in a policy of cooperation on the international stage. Leadership highlights the fact that Flanders is a leader in various fields, in particular due to the achievements of its people and the pioneers who made its history. Cooperation flows from this, as the region emphasises the importance of working together to achieve great things, whether at local, national or international level. The dimensions of inclusion and equality are linked, as Flanders strives to create a society where everyone has their place and to overcome inequality through the principle of 'no one is left behind'. Finally, the values of Flanders are mainly rooted in a principle of individuality in the sense that the individual is at the centre of the policy. It recognises the importance of the individual and his or her necessary contribution to the construction and preservation of the Flemish nation.

VI. Bibliography

BOOKS

Debras, F., *Le chant des sirènes : quand l'extrême droite parle de démocratie*, 2023, Editions Peter Lang, 356p.

Morin, J-F., *La politique étrangère : Théories, méthodes et références*, 2013, Paris, Armand Colin, 315p.

Wendt, A., *Social Theory of International Politics*, 1999, University of Chicago, 433p.

BOOK CHAPTERS

Badie, B., « De la souveraineté à la capacité de l'État », in *Smouts Marie-Claude (dir.), Les nouvelles relations internationales : pratique et théorie*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 1998, pp. 37-58.

Bernard, N., Lys, M., and Romainville, C., « Cinquante années de fédéralisation en Belgique : évolutions politiques et institutionnelles », in *Xhardez Catherine, Counet Maxime, Randour François, Niessen Christoph (dir.) 50 ans de fédéralisation de l'Etat belge. Institutions, acteurs, politiques publiques et particularités du fédéralisme belge*, Louvain-la-Neuve, Académia L'Harmattan, 2020, pp.21-40

Braillard, P., Djalili, Mohammad-Reza, « Les grandes conceptions des relations internationales », in *Braillard Philippe, Djalili Mohammad-Reza, Les relations internationales*, Paris, PUF, 2012, pp. 9-29

Braspenning, T., «Constructivisme et réflexivisme en théorie des relations internationales », in *AFRI*, volume III, 2002, pp. 314-329

Deroubaix, J-C, Gobin, C. « Dépassement de la Belgique unitaire en 45 ans de déclarations gouvernementales », in *Perrez, J., Reuchamps, M. (dir.), Les relations communautaires en*

Belgique : approches politiques et linguistiques, Louvain-la-Neuve, Academia – L'Harmattan, 2012, pp. 75 – 103.

Deschouwer, Kris, “La dynamique fédérale en Belgique” in *Fournier, B., Reuchamps, M., Le fédéralisme en Belgique et au Canada, Comparaison sociopolitique*, De Boeck Supérieur, 2009, pp. 65-72.

Gagnon, A-G., “Multilevel Governance and the Reconfiguration of Political Space”, in *Lachapelle, G., Oñate, P., Borders and Margins : Federalism, Devolution and Multi-Level Governance*, Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2018, pp. 77-90

Hansen, L., “Discourse analysis, post-structuralism, and foreign policy”, in *Smith S., Hadfield A. & Dunne T., Foreign Policy : Theories, Actors, Cases*, Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 95-110

Lachapelle, G., Oñate, P., “Introduction”, in *Lachapelle, G., Oñate, P., Borders and Margins: Federalism, Devolution and Multi-Level Governance*, Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2018, pp.17-28

Meyran, Régis, « Les historiens face à l'identité nationale », in *Halpern Catherine, Identité(s)*, Editions sciences humaines, 2016, pp. 267-270

Norton, B., Morgan, B., “Poststructuralism”, in *Chapelle C. A (ed.), The encyclopedia of applied linguistics*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, pp.1-6.

Panizza, F., Miorelli, R., “Taking Discourse Seriously: Discursive Institutionalism and Post-structuralist Discourse Theory”, 2013, *Political Studies*, 61, pp. 301-318.

Reckinger, R., Wille, C., “Researching identity constructions”, in *IPSE - Identités Politiques Sociétés Espaces (ed.), Doing Identity in Luxembourg: Subjective Appropriations - Institutional Attributions - Socio-Cultural Milieus*, transcript Verlag, 2011, pp. 11-38.

Reuchamps, M. (ed.), *Minority Nations in Multinational Federations: A comparative study of Quebec and Wallonia*, 2015, pp. 160-180.

Willetts, P., « Transnational Actors and International Organizations in Global Politics », in Baylis John, Smith Steve and Owens Patricia, *The globalization of world politics*, second edition, Oxford et New-York, Oxford university press, 2001, pp. 356-383.

ARTICLES

Brems, E., « A Flemish tale: Flemish roots-literature and the dismantling of Flemish identity », 2006, *Dutch Crossing*, 30(2), pp. 295-305

Brigevich, A., « Eurosceptic Regionalists: Flemish and Walloon Identities Compared », 2016, *L'Europe en formation*, 1(379), pp. 95-121.

Chatterji, R., & Saha, S., “Para-diplomacy”, 2017, *India Quarterly*, 73(4), pp. 375-394.

Counet, M., Matagne, G., Verjans, P., « Identité et priorités nationalistes flamandes Évolution des discours de leaders autonomistes (VU/1992 – N-VA/2019) », 2020, *Fédéralisme*, 20.

Dalle Mulle, E., Bieling, M., “Autonomy Over Independence: Self-Determination in Catalonia, Flanders and South Tyrol in the Aftermath of the Great War”, 2023, *European History Quarterly*, 53(4), pp.641-663.

Dixon, K., & Spee, S., « Deploying Identity for Democratic Ends on *Jan Publiek* – A Flemish Television Talk Show », 2003, *The European Journal of Women's Studies*, 10(4), pp. 409-422.

Epstein, C., “Who speaks? Discourse, the subject and the study of identity in international politics”, 2010, *European Journal of International Relations*, 17(2), pp. 327-350

Feyt, A., « Les Communautés et les Régions peuvent-elles se doter d’une diplomatie propre? », *C.D.P.K.*, 2002, pp. 22-41.

Kerremans, B., « The Flemish Identity: Nascent or Existent ? », 1997, *Res Publica* 39(2), 303-314.

Laborderie, V., « La fin de la Belgique et ses impossibilités L'hypothèse d'une indépendance flamande à l'épreuve des faits », 2014, *Outre-Terre*, 4(40), pp. 114-123.

Lagasse, C-E., « Le système des relations internationales dans la Belgique fédérale », 1997, *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, 4-5(1549-1550), pp.1-63

Paquin, S., « La paradiplomatie identitaire : Le Québec, la Catalogne et la Flandre en relations internationales », 2004, *Politique et Sociétés*, 23(2-3), pp. 203-237.

Paquin, S., « Les nouvelles relations internationales et la paradiplomatie identitaire », 2001, *Bulletin d'histoire politique*, 10(1), pp. 13-29

Paquin, S., « Paradiplomatie identitaire et diplomatie en Belgique fédérale: le cas de la Flandre », 2003, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 36(3), pp. 621-642.

Pestieau, J., « Minority rights: caught between individual rights and peoples' rights. », 1991, *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence*, 4(2), pp. 361-374.

Philippart, E., “Gouvernance à niveaux multiples et relations extérieures : le développement de la « para-diplomatie » et la nouvelle donne belge”, 1998, *Études internationales*, 29(3), pp.631-646

Tourret, P., « Les identités culturelles et leurs territoires en Belgique », 2001, *Hommes et Terres du Nord*, 4, pp. 191-197.

Versluys, E., “The notion of identity in discourse analysis: some 'discourse analytical' remarks”, 2007, *RASK: internationalt tidsskrift for sprog og kommunikation*, 26, pp.89-99

WEBSITES

Canon van Vlaanderen, “Hoe is de Canon van Vlaanderen opgebouwd?”, Canon van Vlaanderen website, October 2023, URL: <https://www.canonvanvlaanderen.be/over-de-canon-van-vlaanderen/>.

Cardoen, B., “What is a Flandrien?”, Cycling in Flanders website, URL: <https://www.cyclinginlanders.cc/stories/what-flandrien>.

Collins online dictionnary, *Nation*, Collins website, URL : <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/nation>

CRiSP , *État*, vocabulaire politique, site internet du CRiSP , URL : <https://www.vocabulairepolitique.be/etat/>

Hérodote, *11 juillet 1302 - La « bataille des éperons d’or »*, 27 novembre 2018, Herodote.net website, URL : https://www.herodote.net/11_juillet_1302-evenement-13020711.php.

Jamin, J., « L’ethnie flamande », *Politique*, 17 novembre 2010 URL : <https://www.revuepolitique.be/lethnie-flamande/>

Perspective monde, *Nation politique*, brève définition, *site internet Perspectives monde*, URL : <https://perspective.usherbrooke.ca/bilan/servlet/BMDictionnaire?iddictionnaire=1514>

Visual Journalism Team, “Ukraine in Maps: Tracking the War with Russia,” May 2024, BBCnews website, URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60506682>.

Vlaamse overheid, *Over ons*, site internet Vlaamse overheid, URL : <https://www.fdfa.be/nl/over-ons>

THESIS

Izquierdo, J. M., “Belgian identity politics: At a crossroad between nationalism and regionalism”, Master's Thesis, University of Tennessee, 2014.

DIPLOMATIC DISCOURSES

Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 1.

Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 2.

Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 3.

Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 4.

Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 5.
Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 6.
Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 7.
Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 8.
Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 9.
Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 10.
Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 11.
Discourse of the Delegations in Europe, ED 12.
Discourse of the Delegations outside Europe, DOE 1.
Discourse of the Delegations outside Europe, DOE 2.
Discourse of the Delegations outside Europe, DOE 3.
Discourse of the Delegations outside Europe, DOE 4.
Discourse of the Delegations outside Europe, DOE 5.
Discourse of the Delegations outside Europe, DOE 6.
Discourse of the Delegations outside Europe, DOE 7.
Discourse of the Delegations outside Europe, DOE 8.
Discourse of the Delegations outside Europe, DOE 9.
Discourse of the Flemish Political Instances, FPI FlandersDay 2021, 2021.
Discourse of the Flemish Political Instances, FPI FlandersDay 2022, 2022.
Discourse of the Flemish Political Instances, FPI FlandersDay 2023, 2023.

OFFICIAL REPORTS

Christiansen, T., *Reconstructing European Space: From Territorial Politics to Multilevel Governance*, 1996, EUI Working Paper, RSC 96(53), 40p.

LEGISLATION

Constitution of the Kingdom of Belgium, 2024 version.

Convention on Consular Relations, adopted in Vienna on 24 April 1963, *R.T.N.U.*, 1967.

Convention on Diplomatic Relations, adopted in Vienna on 18 April 1961, *R.T.N.U.*, 1964.

Special law of 21 july 1971, *M.B.*, 23 july.

OTHER SOURCES

Bynens, J., *Vlaanderen is internationaal*, 2022, 50p.

Criekemans, D., *How subnational entities try to develop their own 'paradiplomacy'. The case of Flanders (1993-2005)*, International Conference Challenges for Foreign Ministries: Managing Diplomatic Networks and Optimising Value, 2006, 27p.

Eiffing, V., « Constructivisme, identités et rôles : analyse comparative des réponses apportées par l'Iran et la Turquie au Printemps arabes », *Communication réalisée dans le cadre du colloque ISPOLE (UCL)*, 2014, 19p.

Laborderie, V., Couture, J., *Les déterminants de la volonté d'indépendance : Identité régionale et soutien à l'indépendance dans quatre entités subétatiques (Québec, Écosse, Catalogne et Flandre)*, 2014, 23ème Congrès mondial de l'Association Internationale de Science Politique

Lagasse, N., *Le fédéralisme belge : un exemple de fédéralisme de dissociation*, 2001, International Forum on Federalism in Mexico, 20p.

Verjans, P., *Histoire politique belge. Aide mémoire*, Liège, Presses universitaires de Liège, 2019.