

Belgian Politics in 1985 : « No Turning Back » *

by Jozef SMITS,

Licentiate in Political Science.

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Belgian political life in 1985 was completely dominated by the parliamentary elections, for the Christian-Democrat and Liberal coalition under the leadership of Wilfried Martens (CVP) was in its last year. The Martens V government almost succeeded in completing the parliamentary term as it has intended. The Heysel drama caused an unexpected rupture in the cabinet, so elections were set for October, while normally they would have been held in December. The electoral battle was completely dominated by the three major political families : on the one side, the Christian Democrats and the Liberals, who defended the recovery policy of the previous four years based on a transfer of financial resources from individuals to businesses ; on the other side were the Socialists, who stressed the negative effects of the « income cutback » policy. The polarization of the electoral campaign was symbolized the most clearly by the campaign of the largest majority party. With the slogan *Geen Ommakeer* (No Turning Back) and with outgoing Premier Martens as the figurehead, the CVP tried to communicate to the electorate that there was no alternative to the unpopular socio-economic recovery policy and that this policy had to be continued in order to solve the country's problems definitively. Against expectations and to its own astonishment, the majority emerged strengthened from the ballot box. Consequently, nothing stood in the way of a new edition of Martens V, and on 28 November, the new Christian-Democrat/Liberal government was formed. Wilfried Martens again had the leadership of

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the Cabinet and became prime minister for the sixth time, thus equalling the record set by Gaston Eyskens.

Before he became premier for the first time, Wilfried Martens had already had a remarked and remarkable political career. And it was not self-evident that Martens would end up in the CVP. Initially, it seemed more likely that he was destined for the Volksunie, for he made his first political steps in a number of Flemish national organizations, the most important of them being the *Vlaamse Volksbeweging* (Flemish People's Movement), which, in the beginning of the 1960s, argued for a federal organization of the Belgian state, an heretical idea for the then unitary Belgium. Only in 1963, at the age of 26, did he join the CVP and spent a few years in the entourage of ministerial cabinets, among them those of the CVP Prime Ministers Pierre Harmel (1966) and Paul Vanden Boeynants (1966-1968). Martens came definitively into the political foreground when he was elected chairman of the CVP youth in 1967. Under his leadership, this youth movement published three remarkable manifests. The first concerned the reform of the state and proposed farreaching autonomy for the Flemish- and French-speaking communities. The second manifest dealt with the renewal of the party. It attacked the center position and the pronounced confessional character of the CVP — « a party in which everything is indifferent, except the power » — and advocated a « progressive policy for the renewal of society, built on the ideal of equality, justice, and pluralism ». From this position, the CVP youth opted for collaboration of the CVP with the Socialists as privileged partner and responded positively to the call of the Chairman of the Socialist Party of the time, Léo Collard, for the formation of a progressive front. In the third manifest, they argued for breaking down the pillarization. One of the most important ways to achieve this was the establishment of the pluralistic school that would gradually replace the official (state) and the private (Catholic) educational institutions.

The positions proclaimed in these manifests were diametrically opposed to those of the CVP leadership. Nevertheless, Martens was elected chairman of the CVP by a wide majority in 1972. It was not the CVP that made a change of course, however, but Martens who put aside most of the ideas outlined during his chairmanship of the CVP youth. As party chairman, Martens demonstrated, first of all, that he was an outstanding manager: he carried out the necessary rejuvenation and reorganization of the party executives and freshened up the doctrine of his party. As regards the latter, he strongly emphasized the Flemish and Christian character of the party. Martens' chairmanship also initiated a period of electoral recovery for the CVP.

After seven years as party chairman, Martens, at the age of 43 and with no ministerial experience, was entrusted with the leadership of the Belgian government in 1979. His most important task the brand-new premier considered to be the implementation of the definitive reformation of the State, which had completely dominated the political agenda since the beginning of the 1970s. After many difficulties, political crises, and government formulas, the Martens III government succeeded, in the summer of 1980, in having a constitutional amendment approved by Parliament. Hardly a year later, Martens again caused a stir, this time with a socio-economic « rescue plan ». The enduring communitarian problems had drawn attention away from the deteriorating financial and economic condition of the country. Under pressure from international and national financial institutions, Martens proposed in March 1981 and economizing operation of 30 billion francs in addition to a number of measures that involved a drastic change in the rules of social consultation (1). The Socialist coalition partners, however, could not accept the rescue plan, whereupon Martens submitted his resignation. But he returned more quickly than was expected. A few months later, after the elections of November 1981, which were disastrous for his party, Martens formed a new government, this time with the Liberals. This Cabinet announced a drastic change in the social, economic, and financial policy. The center-right coalition of Martens V devaluated the Belgian franc and changed the system of the coupling of wages to the index in order to restore industrial competitiveness. In October of the year of this report, Martens asked and received from the electorate the mandate to continue this policy and to correct it where it had grievously failed, namely regarding the reconstruction of public finances. If the new center-right coalition formed in November again holds together for four years, it will mean that Wilfried Martens will have dominated Belgian political life for an entire decade.

1. Toward the resolution of the missile question.

Political life in the first quarter of 1985 was completely dominated by the question whether Belgium would implement the NATO double decision of 1979 that foresaw the installation of 48 Cruise missiles on Belgian soil. Although the government had always provided a united front to the public, it was deeply divided internally on this matter. The

(1) See M. DEWEERDT and J. SMITS, « Continuity and Change in the Crisis », in *Res Publica*, 1982, nr. 2, p. 264.

Flemish Christian Democrats, in particular, continually tried to postpone the moment of the ultimate decision. At the end of November 1984, moreover, the Christian Democrats (CVP) « up-dated » their position by stating that the decision to install need not be taken, as planned, before the end of the year and consequently the installation need not begin in March 1985 (2). According to the NATO installation plan, however, this installation had to be completed in March 1985. The NATO schedule, together with the actual decision, provided considerable material for political discussion. For it was not at all clear which Belgian minister or ministers had agreed with NATO for the installation in the spring of 1985 and when this agreement had been made.

All of this confirmed once again the faulty provision of information by the Martens V government on the missile dossier and the veil of secrecy that permanently hung around it. In spite of often massive demonstrations against the installation of the missiles, the Cabinet avoided as much as possible the public discussion of this question — only after long insistence was it prepared to hold a parliamentary debate on the subject in 1983, and it issued sometimes contradictory information bit by bit on the preparation for the installation of the missiles on the military base of Florennes, where the missiles would be installed.

1.1. *Martens and Tindemans to Washington.*

Even before the working visit of Prime Minister Wilfried Martens and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Leo Tindemans (CVP) to the American President in January, there was already a storm of controversy on the missile affair. The cause of this was a newspaper report on 8 January in which it was stated that the importation of parts of the Cruise missiles would begin on 15 January although the government had yet to make a definitive decision. In the first reaction, the Minister of Defense Freddy Vreven (PVV) confirmed that « parts, but absolutely no nuclear parts » could be flown over. A few hours later, he revoked his statement. According to the Minister, the « Cruise missiles as a whole and/or in the form of components and/or spare parts as well as the related nuclear heads as a whole and/or in the form of components and/or spare parts » could only be imported « after an explicit governmental decision ». For the CVP, the confused and confusing statements by Vreven were an occasion to repeat once again its November position. The PVV reacted to this with the statement that

(2) See J. SMITS, « Belgian Politics in 1984 : The Electoral Temptation », in *Res Publica*, 1985, nrs. 2-3, pp. 257-258.

the temporary postponement of the installation decision could « not be the gesture of one party », and any deferral had to obtain the consent of the NATO partners.

With more than ordinary interest — also from the international press — attention was given in these circumstances to the working visit of Martens and Tindemans to Washington on 14 and 15 January. However, the situation did not become any clearer, because Martens and Tindemans defended the « postponed installation » : the government would decide before the end of March to install the missiles but the installation itself would not begin at the middle of March, as provided in the NATO schedule. Belgium would also consult the NATO allies about the installation postponement. This new position was not looked on with favor, as could be expected, by President Reagan nor by the Vice-Premiers Jean Gol (PRL) and Charles-Ferdinand Nothomb (PSC), who were of the opinion that Martens and Tindemans had gone further in Washington than had been agreed upon within the government. The polemic was continued by the Chairman of the CVP, Frank Swaelen, who reacted to Gol and Nothomb's statements by again stressing that the government could not decide in March for an immediate installation of the missiles. If that should happen anyway, possibly after negative reactions from the allies, there would be « very serious political difficulties for the government and for the coalition ».

1.2. *The schedule discussion.*

The confusion increased after the return of Martens and Tindemans from the USA. Indeed, Martens gave the impression of wanting to reconsider the installation postponement by declaring that the government would, in any case, take a decision about the installation in March as well as on the schedule but that the missiles had to be placed certainly before the end of 1987, unless there was a disarmament agreement in Geneva. The negative reactions from a number of NATO allies (e.g., Italy and the Netherlands) to the installation postponement were certainly among the reasons for the new change in the government position. The discussion reached its highpoint after an interview given by Minister Tindemans to the Brussels newspaper, *Le Soir*, on 24 January. Tindemans, who was certainly not happy with the up-dating of the position of his party in November 1984, seemed here to be getting even with the group in the CVP that urged a postponement of the decision. This group centered primarily among the Members of Parliament from the labor movement. Tindemans commented that the ministers who did not agree with a positive governmental decision could resign without

this necessarily bringing down the government. The crucial passage in the interview, however, concerned NATO's installation schedule. This, according to Tindemans, had already been approved by a Belgian minister, whose name he did not know but would determine. The next day, Vice-Premier Gol revealed that the Eyskens government had given its approval in 1981 of the NATO schedule, which meant that the minister in question could be no-one other than the then Minister of Defense and present CVP Chairman Swaelen. With Gol's statement, the Socialists also became involved in the discussion for they had been part of the Eyskens government, but the Flemish Socialists, since they were in the opposition, had resolutely opposed the installation of the missiles.

CVP Chairman Swaelen responded that, as Minister of Defense, he had held strictly to the governmental decisions of December 1979 and September 1980 (3). He added that « the present government, of which I am not a member, has changed that schedule and now plans an installation in two phases. I cannot be held responsible for this. » The spokesman of the government confirmed this: the two-phase schedule, with installation of the missiles beginning in March 1985, had been established by the Martens V government. For his part, the Minister of Economic Affairs, Mark Eyskens (CVP) said that in 1981 the governmental partners had agreed to deploy the missiles as soon as it should appear that the disarmament negotiations gave no results. The socialists Willy Claes and Freddy Willockx, who were members of the Eyskens government, denied ever having been consulted about a military schedule for the installation of the missiles. According to them, the decision had been made by a government in the process of resigning without consultation of the coalition partners (4).

As end was made to this avalanche of contradictory statements when Prime Minister Martens sketched the history of the missile dossier in the Chamber and the Senate: 1° the installation schedule was treated in a NATO document of 4 December 1979 and the end of 1983 was mentioned as the date to be striven for; 2° in an appendix to the NATO double decision of 12 December 1979, there was mention of a

(3) On 12 December 1979, the government approved the NATO double decision that planned the installation of Cruise and Pershing missiles in Europe in the period between 1983 and 1986. The Belgian government did lodge a reservation and postponed the actual installation decision by six months in order to give disarmament negotiations a chance. On 19 September 1980, the decision was postponed indefinitely, and the international situation and the course of the disarmament talks would be evaluated every six months.

(4) The Eyskens government had resigned on 21 September 1981. On 17 December, the new Martens V government took over. Swaelen would have approved the installation schedule on 9 December.

global and simultaneous installation in the five countries involved, to begin in 1983 and going on to 1986; 3° because the installation could not begin in 1983 for all sorts of reasons, SHAPE devised another schedule on 7 August 1981 that was accepted by the Infrastructure Committee of NATO on 27 November 1981. For Belgium, this schedule stipulated the installation of essential parts in April 1985, and the installation of the entirety in August 1985. During the ministerial session of the Committee for Defense Planning of 8-9 December 1981, the defense ministers approved the infrastructure program. Martens admitted that this was *not collectively* discussed within the government; 4° the Martens V government requested on 30 July 1982 funds from NATO to conduct the studies needed for the infrastructural work. The funds were granted on 1 September. Because of delays, the plans were changed and the third quarter of 1987 was set as the final date for the installation. The Americans pushed for 15 March as the begin date. A committee of Belgian and US technicians drew up a schedule with March 1985 as the date for the installation of the first sixteen Cruise missiles and September 1987 as the date of completion. Minister of Defense Vreven revealed this begin date for the first time on 15 February 1984 in response to a parliamentary question.

1.3. *The decision.*

The political tension increased as the moment of decision approached. It was clear that the ball was in the court of the CVP. If this party held to its position, then it would certainly bring the government into difficulties. Therefore, there was great interest in the « Up-Dating Congress » that the CVP held in Ghent on 9 February. Officially, the missile question was only one of the many subjects on the agenda of the congress, but it was the eyecatcher. The party leadership took care to see that this matter did not lead to a disruption. The Foreign Affairs Commission met behind closed doors and no vote was taken. It was said that the majority of the arrondissement sections supported the up-dated position of November 1984, although they strongly emphasized NATO solidarity. Since, in the meantime, it had become clear that the allies would not agree with a Belgian postponement, it may be deduced that the CVP saw in this an opportunity to agree with the installation. Completely in this line was the address of Chairman Swaelen, who placed the responsibility for the installation decision on the government and the members of parliament, who had to judge « in honor and conscience » and « in the interest of our country ». Also noted was Swaelen's sharp attack on the Vlaams Aktiecomité tegen Atoomwapens

(VAKA: Flemish Action Committee against Atomic Weapons), a co-organizer of the demonstrations against the installation of the missiles, which he called « an anti-CVP organization » and « wolves in sheep's clothing ». That the room of the CVP for maneuver was shrinking considerably also appeared from the congress of the French-speaking Christian Democrats held on the same day. This congress unanimously and unambiguously called for rapid installation of the Cruise missiles.

Nevertheless, the Christian labor movement, the ACW, continued to pressure the CVP for a deferral of the decision. On 18 March, the ACW argued for a « temporary postponement », which could be taken as a « signal » from the Belgian government, on the condition of an equally clear counter gesture from the Russian side. Paradoxically enough, the ACW hereby facilitated the government's decision, for the unexpected death of the Soviet Premier Chernenko gave the government the chance to quickly evaluate the readiness of the Soviet Union to make a counter gesture. It was not Premier Martens — because, it was said, of the veto of the PRL — but Foreign Minister Tindemans who traveled to Moscow to attend the funeral. To his Russian counterpart Gromyko, Tindemans presented the Belgian request for a counter gesture to a postponement of the installation, namely, the separation of the negotiations on the medium-range missiles from the two other Geneva themes (space defense and long-range missiles). This proposal, which was hardly realistic, was rejected by Gromyko.

The Belgian decision was then made extraordinarily rapidly. The ministers met in the evening of 14 March, after Tindemans had returned from Moscow. The CVP leadership met separately for a few hours, and at 11 p.m. the ministerial council decided for installation. The implementation of this decision was just as rapid: a few hours after the governmental decision, transport planes left the United States with the nuclear heads. The first airplane landed shortly after Prime Minister Martens had communicated the decision of his government to Parliament (5).

1.4. *The aftermath of the decision.*

In his governmental communication to the Chamber and Senate, Martens recalled that the Belgian government had already previously

(5) Later, it became known that Martens, and he alone, had pressed for such a rapid implementation of the governmental decision out of the fear that « every doubt the competence of the government to take and implement the decision would be fatal for the Cabinet. *The Americans were not in a hurry, I was* ». Citation from W. Martens, *Een gegeven woord*, Tielt, 1985, p. 153.

confirmed its concurrence with the NATO double agreement, and he stressed the efforts of Foreign Minister Tindemans « to organize East-West relations on a more stable basis ». From the report of Tindemans it appeared, according to Martens, that the allies, « particularly those who, like ourselves, have obliged themselves to install the missiles », were of the opinion that Belgium, at this crucial moment, should not rupture the solidarity of the Alliance. « A deferral of the commencement of the installation in our country » would, according to the NATO partners, « weaken the credibility and the cohesion of the Alliance and threaten the very negotiations (in Geneva). » Since the Soviet Union had, in the meantime, gone ahead with the installation of nuclear weapons and did not consider a decoupling of the negotiations on mid-range missiles from the global negotiations, a postponement of the installation in Belgium made no sense. « On this basis », continued the Premier, « the government, in conformity with the governmental declaration of 18 December 1981, has decided that it must confirm now the decision that it has made on 12 December 1979 and 19 September 1980 jointly with its allies. Therefore, it has given its permission for the deployment of the first sixteen missiles ». Martens went on to say that the actual use of the missiles installed on Belgian territory could only take place with the strict respect of the consultation and decision-making procedure of NATO, on the one hand, and of the international treaties and obligations that Belgium has undertaken, on the other. « In any case, nuclear weapons installed on our territory can be used only as a response to aggression and as a last resort and this against targets that are limited to the positions of the aggressor and the infrastructure that supports this attack », thus the communication.

Finally, Martens explained the decision of the government regarding the installation of the 32 remaining nuclear missiles : 1° if, before the end of 1987, the negotiations have led to an agreement that permits the nul option, there will be no need for deployment in Belgium ; 2° if, before the end of 1987, the negotiations have led to an agreement that permits limited deployment, Belgium will implement the assigned portion of that deployment ; 3° if, before the end of 1987, the negotiations have been discontinued or interrupted, Belgium will decide to implement the agreed upon portion of the deployment as this is specified by the Alliance; 4° if the negotiations at that moment are still in progress, the deployment of the 32 Cruise missiles will be postponed for a period of six months after which, failing an agreement, they will automatically be deployed without a new decision being necessary.

With the governmental decision and communiqué, however, the missile question was not yet settled. Although the decision was received very

favorably by the White House and by NATO, it generated sharp criticism in Belgium from the opposition parties and the peace movement. The latter had already decided on 21 February to organize a demonstration on 17 March. Tens of thousands of demonstrators marched in Brussels — according to the organizers 150,000 according to the police 50,000 — no longer, as planned, to put pressure on the government to postpone its decision, but to express their rejection of the installation of the missiles and the policy of Martens-V in this matter. The ACW, which had supported the organizers in previous peace demonstrations, now distanced itself from the slogans. According to the leadership of the ACW, they argued for unilateral disarmament, and the demonstration was ultimately aimed against the government. In spite of this position, many ACW militants marched in the demonstration, which again illustrated the internal tensions between the leadership and the membership of the Christian labor movement. And also during the Chamber debate on the government's communiqué of 15 March, some of the CVP members of the ACW group objected to the decision of the Cabinet. The settlement of this matter was difficult to swallow particularly for Luc Van den Brande, group leader of the CVP in the Chamber, who, after the up-dated position of his party had still stated that, for him, there was « absolutely no date » anymore for the installation of the missiles. For a while, it looked as though he would resign as leader of the group. At the vote on the motion of confidence, he finally approved the position of the government. Two CVP members of the Chamber, both belonging to the labor wing, did not vote with the majority. In the Senate, all the members of parliament of the majority approved the government's position. The parliamentary debate meant the end of the missile question, which had perturbed the political class and public opinion for more than five years. Action groups and also the green parties tried to keep interest in this controversy alive by means of demonstrations around the military base in Florennes. That the population remained sensitive to the peace problem was shown by the new peace demonstration that again brought tens of thousands of people into the streets in Brussels on 20 October, a week after the parliamentary elections won by the government coalition, which supported the installation of the missiles.

2. The up-dating of the government's program.

Parallel with the missile dossier and partially related to it, the Martens V Cabinet worked on the so-called up-dating of its program. After the European elections in June 1984, in which the coalition parties

did poorly, the nervousness within the majority had increased. With an eye on the parliamentary elections in 1985, the Christian Democrats and the Liberals wanted to achieve a number of their own priorities or tried to correct certain negative aspects of the governmental policy.

2.1. *The governmental change.*

First, a solution had to be sought for the succession of Vice-Premier and Minister of Finance Willy De Clercq (PVV), who left for the EEC Commission on 1 January. The French-speaking majority parties seized upon this departure to demand increased French-speaking presence in the foreign representation of Belgium. However, there was no great change in the composition of the government and the distribution of the powers. The restructuring, as proposed by Prime Minister Martens, remained limited. After some urging, Minister of State Frans Grootjans (PVV) agreed to succeed his fellow party-member, Willy De Clercq, as Minister of Finance. Grootjans also received the portfolio of the Self-Employed, which he took over from Louis Olivier (PRL), who retained only Public Works. De Clercq's portfolio of Foreign Trade went to Vice-Premier Jean Gol (PRL), who apparently did not have enough with Justice and Institutional Reforms. State Secretary for Public Service Louis Waltiel (PVV) became also State Secretary for Finances, and State Secretary for Energy Etienne Knoops (PRL) also became State Secretary for the Self-Employed.

2.2. *The adaptation of the government program.*

The Martens V government decided to divide the up-dating of the governmental agreement demanded by the coalition partners into two phases (6). The first phase remained limited to the approval of a list of bills, which had already been submitted to Parliament by the government and which it wanted to have voted on before the parliamentary vacation. The second phase of the up-dating was linked by the Cabinet to the control of the 1985 budget, which had to be completed by 15 February. In the second phase, the government took up the five major themes: employment, social security of the least well-off, the security of the citizens, the decrease of taxes, and the reinforcement of political democracy. The Christian Democrats were the demanding party for the first two themes, the Liberals for the last three.

The consultation of the up-dating proceeded slowly and with difficulty. The possibility of early elections after a break in the Cabinet or because

(6) See J. SMITS, *loc. cit.*, pp. 259-261.

of the « missile disputes » in the CVP did not tend to make the governmental parties compliant. The laborious proceeding was related, in the first place, to the developments in the missile question. It was thus not by chance that, when the government cut through the « missile knot », it also reached an agreement on the up-dating measures. The eyecatcher was the lowering of personal income tax demanded by the Liberals. The Christian Democrats received satisfaction with an increase of the « child benefits », of certain minimum subsistence levels, and pensions. How the additional expenditures inspired by the election would be compensated for by cut-backs was not immediately clear. Other measures of the up-dating did involve economies (e.g., in health insurance, education, and employment) but they did not balance the expected budget overrun, then still estimated at 27,5 billion francs — and the new expenditures planned. Just before Easter, the Cabinet Council met for two days to cast the specifications of the « up-dating program » into two bills. The government also approved a few education measures that were included in the fiscal bill (e.g., the granting of supplementary funds to the private — i.e., largely Catholic — boarding schools).

In the subsequent weeks, there would still be problems about these education stipulations, for the French-speaking Socialists still refused to participate in the School Pact Commission as long as no solution had been found for what they called « the discriminatory consequences of the introduction of the curriculum packet for French-language education ». On 19 April, the PS walked out of the meeting of the School Pact Commission when the boarding school plan and the associated economies on the operational grants for private education were going to be discussed. An attempt made to reach an agreement was vetoed by the PS on 14 May. The Senate approved the fiscal bill, but without the customary approval of the School Pact Commission. This was the first time since the signing of the School Pact in 1958 that such a thing had happened. Before the discussion of the bill in the Chamber, the PSC made one last attempt to unblock the School Pact Commission, but it was fruitless.

Afterwards, education also continued to cause political tensions between the coalition partners and between the Flemish and French-language parties. This was the case with a conflict on building subsidies to private schools and with the integration of two higher educational institutions into university centers. When CVP Chamber Member Chris Moors introduced an amendment to abolish the extra-legal advantages of the personnel of the French-language educational system, the PSC requested that the related bills be returned to the educational commission. However, the CVP refused to go along with this. Consultation between

Premier Martens, the Vice-Premiers, the party chairmen, the group leaders, and the education and budget ministers resolved nothing. For the first time in parliamentary history, the French-language Chamber members of the majority — the vice-premiers and ministers included — and the opposition invoked the « alarm procedure » against the bill that governed the integration of the Dutch-language educational institution (7). Because of the Heysel crisis (cf. above), the alarm procedure would no longer involve any danger for the government. In accordance with the Constitution, the ministerial council issued an advice on 30 July on the question, but this was limited to holding out the prospect of a general bill on the university integration. The Chamber itself did not react to it.

Moreover, the Parliament had to deal with the alarm bell procedure again. On 27 June, the SP, PVV, VU, and AGALEV sounded the so-called alarm bell in the Flemish Council regarding the cable television decree. But this question, too, failed to come to public discussion because of the government crisis caused by the Heysel drama.

3. The end of Martens V.

3.1. *The Heysel drama.*

Although the government had intended to disband the complete legislature and the majority had in the end of 1984 already voted to have the elections not in May but in December, it had to have early elections. The cause was the political consequences of the drama that occurred on 29 May at the football final of the European Cup for country champions between the Italian Juventus of Turin and the English Liverpool in the Heysel Stadium in Brussels.

Forty minutes before the scheduled beginning of the game, Liverpool supporters stormed a section of the stadium containing mostly Juventus fans. The serious incidents cost the lives of 38 people (8). This drama very soon had political repercussions. For the events called into question the way in which the game had been prepared for by the Belgian police forces and the security measures provided. The political responsibility for it was borne by the Minister of Internal Affairs Charles-Ferdinand Nothomb (PSC), who declared on 30 May that he had ordered an investigation to determine the causes of the incidents and to determine

(7) The « alarm bell » is the usual term for the constitutional procedure introduced in 1970 for the protection of ideological, philosophical, or linguistic minorities.

(8) The 39th victim (an Italian) died in August of his injuries.

the responsibility of the police forces. Characteristic of the tense sphere that had prevailed for a number of months within the coalition was that the government and Minister of Internal Affairs Nothomb in particular came under fire not only from the opposition but also from members of the majority. During a commemoration service in the Chamber of Representatives (3 June), the Chamber Chairman Jean Defraigne (PRL) sharply attacked the UEFA, those responsible for keeping order, the government, and Minister Nothomb. Defraigne's speech was censured by the majority groups and generated a strong reaction from Nothomb, who found that it was «unworthy» of the function of the Chamber Chairman. A few days later, the Chamber decided to establish a parliamentary investigation commission. On 6 July, the commission published its report and conclusions. The Commission held the British fans to be primarily responsible for the Heysel drama, but it also pointed out the deficiencies of the organizers and the police forces. On the responsibility of the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Commission members did not agree. Five of the nine members of the Commission, among them a representative of the French-language Liberal Party, held that the Minister of Internal Affairs bore the administrative and political responsibility for the faulty intervention of the police forces in the Heysel Stadium.

3.2. *The parliamentary debate.*

On 12 and 13 July, the Chamber held a public debate on the report of the so-called Heysel Commission. Before the debate began, the group leaders of the majority had agreed not to conclude the debate with a vote on the conclusions of the Commission's report, but to present a recommendatory motion. The distrust between the French-language governmental parties, the PSC and the PRL, was so great, however, that the French-language Liberals threatened not to abide by the agreement already as the debate began.

On the first day of the debate, Nothomb denied having failed at his job. Spokesmen for the opposition held the Minister of Internal Affairs politically responsible for the deficiencies in the action of the police forces and asked the Minister to draw his conclusions from that. They added that the resignation of Nothomb need not involve the resignation of the entire government. More important was the speech of the PRL group leader, Robert Henrion, who completely supported the report of the investigation commission and asked Nothomb to resign «out of a sense of honor». After this speech, the prevailing opinion was that a cabinet crisis was inevitable. Nevertheless, the group leaders of the majority did

arrive at an agreement at the end of the first day on the draft of a recommendatory motion of confidence.

During the second day of the debate, Nothomb again defended himself and the police forces, and Premier Martens defended Nothomb. According to the Premier, the Minister of Internal Affairs had made no policy errors. Again, it was a French-speaking Liberal Chamber Member, Ch. Poswick, who caused a sensation when, in a declaration before the vote in the name of the majority of his group, he announced that he would approve the motion of confidence only so as not to endanger the government. He said that it would have been desirable if the Minister of Internal Affairs had resigned. At the vote, three PRL members abstained; the other members of the majority approved the motion.

3.3. The resignation of Gol.

The vote did not still the political storm. The next day, Louis Michel, Chairman of the PRL, concurred with Poswick's statement and said that he still hoped Nothomb would change his mind. Nothomb himself indicated that he was considering resignation less than ever.

Another day later, on 15 July, Jean Gol, the Liberal Vice-Premier and Minister of Justice, Institutional Reforms, and Foreign Trade, totally unexpectedly sent a letter of resignation to Prime Minister Martens. Gol wrote that he could not concur with « the unjustified refusal of the Minister of Internal Affairs to accept his political responsibility ». The political world was stunned by the news. The PRL stressed that this was a « personal decision », which gave the impression that the other French-speaking Liberal ministers would not follow Gol. But in the evening, the leadership of the PRL met and unanimously approved Gol's decision. All the Liberal ministers declared that they were behind their leader. The PRL declared that it was waiting for a « new fact » — the resignation of Nothomb — for it to review its position. The rupture in the government was thus made definitive. On 16 July, Prime Minister Martens presented the resignation of his government to the King, who took the resignation under advisement. He consulted the resigning ministers, Gol, Nothomb, Dehaene, Grootjans, and, finally, Premier Martens. Afterwards, the Palace stated that the Head of State did not accept the resignation of the government.

Prime Minister Martens immediately explained that the government, the composition of which remained unchanged, would retain office but that early elections would be held, the date of which was still to be set, and would only complete a minimum program. On 18 July, Martens

presented a governmental communication to Parliament in which he requested and received a vote of confidence for the implementation of that limited program.

3.4. *No constitutional revision.*

In the debate on the motion of confidence of mid-July, a great deal of attention was also given to the procedure for amending the constitution. The four major Flemish parties (CVP, PVV, SP, and VU) requested the inclusion of Article 59 bis in the declaration for constitutional revision. The intention was to «federalize» education, i.e., to transfer the authority over education to the Communities. The French-speaking Socialists and Liberals also supported this transfer of powers, albeit not in equal degrees or under the same conditions. The French-speaking Christian Democrats, however, would have nothing to do with a revision of Article 59 bis.

To prevent Article 59 bis from being excluded from the revision declaration by the veto of the PSC, the major opposition parties (SP, PS, and VU) offered Premier Martens what is called an «exchange majority». According to Martens, however, a revision declaration could not be brought about by an exchange majority. The Prime Minister advanced juridical arguments for this, but the political considerations were doubtless decisive for not agreeing to the proposal of the opposition parties. Isolating the PSC in this question would certainly complicate considerably if not render impossible the formation of a new Christian Democrat / Liberal government after the elections. For its part, the opposition argued that it would be unthinkable for the King not to sign a revision declaration approved by a democratic majority.

During the vacation, Martens tried to unblock the affair by linking the revision of Article 59 bis to that of Article 17 on the freedom of education and of Article 107 ter on the Court of Arbitration in order to give the PSC constitutional and enforceable guarantees against the discrimination of private (Catholic) education it feared in the leftist dominated Wallonia. Another possible solution consisted in the replacement of the PSC ministers by French-speaking Liberals so that the constitutionally prescribed linguistic parity in the government would be respected.

The PSC, however, was not mollified with the constitutional guarantees proposed by Martens. The French-speaking Christian Democrats were primarily concerned with financial guarantees, since the federalization of education would result in a redistribution of the budgetary resources to the benefit of Dutch-language education. Louis Michel, PRL Chairman,

stated that his party must not be counted upon to replace the PSC ministers who might resign. For their part, the Flemish Liberals rejected the idea of only revising Article 131 of the Constitution. That article regulated the global revision procedure and its amendment should considerably facilitate that procedure, for example, by deleting the preceding revision declaration and the dissolution of parliament. The CVP, finally, refused to participate in a revision procedure if Article 59 bis would not come into consideration for revision.

In these circumstances Premier Martens could only state at an extraordinary Cabinet meeting (2 September) that the situation was at an impasse. On the same evening, he reported to the Head of State and proposed that the King dissolve Parliament without the resignation of the government. The King agreed. This unusual situation generated considerable criticism from the opposition parties for the government, in which there was no cohesion but which still remained in power, could no longer be controlled by Parliament. Moreover, the newly elected parliament would have no constitutional authority.

4. The parliamentary elections of 13 October 1985.

4.1. *The election campaign.*

The campaign for the parliamentary elections of 13 October was dominated by the question of whether the outgoing center-right coalition would be able to maintain its not so large parliamentary majority (113 out of the 212 seats in the Chamber of Representatives). After the European elections in 1984, serious doubt had arisen in this regard. The projection of these results to the national elections indicated that the Christian Democrats and the Liberals would no longer have a majority. Nevertheless, the coalition parties left no doubt that they would continue to rule together if they should retain their majority.

The election campaign of the Christian Democrats and the Liberals was, therefore, conducted completely on the theme of the continuance of the recovery policy of Martens V. Non-economic controversies, such as the missile question and the communitarian problems, thus disappeared into the background. On the side of the majority, the CVP used outgoing Premier Martens as the figurehead in its campaign. «No Turning Back» was the slogan on the billboards. The slogan initially generated considerable internal criticism. Some considered it too static and too conservative. But the idea behind it was that the socio-economic policy of Martens V had to be carried through and consequently no return was possible any longer to the period of before the government. This also

made it clear that a coalition with the Socialists was virtually impossible. Chairman Swaelen announced beforehand already that he would resign if the Socialists would join a coalition with the Christian Democrats. The PVV in its campaign also stressed the need to continue the policy. The Flemish Liberals presented themselves as the « best guarantee » for keeping the Socialists in the opposition and to implement the tax cuts.

The Flemish Socialists entered the election campaign with the slogan « Work, Peace, Justice », which had served them so well in the European elections. At the last moment, the SP decided to respond to the CVP's « No Turning Back » by adding to their slogan « If you want things to change ». The SP tried to make it clear to the voters that their program was the only alternative for the policy of the center-right coalition. Three themes dominated the SP campaign: work redistribution, income redistribution, and no missiles. The VU conducted its campaign under the slogan « More work and less taxes in a free Flanders ». The polarization between the Christian Democrats and the Liberals, on the one hand, and the Socialists, on the other, made it particularly difficult for this Flemish national party to bring communitarian themes to the forefront in the election struggle.

In the French-speaking part of the country, the campaign was less polarized. The PS, which had never concealed its desire to govern again, presented itself more moderately than did the Flemish Socialists. Socio-economically, the French-language Socialists argued for a policy of selective pump priming. Further, they were for the federalization of education and of the economy. In contrast to the Flemish Socialists, the missiles formed no stumbling block for the PS for governmental negotiations. The French-language Christian Democrats and Liberals, like their Flemish counterparts, made it clear that they wanted to continue to govern. The PSC stressed in its electoral platform the traditional Christian-Democrat themes like the family, education, and employment. Noteworthy was the agreement the PSC concluded with the Alliance Démocratique Wallonne (ADW: Walloon Democratic Alliance) of Paul-Henri Gendebien, who had been chairman of the Walloon federalistic party, the Rassemblement Wallon, from 1974 to 1978. The PRL attracted interest before the elections primarily by its attempts to recover the heritage in Brussels of the languishing FDF.

The opinion polls predicted gains for the Socialist parties, even to the extent that they would become the largest political family in the country, and slight losses for the Christian Democratic parties, although they were doing better as the elections approached. The polls also predicted considerable losses for the Flemish Liberals and a slight gain for the French-

language Liberals. Converted into seats, it looked as though the center-right coalition would not be able to maintain its majority.

4.2. *The election results.*

Against the opinion polls and the general expectations, the center-right coalition emerged not only safe but even strengthened from the election, primarily by the surprising gains won by the CVP. The election results, moreover, showed several remarkable things. Three of the four government parties, the CVP, the PSC, and the PRL, booked gains, while the Socialists, too, the largest opposition parties, made advances. The gains of the traditional parties were achieved at the cost of the federalist parties, which were the biggest losers of the elections: the Volksunie in Flanders and the FDF in Brussels. Walloon nationalism had already been largely absorbed before the elections primarily by the Socialists and thus played no longer any significant role. The green parties continued to advance, but they were unable to achieve a large step forwards this time. It seems as though they have reached their electoral ceiling. Striking in these elections was the disappearance of the Communists from Parliament.

In Flanders, the SP advanced by 3.1 %, which brought its total of the votes cast to 23.7 %. With this, it recovered its position as the second party in Flanders, which it had lost in 1981 to the Liberals. The Flemish Socialists won in all arrondissements, particularly where the rejuvenation and the renewal had occurred to the greatest extent. Much less successful were the PAKS and the *Doorbraak* candidates on the SP lists (9). The vote gains gave the SP 36 seats in the Chamber, six more than in 1981 but the advance was less than in the European elections. The smaller than hoped for vote gains and the retention of the center-right majority gave the SP a hangover after the elections and the radical opposition policy was questioned within the Party. The Christian Democrats recovered slightly from their severe defeat in 1981. The polarization of the voting striven for by the CVP and the « Martens effect » were good for a vote gain of 2.6 %. With 34.6 % of the votes cast and 49 seats (+ 6), the CVP remained by far the largest party in Flanders. Its gains were not equally divided. In the Province of Limburg, the CVP even lost somewhat, precisely where a number of party leaders

(9) PAKS stands for Progressief Akkoord Christenen-Socialisten. This is a group of ACW militants who saw cartel formation with the Socialists as the first step toward their own political formation of Christian workers and a progressive front formation. Cf J. SMITS, *loc. cit.*, p. 264.

had expressed criticism of the Martens policy. The CVP appeared primarily to have won back PVV voters and also voters from the VU.

The PVV was the only party of the outgoing majority that did not succeed in improving its electoral position. It lost 3.8 % and fell back to 17.3 % of the votes cast, which was good for 22 seats or 6 less than in 1981. In comparison with the European elections, the loss of the Flemish Liberals was not as bad as expected. Undoubtedly, they paid the price for not being able to keep the fiscal promises made in 1981 in the past parliament. After this setback, the question was whether the young chairman, Guy Verhofstadt, could maintain his orthodox liberal course unchanged.

The Volksunie, which had also scored poorly in the European elections, fell from 15.9 % to 12.7 % of the votes cast, which was good for 16 seats (— 4). The Flemish nationalists did not succeed in bringing the communitarian problems — Cockerill-Sambre, Happart, the Galle bill — to the fore in the battle for votes. Moreover, in this period of economic crisis, the VU has not succeeded in working out an attractive socio-economic profile. The most important problem with which it will certainly be confronted in the future is the rejuvenation of its leaders and staff. After the election defeat, voices were raised to get it over with quickly.

The green party, Agalev, advanced by 2.1 % by winning 6.1 % of the votes. In the Chamber, Agalev now has four seats (+ 2). Nevertheless, this result was no reason for any great enthusiasm, for the ecologists had done better in the European elections. Thus, many were of the opinion that the « green march forward » had come to a halt or at least had passed its high point. It is possible that the poorer election result was influenced by the confusion that prevailed in the party after the socio-economic congress in the spring. At this congress, a number of radical positions were pushed through, such as the socialization of the banks and the energy sector and the introduction of the 32-hour week. These positions, of course, received a great deal of attention in the press, and it was stated that Agalev had resolutely chosen a « leftist course ». The party leadership thus felt obliged to deny that Agalev strived for a centralized planned economy and general nationalization.

In Wallonia, the Socialists were the big winners. The PS won 39.4 % of the votes or 3.2 % more than in 1981. The vote gain, however, did not translate into a gain of seats (10), so they retained their 35 seats.

(10) As regards the distribution of seats, account must be taken of the adjustment of this distribution to the evolution of the population. In comparison with 1981, the Flemish provinces had two seats more and the Walloon provinces two less.

The advance of the French-language Socialists was made at the cost of the small leftist parties and the Communist party, which, for the first time since 1925 no longer has a seat in Parliament. As with its Flemish sister party, the victory left a bitter aftertaste because the seat gains of the Christian Democrats placed the PS on the opposition benches both in the French Community Council and in the Walloon Regional Council.

The PSC advanced by 3 % and thus confirmed the upward trend manifested in the European elections. The position of the PSC regarding the federalization of education, whereby the party constituted itself the only defender of French-language Catholic education and that of Nothomb in the Heysel affair were clearly considered differently in Wallonia than in Flanders. With 22.6 % of the votes and 20 seats (+ 2), the French-language Christian Democrats remained the third party in Wallonia. For Chairman Gérard Deprez, the result proved that there is still a place for a center party like the PSC in Wallonia. After the election debacle in 1981, it was feared in the PSC that the party would be crushed by the polarization between the Socialists and the Liberals. For the time being, this danger is past. The other governmental party, the PRL, also advanced. The vote gain of 2.5 % yielded, as for the Socialists, no gain in seats for the French-language liberals, so they remained with 24 seats. The PRL total amounted to 24.2 %, which is only 1 % less than the best result the Liberals have ever obtained in Wallonia since 1945. The green party, Ecolo continued to mark time: from 6.1 % to 6.2 % of the votes but it won three seats in the Chamber and now has five. In comparison with the 9.4 % it had won in the European elections, this was actually not a good result. While the French-language greens had previously scored better than the Flemish, both of them now won roughly an equal share of the electorate in the two parts of the country.

In Brussels, the Liberals, in particular, performed excellently. This success was in large measure due to the presence on their list of the ex-FDF and controversial burgomaster of Schaarbeek, Roger Nols, and of the ex-Socialist minister Henri Simonet. The Liberals are now the largest political formation in the capital, a status that belonged to the FDF from 1971 to 1981. The crumbling away of the FDF also continued in these elections. The party lost more than half of its voters and retained only three of the six Chamber seats.

In the Chamber, the Senate, and the Flemish Council, the Liberals and the Christian Democrats possessed a comfortable majority (115 out of 212, 102 out of 183, and 107 out of 185 seats, respectively). In the French Community Council and the Walloon Regional Council, the

political cards have been dealt differently : the PSC and the PRL counted in these Councils, respectively, 66 out of 133 and 52 out of 104 seats.

5. The difficult birth of Martens VI.

Although the outgoing coalition emerged strengthened from the elections, the formation of a new Christian Democrat/Liberal coalition was much more difficult than expected. The Christian Democrats and the Liberals had indicated several times before 13 October that they wanted to continue to govern « to complete what Martens V had begun ». The loss of the Flemish Liberals in the elections, however, complicated the cabinet formation. As the only party of the outgoing majority that did not book a gain in votes, the PVV was particularly stubborn in the formation deliberations. Chairman Verhofstadt concluded from the elections losses of his party that too little emphasis was placed during the preceding parliament on Liberal themes, and, consequently, clear agreements must be made in this regard in the new governmental declaration. The second and perhaps most important factor that complicated the formation concerned the situation of public finances. As the year drew to a close, it became increasingly clear that the budgetary deficit would be considerably higher than had been estimated. Consequently, the coalition partners, who had repeatedly stated during the election campaign that « three fourths of the way was already finished » and « the light at the end of the tunnel was in sight », had to work out a new restructuring program. Nevertheless, the new Martens VI Cabinet was formed on 28 November without a concrete economization plan. The government did declare, however, that it wanted to reduce the deficit to 7 % of the GNP by the end of the legislative term, which was precisely the same objective the Martens V had set in 1981. As in 1981, the Cabinet would execute the restructuring of the public finances with special powers.

5.1. *Never change a winning team ?*

Those who expected a rapid reformation of the outgoing center-right coalition were deceived. Nevertheless, there was not the least doubt in political circles after the elections that there would be a re-edition of the Christian Democrat/Liberal Cabinet of Martens V. The only difficulty political observers saw was the digestion by the Flemish Liberals of their election defeat. Therefore, interest was focused on the Chairman of the PVV, the youthful G. Verhofstadt, who had given his party a new spirit

in 1981 by stressing neo-liberal ideas but who saw his position threatened after the losses of 13 October.

As customary, Prime Minister Martens offered the resignation of his government to the King on the day after the elections. The Head of State accepted the resignation and immediately commenced his traditional consultations with prominent members of the worlds of politics, unions, management, and finance. On 16 October, the King requested the outgoing Premier Martens to form a new government. Martens accepted the task and announced at a press conference that he wanted to continue to give priority to the socio-economic recovery policy. At the same time, Martens declared that the draft budget for 1986, which had not been compiled by the outgoing cabinet, would be submitted to Parliament before the end of the year. At the same time, the *formateur* tempered the enthusiasm of those who pushed for a rapid formation of a government. Since the Senate would be completely formed only by mid-November because of the election of the provincial and coopted senators, there was, according to Martens, plenty of time for the formation consultations.

For their part, a few days before the appointment of Martens as *formateur*, the Liberals, via Vice-Premier J. Gol, had already made known their priorities, namely breaking of the broadcast monopoly, reduced taxes, socio-economic flexibility, the guest workers and the security of the citizens — all points that were included in the governmental declaration of Martens V but that had not emerged sufficiently in the policy. Gol warned Martens not to use the Liberals as an extra support for a homogeneous Christian-Democrat cabinet. There was danger also from the corner of the Christian trade union. The ACV, with its attitude of tacit approval of the socio-economic recovery policy of Martens V, had been the most important support of this cabinet. Immediately after the elections, however, the ACV revealed a number of striking demands. It requested a complete restoration of the index linkage, the scrapping of the index freeze of the Economy Plan of 1986 before implementing a decrease of personal income tax, the maintenance of employment in public services and education, and the expansion of the job programs set up by the government.

3.2. Budgetary difficulties.

On 21 October, the formation consultations began in earnest. On that day, Martens presented to the negotiators from het CVP, the PSC, the PVV, and the PRL an initial memorandum on the socio-economic thrust of the governmental policy to be implemented. The memorandum

was described as « vague » and « general » and was clearly of a Christian-Democrat cast. In summary, the memorandum proposed the continuance of the economic recovery policy without endangering social justice. The most striking paragraph concerned public finances. On top of the so-called Budget Savings Plan of March 1984 (11), an additional 70 billion francs in savings were necessary, to be achieved over two years. Although « all expenditure posts » would be considered for this, « special attention » would be given to subsidies for public and private firms, i.e., the so-called national sectors, the « transfers to individuals » or social security, the educational sector, and the decrease of the interest on the governmental debt. In short, the sectors to which the knife had already been taken in the previous austerity plans would again be the areas selected for the new cuts. Nothing was said about the non-socio-economic problems which would be dealt with separately. Martens, as *formateur*, hoped to be able to achieve an agreement with the negotiating parties by 15 November.

But this did not take account of what the SP chairman Karel Van Miert called the « budget skeletons » that would emerge from the closet in the subsequent days. The additional economies of 70 billion francs postulated in the Martens memorandum would soon be revised. On 24 October, the Minister of the Budget, Philippe Maystadt (PSC), announced surplus expenditures for the current budget year of 11 billion francs, and Minister of Finance Frans Grootjans predicted a 30 billion shortfall in income, which amounts were considerably larger than initially estimated. Thus, not 70 but 90 billion francs more would have to be saved. The question was then immediately raised whether the budgetary deficit objective foreseen in the Martens memorandum had to be achieved after three or four instead of two years. The idea was raised by the Christian Democrats to compensate for the shortfall in receipts by an increase of the indirect taxes, which was immediately and categorically rejected by the Liberals.

The clouds continued to pile up over the budgetary horizon when the Minister of Economic Affairs, Mark Eyskens (CVP) brought up the financial condition of the national sectors — steel, coal, shipbuilding, textiles, and glass — at the formation consultation. The Walloon steel company Cockerill-Sambre had done better than the previous years but was still 11 billion francs behind its restructuring plan. It was expected that the company would encounter new financial difficulties in mid-1987. There were also problems in the Flemish coal industry. The national resources to cover the losses of the Kempense Steenkoolmijnen (KS)

(11) See J. SMITS, *loc. cit.*, pp. 244-247.

would be exhausted already in 1986 so that Flanders would have to make up for the operational shortfall with the yield of the inheritance tax. But there was more at stake in the KS. Roughly at the same time as the national sectors were being discussed in the formation consultations, a wildcat strike broke out in the KS. It was said that the management of the mines had worked out a reconstruction program that provided for the natural diminishment of almost 4000 employees, the scrapping of the building of a new shaft, the merger of a number of mines, and a significant cut back in production. The purpose of all of this was, of course, to keep the operating deficits of the KS from increasing further. The strike, which was quickly recognized by the unions, ended after it was stated that no definitive decisions would be taken by the management of the mines without consultation with the government. This did not resolve the problems of the KS and the other national sectors. Such a settlement was not forthcoming, so the entire problem was simply shifted to the future by the government negotiators.

On 29 October, Martens as *formateur* issued a revised memorandum from which the chapter on public finances had been removed. Apparently Martens wanted to evade the thorny budget problems and first to reach an agreement on the other aspects of the socio-economic program, such as the competitiveness of the firms, the industrial policy, jobs, and social security. The discussions on them did not take up much time. The result was a more detailed text with little that was new in it. Most of the additions were associated with the governmental declaration of Martens V or concerned bills that negotiators wanted to have given priority treatment by Parliament. Important was the decision not to extend the share law but to replace it with a system of « supplementary pension savings » with a favorable tax system. At the same time, it was agreed that successful companies could, under certain conditions, apply profit sharing that would be exempt from the general pay moderation imposed by Martens V.

In the shadow and clearly linked to the national consultations, the formation consultation for the regional and community executives began in early November. The Christian Democrats and Liberals made no secret of also wanting to govern on these levels together.

5.3. *New budgetary objectives, special powers, and a tax freeze.*

On 6 November, the negotiators at the formation consultations received a revised version of the chapter on public finances that had been lacking. The objective was now to reduce the budgetary deficit to 7 % of the GNP by 1989. Martens had thus moderated his ambitions: the economiz-

ing period would be extended from two to four years, although it was added that the most severe restructuring efforts would be concentrated in the first two years of the new parliament. In 1987, the net balance to be financed would already be brought back to 8 % of the GNP. The memorandum, for the rest, gave no concrete figures so that there was uncertainty about the necessary measures on top of the already existing economizing plans. Nor did Martens' memorandum offer a figure for the budgetary deficit in 1986. It was clear only on the way in which the government would take the necessary measures, namely, by means of special powers, as Martens V had done.

With this began the tedious negotiations on the new restructuring operation. The first collisions between the Christian Democrats and the Liberals soon occurred. The latter pressed for a fiscal freeze. Martens' reworked memorandum on governmental finances gave them no satisfaction on this point. The specification that « the global fiscal and para-fiscal pressure » had to remain equal was too vague and certainly not conclusive. In 1981, Martens V also had intended not to increase the tax pressure but it was still strongly increased during the parliamentary term. Thus, the Liberals wanted more secure guarantees on this point. Difficulties also arose about the discussion of the chapter on educational economies. The assumption was that the Ministers of Education Daniël Coens (CVP) and André Bertouille (PRL) had still awarded contracts for the building of schools, although they were aware of the agreement in the formation consultations about a moratorium on school construction. Martens thereupon sent a letter to these ministers demanding clarification in this matter. This gave rise among the negotiators to another discussion on the finances of private and public education whereby the Christian Democrats and the Liberals, depending on the subject, formed blocs in function of their party affiliation or their communitary allegiance. Then, social security came up, but in this matter the negotiators avoided most of the bottlenecks. The debate on the financing of social security and, more particularly, on a possible increase of the social contributions was deferred until later.

In the meantime, the rank and file of the parties were becoming more impatient with the dragging out of the negotiations, all the more so since the cooptation of the senators had taken place on 12 November and consequently nothing stood any longer in the way of the formation of a new center-right government. The breakthrough in the formation consultations came only on 16 November. On that day, an agreement was reached between the negotiators on the fiscal freeze demanded by the Liberals and particularly by the PVV Chairman Verhofstadt. The

agreement went as follows: « that neither the fiscality nor the para-fiscality may increase and that no new governmental assessments may be introduced ». Further, it was added that the tax reduction decided upon at the last moment by Martens V would be implemented unchanged and that the new government would also work out « a charter for the protection of the taxpayer ». PVV-Chairman Verhofstadt expressed particular pleasure over the inscription of these points in the governmental agreement and thus avoided having to go to his party congress with empty hands. The Christian Democrats, however, immediately cast doubt on the fiscal freeze. However that may be, the negotiations thereafter accelerated. On 18 November, Martens presented at the formation consultations his so-called political memorandum with, in turn, the objectives regarding the reform of the state, the further democratization of the constitutional state, the security of the citizens, education, foreign policy, and defence policy. This memorandum, too, was the most striking for its vagueness and the problems that were not dealt with in it. On the most delicate problems — the affair of the Voeren burgomaster Happart and the linguistic knowledge of the political officials in the Brussels suburban communities (12) — nothing was said, and, with regard to the federalization of education, the non-committal formula used was that the government would work out guarantees « for an equitable treatment of all educational systems that must precede each transfer of educational authority to the communities. On the basis of the agreement reached within it, it will submit a draft declaration for the revision of the Constitution to make the realization of these reforms possible. » Thus no direct reference to the notorious Article 59 bis of the Constitution was made.

The Christian Democratic and Liberal negotiators finally, after an all-night session, reached a global agreement in the morning of 22 November on the new government program. During the last hours of the negotiations, the vague memorandum on the political problems received hardly any further precision. For the rest, the agreement was to freeze the community problem in a study center. The socio-economic part was dominated by the continuation of the struggle against the crisis and unemployment and the restructuring of government finances. As regards the last, an amount of 200 billion francs was postulated, or 130 billion more than at the start of the formation consultations. Further, the coalition partners set the objective of reducing youth unemployment by 50,000 — a somewhat cynical specification since it was known that the

(12) See J. SMITS, *loc. cit.*, pp. 232-236.

objective would be achieved by demographic evolution alone — and of continuing to base the social security system on the principle of solidarity, with priority being given to the least advantaged.

5.4. *The party congresses and the distribution of the portfolios.*

In spite of the lack of concreteness in the governmental agreement, the negotiators returned confidently to their respective party congresses. There was more speculation about shifts in the leadership of the CVP and the PVV and the distribution of the ministerial portfolios than about the reactions of the parties to the agreement reached. Thus, there was discussion about the inclusion of Swaelen in the government, which could mean that the Flemish Christian Democrats would have to look for a new chairman. Various names were mentioned, but the most attention was given to the director of the research service of the CVP Herman Van Rompuy, who belonged to the right wing of the party, and to the most important representative of the Christian labor movement in Martens V, the Minister of Social Affairs Jean-Luc Dehaene. The candidacy of Dehaene seemed more intended to be a message to Swaelen to convince him to remain as chairman of the party because his succession could give rise to a sharp internal struggle. Among the Flemish Liberals, there was also interest in what their chairman would do: stay as chairman or enter the government to succeed Vice-Premier and Minister of Finance Grootjans, who had previously let it be known that he no longer desired a ministerial post.

As expected, the governmental agreement was guided through the party congresses without difficulties. The statement of the youth chairman, Johan Van Hecke, that it would be best if Nothomb were not included in the national government because of his attitude in the Happort affair, was noted at the CVP congress. Further, the fiscal freeze cheered by the Flemish Liberals was dismissed by the CVP as a « pacifier ». The French-language Liberals were particularly satisfied with the freezing of the communitarian problems. In fact, the party congresses were dominated by the same figures who had dominated the formation consultations: Prime Minister Martens, PVV Chairman Verhofstadt, and the Vice-Premiers Gol and Nothomb.

These four men also formed the core of the new Martens VI Cabinet that was sworn in on 28 November. Prime Minister Martens succeeded in convincing Verhofstadt to join his government, thereby preventing Verhofstadt from putting too much pressure on the new government from the outside in his position as party chairman. Moreover, Verhofstadt received a key position in the new government. As Minister of the Budget

and as Vice-Premier, he was given both a supervisory and an authority function for the extensive restructuring operation that was in store and on which Verhofstadt had so stubbornly insisted during the negotiations. Gol and Nothomb, who were after each other's political throats during the Heysel crisis, retained, along with the Vice-Premiership, their Justice and Internal Affairs portfolios. For the rest, Mark Eyskens (CVP) moved to Finances, Philippe Maystadt (PSC) succeeded Eyskens at Economic Affairs, and the French-language Liberal François-Xavier de Donnea replaced the Flemish Liberal Freddy Vreven at National Defense. For the French-language Education, Bertouille (PRL) was replaced by his fellow party member André Damseaux. Tindemans (CVP - Foreign Affairs), Dehaene (CVP - Social Affairs), Coens (CVP - Dutch-language Education), Hansenne (PSC - Labor and Employment), Olivier (PRL - Public Works), and De Croo (PVV - Traffic and Transport) continued with the same portfolios. Women, as in Martens V, were only weakly represented in the new government. They had to be content with two state secretariats with authority of unimportant and partially regionalized sectors. The Martens VI government has 15 ministers, like Martens V, and 13 state secretaries, three more than in 1981.

In the meantime, the Flemish formation negotiators had agreed on the policy declaration of the new Flemish government. The Flemish Council met on 10 December to officially appoint the nine members of the Flemish government: six from the CVP and three from the PVV under the chairmanship of Gaston Geens (CVP). In spite of their slim majority, the Liberals and the Christian Democrats decided to work together in the French Community Council and the Walloon Regional Council and to lock the PS, the largest French-language party, into the opposition. This small majority was, moreover, the occasion for the exclusion of the Volksunie Senator Van Overstraeten, who had been elected by the vagaries of the electoral law in French-language part of Brabant. In the Walloon Regional Council, the 52 members of the PSC and the PRL decided, after the representatives of the other parties had left the meeting, not to validate the credentials of the VU senator. The six members of the Walloon Regional Council were then appointed, three Christian Democrats and three Liberals under the chairmanship of Melchior Wathelet (PSC). The French Community Council also did not validate the credentials of Van Overstraeten. The decision was taken by the PSC-PRL majority and four FDF members. Two Liberals and one Christian Democrat formed the French Community government with Philippe Monfils (PRL) as the chairman. Virtually anyone of any importance in the coalition parties was included in the national gov-

ernment or in the regional executives, with still a clear advantage for the national government in which the strongest figures sit while the executives have most of the newcomers.

5.5. *The investiture debate and the first reactions.*

On 29 November, Prime Minister Martens read the governmental declaration in parliament. Martens said that Belgium had waited too long to take measures to counter the economic crisis and that the recovery was not yet achieved. Therefore, further priority would be given to the socio-economic recovery policy with the primary objective being the battle against unemployment. Martens also repeated the budgetary objectives of which he announced that they would be worked out technically by the end of July 1986. For the implementation of the objectives regarding public finances, the government asked for special powers from parliament until « the end of the activities of the budget control of 1987 », that is, until 31 March 1987.

On the same day that Martens read his governmental declaration, a striking interview with André Leysen, the chairman of the employers' federation, the VBO-FEB, appeared in the *Financieel-Economische Tijd*. Leysen mercilessly exposed the deficiencies of Martens V and of the governmental agreement of Martens VI. The previous Cabinet had not accomplished a true restructuring, but only had topped off the governmental deficit, which was not achieved by economies but by increasing charges and by « tricks », such as the shifting of the payment of the salaries of government officials to the following budget years. In order to find enough money to cover the deficits, Martens V, according to Leysen, had had wage earners surrender ever more while income from securities was left untouched. The end of the tunnel was, contrary to what the coalition parties contended, not at all in sight. Leysen also had sharp words to say about the CVP and particularly about its labor wing. If Leysen's comments were scathing for the work of Martens V, they provided support for those in the coalition who pushed for a drastic reduction of the governmental apparatus and a decrease of governmental involvement in the socio-economic life. Leysen's statements did temper the euphoria that had arisen in the coalition parties after the electoral victory of 13 October and exposed the weak points of the governmental agreement of Martens VI.

Even before the commencement of the parliamentary debate on the governmental declaration in the Chamber, difficulties arose in the coalition on the division of authority regarding education. PVV group leader Ward Beysen demanded for his party « a fundamental share in authority »

in educational matters. With this, he gave expression to the objections that were expressed at the PVV congress against the fact that the Dutch-language educational department would again be in the hands of a Christian Democrat, which had, indeed, happened in the meantime. The question was settled with a protocol between the CVP and the PVV. The most important point in it was the establishment of a temporary management committee for public education, proportionally composed (half CVP, half PVV), with a Liberal at the head. The commission was assigned the task of handling all the dossiers regarding public education in Flanders.

In the Chamber, the investiture debate began on 4 December, and it grew into a marathon. No less than a third of the Chamber members mounted the lectern. The opposition spared no criticism about the vague governmental agreement, the high budgetary deficit suddenly discovered by the majority after the elections, the lack of a draft budget for 1986, the problems of the national sectors, the swelling ministerial cabinets, and the size of the national and regional governments (almost a third of the members of the majority had a governmental function). The opposition and the majority did agree on one point, namely, the request of the Cabinet for new special powers. The members of parliament of the majority appeared to be just as opposed to it as the opposition. According to the opposition, the reasoning offered for the request was merely a pretext: it was not that the parliament worked too slowly, as the government contended, but that the special powers were necessary to gloss over the differences of opinion within the majority parties. CVP group leader Luc Van den Brande manifested little enthusiasm for the special powers. He demanded that the majority be closely involved in the working out of the restructuring policy.

In his rebuttal, Prime Minister Martens repeated again the necessity of « a loyal and steadfast execution » of the recovery policy. He declared further that he linked the fate of the government and his own political fate to the success of the restructuring. On 7 December, the Martens VI government won the vote of confidence of the majority and on 10 December of the Senate with no difficulty. During the debate, Martens did not agree to the request of his own majority regarding the special powers. The chairmen of the Chamber and the Senate, Jean Defraigne (PRL) and Ward Leemans (CVP) shared the fear of the group leader Van den Brande that the Parliament would be neutralized by the special powers, as had occurred under Martens V. On 11 December, they wrote a letter to the Premier in which they urged that the government submit the draft decrees, after receiving the advice of the Council of State, to the Executive

Committee of the Chamber for the inspection by the members of parliament. In addition, they requested that the government would issue the statutory order at the earliest one week after this submission. The Premier promised to examine the question and to consult with the group chairmen. On 20 December the Cabinet Council agreed with the proposal of the Premier to involve the group leaders of the majority parties in the Chamber and the Senate as much as possible in the delimitation of the areas of the special powers, the drafting of the statutory orders, their parliamentary control, and their ratification. The Premier reached an agreement on the procedure with the group leaders on 23 December. Martens formally undertook to submit the statutory orders to parliament a week before their publication. The members of parliament would be able to check the decrees against the special powers act and the budgetary memorandum, and be able to amend them legislatively if necessary. Over the essentials, they would not be able to decide.

The last weeks of 1985 were devoted by the government to the drafting of the special powers act, but the work did not proceed so smoothly. The PVV was slanted against special powers for the decrease of the so-called fiscal advantages ; the French-language Liberal Minister of Justice Jean Gol also wanted special powers for the security policy. The government cut the knot on 24 December : the fiscal expenditures and the security measures would be included in one, special bill (later they would be separated), together with the taxpayers' charter. On the same day, the draft of the special power act was approved and sent to the Council of State for advice.

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The Belgian political year in 1985 was dominated by three questions. The spring was completely given over to the settlement of the missile question. After the visit of Prime Minister Wilfried Martens and Minister of Foreign Affairs Leo Tindemans to Washington, it was certain that the center-right coalition would make its decision in this matter in March. Before it had come so far, there was an unsavory discussion over the question of which Belgian minister had approved the installation schedule of NATO and who had been informed about it. The dispute revealed that this important matter had been decided by the resigning Eyskens I government but without consulting the its Socialist coalition partner. In spite of attempts by the labor wing in the CVP to have the decision postponed, the government settled the matter on 14 March by deciding to allow sixteen Cruise missiles be installed on the military base of Florennes. By the next day, the missiles were already there, and two days

later tens of thousands protested in Brussels against the government decision, its amazingly rapid execution, and the way Martens V had handled the missile dossier. For a while it looked as though a not insignificant group in the CVP would not go along with the decision of the government, but ultimately the number of dissidents at the vote of confidence was very few, and the coalition emerged from the dispute unscathed.

The tragic outcome of the football game between Turin and Liverpool at the Heysel Stadium in Brussels did lead to a short circuit in the Cabinet. The very faulty arrangements for keeping order at this game raised the question of the political responsibility of the Minister of Internal Affairs Charles-Ferdinand Nothomb. A parliamentary investigation commission was established, and the parliament debated its report. Tension rose when Nothomb refused to resign when the PRL group leader called upon him to do so. At the final vote, three French-language Liberals abstained, but the remaining members of the majority approved the confidence motion. The danger seemed to be past, when the Liberal Vice-Premier Jean Gol completely unexpectedly presented his resignation and thereby caused a crisis in the government. Premier Martens could no longer paste over the rupture, and was obliged to prescribe early elections. The government set out to complete a minimum program but did not succeed in having the federalization of education as demanded by the Flemish parties included in a declaration for the revision of the Constitution. The veto power of the French-language Christian-Democrats was stronger than the will of the Flemish majority.

The parliamentary elections were held on 13 October and were completely dominated by the question of whether the recovery policy of the previous four years must be continued. As a result of the polarization of the electoral campaign around socio-economic policy, the communitarian themes and the missile question played less important roles than expected, which ultimately benefited the traditional parties. Against all expectation and in spite of the gains of the Socialist parties, the Christian Democrats and the Liberals not only retained their parliamentary majority, they were even slightly strengthened. Of the four coalition parties, only the Flemish Liberals lost ground. Consequently, nothing stood in the way of a reedition of the center-right cabinet. Nevertheless, the negotiations on a new governmental agreement dragged on longer than expected. This was primarily due to the bad condition of the public finances. During the formation consultations, it became increasingly clearer that Martens V had failed in the restructuring of public finances and that a new economizing operation was necessary. Martens VI, the center-right coalition formed

on 28 November, set the restructuring of public finances as its most important objective. The vague governmental agreement shed little light on the concrete working out of this objective. The only thing certain was that Martens VI would apply special powers to do it. The real work of governing could only begin in 1986.

Abbreviations.

ACV-CSC	Algemeen Christelijk Vakverbond van België - Confédération des Syndicats chrétiens de Belgique : General Christian Trade Union of Belgium
ACW-MOC	Algemeen Christelijke Werkersverbond - Mouvement ouvrier chrétien : General Christian Workers' Association
ADW	Alliance Démocratique Wallonne : Walloon Democratic Alliance
AGALEV	Anders Gaan Leven : Flemish green party
CVP	Christelijke Volkspartij : Christian Democratic Party (Flemish)
Doorbraak	: Breakthrough (combined Christian-Socialist movement)
Ecolo	Green party (French-speaking)
FDF	Front Démocratique des Bruxellois Francophones : Brussels French-Speaking Democratic Front
KS	Kempense Steenkoolmijnen : Kempen Coal Mines
PAKS	Progressief Akkoord Christenen-Socialisten : Progressive Christian-Socialist Agreement
PRL	Parti Réformateur Libéral : Liberal Reform Party (French-speaking Liberals)
PS	Parti Socialiste : Socialist Party (French-speaking)
PSC	Parti Social Chrétien : Christian Democratic Party (French-speaking)
PVV	Partij voor Vrijheid en Vooruitgang : Party for Freedom and Progress (Flemish Liberals)
RW	Rassemblement Wallon : Walloon Rally
SP	Socialistisch Partij : Socialist Party (Flemish)
VAKA	Vlaams Aktiecomité tegen Atoomwapens : Flemish Action Committee against Atomic Weapons
VBO-FEB	Verbond van Belgische Ondernemingen - Fédération des Entreprises de Belgique : Federation of Belgian Industries
VU	Volksunie : The People's Union (Flemish nationalists)
VVB	Vlaamse Volksbeweging : Flemish People's Movement

