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# Paradiplomacy and the European Union's trade treaty negotiations: the role of Wallonia and Brussels

Michel Huysseune <sup>a</sup> and Stéphane Paquin <sup>b</sup>

## ABSTRACT

Because of their integration in the elaboration of national positions in the European decision-making process, Belgian subnational entities have since the 1990s favoured collaborative paradiplomacy. This has been particularly the case for Wallonia and the Brussels Region since they have a stronger stake in keeping Belgium together. Cooperative paradiplomacy has therefore been their default option, only interrupted by the crisis over the signature of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) treaty, which was refused by these two regions. This article therefore analyses the dynamics of the conflict over the signature of the CETA treaty and the specific contribution of the two regions, Wallonia and Brussels.

## KEYWORDS

cooperative paradiplomacy; Wallonia; Brussels Region; trade negotiation; European Union; Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) controversy

**HISTORY** Received 29 April 2022; in revised form 15 December 2022

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Within the galaxy of European subnational authorities, the Belgian regions and communities take quite an exceptional position. Since the constitutional reform of 1993 that transformed Belgium into a federal state, they also have ample competence in foreign affairs, according to the principle *in foro interno, in foro externo* (implying that their internal competences are also valid in international relations). Concerning European policies, Belgian regions and communities (co-)participate at the elaboration of the Belgian position in the respective Councils of Ministers in their fields of competence. The Belgian position in these councils is reached through an agreement of all the entities concerned, in the absence of an agreement, Belgium must abstain itself.

The Belgian federal system is often described as centrifugal because the dynamics of constitutional reform reinforce regional and community authorities, at the detriment of the federal government. Typically, such reforms tend to be deals whereby the richest region, Flanders, accepts mechanisms to refinance the other regions and communities, and asks for more competences as compensation. Flanders has always been the region keenest on affirming its identity and claiming more competences (Huysseune, 2012). This tendency has undoubtedly been reinforced by the revival of Flemish nationalism and the rise of the Flemish nationalist party, Nieuw-

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Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA), with a pro-independence programme, and since the federal elections of 2010 this has been the leading party in the region. Wallonia and Brussels, on the other hand, have a strong financial incentive to favour Belgian unity and solidarity, while Brussels by its very essence a bi-communitarian region, has an additional reason to support Belgian unity, and therefore to be cautious when breaking with federal loyalty.

The centrifugal dynamics of national politics have rarely impacted European affairs. The specific institutional context of European policymaking in Belgium, with its focus on elaborating common viewpoints towards the Council of Ministers, has resulted in an opposite, centripetal dynamic of cooperation between these entities and the federal government (e.g., Beyers & Bursens, 2009; Romainville, 2015). Undoubtedly, the fact that European affairs are rarely topics of public controversy and therefore not a cause of communitarian bickering has facilitated a cooperative attitude. Even in cases with diverging interests, regions have frequently been able to broker compromises and reach a common Belgian position (Sepos, 2005). However, the increasing political polarization between Flanders, with its solid centre-right majorities and an upsurge of (conservative) Flemish nationalism, and the more centre-left-leaning regions of Wallonia and Brussels, have increased the potential for conflicts concerning European issues. The fact that in 2016 the two regions with the least incentives for conflictual paradiplomacy, Wallonia and Brussels, initially refused to ratify the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) treaty and hence publicly broke with the normal pattern of cooperation was an event that needs to be explained and contextualized. The choice of conflict was certainly not self-evident, and rather than affirming a conflictual approach to paradiplomacy both regions afterwards returned to their normal cooperative mode. In this conflict, the Wallonian government and its president, Paul Magnette, took the lead, while in Brussels it was the parliament that played the most prominent role, while the government maintained a neutral profile, a difference we attribute to the different institutional framework of the Brussels Region.

## 2. THEORETICAL ASPECTS

Because of the Belgian institutional set-up which allows regions to participate in policymaking within the relevant Councils of Ministers, and the integration of representatives of regions in the Belgian Permanent Representation, we assume that cooperation (both with the federal level and with other regions) will be the predominant pattern in Europe-related policymaking. This is particularly the case for the two regions studied in this contribution, Wallonia and Brussels. Neither region has an incentive to separate from Belgium and hence to develop proto-diplomacy but concerning European affairs even their paradiplomatic activities remain subordinate to their participation in collective decision-making in the Permanent Representation. The incentives for cooperation are even stronger for the Brussels Region than for Wallonia because Brussels institutions are based on consociative cooperation between the two communities. This article therefore intends to analyse the reasons behind the 2016 rupture with cooperative paradiplomacy, and also examine the impact of the 2016 event on the paradiplomacy of Belgian regions.

The literature explaining the causes of conflictual paradiplomacy has given conflicting results about whether increased devolution enhances conflicts. While some authors (e.g., Donas & Beyer, 2013) would confirm this view, other research (e.g., Tatham, 2013) has found no significant correlation between levels of devolution and conflict. Tatham (2013) also did not find a significant effect of party politics but noticed that the absolute gross domestic product (GDP) of a region correlated with possible conflictual paradiplomacy. The latter explanation is certainly not applicable to the CETA controversy, since the richest region, Flanders, did not engage against CETA. Scholars have in fact given a variety of explanations of Wallonian opposition to the ratification of CETA (generally ignoring the role of the Brussels Region). Bollen et al. (2020) proposed three factors for explaining the growing involvement of Belgian parliaments on trade

agreements. First, European Union (EU) trade policy itself has evolved: the recently negotiated treaties have growing political implications therefore enhancing the interest of different parliaments. This dynamic is reinforced by increasing civil society activism around these treaties. Finally, in the specific Belgian context a third factor is its institutional configuration, particularly the asymmetrical coalition formation (with the parties then forming the government coalition in Wallonia, the Socialists and the Christian Democrats were in opposition at the federal level). Broschek and Goff (2022, p. 816) argued that rather than the politicization of trade agreements and the mobilization of civil society, the political and economic preferences of substate authorities in Europe (Belgium, Germany and Austria) determined their opposition to CETA and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership between Europe and the United States (TTIP), because they feared these agreements would impose important constraints on their autonomy. They were particularly critical of market-making positive integration, in the form of Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanisms and regulatory cooperation. Bursens and De Bièvre (2023), while agreeing that civil society mobilization is not a sufficient explanation of the Wallonian veto, suggested that economic interests played an important role, since Wallonia and Brussels have a less export-oriented economy than Flanders and therefore less was at stake in the Treaty.

The literature therefore suggests that the four following explanations may be relevant to demonstrate the shift to a conflictive paradiplomacy. The first element is issue salience since the content of the Treaty would have impacted the policymaking capacity of subnational authorities. The second aspect, related to issue salience, concerns civil society mobilization, which was strong on this issue. The third facet is party politics, particularly relevant for Wallonia since the parties governing the region were in opposition at the federal level. Finally, the fourth concerns the diverging economic interests of Flanders and Wallonia, the latter region being less export oriented.

Our research assumes that cooperation has been the norm, and therefore focuses on why the conflict of 2016 over CETA occurred and whether it fundamentally altered cooperative paradiplomacy, and it hence includes both material on the crisis and on its aftermath. For the 2016 crisis, the focus is on an analysis of public declarations, documents from the respective parliaments, as well as the writings of the previous Prime Minister of Wallonia, the socialist Paul Magnette (Table 1).

While focusing on the 2016 crisis, relevant debates on trade treaties after the 2016 CETA crisis subsided have also been consulted, including for Flanders, to verify the impact of the crisis. The research on the Brussels Region, which is less studied, also includes interviews both with officials of the Brussels government and Brussels MPs (both in favour and opposed to CETA, and both Flemish and Francophones) (Table 2), which provides additional information on the aftermath of the 2016 crisis, concerning trade treaties and the exercise of paradiplomacy. While it is not our intention to provide a fully fledged explanation of the causes that led to the temporary shift to conflictive paradiplomacy, the scope of the research is to reach, by a close reading of the articulated opinions of the actors involved, a more in-depth knowledge on this case.

### 3. FIRST PERIOD, 1993–2016: COOPERATIVE PARADIPLMACY

The activation of the Maastricht Treaty coincided in Belgium with a political crisis that would lead to its constitutionally confirmed transformation in a federal state, in which regions and communities also hold European and international competencies. Since 1994, the federal government and subnational entities have coordinated their foreign policy in the Interministerial Conference on Foreign Policy. The establishment of a coordination agreement on foreign policy between the federal and the subnational level and the integration of representatives of

**Table 1.** Official documents consulted.

Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest, Delegation van het Gewest bij de Europese Unie, <https://be.brussels/over-het-gewest/internationaal-brussel/vertegenwoordiging-en-aanwezigheid-van-brussel-in-het-buitenland/de-permanente-vertegenwoordiging#:~:text=Organisatie-,De%20Delegatie%20van%20het%20Brussels%20Hoofdstedelijk%20Gewest%20bij%20de%20Europese,van%20het%20Brussels%20Hoofdstedelijk%20Gewest>, consulted on November 18, 2021

Déclaration de politique générale commune au Gouvernement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale et au Collège réuni de la Commission communautaire commune. Législature 2019–2024, <https://www.parlement.brussels/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/07-20-D%C3%A9claration-gouvernementale-parlement-bruxellois-2019.pdf>, consulted on January 24, 2022

Parlement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale. Séance ordinaire 2015–2016. 23 mars 2015/Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Parlement. Gewone zitting 2014–2015. 23 maart 2015, <http://weblex.irisnet.be/data/crb/doc/2014-15/126772/images.pdf>, consulted on January 14, 2022. Referred to as ‘Brussels Parliament, 23 March 2015’

Parlement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale. Séance ordinaire 2015–2016. 10 juin 2016. Proposition de résolution relative à l’Accord économique et commercial global (CETA) entre l’Union européenne et le Canada et ses conséquences pour la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale /Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Parlement. Gewone zitting 2014–2015. 10 juni 2016. Voorstel van resolutie betreffende het alomvattend economisch en commercieel akkoord (CETA) tussen de Europese Unie en Canada en de gevolgen ervan voor het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest, <http://weblex.irisnet.be/data/crb/doc/2015-16/129216/images.pdf>, consulted on January 14, 2022. Referred to as ‘Brussels Parliament, 10 June 2016’

Parlement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale. Compte-rendu intégral. Séance plénière du vendredi 8 juillet 2016 (Séance du matin) /Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Parlement. Integraal verslag. Plenaire zitting van vrijdag 8 juli 2016 (ochtendvergadering), <http://weblex.brussels/data/crb/cr/2015-16/00040/images.pdf>, consulted on January 24, 2022. Referred to as ‘Brussels Parliament, 8 July 2016’

Parlement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale. Compte-rendu intégral. Séance plénière du vendredi 28 octobre 2016/Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Parlement. Integraal verslag. Plenaire zitting van vrijdag 28 oktober 2016, <http://weblex.brussels/data/crb/cr/2016-17/00008/images.pdf>, on line consulted on January 14, 2022. Referred to as ‘Brussels Parliament, 14 October 2016’

Parlement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale. Compte-rendu intégral des interpellations et des questions orales. Commission chargée des Questions européennes. Réunion du lundi 8 janvier 2018/Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Parlement. Integraal verslag van de interpellaties en mondelinge vragen. Commissie belast met de Europese Aangelegenheden. Vergadering van maandag 8 januari 2018, <http://weblex.irisnet.be/data/crb/biq/2017-18/00047/images.pdf>, consulted on January 26, 2022. Referred to as ‘Brussels Parliament, 8 January 2019’

Parlement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale. Compte-rendu intégral. Séance plénière du vendredi 20 novembre 2020 (après-midi). Session 2020–2021/Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Parlement. Integraal verslag. Plenaire zitting van vrijdag 20 november 2020 (namiddag). Zitting 2020–2021, <http://weblex.brussels/data/crb/doc/2020-21/140395/images.pdf>, consulted on January 14, 2022. Referred to as ‘Brussels Parliament, 20 November 2020’

Parlement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale. Compte-rendu intégral des interpellations et des questions orales. Commission chargée des Questions européennes. Réunion du lundi 15 mars 2021/Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Parlement. Integraal verslag van de interpellaties en mondelinge vragen. Commissie belast met de Europese Aangelegenheden. Vergadering van maandag 15 maart 2021, <http://weblex.irisnet.be/data/crb/biq/2020-21/00095/images.pdf>, consulted on January 26, 2022. Referred to as ‘Brussels Parliament, 15 March 2021’

Parlement de la Communauté française, Résolution relative à l'exclusion des produits culturels du futur accord de Partenariat de commerce et d'investissement entre l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis d'Amérique adoptée par le Parlement de la Communauté française en sa séance du mercredi 5 juin 2013, <http://archive.pfwb.be/1000000010d606d>, consulted on February 24, 2022. Referred to as 'Parlement de la Communauté française, 5 June 2013'

Parlement Wallon, Session 2013–2014. 26 mars 2014. Résolution visant à défendre et à garantir les spécificités du monde agricole wallon dans le cadre des négociations sur l'accord de Partenariat transatlantique de commerce et d'investissement entre l'Union européenne et les États-Unis d'Amérique, [http://nautilus.parlement-wallon.be/Archives/2013\\_2014/RES/852\\_3.pdf](http://nautilus.parlement-wallon.be/Archives/2013_2014/RES/852_3.pdf), consulted on February 24, 2022. Referred to as 'Parlement Wallon, 26 March 2014'

Parlement Wallon, Session 2014–2015. Compte rendu intégral. Séance publique de commission. Comité d'avis chargé des questions européennes. Jeudi 27 novembre 2014, [http://nautilus.parlement-wallon.be/Archives/2014\\_2015/CRIC/cric44.pdf](http://nautilus.parlement-wallon.be/Archives/2014_2015/CRIC/cric44.pdf), consulted on February 24, 2022, 2022. Referred to as 'Parlement Wallon, 27 November 2014'

Parlement Wallon, Session 2014–2015. Compte rendu intégral. Séance publique de commission. Comité d'avis chargé des questions européennes. Jeudi 11 décembre 2014, [http://nautilus.parlement-wallon.be/Archives/2014\\_2015/CRIC/cric56.pdf](http://nautilus.parlement-wallon.be/Archives/2014_2015/CRIC/cric56.pdf), consulted on February 24, 2022. Referred to as 'Parlement Wallon, 11 December 2014'

Comité d'avis chargé des questions européennes, Projet de partenariat transatlantique du commerce et d'investissement entre l'Union européenne et les États-Unis (TTIP), 3 juillet 2015, <http://nautilus.parlement-wallon.be/Archives/brochures/ttip.pdf>, consulted on February 24, 2022, 2022. Referred to as 'Parlement Wallon, 3 July 2015'

Parlement de Wallonie, La Commissaire européenne au commerce est venue débattre sur le TTIP (29-01-2016), <https://www.parlement-wallonie.be/la-commissaire-europeenne-au-commerce-est-venu-debattre-sur-le-ttip>, consulted on February 24, 2022. Referred to as 'Parlement Wallon, 29 January 2016'

Parlement de Wallonie, 56<sup>ème</sup> séance plénière du CPI (17-06-2016): <https://www.parlement-wallonie.be/56e-seance-pleniere-du-cpi>, consulted on February 24, 2022. Referred to as 'Parlement Wallon, 24 February 2016'

Vlaams Parlement, Tekst aangenomen door de plenaire vergadering van het voorstel van resolutie van Karl Vanlouwe, Ward Kennes, Rik Daems, Karim Van Overmeire, Joris Poschet en Jan Van Esbroeck betreffende het Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) tussen Canada en de Europese Unie (EU), 919 (2016–2017) – Nr. 3 19 oktober 2016 (2016–2017), <https://docs.vlaamsparlement.be/pfile?id=1212704>, consulted on September 24, 2022. Referred to as 'Vlaams Parlement, 19 October 2016'

Vlaams Parlement, Verslag van de hoorzitting namens de Commissie voor Buitenlands Beleid, Europese Aangelegenheden, Internationale Samenwerking en Toerisme uitgebracht door Philippe Muylers over het voorstel van resolutie van Bruno Tobback, Ludwig Vandenhove en Annick Lambrecht over extra voorwaarden voor de ratificatie van het handelsakkoord tussen de EU en Mercosur, 556 (2020–2021) – Nr. 2 ingediend op 29 maart 2021 (2020–2021), <https://docs.vlaamsparlement.be/pfile?id=1684739>, consulted on September 24, 2022. Referred to as 'Vlaams Parlement, 29 March 2021'

subnational entities in the Belgian Permanent Representation has determined the European policymaking strategies of the latter. Their participation in the European Councils of Ministers gave these entities privileged access to EU policymaking processes, for example, as representatives of Belgium to various consultative bodies (Bursens, 2005; Paquin, 2021).

**Table 2.** Interviews with the Brussels Capital Region.<sup>a</sup>


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Anonymous, MP Brussels, CD&V (Flemish Christian Democrats), 17 November 2021
Collaborator of a member of the Brussels government, 19 November 2021
Marie Lecocq, MP Brussels, <i>Ecolo</i> (Francophone Greens) and Juan Benjumea, MP <i>Groen</i> (Flemish Greens), 8 December 2021
Cieltje Van Achter, MP Brussels, N-VA (Flemish Nationalists) 9 December 2021
Collaborator of the administration of the Brussels Region, 13 December 2021
Julien Uyttendaele, MP Brussels, PS (Francophone Socialists), 14 January 2022
Anonymous, parliamentary collaborator of the PTB at Brussels Parliament, 18 January 2022
Guy Vanhengel, MP Brussels, VLD (Flemish Liberals), 1 February 2022

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Note: <sup>a</sup>All persons interviewed were informed about the purpose of the research and given the opportunity to verify the exactness of the information they provided. All interviewed persons whose names are mentioned have given their written consent to publish their names (the others have been anonymized).

The Belgian federal system is asymmetrical. In Flanders, regional and community institutions have been integrated, a process that did not take place in the other regions. The Brussels Region moreover differs from Wallonia and Flanders with a structure (officialized in 1990) that is the outcome of long and complex negotiations between politicians from the Flemish and Francophone communities (Delwit & Deschouwer, 2009). Its institutions are characterized by their consociational nature, with a fixed presence of the two communities, both at the level of the Brussels Parliament (presently with 72 francophone and 17 Flemish MPs) and its government (it consists of one francophone prime minister, and two ministers from each community, as well as three secretaries of state, one of them is Flemish). The government moreover needs to have majority parliamentary support in both communities. While because of economic reasons both Wallonia and Brussels have no incentive to develop conflictual paradiplomacy, this is even more the case for the Brussels Region, since its very nature is based on community cooperation. The region stands to lose from an eventual disintegration of the Belgian federation, and there are therefore no claims whatsoever for Brussels independence (even in the unlikely form of the European equivalent of the District of Columbia). The Brussels institutions are moreover weaker, both in terms of political power and administrative capacity, which is yet another disincentive for conflictual paradiplomacy. For its European policymaking, it is moreover largely dependent on information provided by the Belgian federal administration.<sup>1</sup> The relatively rare conflicts concerning European policies tended to be between Flanders and Wallonia, not involving the Brussels Region (Paquin, 2010; Sepos, 2005).

For their European policymaking Belgian regions have focused their European advocacy on working within the Belgian Permanent Representation. They attribute less weight to other channels such as representation offices in Brussels (only the Flemish region and the German-speaking community have set up such offices), or participation in the Committee of the Regions or in regional networks and local authorities. Scrutiny of European affairs in subnational parliaments (but also in the federal ones) remained moreover limited (Randour & Hamilton, 2021). This is even the case for Flanders. Although the region has certainly been the most active one in European affairs, notably by opening its own office for interest representation at the EU, it still prioritizes an indirect approach towards European institutions (Vanhecke et al., 2013). The Brussels Region is involved in networking with other capitals and capital regions in activities related to its urban identity and focuses on its role as host region of the EU (and additionally for other international institutions such as NATO). It also provides practical and administrative aid to the representation offices of local and regional authorities in Brussels (Huyseune & Jans, 2005, 2008; Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest, Delegatie van het Gewest bij de Europese Unie, n.d.).<sup>2</sup> Because

of a lack of interest of its politicians, for a long time the Walloon region has invested only in a limited way in European affairs and its interest was essentially reactive, responding to initiatives taken by Flanders (Tuñón, 2008). In recent years, the region has clearly become more interested in European affairs. Its president from 2014 until 2017, Magnette, is also a renowned scholar on European affairs, and his critical approach towards European governance has undoubtedly been one of the elements contributing to 2016 crisis (cf. Bursens & De Bièvre, 2023).

#### 4. SECOND PERIOD, 2016: CONFLICTUAL PARADIPLMACY

The 2016 crisis over CETA disrupted the pattern whereby both Wallonia and Brussels preferred a low profile and non-conflictual approach to European affairs. This crisis occurred in a context whereby the normal procedures of cooperation between federal and subnational authorities were circumvented since the negotiation process of the Treaty had excluded regional authorities (Paquin, 2021, 2022). The absence of possibilities to influence the content of the Treaty left regional authorities critical of the Treaty with no other option than vetoing it.

The Walloon veto against CETA caused a constitutional and international crisis (Bursens, 2016). Put simply, when trade treaties deal with issues under the competence of the EU, no intervention by national parliaments is required (De Bièvre, 2018; EU, 2018). When an agreement is declared 'mixed', meaning that responsibility is shared between the EU and EU member states, the EU can provisionally apply the agreement, but it must have been previously signed by member states and be subsequently ratified by national parliaments. In addition, in some cases, regional parliaments need to give their consent to the federal government to sign and ratify CETA in accordance with national procedures, before it can be fully implemented (EU, 2018; Van der Loo, 2016). CETA was classified as a 'mixed agreement' by the European Commission in July 2016 and the Council agreed. This meant that all 28 EU member states with their 38 national and substate parliaments had to support CETA before it could fully enter into force. The classification of CETA as a mixed agreement meant that Belgium had to sign and ratify it according to Belgian national procedures, which meant that Wallonia could block the Belgian ratification.

The origin of the conflict can also be traced to the interest substate parliaments have developed in international negotiations and more specifically in the EU's trade negotiations as next-generation trade treaties affect areas under their constitutional competence (Paquin, 2003, 2010; Paquin et al., 2015). The sensitivity of new trade agreements, particularly the TTIP, but also CETA was obvious in the EU. Although the Walloon Region has received a great deal of international media attention, Belgium was not the only federated state in the EU where there was opposition to TTIP and CETA (Broschek & Goff, 2020; Paquin, 2021). In Austria, for example, all state parliaments have unanimously passed resolutions rejecting TTIP and opposing the provisional ratification of CETA. Despite the unanimous opposition to CETA, the Austrian government ignored the concerns of the *Länder* and ratified the agreement (Broschek et al., 2020). In Germany, not all *Länder* were supportive of CETA (Keresshot et al., 2020, p. 10). The sense of exclusion from trade negotiations in several states has fuelled resentment towards trade agreements among the population and social movements. This was particularly evident in the Walloon Region (Bollen et al., 2020; Magnette, 2017; Paquin, 2021). These elements triggered the activism of the Walloon Parliament, followed by those of the French Community and the Brussels Region (Randour & Hamilton, 2021).

The concerns in Europe about TTIP and CETA have also led to a strong mobilization of citizens in Europe, as well as an engagement of political parties, especially on the left. The European Commission had to resign itself to register a citizens' protest against TTIP and CETA on 10 July 2017. This registration follows an initial Commission decision to refuse to register the 'Stop TTIP' Initiative on 10 September 2014. That decision was annulled by the General



Court of the European Union on 10 May 2017. The Commission has decided not to appeal the judgment. European Citizens' Initiatives were introduced with the Lisbon Treaty and launched as an agenda-setting tool in the hands of citizens. A European Citizens' Initiative allows 1 million citizens from at least a quarter of the EU member states to invite the European Commission to propose a legal act in the areas where the Commission is empowered to do so.<sup>3</sup> Between 7 October 2014 and 6 October 2015, almost 3,290,000 citizens supported the platform's request; the national quorum was reached in 23 out of 28 countries (Magnette, 2017, p. 308).

The sensitivity of new trade agreements, particularly the TTIP, prompted the Walloon Parliament to develop expertise on trade issues. The fundamental reason CETA was targeted first was because it was the first treaty to be submitted to the Parliament of Wallonia (Magnette, 2017, p. 195).<sup>4</sup> CETA was presented as the Trojan horse of the upcoming agreement between the EU and the United States. Starting on 27 November 2014, the Walloon Parliament decided to analyse the agreement and hold hearings. It invited specialists to parliamentary committees to explain the effects of trade agreements on their areas of competency, enabling them to hold debates on ISDS, regulatory cooperation and also the liberalization of public services. The Advisory Committee on European Issues (*Comité d'avis chargé des questions européennes*) met with several experts on international trade issues including M. Demarty, Director General for Trade at the European Commission,<sup>5</sup> Pierre Defraigne,<sup>6</sup> Director of the Madariaga-College of Europe Foundation and professor at the College of Europe and at Sciences-Po Paris and former Deputy Director General of the powerful Directorate General for Trade in the European Commission, and even M. Jones, Executive Director Europe and Eurasia, International Trade Administration, US Department of Commerce during a closed session, and EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmström on 29 January 2016.<sup>7</sup>

Defraigne, who was also a former Director of Cabinet of Pascal Lamy when he was Commissioner for Trade of the EU, was strongly against the TTIP and against the current EU trade policy. He even encouraged the Walloon Parliament to use its veto to influence the course of events. He said:

I am all the more pleased that the Walloon Parliament will have – because the agreement we are going to discuss, the TTIP, will be a mixed agreement – in fact, a decisive word in the final ratification of this agreement. And if it uses in time the dissuasive character of this theoretical capacity of veto, it can influence the course of things.<sup>8</sup>

During the negotiations, the Walloon Parliament also adopted several resolutions to send signals and to mobilize the population around a specific issue to put pressure on the national government and the EU (Bollen et al., 2020; Tatham, 2018). On 26 March 2014, a resolution of the Walloon Parliament was adopted to defend and guarantee the agricultural specificities in Wallonia.<sup>9</sup> On 5 June 2015, the Parliament of the French Community adopted a resolution for the exclusion of cultural products from the future agreement between the EU and the United States.<sup>10</sup> In May 2015, the *Parti Socialiste* (Socialist Party) of Wallonia presented a resolution clearly indicating its concerns about CETA. On 3 July 2015, the Advisory Committee on European Issues even released a document summarizing the actions taken by the parliament since the beginning of the negotiation. The purpose of this booklet, which was presented 'as the first publication of its kind' produced by the Walloon Parliament was to 'allow citizens and civil society actors to fully appreciate the important work accomplished by the Walloon Parliament'.<sup>11</sup> Many issues were outlined such as agriculture and culture, but ISDS was central to the problem. On the issue of ISDS, Magnette declared, 'There is an asymmetry between the power of money that is constantly being strengthened and the public interest, which is finding it increasingly difficult to defend itself' (interview cited in RTBF, 2017; our translation from the French).

Adopted in April 2016 with support of all parties but one (*Mouvement Réformateur*, the Francophone Liberals), a motion compared CETA to the Trojan horse in relation to the TTIP. In October 2016, the Walloon Parliament reaffirmed its opposition to CETA, arguing that the government would not give its consent to the federal government to accept the agreement. This situation caused an intra-Belgian, but also European and even international crisis, since it meant that the Belgian government could not sign CETA (Ducourtieux & Stroobants, 2016; Van der Loo, 2016).

While the Brussels Region did not take a lead in the polemics around CETA, the interest of its parliament in trade treaties also predated the 2016 crisis.<sup>12</sup> Following an interpellation of Bruno Delille (*Groen*, the Flemish Greens) on 10 November 2014, parliament had organized an audition around the TTIP Treaty on 9 February 2015, with the negotiator of the Belgian government, representatives of the employers' organization, unions and the CNCD-11.11.11 (Centre national de coopération au développement), a civil society organization active in organizing the opposition to the Treaty.<sup>13</sup> The audition was followed up with the vote of a resolution demanding increased vigilance of the Belgian authorities concerning the TTIP negotiations.<sup>14</sup> The organization of such a debate was itself rather a novelty since the Brussels Parliament was and still is normally not very active on international and European issues.

In the CETA controversy, the Brussels regional government avoided taking sides because it was itself divided on the issue. The Vervoort II government (2014–19) consisted of a coalition of Francophone Socialists, Christian Democrats and *Défi* (Brussels francophone regionalists), and Flemish Liberals, Socialist and Christian Democrats, with the minister then responsible for European affairs, the Flemish Liberal Guy Vanhengel, favourably disposed towards CETA. Therefore, parliament played a leading role in Brussels. On 8 July 2016, it voted a resolution against CETA (39 yes, 24 no, 18 abstentions).<sup>15</sup> The opponents of the Treaty were in fact divided in their votes, since the (Flemish and Francophone) Greens and the radical left *Parti du Travail de Belgique* (PTB) abstained because the resolution did not include the obligation of the Brussels government to refuse to delegate its powers of approval to the federal government.<sup>16</sup> On the Francophone side, only the Liberals opposed the motion (and hence supported the Treaty). Support for the Treaty was larger amongst the Flemish MPs, since the Flemish Christian Democrats, the Flemish Nationalists of the N-VA and the Liberals expressed themselves in favour of it (besides the Greens and the Socialists only the radical right *Vlaams Belang* opposed it). In both Wallonia and Brussels, the parliaments were strongly involved in the opposition to CETA, even taking a leading role in Brussels. The situation in Flanders, where the centre-right majority (the moderate nationalist N-VA, the Christian Democrats and Liberals) supported CETA was quite different. Its parliament remained largely passive, since CETA and trade treaties were only occasionally brought up in parliamentary questions (Randour & Hamilton, 2021). The Flemish government approved CETA on 16 September 2016, before the Flemish Parliament voted a resolution in favour of the agreement on 18 October 2016 (Vlaams Parlement, 19 October 2016).

To solve the crisis engendered by the Walloon veto and under pressure from the European institutions and the Government of Canada, the Walloon and Belgian governments began negotiations. In addition, the Walloon Region – contrary to past EU practice – conducted direct negotiations with Canadian International Trade Minister Chrystia Freeland in the presence of the European Commission's chief negotiator, Mauro Petriccione. The latter had a mandate from the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker. For a while the negotiations also involved the President of the European Parliament Martin Schultz. After several days of tense negotiations, an agreement was reached (Paquin, 2021). Because of its neutral position, the Brussels government may have contributed to brokering the compromise that ended the crisis.<sup>17</sup>

The 12-page compromise (the Agreement is over 1600 pages long with annexes) was approved by Canada, the ambassadors of the 28 EU countries (before Brexit), as well as the Walloon Region, Brussels–Capital and the French Community (Ducourtieux & Stroobants, 2016). The respective parliaments ratified the compromise, although the opposition parties denounced it as a rendition with no real guarantees for the concessions obtained, an argument equally deployed by the parties favouring CETA (France 24, 2016).<sup>18</sup> In this final agreement, concessions were made to the Walloon Region in exchange for its support. These concessions did not entail the reopening of the Agreement; rather, they meant including an interpretative legal instrument to clarify certain parts of the agreement, particularly in areas affecting labour law, but also with respect to environmental protection mechanisms. Perhaps the most important clarification was related to the effects of the investor–state dispute settlement mechanism. The Joint Interpretative Instrument states that the EU and Canada ‘will continue to have the capacity to achieve legitimate public policy objectives that their democratic institutions set, such as public health, social services, public education, the environment [etc.]’ and that the agreement ‘will not affect the ability of the EU and Canada to achieve their legitimate public policy objectives’. The Walloon Region also demanded that the investment court system be subject to review by the Court of Justice of the European Union to ensure its compliance with EU law (RTBF, 2016). On 30 April 2019, the Court confirmed that the CETA mechanism was compatible with EU law (Court of Justice of the European Union, 2019).

In the refusal to ratify the initial CETA treaty, the Walloon region and its Prime Minister Paul Magnette played a central role. Magnette has also extensively explained the reasons behind the region’s and his opposition to CETA. According to him, this new generation of international trade treaties goes far beyond trade. He writes:

They affect, at least potentially, very sensitive national and regional competences (labour, health, and environmental laws, public services and social protection, local agriculture ...). The European Commission should have understood that treaties with such wide-ranging effects would not leave public opinion in the nations and regions indifferent. (Magnette, 2016)

According to Magnette:

If the resistance was so strong in Wallonia, it is not by chance. In this region of three and a half million inhabitants, citizens measure on a daily basis the ravages caused by European policies which, for more than thirty years, have sworn by deregulation, absolute freedom of trade, and austerity imposed on the weakest, and at the same time have proved incapable of dealing with tax evasion, social dumping, and the immense damage caused by technological and industrial changes that they no longer seem to be trying to control. (Magnette, 2017, p. 52; our translation from the French)

Wallonia has a long history of opposition to trade agreements such as the infamous Multilateral Agreement on Investment of the OECD, which was abandoned in 1998 due to civil society opposition.<sup>19</sup> This was also evident with the Bolkestein directive on the liberalization of services in the EU. Magnette stated in his book about CETA that the movement against the agreement was a collective struggle that brought together ‘dozens of men and women’ (Magnette, 2017, p. 29). He mentions the support from the Francophone Socialist Party, the Walloon and European parliamentarians and the regional assemblies, as well as trade union organizations and associations of civil society (p. 35). The three main trade unions and several associations in the field of environment, cooperation and development, and poverty were mobilized against TTIP and CETA (p. 324).

Behind the Walloon rebellion, one can detect a disapproval of the evolution of the EU over the course of several years. Magnette stated:

For thirty years, the European institutions have carried the project of opening up to competition vast sectors of the European economies that had been subject to public monopolies for decades: air transport, finance, energy, postal services and rail transport. The employees of these sectors, which are also traditionally the spearhead of the social movement, were in turn put under pressure. At the same time, the European Union has proved incapable of regulating social and fiscal dumping within its borders. Convinced that attracting investment means being friendly to large corporations, more states have reduced their taxes on corporate profits, leading to a downward spiral and increasingly reducing the capacity of public authorities to act. Since the international financial crisis of 2008, the European Union has also put in place fiscal control mechanisms that have plunged the entire continent into austerity and deepened the recession. (Magnetete, 2017, pp. 143–144)

Moreover, according to Magnetete:

The most recent trade agreements include rules on intellectual property, free movement of capital and investment promotion, among others, that are designed to preserve the profits of very large corporations. These treaties come at the expense of other legitimate national objectives, such as environmental rules, labour rights, and public health. (pp. 166–167)

For Magnetete:

The way in which the European Union negotiates these treaties is also at issue. Of course, it only acts on the basis of mandates given to it by the member states. Certainly, it publishes some of the documents that serve as a basis for these negotiations. Admittedly, for some years now, aware of the unease that reigns due to the opacity of these negotiations, it has occasionally organized forums with companies and NGOs, but its practice remains far removed from the criteria of transparency and accountability that govern our democracies. (p. 172)

According to Magnetete, the CETA saga offers political lessons:

It shows how the broad mobilization of a civil society, heard and supported by its Parliament and government, can force the European institutions to break out of their routine and open a dialogue. Faced with Belgium's refusal to sign, the European Commission has, for the first time in its history, negotiated directly with a region. It has accepted that the negotiations be accompanied by a legally binding interpretative instrument, which clarifies and corrects the treaty on key issues, while the negotiation is supposed to be over. (p. 62)

In his account of the events surrounding the negotiation of the agreement, Magnetete concluded that the strategy of ignoring the demands of the Walloon Region was deliberate. According to Magnetete, Commissioner Malmström wanted the Walloon Region to give in to pressure from its Belgian partners, Canada, several European heads of state, European social democratic party leaders, and also from European institutions (Magnetete, 2017).

The debates on trade treaties in the Brussels Parliament tackled similar arguments as the ones outlined by Magnetete. What is striking about them is how much they were ideological discussions on free trade treaties in general. Identity issues are not surprisingly entirely absent, except statements of those favouring the Treaty that a vote against it would harm the image of Brussels as the Capital of Europe or of its opponents emphasizing the symbolic value of a no vote.<sup>20</sup> But it is also remarkable how the discussion very rarely referred to specific economic interests. The arguments were about the impact of trade agreements in general or more specifically for Belgium, rarely for Brussels in particular.<sup>21</sup> The parties favourable to CETA pointed out its economic advantages, more employment and increased export opportunities, while the Treaty will preserve

the European social model. Its opponents, while denying being enemies of international trade, put into doubt these advantages but they were particularly critical of the ICTS and its possible negative impact. This included impact on public services, on the Belgian social model, on the environment, on consumer protection, and more generally argued that the Treaty favours the interests of multinationals rather than those of small and medium enterprises. Critique of ISDS arbitration takes a central place in their arguments. They also denounced the democratic deficit in the entire procedure where at the end of the process parliaments are expected to express an opinion on the Treaty but are not supposed to contest or reject it.<sup>22</sup>

Comments on specific sectors or enterprises are marginal in these debates. This absence may be related to the fact that on this issue party positions are in the first place determined by Flemish and Walloon interests, their Brussels sections do not have much weight in the decision-making related to European affairs.<sup>23</sup> While this is not as much the case on the Francophone side, Wallonia and Wallonian interests nevertheless seem to have played a more prominent role than those of Brussels. It is important to note that with the exception of the radical right *Vlaams Belang* and its defence of national sovereignty, most opponents of the Treaty refuse to consider their position as anti-European or Eurosceptic.<sup>24</sup> The opponents also argue that they are not isolated, that they express a critique voiced by an important segment of European public opinion, or as in the more recent debate on Mercosur, these are perplexities also voiced within European institutions and by other member states.<sup>25</sup>

## 5. THIRD PERIOD, AFTER 2016: RETURN TO COOPERATIVE PARADIPLMACY WITH A LOW LEVEL OF CONFLICT

The aftermath of the 2016 situation revealed that neither of the two regions intended to shift to a conflictual mode of paradiplomacy. Cooperation is still the preferred option of policymakers in those regions, particularly in Brussels.<sup>26</sup> While not necessarily as strong, such disincentives are equally present in Wallonia. Both regions encountered changes in government. In Wallonia, the Socialist Party was ousted from the government in 2017 and replaced by the *Mouvement Réformateur* then also partner in the federal government, diminishing the political incentives for conflictual paradiplomacy. After the 2019 elections a broad coalition of Socialists, Liberals, and Greens, corresponding with the federal government coalition has governed the region. In Brussels, the Flemish and Francophone Greens replaced after 2019 the Christian Democrats in the new government majority (Vervoort III).

Trade agreements remain a subject of controversy. In the two regions, all these coalitions included parties both in favour and critical of trade agreements, with parties critical of these treaties being a majority in the respective parliaments. As a consequence, both regions have frozen the ratification of CETA – while the federal and Flemish parliaments approved ratification in 2018 (VRT nieuws, 2018) – a suitable compromise between the persistence of a majority in the respective parliaments opposed to or at least reluctant towards this ratification, and the desire not to antagonize exceedingly other authorities, in the first place the EU itself. Since non-ratification implies that one of the most controversial aspects of the Treaty, investment protection, is not activated, this stalemate suits its opponents. The radical left PTB, in the opposition, rejects this strategy, but it is politically isolated, and in the present absence of civil society mobilizations on this issue, it is unable to pressure the parliaments to take a more explicit position.<sup>27</sup>

Both regions, however, are still active on the issue of trade treaties. The 2019 Brussels governmental declaration included a statement that trade agreements would be conditional on the inclusion of social and environmental safeguards (Déclaration de politique générale, n.d., p. 127). The parliaments in both regions have adopted motions against the Mercosur Treaty in its present form. In Wallonia, support for the motion was even unanimous (including even the *Mouvement Réformateur*, favourable to CETA), with the protection of the interest of

Wallonian farmers as a central argument.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly enough, the Flemish Parliament also organized a hearing on Mercosur in which also a member of the centre-right majority coalition (the same as in the previous session) voiced critiques on the Treaty (Vlaams Parlement, 29 March 2021).

While European and international issues are less relevant in the day-to-day work of parliaments, the discussions on trade treaties do correspond with their increased international interest and involvement.<sup>29</sup> In Brussels, European issues are normally addressed in the ad hoc commission of the parliament, where MPs may ask questions to the minister responsible for European affairs. Concerning European issues, the parliament is dependent on information provided by the Brussels government and the respective ministerial cabinets, since the MPs do not have enough resources (staff in particular) to follow up on European policies.<sup>30</sup> Such information, however, is not provided automatically, the PTB in opposition receives no such information, and even MPs from parties in government observe that information mainly comes from (politically) friendly cabinets.<sup>31</sup> In practice, it is the information provided by civil society organizations that has proved to be crucial for raising awareness on trade treaties.

The aftermath of the discussions around the ratification of the CETA treaty in 2016 is paradigmatic of the sole limited break with a cooperative strategy for these two regions. However, horizontal cooperation between Flanders on the one hand, and Brussels and Wallonia on the other has become more problematic. This is because of the differentiation of policy preferences in the fields of trade and environmental policies. Since on those issues regional authorities co-determine the Belgian position and their consensus is needed, it has become increasingly difficult to articulate a common Belgian position on them, and in recent years, time-absorbing meetings to attempt to reach a compromise have increasingly become the rule.<sup>32</sup> Neither Wallonia nor Brussels, however, intend to develop a conflictual paradiplomacy, preferring alliances with each other. In the present political constellation, they sometimes align also with the federal government, while with the previous centre-right federal government, relations were more conflictual. On environmental issues, Wallonia and the Brussels Region tend to be in agreement with proposals from the European Commission, with Flanders more critical or opposing them, while on trade issues the opposite situation prevails, with Wallonia and Brussels lukewarm or critical towards them, and Flanders supporting them.<sup>33</sup> The common presence of representatives of the regions in the Permanent Representation nevertheless still helps to smooth conflicts since it allows them to better understand the respective positions and prepare possible compromises.<sup>34</sup>

The Brussels Region itself still acts in some circumstances as a broker for compromises.<sup>35</sup> The fact that several dossiers are less relevant for Brussels, for example, industrial policies, facilitates this role as mediator.<sup>36</sup> Besides its relatively modest political weight, the limited administrative capacities of the region and its reliance on federal administration has also contributed to a preference for a low and cooperation-oriented profile. The present Brussels government, however, has elaborated an explicit policy reinforcing the European engagement of regional authorities. The administration responsible for European affairs has been considerably reinforced, and the various ministerial cabinets now all have an advisor for European affairs. The region is now more prepared regarding European issues and is also acting more actively, albeit still in a cautious way and always in alliance with other entities.<sup>37</sup>

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The predominantly cooperative attitude of Belgian regions concerning Europe firstly results from the unique Belgian constitutional set-up, in which regions are fully integrated in the national process of policymaking. This arrangement explains why cooperative paradiplomacy has generally prevailed, but also why regions do have the means to influence EU politics and hence a potential to launch conflictual paradiplomacy, as revealed in the 2016 CETA controversy.

The crisis, however, also resulted from the fact that regional authorities had not been consulted during the CETA negotiations, bypassing the normal procedures of cooperative paradiplomacy. After the crisis subsided, subnational authorities returned to the more traditional pattern of cooperative paradiplomacy. This return was facilitated by the fact that the two regions involved, Wallonia and Brussels, have little or no incentive for non-cooperation. This is particularly true for the latter: its bi-communitarian institutions as well as its more limited administrative capacity explain why it played a more limited and conciliatory role in the conflict.

Our analysis of the 2016 crisis reveals that the opponents of CETA emphasized issue salience. With the partial exception of the radical right *Vlaams Belang* and its focus on national sovereignty, the opponents of CETA formulated the same critiques of the Treaty. They insisted on safeguards against possibly negative social and environmental side-effects of trade treaties but were also concerned with democracy. As one of the participants in the Brussels debate, Philippe Close, stated it, the fact that the Brussels and Walloon Parliament devoted much more time to discussing those treaties rather than other parliaments is for him a genuine democratic problem.<sup>38</sup> In particular, the ISDS were perceived as instruments that would endanger the policy-making capacity of authorities, and rejection of the ISDS was the most prominent item in critiques of the Treaty. Those in favour of CETA downplayed these critiques on ISDS, argued that CETA would not endanger the European social model, emphasized the benefits of free trade, and highlighted the normality of trade treaties. They tend to explain the CETA controversy by referring to party politics and the tensions between francophone Liberals and Socialists.<sup>39</sup>

It seems highly unlikely that the actors refusing CETA in 2016 were not aware of the risks involved in such a decision. It implied antagonizing the EU in a field that is undoubtedly its core business and *raison d'être*. Therefore, we can assume that the protagonists were highly motivated and that the content of the Treaties and hence issue salience indeed was an important determinant of their actions, and their continued interest in trade treaties even with weakened civil society mobilization confirms this assumption. Opposition to CETA helped in fact to politicize debates on trade treaties, to create a political space within the European policy sphere where the contents of such treaties would be opened to debate.<sup>40</sup> It remains uncertain whether the opposition to CETA has been successful. Crespy and Rone (2022) have argued that after the CETA crisis the EU has managed to reinstate executive domination over trade negotiations. It may nevertheless be observed that the ratification process of CETA remains problematic, while in debates on new trade treaties, with Mercosur as a paradigmatic example, the erstwhile isolated opponents can now count on a far broader alliance of actors who are critical of it.

CETA opponents frequently refer to the role of civil society, and opposition to CETA in Wallonia and Brussels was undoubtedly related to the mobilization of civil society movements. The weaker mobilization of civil society on this issue in recent years facilitates the avoidance of conflicts around trade treaties, although regional parliaments have remained attentive to the issue. Civil society also played a role in providing information to politicians (a dimension emphasized by members of the Brussels Parliament). Opposition in Wallonia was also supported by interest groups in farming and the *Union des Classes Moyennes*, and farmers' interests also explain Wallonian opposition to the Mercosur Treaty. These groups were much more reluctant about these treaties than their Flemish equivalents, supportive of CETA, helping to explain the opposite positioning of Flemish, Walloon and Brussels authorities, and the contrasting position within party families, especially the Christian Democrats, where Flemish and Francophones have strongly divergent visions on CETA and trade treaties.

The opposition to CETA cannot, however, be interpreted as a transition towards a conflictual paradiplomacy. The Brussels Region intends, at the Belgian level especially, to continue to act in a cooperative way and where needed, to help broker deals between the other regions. The fact that both Wallonia and the Brussels Region avoid taking initiatives concerning the ratification

of CETA may moreover be interpreted as a strategy to de-escalate possible conflicts with Flanders, and hence a move away from conflictual paradiplomacy. Reaching of compromises has nevertheless become more difficult over the years, undermining the principle of federal loyalty that countered the centrifugal tendencies of the Belgian federal system. This countertendency is not entirely a novelty. However, it has been reinforced by a political polarization, which in the Belgian context also appears as a polarization between communities. As such, it reveals that the centrifugal dynamics characteristic of the Belgian federal system at the national level are not absent – although not yet predominant – from European policymaking, thus reinforcing the fragility of the Belgian federal system.

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## NOTES

1. Interview with collaborator of a member of the Brussels government.
2. The secretary of state responsible for European affairs, Pascal Smet, has been elected vice-president of the European section of Metropolis, the network of large cities and urban areas (Brussels Parliament, 15 March 2021, 9).
3. See [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_17\\_1872/](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_17_1872/).
4. Magnette argued the same thing at a conference in Montréal in 2017; <https://www.corim.qc.ca/fr/conference/771/2017-06-02-paul-magnette/>.
5. Parlement Wallon, 27 November 2014.
6. Parlement Wallon, 11 December 2014.
7. Parlement Wallon, 29 January and 24 February 2016.
8. Our translation from the French; Parlement Wallon, 11 December 2014.
9. Parlement Wallon, 26 March 2014.
10. Parlement de la Communauté française, 5 June 2013.
11. Parlement Wallon, 3 July 2015.
12. Interview with Julien Uyttendaele.
13. Brussels Parliament, 23 March 2015, 1.
14. Brussels Parliament, 23 March 2015, 68–72.
15. Brussels Parliament, 8 July 2016. For the text of the resolution and proposed amendments, see Brussels Parliament, 10 June 2016.
16. Zoé Genot (*Ecolo*), Brussels Parliament, 8 July 2016, 23.
17. Interview with Guy Vanhengel.
18. Brussels Parliament, 28 October 2016.
19. See <https://www.oecd.org/investment/internationalinvestmentagreements/multilateralagreementoninvestment.htm/>.
20. See Armand De Decker, 28 October 2016, 19; and Philippe Close, 8 July 2016, 27, respectively.
21. An exception would be Arnaud Verstraete, *Groen*, on the possible negative impact of Uber and Airbnb on Brussels; Brussels Parliament 28 October 2016, 22.
22. For example, Arnaud Verstraete, *Groen*, Brussels Parliament, 28 October 2016, 21.
23. Interview with MP CD&V.



24. For the PTB, see, for example, Mathilde El Bakri, Brussels Parliament, 23 March 2015, 37. For the position of *Vlaams Belang*, see Brussels Parliament, 28 October 2016, 69.
25. Juan Benjumea, Brussels Parliament, 20 November 2020, 37.
26. Several of the interviewees confirmed this preference of the authorities of the Brussels Region: MP *CD&V*, Cielte Van Achter, Guy Vanhengel.
27. Interview with Loic Fraiture.
28. For Wallonia, see *La Libre Belgique* (2020) and Parlement Wallon 20 January 2020. For Brussels, see Brussels Parliament, 20 November 2020.
29. Interview with Marie Lecocq and Juan Benjumea.
30. Interview with Julien Uyttendaele.
31. Interviews with Marie Lecocq and Juan Benjumea; and Julien Uyttendaele.
32. Interview with a collaborator of the administration of the Brussels Region.
33. Interview with a collaborator of a member of the Brussels government.
34. Interview with a collaborator of the administration of the Brussels Region .
35. Interview with a collaborator of the administration of the Brussels Region .
36. Interview with a collaborator of a member of the Brussels government.
37. Interviews with a collaborator of a member of the Brussels government; and a collaborator of the administration of the Brussels Region.
38. Brussels Parliament, 28 October 2016, 40.
39. Interview with Guy Vanhengel.
40. In the debate on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership in the Brussels Parliament, the representative of the Centre national de coopération au développement (CNCD) mentioned that several member states had expressed their perplexity about Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) concerning CETA, but that the European Commission ignored these observations; Brussels Parliament, 23 March 2015, 41.

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