

Review 2

Title: The Clash of The Titans: A psycho-political cartography of Belgian politics. By Christ'l De Landtsheer and Pascal De Sutter (2011). 272 p. Antwerp: University of Antwerp Press. ISBN: 978-905487 865-0

Reviewed by: Annelies Verschueren (University of Antwerp)

This book is a rare glimpse into Belgian politics after the federal elections of June 13th, 2007. It gives an accurate picture of the political developments in Belgium in a specific period. The book starts with a comprehensive overview of psychological profiling in the world of politics. It explains the significance of profiling politicians, namely understanding their thoughts and acts, in order to predict the future. The book is based on the Immelman-method. The profiling of the different politicians resulted from a collaboration between students of the Communication Sciences of the University of Antwerp and two professors, Christ'l De Landtsheer of the University of Antwerp and Pascal De Sutter of the Catholic University of Louvain-La-Neuve.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part is about political psychology and contains the first two chapters. The second part is the psycho-political cartography of the Belgian government, this part includes chapters three, four and five. The last part is about the future of Belgian politics. It contains chapters seven, eight and nine.

In chapter one, the authors explain psychological profiling in the world of politics, which is not a new phenomenon. This part clarifies how the profiling of a politician works. The method is applied from a distance, there is no direct contact with the person who is being observed. The aim is to discover a pattern of someone's behaviour and to find unchangeable characteristics of the person in question. The authors explain that this kind of research can facilitate a peaceful resolution of dangerous situations in world politics. That is to say, current leaders may base their plans on such research to prevent threatening situations.

Chapter two contains the overview of Immelman-method. The authors exemplify how the method works and how they apply it to the Belgian cabinet level. Personality traits contribute greatly to intentions, competence and strategy of the politicians. Not only the personality is significant, also the political situations are important. The method used in this book is the most recent approach designed by Aubrey Immelman. He adapted the personality model of Theodore Millon called the Millon Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria (MIDC).

The method is based on a qualitative psychological classification which is empirically validated. The classification of personality patterns occurs with the assistance of conven-

tional psychodiagnostic methods, based on material discovered from media articles, biography, interviews etc.

There are three phases in the procedure. The first one is the analytical phase. This phase consists of the monitoring of the media and the collecting of as many sources as possible. Secondly, there is the synthetic phase, where the diagnostically relevant information is quantified. The authors classify the materials into twelve personality types, and five behavioural domains by using the MIDC inventory of 170 diagnostic terms. The scores are transferred by holistic coding into the MIDC-scoresheet and into a psycho-diagram. Finally, there is the evaluation phase where the researchers explain which combinations frequently occur during the analysis.

Chapter three deals with the psycho-political cartography of the Belgian cabinet. In this chapter, the authors map the political situation in Belgium after the federal elections of June 10th, 2007. The Christian-democratic political party CD&V was the winner in the elections while the conservative-liberal Open Vld and the social-democratic SP.A-SPIRIT suffered an electoral defeat. The formation of a government was a very difficult undertaking and, until now, one of the longest governmental formations in the world.

During the formation, the Wallonian Conservative Liberal Didier Reynders (MR) began as informateur. This was a challenging task, due to the community question in Belgium. Flanders and Wallonia had conflicting demands. Thereafter, Jean-Luc Dehaene (CD&V) became royal mediator but he was not able to find a solution. Then Yves Leterme (CD&V) became a formateur. He also gave his resignation because he did not find a way to facilitate the cooperation between the two sides. After that, Herman Van Rompuy acted as political mediator, but his role was also of a short duration. Van Rompuy left Belgian politics in order to become a president of the European Council. Yves Leterme was reappointed as formateur but once again he was discharged of this function. Guy Verhofstadt (Open Vld) and his government received more powers from King Albert II. Awaiting a solution for the political crisis and a new government, Verhofstadt was also appointed as a formateur. The intention was that the Verhofstadt III government (active from the 3rd of December 2007 until the 20th of March 2008) would be temporary until Yves Leterme could step into his shoes. The Leterme I government ran from the 20th of March 2008 and ended the 22nd of December 2008 because of the Fortis case. Subsequently, the Van Rompuy government followed from the 30th of December 2008 until the 25th of November 2009. When Van Rompuy served in his new function in the European Council, the Leterme II government was put together.

In chapter four, the authors explain the psychological profiles of the leaders of the Federal Government, or of those who had an important role during the governmental negotiations. They set up the psychological profiles ascertained from the Immelman-method and gave them titles matching each profile: Guy Verhofstadt the Voluntarist, the Conscientious Yves Leterme, the Relativating Herman Van Rompuy, the Stubborn Joëlle Milquet (CDH), the Power-oriented Didier Reynders (MR), the Charming Elio Di Rupo (PS), the Rebellious Bart De Wever (N-VA), the Aggrieved Jo Vandeuren (CD&V) and the Dominant Karel De Gucht (CD&V).

In chapter five of the book, the authors set up the psychological profile of the members of the Federal Government from 2007 until 2010. In this part, they present the profiles of six politicians: the Jovial Michel Daerden (PS), the Dynamic Pieter De Crem

(CD&V), the Optimistic Vincent Van Quickenborne (Open Vld), the Severe Inge Vervotte (CD&V), the Fluent Paul Magnette (PS) and the Authoritative Laurette Onkelinx (PS).

In chapter six the authors compare psychological profiles at the federal level. They investigate how governmental negotiations developed at the psychological level during the formation after June 2007 and in the different governments: Verhofstadt III, Leterme I and Van Rompuy I. So, they gained an insight into the difficult process led by Leterme after winning the elections and into how Verhofstadt pulled a temporary government together after four days. Leterme could not solve the challenge of forming a government, for six months, because of sharp criticism in the media, the community question and the failing economy.

Yves Leterme attaches a big importance to norms and values. He acts from a sense of duty and likes to have control of the situation. Joëlle Milquet attaches more significance to standards than Leterme, she likes to manipulate and acts compulsively. Didier Reynders is very similar to Leterme and Milquet during political acts. Bart De Wever finds his reputation important and sometimes acts as a quarrelsome person who is difficult to negotiate with. Karel De Gucht is a strong dominant person who cares about norms and values. Elio De Rupo is an exception. As opposed to other politicians, his profile reveals that he is very charming. All these profiles show why the negotiations were deadlocked. The authors explain that the cause of this is the community question in Belgium. Yet they also demonstrate that there was a lack of obligingness and joviality on both sides. The politicians were too dominant, quarrelsome and they relied too much on the regulations. The personalities were not very different. They show similarities that caused the difficulties during the formation.

Further, the authors get to the bottom of the three different governments during the period under consideration. In regard to the Verhofstadt III government, they ask why Verhofstadt managed to form the government so fast contrary to Leterme. The coalition agreement was largely the same and Verhofstadt had a record of service. He delivered his political career with a great panache. That is why he formed a government faster than Leterme. During the Leterme I government, there was no trust between the members. The Fortis case did not help to restore the confidence. There was a lack of politicians with guts, obligingness and/or joviality. Maybe without the Fortis case, the government could have stacked it out for a longer time. During the Van Rompuy I government, it was finally not the political bickering that brought down the government. Van Rompuy was able to effectively lead the government, a government that almost consisted of the same members as Leterme I. Leterme had problems to channel different ambitions. Van Rompuy is bold, ambitious and obliging. He can turn the ambition of one person into something collective and he handles compromises very well. Leterme was not able to be a leader in this political landscape because his character appeared too similar compared to the other ministers. This is an interesting conclusion from the different profiles that the authors have made.

The third part of the book was about the future of Belgian politics. Chapter seven is about the leadership style of federal victors of the 10th June 2010 election, namely of Bart De Wever and Elio Di Rupo. Bart De Wever is called a nonconformist leader. According to his personality profile, he is dominant, ambitious, dauntless and a little bit quarrelsome. Power and ideology give him the incentive to carry on and he has a strong political conviction and opinion. De Wever is not interested in maintaining close ties with colleagues

and he uses power to exercise supervision. De Wever is also very critical about the information he gets. Di Rupo is called the institutional leader. He has a complex personality: he is conscientious, obsessive and he acts compulsively. Di Rupo likes to be organised. Furthermore, he is worried about the approval of the audience and his popularity. This politician shows a lot of respect for traditions and for authority. Moreover, he supports the most efficient and formal policy. Interestingly, the politician's scores on the same characteristics differ a lot.

In chapter eight the authors describe the profile of two politicians in opposition – Johan Vande Lanotte (SP.A) and Jean-Michel Javaux (Ecolo). Vande Lanotte is a dominant politician, while Javaux has a marked individuality. Javaux is very jovial, he is the most socially capable politician in Belgium. He is into consensus and loves to get attention. Vande Lanotte is very confident, realistic, firm, and honest.

The last chapter, nine, is about the incumbent Flemish and Walloon minister presidents Kris Peeters (CD&V) and Rudy Demotte (PS). In spite of the storm of criticism in the political arena, these two politicians know how to steer the government in the right direction. Kris Peeters (also called the Flemish George Clooney) is a willing and conscientious person. On the one hand, he runs risks when he starts a dialogue about the community question, on the other hand, he does not want to stand alone in his decisions. He often waits when they enlist his support and he is very dutiful. Rudy Demotte is called ascetic; he is ambitious, calm and confident. He is a friend of everyone and he is extremely disciplined. Both politicians are very passionate but they also make a pragmatic effort for their projects.

At last, the conclusion of the book follows. Personality in politics can make a difference. Every situation is unique. It all depends on the environment where a politician operates and the personality profile. The ambitious and dominant characteristics are represented at a high level in politics.

In sum, this book is easy to read although the Immelman-method, in chapter two, is a part you must follow attentively. The book is a unique piece that looks inside the world of Belgian politics. It is the first time that psychological profiling is applied to the governmental formation after the federal elections on the 13th of June 2007. While reading the book, you learn why the personality of politicians contributed to the difficulties during the government formation. The book is certainly recommended if you want to know more about the Belgian formation of 2007 and the impact of personality in politics.