

## **The influence of cultural division on country image The Belgium case: Flanders versus Wallonia**

*Lavinia Cincă, Dumitrița Dorina Hîrtie*

### **Abstract**

In the pursuit of a viable form for the European Union political unification, Belgium is often referred as a model in terms of intercultural communication and cooperation between its two main linguistic communities: the Flemings (Dutch-speaking) and the Walloons (French-speaking). The high degree of regional autonomy and cultural liberty were considered key success factors for making possible the survival of an artificial political construction like Belgium. Yet, bringing together peoples with different cultural identities led to division between the two communities. For instance, in Spain and Northern Ireland group cultural differentiation generated violence, but still in Belgium the conflict did not alter the physical level, mostly remaining at the symbolic one. Anyhow, the conflict affected the country image, being highly visible particularly because of the tensions within the political arena, as not only that the two communities are linguistically separated, but also had different results in the 2008 elections for the Belgian Parliament.

In this paper we are going to monitor Belgium's image during 3 months (September – November 2008), disseminated through three main Belgian newspapers, with international coverage: "Le Soir" (Walloon newspaper), "Brussels Times" (national newspaper), "Flanders" (Flemish newspaper). The interpretation of the media monitoring results will be based on the media image analysis model, a method derived from content analysis. According to the method, we will create an image profile composed of Anholt Brand Nation Index: export brands, foreign and domestic policy, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, people, tourism. Furthermore, we will identify the conflict moments and based on the profile analysis we will determine how the conflict effects the image monitored. The research will eventually bring solutions to manage the group conflict in order to avoid an image crisis and the split of Belgium, also the study highlighting key issues in the EU political construction process.

**Key Words:** country image, conflict, crisis, cultural communities, culture, diversity, nation brand

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### 1. Concepts and theories

Image is a particularly defining concept for an individual, organization or country, determining success in the social sphere and communication sciences understand through it the representation of a social object formed by an individual, a social group or even a segment of the population. "Image is the representation formed as a sum of beliefs, attitudes, opinions, prejudices, experiences and assumptions, by a group of people or within the public opinion, on persons, institutions, organizations or any phenomenon or object<sup>1</sup>". Starting from the definition above, country image can be defined as "the sum of beliefs and impressions people hold about places. Images represent a simplification of a large number of associations and pieces of information connected with a place<sup>2</sup>." One can consider the places being described by positive elements geography, history, arts, famous citizens, products, brands, entertainment industry etc. and also negative ones: the state of health of the entire population, political equilibrium, civil rights violations, environment protection, racial/ethnic conflicts, poverty and crime. All these elements can turn into stereotypes of a country, being used as short-cuts for information processing resulting in long-lasting and difficult to change representations.

Instead of country "image", Wally Olins is talking about country "brand", including an emotional dimension, by which he understands the deliberate actions of a nation in order to construct its prestige and reputation, by projecting its national identity in a consequent way and according to a specific ideology<sup>3</sup>, determining the way through which people think about a country. This definition links the "image" to the "national identity": a strong country image (or brand) cannot be created unless it is founded on a "national identity". The same author<sup>4</sup> states that the internal regionalism in Belgium and countries like Spain, Great Britain and even Italy, puts in danger the process of building a country brand, as "a symbolic construct, an idealistic, attractive and memorable qualities of a nation<sup>5</sup>".

Simon Anholt approached the concept as "nation brand" through which he understands the sum of perceptions of a country and its citizens related to six dimensions, creating the Nation Brands Index: export brands, foreign and domestic policy, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, people, tourism. The Index is a comprehensive tool, useful to understand the problems of a country, but not a way to solve them<sup>6</sup>. The model brings together all the efforts projected internationally, in order to create a favorable national image.

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Some authors think that there is a slight difference between country/national image, and nation brand and country brand<sup>7</sup>. “The national image is the set of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person holds regarding a specific country”<sup>8</sup>. The country brand consists of both identity and image, and the extent to which the values promoted by the brand coincide with the audience’s representations is proportional to branding efforts in tourism, exports or foreign direct investment<sup>9</sup>.

Another definition of nation brand takes also into consideration the stakeholders: “a nation brand is the total sum of all perceptions of a nation in the mind of international stakeholders which may contain some of the following elements: people, place, culture/language, history, food, fashion, famous faces (celebrities), global brands etc”<sup>10</sup> and it exists with no effort from the nation itself. The analysis may emphasize the product brands (e.g. chocolate, frites or beer in Belgium), the place marketing (Brussels, the capital of the EU), the region (e.g. Flanders), the people or the state, which is not the case for Belgium at the moment. The three elements listed above are far more visible than the last two which, in fact, have stronger impact on public’s representations. The reason for this is related to cultural division between the two main ethnic groups, the Flemish and the Walloons, making impossible a country positioning or country image.

In the article we will opt for national/country image, as we think that it is premature to speak about country brand in the case of Belgium. This position is supported also by the considerations of Anholt: "Belgium branding is a global scandal. As a result of divisive politics, Belgium's brand equity is being squandered." The brand Belgium has a definite value, as Flanders or Wallonia do not exist separately in terms of branding, even of tourist avoid using the word 'Belgium' and prefer unknown names<sup>11</sup>.

## **2. Presenting the actor: Belgium, a culturally divided country**

Belgium, one of the youngest countries from Western Europe, has its origins on a very precious ground that is reflected in nowadays richness of the country. Before gaining its independence, the country’s geographical limits were the playground and, often, the battleground for the most powerful countries of Europe<sup>12</sup>. After gradually being split, the country succeeded in accomplishing a shape that kept it united, at least, officially speaking.

Being one of the smallest countries of the European territory, Belgium covers 11, 780 square miles<sup>13</sup>, and despite this, it is one of the most dense-populated countries, with a population of 10, 414,336 (July 2009 est.) split in its two main ethnic regions, Flanders (58%) and Wallonia (31%) and one mixed group (11%). On its territory there are three official spoken languages: Dutch (60%), French (40%) and just for less than 1% of the population, German. Its capital, Brussels, gathering a population around one million inhabitants, has a unique conformation because of the both spoken

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languages, French (80%) and Dutch and his position in the heart of Flanders. This is the reason why Brussels is the nowadays playground of the two main regions and, of course, of the country. To go deeper in its diversity, Brussels is a capital for times: for The European Union, for Belgium, for Flanders and for the French Community. The religion in Belgium is mainly catholic (75%), and the urbanization is almost absolute (97%), the same thing can be said about the literacy level (99%)<sup>14</sup>. Lately, falling on the second step when talking about the quality of the health system, Belgium still stays on positions and registers the smallest numbers (0,2% (2007 est.)) regarding HIVS/ AIDS affected population.

When discussing about the Belgian administration, one should pay attention to the fine share of powers and attributions among communities, regions, provinces and communes/ municipalities. More exactly, the language aspect conducted at the birth of three *communities*: Dutch, French and German, three *regions* Flanders, Brussels – Capital and Wallonia, which all have regional authority for the language, culture, education, preventative medicine, protection of young people, scientific research, sports and public services<sup>15</sup>. The administrative rank continues with *ten provinces*, equally divided between Flanders (Antwerp, Limburg, West Flanders, East Flanders, Flemish Brabant) and Wallonia (Hainaut, Namur, Liege, Luxemburg, Walloon Brabant). Each province has an elected council which is responsible for their good climate. Going to the next level, Belgium has 599 communes, of which each has a Town Hall (*Stadhuis*) responsible for the local law and order, as marriages, social system and so on.

With such a complex administrative structure, the political structure cannot be different. A simple explanation is that the governments of the regions and communities overlap and this makes from Belgium a country hard to manage from the political point of view. The separation occurred when each region wanted to have more and more power and not because of the peoples will, but because of the negotiated interest among the parties itself. Belgium is a federal state, where the King (King Albert II), the Head of the State, and the Prime Minister, the head of the Government play the most important roles in Belgian politics. Alongside the Federal State, with the same legal impact, but acting on different fields, there are the Communities and the Regions. Officially, the King exercises both roles, symbolic and political, but the stress is heavily put on the former one. The symbolic aspect plays an important role on the people's and parties cohesion and unity, and it cannot be underestimated. But, the King's actions have no effect unless they are not supervised and made responsible by a Minister. We can say that he plays a moderator role among some many political actors. There are also differences in political orientation: the Flemish people mainly vote centre-right parties, while the Walloons mostly left-wing parties. In fact,

the country is already split up when taking into consideration the political arena: there is no Belgian political party, all of them are totally separate: Flemish and Walloon Christian-Democrats, Flemish and Walloon Socialists, Flemish and Walloon Liberals, Flemish and Walloon Greens, etc. This separation led to curious situations: while the Walloon Socialist party is in the federal government, the Flemish Socialist Party is in the opposition. So, every political party from Flanders has its equivalent in Wallonia. The major political parties are: the Christians, the Socialists, the Liberals, the Linguistic party and the Greens<sup>16</sup>.

Regarding the social system, “Flanders prefers to spend the government finances in promoting and attracting local and foreign investors for creating jobs; in the real socialistic tradition, Wallonia prefers to spend the finances for social support to jobless people. As a result the degree of jobless people today is about 7 % in Flanders, in Wallonia about 20 %”<sup>17</sup>. This situation spread the wide mentality that each Flemish is actually daily spending 3 EUR for social support to Wallonia. The differences also concern the attitude towards work: the Flemings evaluate themselves as ethical, efficient, organized and disciplined; on another hand, the Walloons appreciate their own “like champagne” spirit, their creativity, their way of being inventive and tolerant<sup>18</sup>.

According to an interview taken to Professor Guido Peene from Katho Business School, the language problem in Belgium does not actually consist in the fact that in Flanders one speaks a Germanic language and in Wallonia a Romanic one, neither in the fact that the Flemish do not feel as kindred to the Dutch culture, as Walloons do to the French one<sup>19</sup>. Even if the first official language in Belgium was French (established in 1830) and Dutch became also official language 100 years later, the real linguistic problem lays in the difference in the education system. “While nowadays in Flanders the first foreign language is French, mandatory in all schools, in Wallonia students have the choice for their first foreign language between Dutch and English and the majority takes English<sup>20</sup>”. As a consequence, the majority of Walloon people is not exposed to Flemish media and is unable to communicate in Dutch with the Flemings.

It is considered that the Flemings are culturally more similar to the German people, by emphasizing the importance of language, collectivity and history, while the Walloons are more focused on common will, elective system, considering themselves a revolutionary nation, as the French do<sup>21</sup>.

*Events context:* The period monitored is not randomly chosen. All three months (September, October and November 2008) were the playground where Belgium’s image had drawn Europe’s attention through the Fortis Crisis invitations. Fortis was one of the largest banks at the beginning of 2008, with a Benelux shared capital. The main reason the Fortis crisis took place was the financial crisis that stroke, generally speaking, the whole

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world. But, particularly, the crisis increased with the acquisition of the Dutch bank ABN Amro. During this time, the investors started to withdraw their deposits, this determining the Dutch and Belgian Ministers, and European specialists hold meetings to tackle the crisis<sup>22</sup>. On 28<sup>th</sup> of September Fortis bank had been nationalized and, the following day, Dexia did the same. All this took place under the Belgian Minister Yves Leterme administration, which played the main leader role in the Fortis crisis management. As for this, his contribution, as his failures in managing crisis and respecting self imposed deadlines, had been calculated to the final countdown of the financial and diplomatically loses the of the Belgium's image.

### 3. The sources critics and the general publics' references

*The sources:* The analysis is based on three main Belgian newspapers, with international coverage: "Le Soir" (Walloon newspaper), "Brussels Times" (international newspaper), "Flanders Today" (Flemish newspaper). "Le Soir" is an independent daily newspaper defining itself as progressive-minded and independent, the main francophone journal in Belgium. In spite of a politically neutral self-positioning, actually it is a natural guardian of the Flemish-speaking communities set on the outskirts of Brussels<sup>23</sup>. Founded in 1887, it is a pioneer of the web, having the first francophone information site, [lesoir.be](http://lesoir.be), in Belgium<sup>24</sup>.

"Flanders Today" positions itself as an independent (even if it is actually paid by the Flemish government) newsweekly on Flanders written in English, based on Flemish press, being distributed in the EU area of Brussels. It was criticized that its main goal is to promote Flanders, lacking in business news<sup>25</sup> and not offering serious articles to expats, its target public<sup>26</sup>.

"Brussels Times" is part of World News, a network that presents and distributes news, sport, business and entertainment around the globe, founded in 1995<sup>27</sup>. It offers also local news, having 20.000 regional and thematic sites. It gathers news from all over the Internet, being an objective, free, no editorial-no bias journal, so we considered it as a neutral source contributing to the creation of Belgium's image around the world.

*General Public's reference:* The political struggle between the two communities started with the Flemings battle for cultural identity, mainly regarding language. The constant creation of stereotypes describing Flemish as entrepreneurial, hard working, right oriented in politics, and Walloons as the opposite, led Wallonia to look for social and economic position. Feeling culturally suppressed by the French, the Flemings considers that their nationality derives from the place of birth (*jus soli*), while the Walloons relate it to the people they belong to (*jus sanguinis*). So the Walloons' lack of emotional belonging to Wallonia as a whole, led them to import the cultural aspirations from France and to develop a feeling of identity related to the

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province they live in (Liege etc.) while also offering rights to the French speaking even if they are living in Flanders<sup>28</sup>.

The levels of trust in institutions are not as different as expected between the regions (Annex1, Table 1): the Flemings mostly trust in the education system, whereas the Walloons mostly have confidence in the social security, even if both regions situate them in top three, as well as the EU, proving to be a euro-optimistic country. The administrative system is less trusted in Flanders (ranking place 12 out of 13) than in Wallonia, where it occupies the sixth place. Regarding the Parliament, the level of trust is low in both regions and similar. Another interesting point concerns the press: it is more trusted in Flanders, than in Wallonia<sup>29</sup>. The two groups also share almost the same main values to use in education: “tolerance and respect” (75% Flemings, 71% Wallonia), and “responsibility” (72% Flemings, 77% Wallonia)<sup>30</sup>.

According to researches<sup>31</sup>, the Flemings and Walloons differ in terms of citizenship feelings: in Flanders one values the struggle for autonomy and the ancestors, puts the community above the individual, being proud of the national belonging. In Wallonia what matters is the regional identity helping the economic development; being more individualistic, they do not encourage the creation of Walloon identity, in order not to be accused of being nationalistic. *Le Soir* published a study that supports interesting findings: 5% of the Walloons feel Walloons, 7% feel francophone and 18% of the Brussels inhabitants consider their identity as “bruxellois”, while 63% of the Walloons feel Belgians. The problem of Wallonia is that the commitment to build the Walloon identity was strongest in the sixties, being created on the basis of an assertive labor movement taking place in a highly industrial area. Meanwhile, the Flemish identity was built on language and on the idea of a rich nation, as Flanders has surpassed Wallonia in terms of GDP, from the late sixties on<sup>32</sup>.

#### **4. Methodology of research and hypotheses**

Image analysis is based on daily monitoring broadcasts of selected media sources (with high market share) over a period of time<sup>33</sup>, a method derived from content analysis. In order to be valid, the model should monitor the media at least three months, on at least three sources and collect minimum 100 references.

Broadcast image is the actor’s representation disseminated by the media towards the public-reader. Thus, journalists’ references of social actor are comprised of a system of indicators sociologically validated (dimensions defining the actor according to the concept operational definition) and sub-indicators (features that materialize the dimensions). Both indicators and sub-indicators project a desirable, positive social model of the actors’ image. The unit of reference is the article and each reference is quoted with index 1 if

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positive and -1 if negative. These absolute values are then aggregated to obtain a total of subtotals for both indicators and sub-indicators, and finally converted into percentages.

Indicators and sub-system is then subjected to mathematical processing that will result in different types of image profiles. The primary profile describes what and how much the selected sources wrote about a certain actor and show its average visibility. This profiles show what reached the target audience. The cumulative profile pictures the visibility of certain indicators or sub-indicators in the press. The dichotomy or binary profile materializes the positive or negative points of the character's image, as compared to both the whole number of references and to the references of only a certain indicator. The dynamic chart indicates how the image evolves over time or intervals. They can highlight both the visibility and character of the image. The media or sources profiles show the sources' contribution to the image creation (visibility, positive or negative character). Several correlations will be made between indicators and sub-specific in order to sketch the actor's image.

Also, image vulnerabilities and risks will be identified (by vulnerability one understands exaggerate negative share, or almost no visibility of an important indicator/sub-indicator or a huge share of positive visibility of a not important indicator/sub-indicator.) The importance of an indicator will be established to a presumptive ideal image profile of the actor. The vulnerabilities, in certain contexts, turn into risks.

The country image model is based on the operational definition we have created, deriving from the indexes of nation brand<sup>34</sup>. We proposed three different dimensions, which are specific for country image: internal and external politics, brands and economy and culture and mentality. The model does not include the aspects related to crime, as being a press monitoring based analysis, one knows<sup>35</sup> that the media emphasizes and over exposes the public to news related to local crime. As Belgium, according to international surveys<sup>36</sup>, is one of the countries with the lowest level of social deviation, being very secure, we agreed not to monitor it. Moreover, we proposed a balanced ideal model for country image, as following: internal and external politics (40% of the references), brands and economy (30% of the references) and culture and mentality (30% of the references). The monitoring included 836 references from all articles collected from the three above-mentioned journals, within the period September-November 2008, found in the Internet archives. The image resulted is a disseminated one, by which one understands that image shaped the selected sources to reach the target audience. The image is measured according to a scale (Annex 1, Table 2).

As general hypotheses we assumed that: 1) The over exposure of the cultural clash derived from cultural division of the Flemish and the Walloons

will be responsible for a major part of the negative image of the country, 2) The bank crisis will fade the media coverage of the cultural division, 3) The international journal will be more influenced by the French point of view rather than the Dutch one due to linguistic barriers.

##### 5. Discussion: Results, interpretation and limits

According to the analysis, the country image within the period September-November 2008, in the three sources is slightly positive (+55,86%, -44,14%) (Annex 2, Fig.1). The main contribution to the positive image is brought by *Le Soir*, which has also the highest number of references, while *Brussels Times* and *Flanders Today* have almost an equal contribution (Annex 2, Fig.2, Fig.3). The distribution of references on the three indicators, when compared to the ideal model, shows that the most visible dimension is “internal and external politics” (61, 36% to 40%), followed by “brands and economy” (21,17%, to 30%) and “culture and mentality” (17,46% to 30%). (Annex 2, Fig.4). This distribution, correlated with the dichotomy profile leads to an interesting picture: the indicator bringing the most of the negative references is “internal and external politics” (-22,37%), being also the dimension with a preponderant negative image (-63,55% in the binary chart) (Annex 2, Fig.5, Fig.6). The other two indicators, even if being not so visible, have a preponderant (79,10% - “brands and economy”) and respectively an extremely (95,89% - “culture and mentality”) positive image.

This result can be explained as, for the one hand there is a political crisis generated by the different ideologically oriented regions, reflected in the votes and government composition, and on another, by the bank crisis which involved the authorities. The second point of view is also supported by the fact that October (the month in which the Fortis-Dexia crisis emerged) has the most number of references, both in terms of cumulative references, 42,43% and dichotomy, -22,97% of negative references are also in October (Annex 2, Fig.7, Fig.8). Another interesting point refers to the fact that the economic crisis did not bring more articles on economy in Belgium, as expected. This could be a positive aspect, as crisis in economy led to worsening image for all countries reached. The image evolution, comprised in the dynamic charts show a growing number of references, from September to October (October being the peak), while in November they tend to decrease, after the Fortis being nationalized and then sold (Annex 2, Fig.9).

*The External and Internal Politics Dimension* (Annex 3, Fig.1, Fig.2, Fig.3, Table 1)

This dimension reflects the high conflict between the two ethnic groups: the Flemish and the Walloons. The sub-indicator with the widest visibility is “harmonized relation between regions” (8,13%) and also with the biggest negative share (-7,30%), bringing the most dangerous image deficit. It can be considered a risk, and it is mainly presented within *Le Soir* (5,50% cumulative and 4,90% negative in the dichotomy), as it supports the French

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speaking Belgians living in the Brussels outskirts. In spite of the high presence of this indicator in the French-speaking community voice, it was not so visible in the international articles gathered by *Brussels Times* (1,44% cumulative and -1,20% in dichotomy). *Flanders Today* seems not having been so keen in presenting the cultural division in terms of both visibility and negative representation.

The second highly visible sub-indicator is “highly competent government” (5,62%). In the context of the bank crisis, this is a predictable result, the press being interested in the way the national Government would solve it. But this situation is materialized in a vulnerability: the press considered it rather negative (-2,99%), and especially the Flemish press (-1,90%), as several ministers, such as the Finances Minister, Didier Reynders, are Walloons. The French-speaking press considered the actions of the government rather appropriate (+1,08%) and so did *Brussels Times* (+1,44%). Again the cultural division threatens the country image: the highly visible sub-indicator “efficient prime-minister” (3,47%), refers to Yves Leterme, Flemish-born, whose image was rather negative in the French press, but positive in the international one. The reason was not the way he handled the bank crisis, as Wallonia, socialist-oriented agreed with Fortis nationalization, but the lack of efficiency in solving the French-community (living around Brussels) problems. The Flemish press, on another hand, also spread quite a negative image, as being right-oriented it disagreed with Fortis coming back into the state property.

Related to these sub-indicators is another one very visible: “honest official communication” (5,62%), also negatively appreciated (-2,99%), especially by *Le Soir* (-1,56%), relating it to the Fortis crisis, mainly after the decision of the Prime Minister to privatize it. It is interesting that this sub-indicator replays the situation of Prime-Minister Leterme, as the international press has an opposite opinion (+1,44%).

Another sub-indicator related to this situation is “representative leaders” (4,78%), visible and controversial, as it is also negatively viewed (-3,11%), especially in *Le Soir* (-2,15%), but exclusively positively at international level. This situation is due to, on the one hand, having a Flemish Prime Minister and a Flemish oriented government composition, and on another, to the fact that the Flemish press mostly presents the Flemish politicians depicted in a positive way, omitting the Walloon ones, and also being less critical to the Government that is closer to them. The cultural division affects the image only at the local level, the international press being more objective, but also less interested in the subject, creating an opportunity to keep a good country image. The legal decisions taken especially during the crisis were also highly visible (2,87%), equally positive and negative: the strange situation was due to the fact that Flanders considered the decisions

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were wrong (being against state-owned banks), while Wallonia right (being pro-nationalization). This divergence materializes in a risk: the image is biased and the international press does not give it too much importance and visibility. The interpretation is enhanced also by the sub-indicator “harmonized different ideology parties in the government” (2,39%), where Wallonia considers overwhelmingly (-1,56%) that the governmental solution is not a functional one.

The fourth highly visible sub-indicator is “well functioning labor policies” (4,90%), and it is a consequence of the crisis, but also it is deepened by the conflict between Flanders and Wallonia. It is negatively appreciated (-3,71% dichotomy and -6,04% binary) and to it, *Le Soir* has the major contribution (-1,79%) due to the fact that in Wallonia the unemployment rate is raised. This sub-indicator is linked to “well-functioning social system”, which is medium visible, but in this case both of the regions disagree, the French-speaking consider it very well functioning (+2,15%), while the Flemish the opposite (-0,84%), as the latest think that the social contributions are due to help the Walloons who do not want to work. Both sub-indicators are almost invisible in the international newspaper, meaning that the conflict is maintained at the local level.

Another issue refers to the public administration efficiency (3,11%), Also viewed as negative (-2,63%), by both regions, and also the international press. The lacking of capacity of the administration to solve problems such as federalization, immigration inclusion, unemployment, cultural and regional problems, led to a negative image of the Belgian administration.

Regarding the external politics, the press gives attention to it, due to the fact that the Belgian capital is also the European one. Most of the references considered that Europe has to develop a plan in order to save the banks from collapse. For the sub-indicator “internal policies in agreement with EU policies” (5,26%), both Flanders and Wallonia agreed that the EU has not done much to help the banks, so shaping the internal policies to them was not useful (-1,44%, -0,96%). The sub-indicator “responsible external policy” is highly represented due to the negative critics brought by the Walloon press in the problem of Congo, former Belgian colony, where the journalists think that the king and the authorities did not do much for stopping violence and developing the country.

When considering the last two indicators, for such a developed country as Belgium is, the fact that there have been registered the fewest references should be considered a positive aspect if taking into account what the opinion of Ying Fan says<sup>37</sup>, that if a country encounters a difficult period, as a crisis, or if a concerting action to develop the living conditions and the image of a country takes place, the first reform or level that should be worked upon is the political one, the economical coming the second. As for the

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political indicator, the highest number of references for the economical and cultural indicators has been registered also in October.

The “*Brand and Economy*” indicator (Fig.4, Fig.5, Fig.6, Table 2) According to the profiles the image on economical and cultural indicators is strongly positive and, moreover, this fact is interesting because the economical aspects (21,17%) outrun the cultural ones (17,46%), thus, in a crisis period, the expected results should be the opposite. What we understand from here is that the battlefield of the financial crisis was more political (61,36%) than economical (21,17%).

The most cited and with the highest positive impact sub – indicator is *business oriented culture* (36,16%). This thing is not surprising if we think about the rich references of the *Le Soir* in economical subjects but, still, the crisis did not affect obviously the references character from a normal period, fact which shows the strong concern of the country for its prosperity. The following, as a positive percentage, is the *notorious Belgian brands* sub - indicator (13,56%). *Notorious Belgian brands*, with a positive reference of 15,25%, registered the lowest negative impact (-0,56%) from all the sub - indicators, this thing showing that, during a difficult period, the Belgian brands do continue to promote and be present at an international level of the market. The vulnerability arises because of the low connection noticed between the *business oriented culture* and *notorious Belgian brands*, two sub – indicators that should go in the same direction, they open possibilities to risks because the accent goes more on *great foreign investments*(-5,08%, 13,56%) while the *satisfactory national products* (-5,65%, 6,78%) are being neglected. The *substantial contribution to the scientific progress* met low scores in all the publications monitored (-0.12%, 6% )

The *Mentality and Cultural* indicator (Fig. 7, Fig. 8, Fig.9, Table 3)

When it comes about the *Mentality and Cultural indicator*, almost everything is positively seen. What actually makes the case of the cultural inequalities between the two regions, the language aspect, in the image profile, the *importance of language* (4,79%) sub-indicator does not meet almost any reference. The silence of the press can be taken as it is an overrated subject that does not deserve a headline, or, the individuality of each region stays in the way of a compromise, which, as will be seen in the end, we consider to be a practical solution as to overcome the existing conflicts in Belgium. *The family is important* sub-indicator is also lacking references, sign that, considering the fact that now Belgium does not occupy the first position in the quality of the health system in Europe, but the second, shrinks a little bit the perception of performance in administration. The two sub-indicators, of the two different indicators, *the substantial contribution in sports at the international level* and *the substantial contribution of the country to the scientific progress* converge reciprocally but the little numbers

they own give them little chances to create a distinguish feature of Belgium's image worldwide.

The cumulative profiles show the interest each media paid to each indicator and sub-indicator. From this point of view, the sub-indicator *business oriented culture* (9,57%) meets the highest score from all the newspaper used in our work, the second and the third place being occupied by the *proud towards cultural background* (8,87%) and *notorious personalities: past and present* (5,98%) sub-indicators. This is understandable as long as these subjects are of high interest and sell very well, regardless the publication, but, also from this angle, *Le Soir* is the source for the most of them. *Religion* is not seen as an impediment or as an acceleration factor into the potential cohesion of the country, and this does not raise special problems as long as over 75% of the inhabitants are Catholics.

*Limits.* Due to the lack of information regarding market share, we were not able to create weighted profiles, obtained by multiplying the primary results with a score depending on market share of publications and the nature of the means of communication: radio, television, written press. These profiles show the image that actually reached the public. Secondly, unfortunately, due to linguistic aspects we were not able to choose a Flemish newspaper that could be considered the voice of the Flemish community such as "De Standaard" or "De Morgen". A limit can be met in analyzing the international dedicated newspaper, *Flanders Today*, for example, which was less critique to the real issues and problems of the period monitored, accentuating the positive cultural aspects at its common high level practice. We consider this a limit in our attempt to see the real and current dialogue of the country with the international readers. Also, the problems with some archives not available on the Internet anymore in the international press consist in a limit.

## 5. Conclusions and further research

From the very beginning, we want to underline that we did not have the intentions of building a brand campaign or of an analysis which should solve the internal problems that Belgium faces. We situated ourselves from a diagnosis point of view and, in the following lines, we will modestly try to shape some prognosis in order to improve the intern Belgian climate and its reflections to the outside world. We consider that this can be a good start from where to create a branding campaign.

Regarding our hypotheses, the first one "The over exposure of the cultural clash derived from cultural division of the Flemish and the Walloons will be responsible for a major part of the negative image of the country" was proven to be true: most of the negative references concerned the tensioned relations between regions and also several other political indicators were affected. The second one, "The bank crisis will fade the media coverage of

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the cultural division” it was not confirmed, the bank crisis boosted the conflict, raising new tensions within the political arena, generated by the different views of the two ethnic groups. The third hypothesis “The international journal will be more influenced by the French point of view rather than the Dutch one due to linguistic barriers” was only partially confirmed. Indeed *Le Soir* is a very popular source for the international press, but the linguistic problem has been surpassed, as international press agencies tend to either work with Dutch speakers in order to have access to Flemish press, or to have special monitors written by Flemish press in English, tailor-made for the international environment.

Also, when comparing to the ideal image model, one may notice that the political dimension is exacerbated compared to the economical and cultural ones, bringing an image deficit to the country.

Belgium is far one of the most developed country from Europe and with a good communicated image in terms of brands and Capital city. But this does not protect it from the international or national crisis which can shift the perception had upon its image.

Tackling the cultural level, which consists of an important sub-indicator, the *language* aspect, there should be paid more attention to the languages learnt in schools as to avoid the total intercultural split that exists nowadays. Moreover, this solution is not susceptible to imply antipathies as long as the process of learning a new language has mostly a utilitarian function, fact which will not affect each identity in its individuality.

Considering the fact that the press also influences what do people think, it is of major importance that the subjects and the issues tackled by the press to approach the less discussed aspects but with a big role in the community linkage as the language problem.

The concerns that the country is paying to the internal administrative issues, as family and religion, is hardly reflected in the press, comparing to the pride they have towards the cultural personalities and background. This fact could extend in an image risk for the international readers as long as the focus is not put on the people’s way of leaving and behaving.

## Notes

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- <sup>2</sup> P. Kotler and D. Gertner, “Country as Brand, Product, and Beyond: A Place Marketing and Brand Management Perspective”, in *Destination Branding: Creating the Unique Destination Proposition*, N. Morgan, A. Pritchard, R. Pride, Oxford, Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann, 2004, p. 42
- <sup>3</sup> W. Olins, *On Brand*, Bucharest, Comunicare.ro, 2006, p.128
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 136
- <sup>5</sup> M. Allan, “Why Brand Places?”, *Opinion*, No. 64, [http://www.beyond-branding.com/Agenda\\_MSA\\_Article\\_Feb.pdf](http://www.beyond-branding.com/Agenda_MSA_Article_Feb.pdf), 2004
- <sup>6</sup> S. Anholt, “The Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index”  
[http://www.gfkamerica.com/practice\\_areas/roper\\_pam/placebranding/nbi/index.en.html](http://www.gfkamerica.com/practice_areas/roper_pam/placebranding/nbi/index.en.html)
- <sup>7</sup> A. Dolea, A. Țăruș, *Branding Romania, How we promote country image*, Bucharest, Curtea Veche, 2009, p. 36
- <sup>8</sup> P. Kotler and D. Gertner, *op.cit.*, p.43
- <sup>9</sup> E. D. Jaffe, I. D. Nebenzahl, “National Image and Competitive Advantage”, Copenhagen, Business School Press, 2001, *apud* B. Đorđević, “Corporate Strategic Branding: How Country And Corporate Brands Come Together”, University of Belgrade, <http://anali.ekof.bg.ac.yu/pdf/177/2-1.pdf>, p.61
- <sup>10</sup> Y. Fan, Branding the nation: What is being branded?, Brunel Business School, Brunel University, Uxbridge, <http://www.complex.com/kaneva/YingFan.pdf>, 2005, p. 7-8
- <sup>11</sup> Dafydd ab Iago, “Belgium Dilemma, To be or not to be”, [http://www.brandchannel.com/features\\_effect.asp?pf\\_id=322](http://www.brandchannel.com/features_effect.asp?pf_id=322)
- <sup>12</sup> [http://www.vremco.com/bel\\_his\\_eng.htm](http://www.vremco.com/bel_his_eng.htm)
- <sup>13</sup> <http://www.123independenceday.com/belgium/demography.html>
- <sup>14</sup> [http://www.indexmundi.com/belgium/demographics\\_profile.html](http://www.indexmundi.com/belgium/demographics_profile.html)
- <sup>15</sup> <http://brussels.angloinfo.com/information/29/natadmin.asp>
- <sup>16</sup> <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2874.htm>
- <sup>17</sup> G. Peene, “Interview on Flanders and Wallonia”, Courtrai, not published, 2009, p. 2
- <sup>18</sup> B. D’Harte, “Citizenship- Belgium and Flanders”, Courtrai, Katho-IPSOC, 2008, p. 8
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p.3
- <sup>20</sup> G. Peene, *op.cit.*, p.2
- <sup>21</sup> B. D’Harte, *op.cit.*, p.6
- <sup>22</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/financetopics/financialcrisis/3100606/Financial-crisis-Benelux-bank-Fortis-nationalised-to-stop-collapse.html>
- <sup>23</sup> <http://presseurop.eu/ro/content/source-information/21571-le-soir>
- <sup>24</sup> [http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Le\\_Soir](http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Le_Soir)
- <sup>25</sup> <http://www.intute.ac.uk/cgi-bin/fullrecord.pl?handle=20080205-13252217>
- <sup>26</sup> <http://antwerp.wordpress.com/2007/10/19/flanders-today-belgium-launches-yet-another-expat-magazine/>
- <sup>27</sup> <http://wnnmedia.com/>
- <sup>28</sup> B. D’Harte, *op.cit.*, p.9
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p.11
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p.6
- <sup>32</sup> E. Deffet, “Destrée version 2008”, [http://archives.lesoir.be/destree-version-2008\\_t-20080917-00HZDH.html?firstHit=80&by=10&when=&begYear=2008&begMonth=09&begDay=02&endYear=2008&endMonth=09&endDay=30&sort=dateasc&rub=DEBA&rub2=&pos=88&all=166&nav=1](http://archives.lesoir.be/destree-version-2008_t-20080917-00HZDH.html?firstHit=80&by=10&when=&begYear=2008&begMonth=09&begDay=02&endYear=2008&endMonth=09&endDay=30&sort=dateasc&rub=DEBA&rub2=&pos=88&all=166&nav=1), 2008
- <sup>33</sup> B. Halic, I. Chiciudean, *Organizational Image analysis*, Bucharest, Comunicare.ro, 2004, p.23
- <sup>34</sup> S. Anholt, *op.cit.*
- <sup>35</sup> M. Dan, *Writing techniques for Public Relations*, Bucharest, Comunicare.ro, 2004, p.10-12
- <sup>36</sup> <http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/BelgCul2.html>
- <sup>37</sup> <http://www.complex.com/kaneva/YingFan.pdf>

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**Lavinia Cinca** is Master student in Management and Business Communication at the National School of Political and Administrative Studies in Bucharest, Romania. As exchange student in Belgium, she focused her studies on intercultural management and international marketing.

**Dumitrita Dorina Hirtie** is student at the Faculty of Communication and Public Relations at the National School of Political and Administrative Studies – Bucharest, Romania. As exchange student in Belgium, she focused her studies on intercultural communication and global issues.

## Annex 1

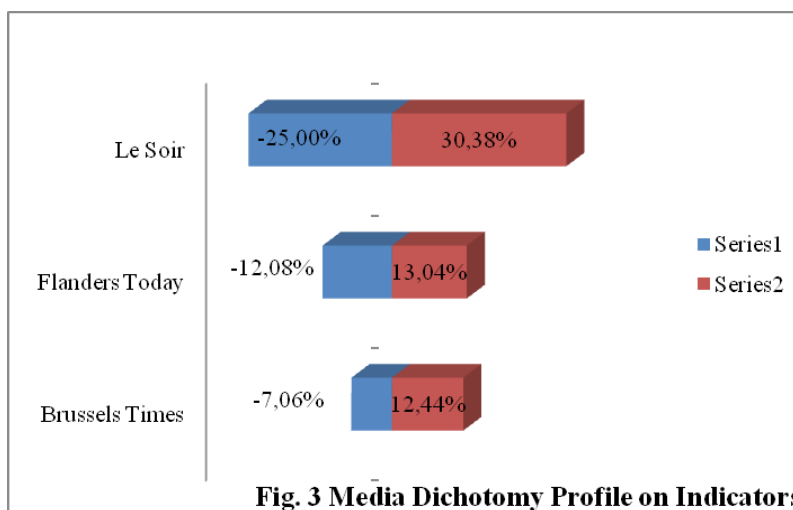
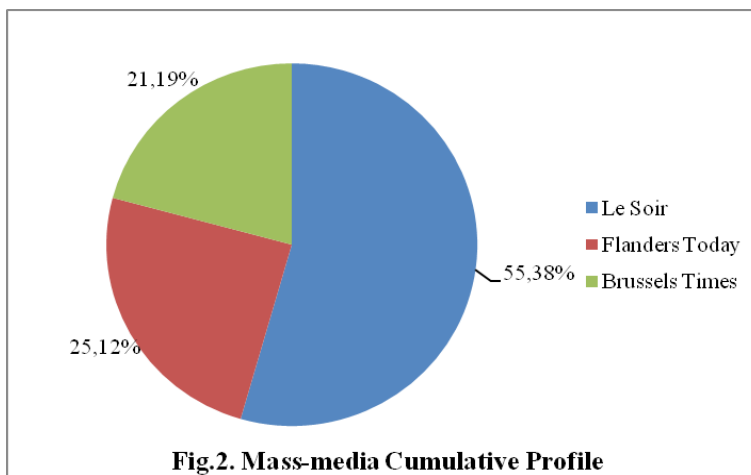
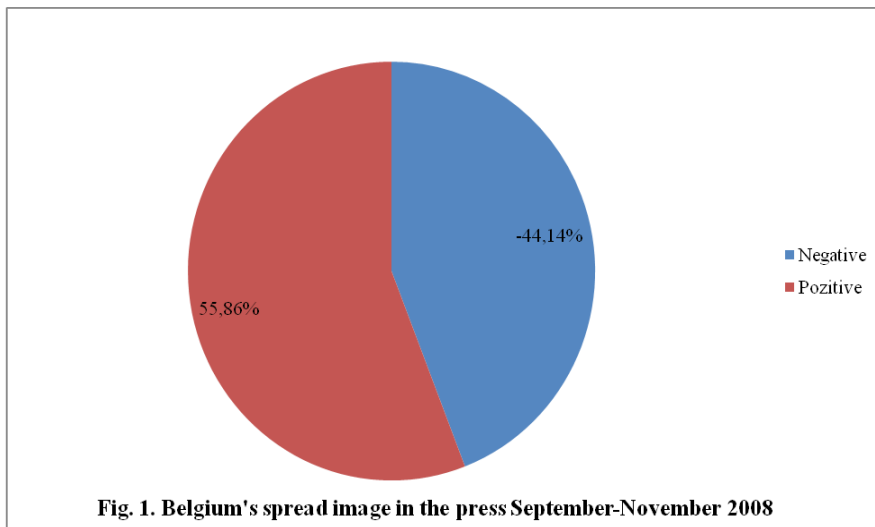
**Table 1 – The level of trust in institutions: Flanders and Wallonia (B. D’Haerte, 2008)**

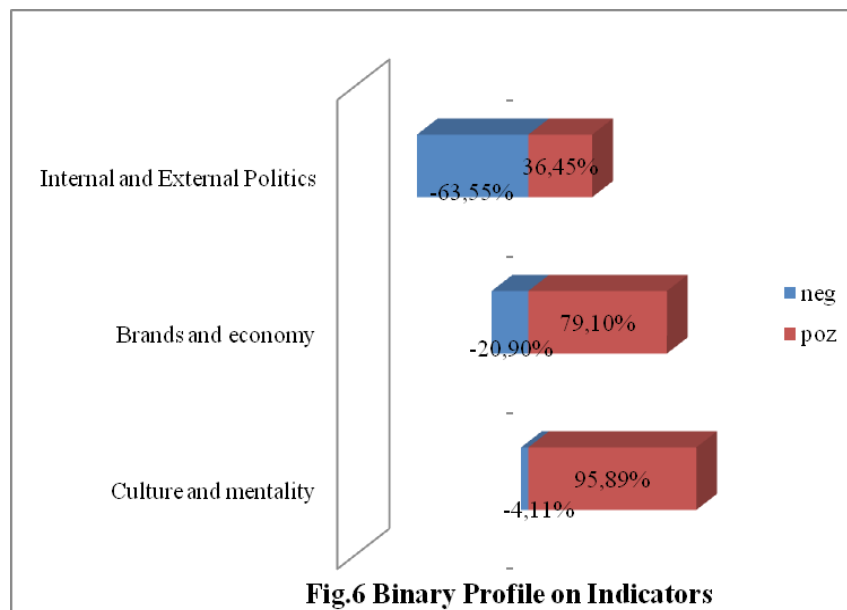
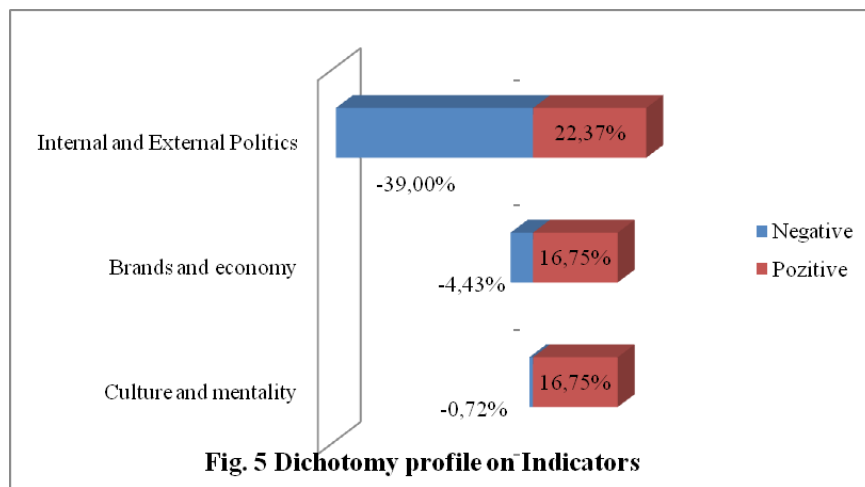
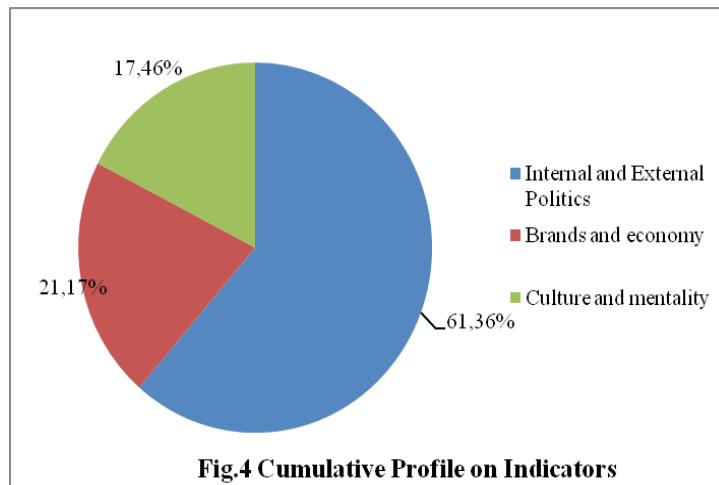
**Flanders** 1. Education system 2. Social security 3. EU 4. Police 5. Church 6. Big Companies 7. Administration 8. Justice 9. NATO 10. Parliament 11. Unions  
**Wallonia** 1. Education system 2. Social security 3. EU 4. Police 5. Church 6. Administration 7. Justice 8. Big Companies 9. Press 10. NATO 11. Army 12. Unions

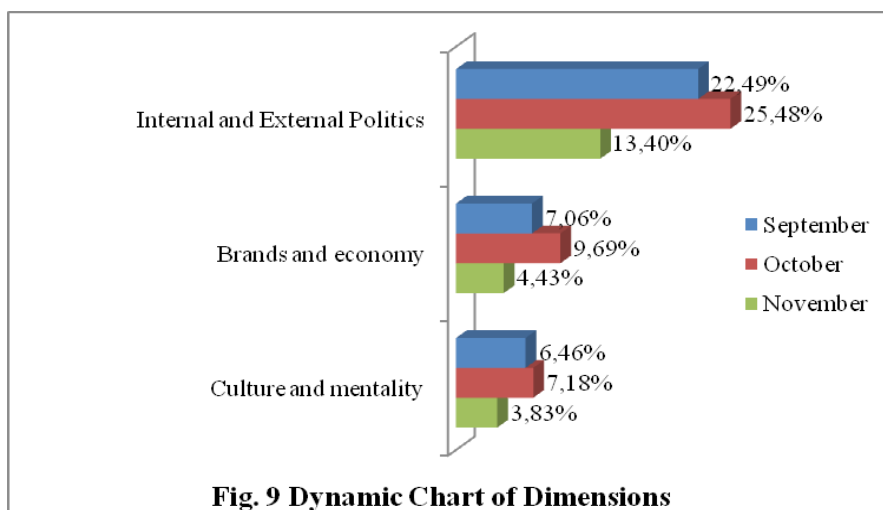
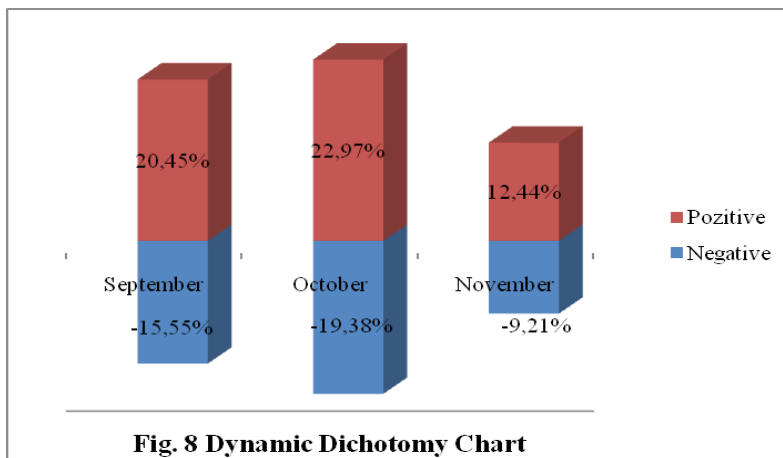
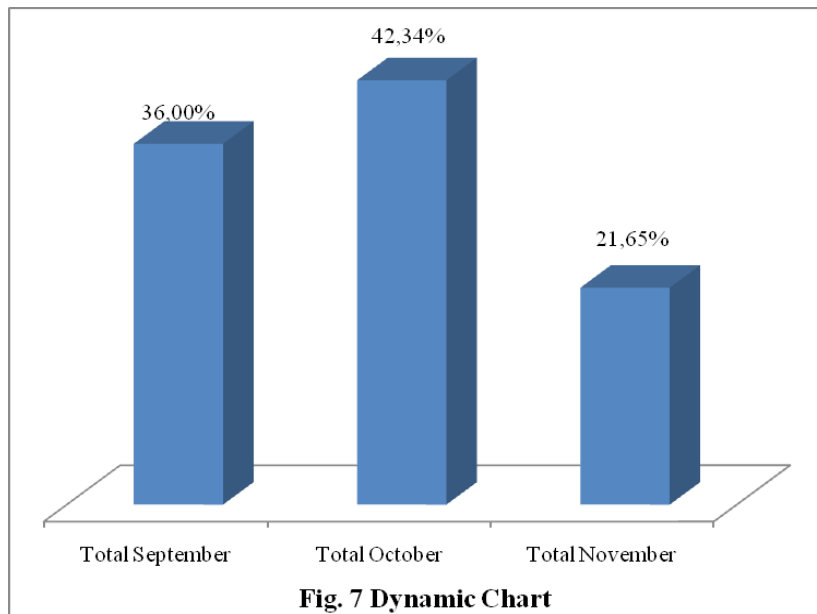
**Table 2 – The positive/negative character of image (B. Halic, I Chiciunean, 2004)**

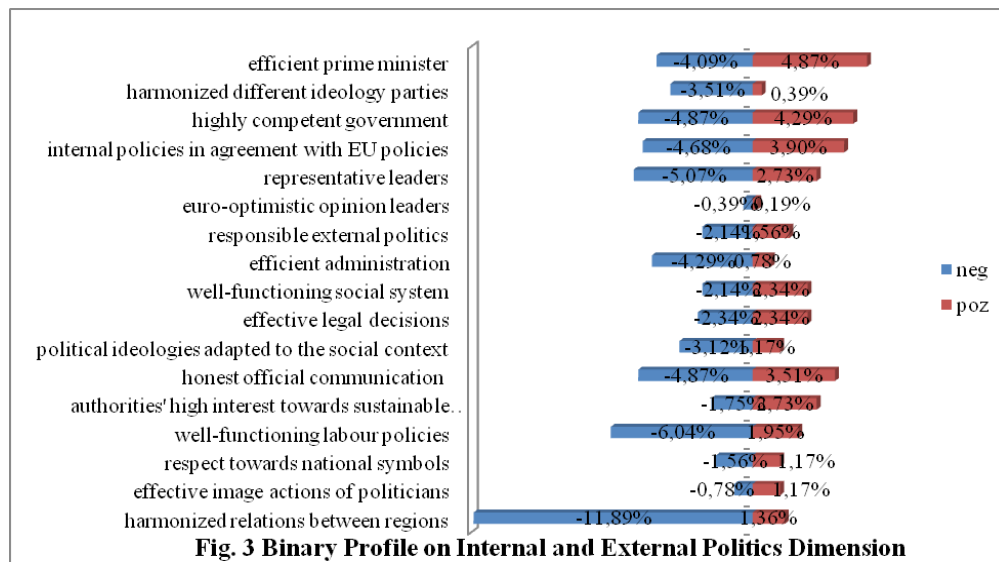
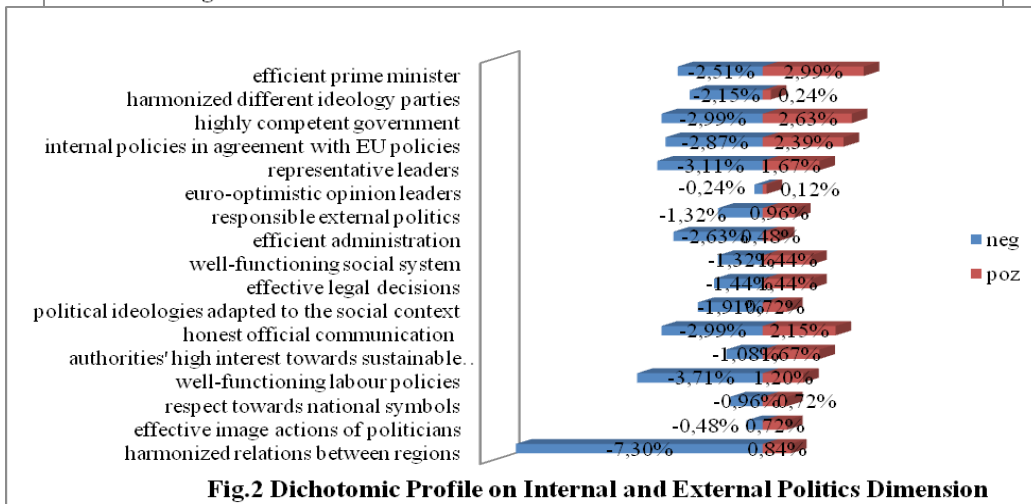
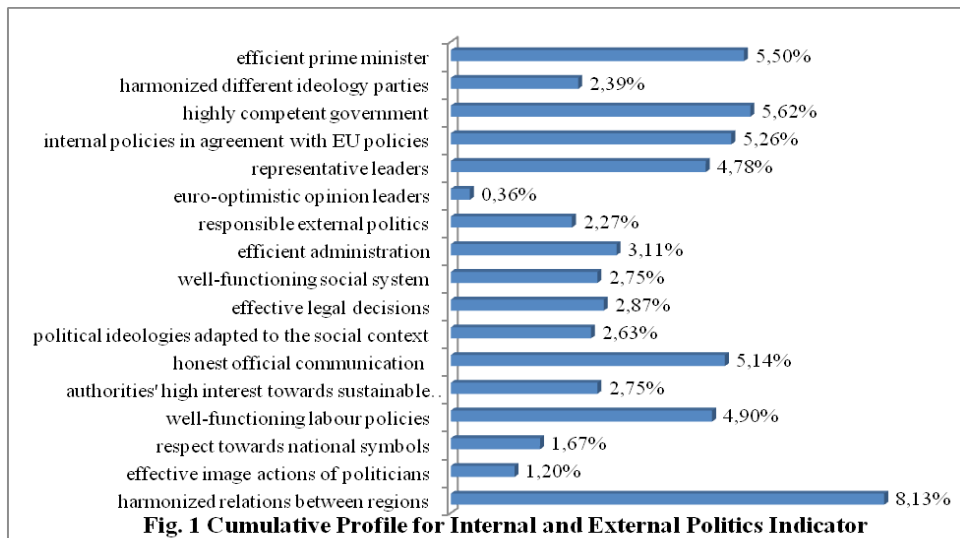
**Percentage** +100-80% Extreme positive + 80-60% Preponderant positive + 50-60% Slightly positive - 50-60% Slightly negative - 80-60% Preponderant negative - 80-100% Extreme negative

## Annex 2



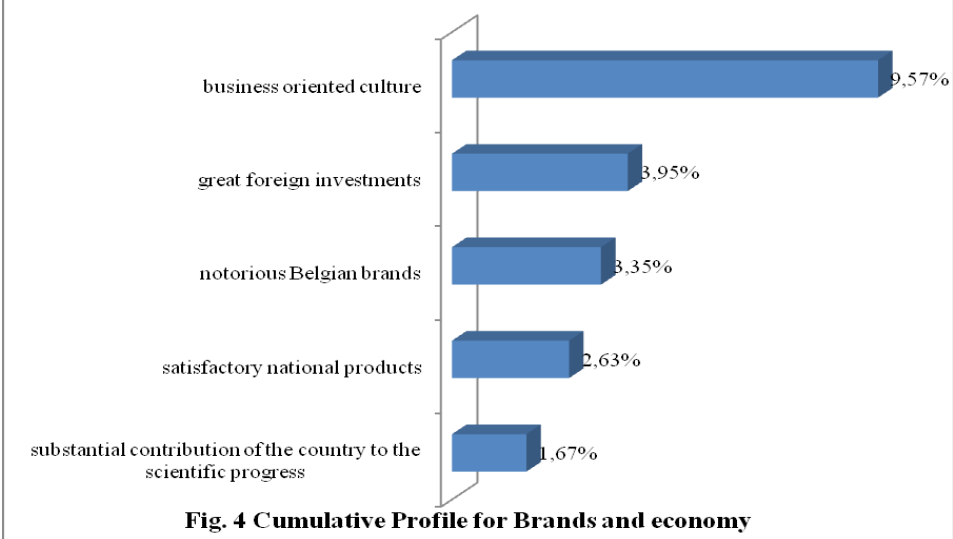




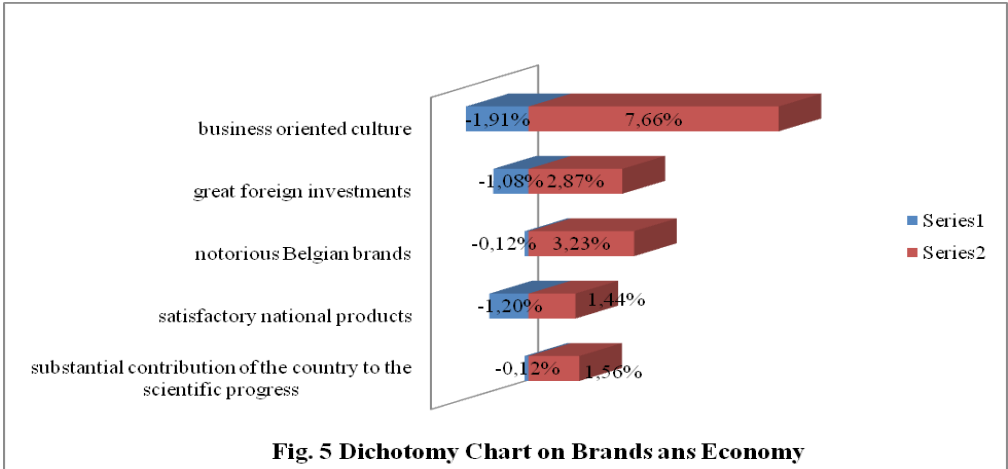


**Table 1 – Cumulative and Dichotomy Indexes on Sources for The Internal and External Politics Dimension**

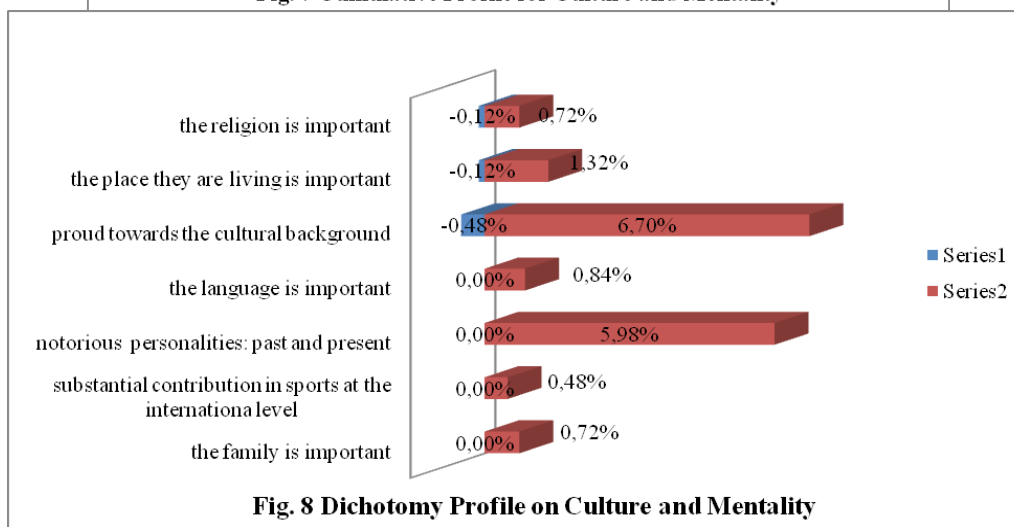
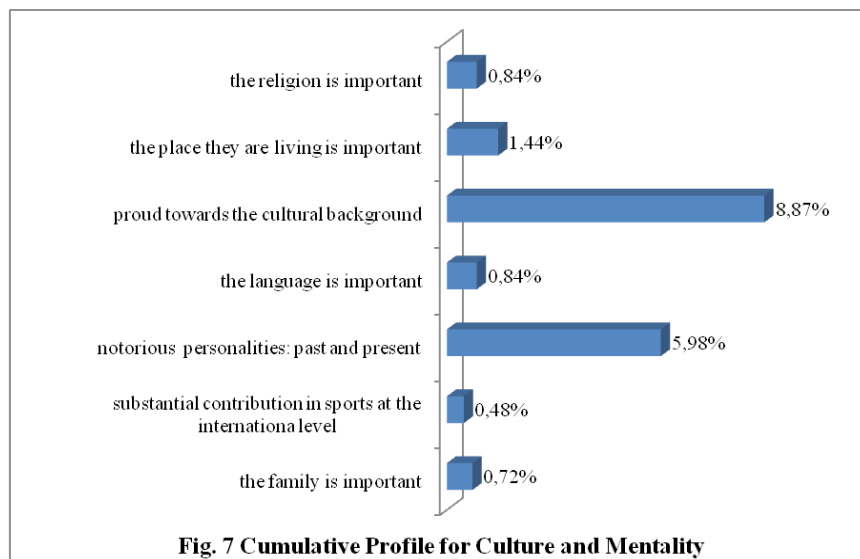
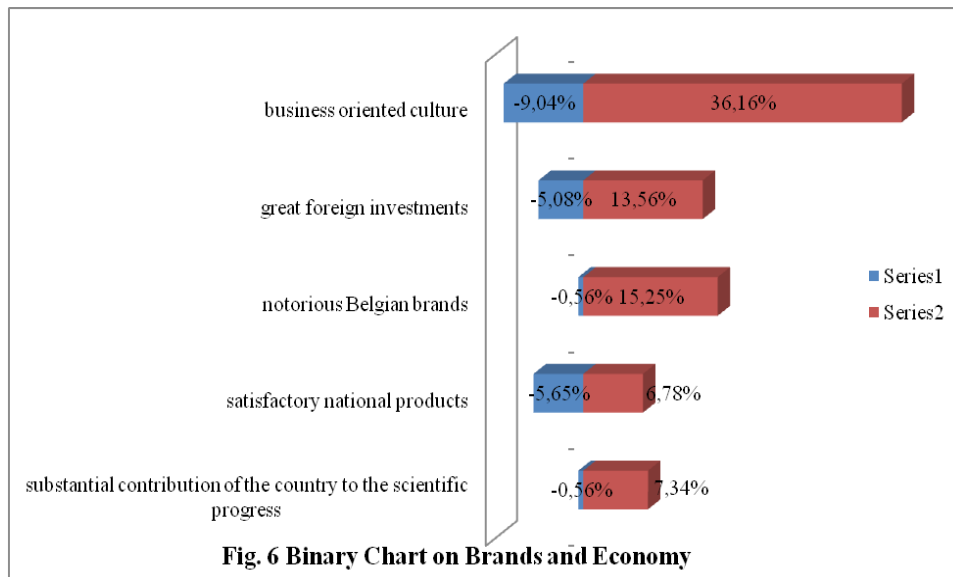
Dimension	Cumulative	Dichotomy	Internal and External Politics	Negative Le Soir	Negative Flanders Today	Negative Brussels	Pozitive Le Soir	Pozitive Flanders	Pozitive Brussels						
parties	1,67%	-1,56%	-0,48%	-0,12%	0,36%	0,12%	0,00%	highly competent government	1,91%	-0,96%	-1,20%	-0,84%	1,08%	0,24%	1,44%
agreement with EU policies	2,87%	-1,44%	-0,96%	-0,48%	0,36%	0,84%	0,12%	representative leaders	3,11%	-2,15%	-0,72%	-0,24%	1,08%	0,12%	0,60%
optimistic opinion leaders	0,24%	-0,24%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,12%	responsible external politics	1,67%	-1,32%	0,00%	0,00%	0,36%	0,24%	0,36%
administration	1,20%	-0,96%	-0,96%	-0,72%	0,72%	0,12%	0,12%	well-functioning social system	1,20%	-0,36%	-0,84%	-0,12%	2,15%	0,48%	0,12%
decisions	1,08%	-0,60%	-0,72%	-0,12%	0,36%	0,72%	0,24%	political ideologies adapted to the social context	1,79%	-1,32%	-0,60%	0,00%	0,36%	0,12%	0,12%
honest official communication	2,15%	-1,56%	-0,72%	-0,72%	0,36%	0,12%	1,44%	authorities' high interest towards sustainable development	0,96%	-0,36%	-0,72%	0,00%	0,72%	0,96%	0,12%
well-functioning labour policies	2,15%	-1,79%	-1,20%	-0,72%	0,72%	0,72%	0,12%	respect towards national symbols	0,60%	-0,48%	-0,36%	-0,12%	0,36%	0,12%	0,48%
effective image actions of politicians	0,84%	-0,48%	0,00%	0,00%	0,36%	0,00%	0,00%	harmonized relations between regions	5,50%	-4,90%	-1,20%	-1,20%	0,36%	0,00%	0,24%

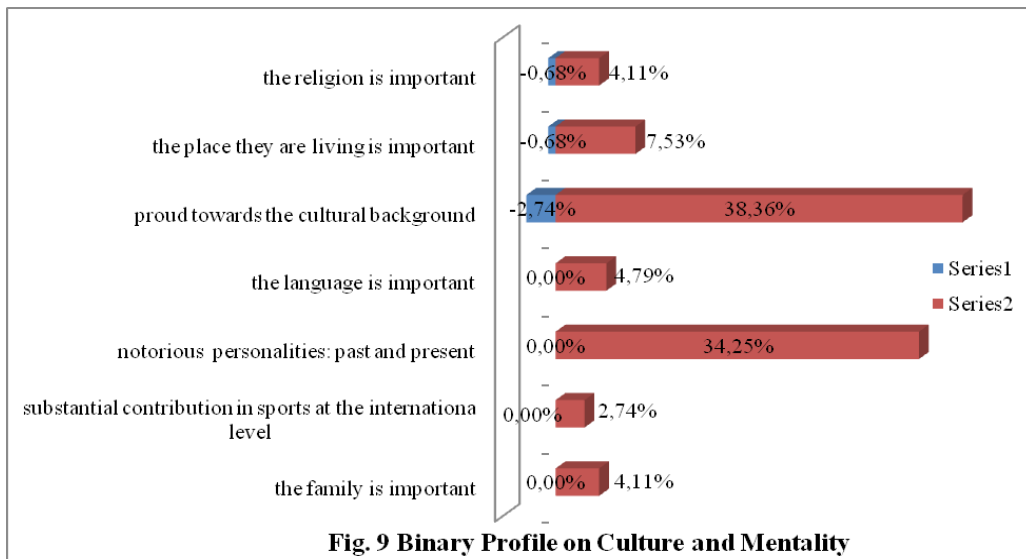


**Fig. 4 Cumulative Profile for Brands and economy**



**Fig. 5 Dichotomy Chart on Brands and Economy**





**Table 2 – Cumulative and Dichotomy Indexes on Sources for The Brands and Economy Indicator**

Dimension	Cumulative	Dichotomy	Brands and economy	Negative Le Soir	Negative Flanders Today	Negative Brussels	Positive Le Soir	Positive Flanders	Positive Brussels
business oriented culture	4,07%	-0,72%	-0,48%	-0,72%	4,31%	1,79%	2,51%	great foreign investments	2,15%
notorious Belgian brands	1,91%	0,00%	-0,12%	0,00%	2,15%	0,60%	0,72%	satisfactory national products	1,91%
substantial contribution of the country to the scientific progress	0,84%	-0,12%	0,00%	0,00%	1,08%	0,24%	0,60%	substantial contribution in sports at the international level	0,36%

**Table 3 – Cumulative and Dichotomy Indexes on Sources for The Culture and Mentality Indicator**

Dimension	Cumulative	Dichotomy	Culture and mentality	Negative Le Soir	Negative Flanders Today	Negative Brussels	Positive Le Soir	Positive Flanders	Positive Brussels
the religion is important	0,60%	-0,12%	0,00%	0,00%	0,36%	0,24%	0,00%	the place they are living is important	0,84%
the language is important	0,84%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,72%	0,00%	0,00%	notorious personalities: past and present	4,43%
the family is important	0,72%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,12%	0,00%	0,00%	substantial contribution in sports at the international level	0,36%