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**PERSONAL ADVISORS OF MINISTERS: MORE THAN PERSONAL
LOYAL AGENTS?**

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1 Abstract

Ministers in many countries are surrounded by personal advisors. In Belgium and Flanders personal advisors are institutionalized in ministerial cabinets. Therefore they may be a good indicator for other countries to gain insight into impact of personal advisors on politico-administrative relations. Traditionally, the members of cabinet (MC) were linked to a specific minister. This is also the reason why the postulation often can be found that they come and go with the minister. In this sense, they could be characterised as trustees to one minister. If executives leave government, their trustees will also go out of sight. In this paper we argue that this traditional concept needs updating. On the basis of empirical research, we will conclude that MC are more than loyal agents. They are more linked towards their expertise than towards their minister. Because of their professional expertise they fulfil a stabilizing role on the political level.

2 Introduction¹

In many countries across Europe ministers are surrounded by personal advisors. Even in the UK, the most traditional case of politico-administrative relations, the number of special advisors increases. They even increase at a level, authors mention the Whitehall model is at risk (Campbell & Wilson, 1995). In Belgium and Flanders² personal advisors are institutionalized in ministerial cabinets (Ziller, 1993).

A ministerial cabinet is a policy supportive body of the minister, composed of political and policy advisers with a temporary nomination. The minister appoints his/her staff members personally and they are not part of the administrative hierarchy (Pelgrims, 2003).

Often only political functions are subscribed to them. Traditionally, they are considered as an extension of politicians. However, ministerial cabinets do not only fulfil political functions. They also fulfil policy functions (Pelgrims, 2001). The combination of the different functions makes ministerial cabinets more than the combination of a minister's private secretary, political advisors and spokesperson. Due to the influence ministerial cabinets have on politico-administrative relations, they create an important study field in public administration. Ministerial cabinets' role in policy advice is so intense that they often shield the minister from the civil servants (Van Hassel, 1974). Besides, a parallel bureaucracy is created which shuts out the civil servants. This parallel bureaucracy is as well

¹ The author would like to thank Nick Thijs, Kris Snijkers and Pedro Facon. Nick for his contribution to the calculations and Kris and Pedro for their comments on earlier versions.

² During the last three decades, Belgium changed from a unitary to a genuinely federal state in a process of state reform in four steps (1970, 1980, 1988, 1993). The federation is composed of three communities and three regions, each with legislative powers, and thus with their own parliament, government, and administration: the Flemish, Walloon, and the Brussels regions on the one hand and the Dutch-speaking, French-speaking and German-speaking communities on the other. The Flemish government combines the competences of both the Flemish region and the Dutch-speaking community. Apart from the political level, it comprises the Ministry of the Flemish Community (core civil service) and a number of "Flemish Public Institutions" (agencies).

involved in the policy preparation as in executive tasks. They even interfere in internal affairs of the administration (Van Hassel, 1974; Rouban, 2003). Hood illustrates a classic example of hybrid bargains in cabinets where politicians pick their teams of trusted councillors and work with them on a team basis (Hood, 2000).

Traditionally, members of cabinet (MC) were linked to a specific minister. This is also the reason why the postulation often can be found that they come and go with the minister (Dierickx, 2003; Suetens & Walgrave, 2001). In this sense, they could be characterised as trustees to one minister. If a minister leaves government, trustees will also go out of sight. In this paper we argue that this traditional concept needs updating. On the basis of empirical research we will conclude that MC are more than loyal agents. Because of their professional expertise they fulfil a stabilizing role on the political level. New coming ministers recruit professional expertise from other ministerial cabinets trying to reduce uncertainty.

3 The Belgian “raison d’être”

Ministerial cabinets have always existed in Belgium, but their size, structure, and roles have strongly evolved during the 20th century. The growth of ministerial cabinets answered the need of ministers to free them from the King's influence. The first modest expansion of the personal secretariats of ministers consecrated the emancipation of ministers from the King's influence (Van Hassel, 1975; Luyckx & Platel, 1985). The proliferation of cabinet members really started taking momentum after World War II, following the growth of the welfare state and party political developments (Brans, Pelgrims, & Hoet, 2002). Government expansion increased not only the number of ministerial departments but also affected the nature of the ministerial tasks, in that the latter became more heterogeneous (Crabbe, 1960). In principle, the production of policy advice and control of departments could also have been delivered by the civil service. Yet, the impact of party politics on politico-administrative relations did not allow the smoothness such option would have required. The turnover of Liberal and Christian democratic governments and their extensive use of informal politicisation of administrative positions created a dialectic that favoured the expansion of ministerial cabinets (Van Hassel, 1975). Consecutive politicisations of recruitment and promotions negatively affected the ministers' trust of civil servants. Partisans of government parties with low turnover have been overrepresented and partisans of opposition parties underrepresented (Majersdorf & Dierickx, 1992). In 1990, 62 percent of the top three senior civil servants of the federal ministries belonged to the Christian Democratic Party; 21 percent to the Socialist parties; 11 per cent to the Liberal. Only 6 percent were independent and 1 per cent Flemish nationalists (Brans & Hondeghem, 1999). At any rate, to ministers, the option of recruiting partisan spoils in ministerial cabinets was more attractive than involving civil servants either as modest partisans or neutral agents. We may conclude that the ministers' perception, civil servants lack loyalty is the main reason to recruit personal advisors.

4 Only loyal agents?

Cabinets play a central role in the production of policy advice (Brans & Hondeghem, 1999). Flexible policy support, specific expertise and unconditional loyalty are central assets for the short-term projects of generalist ministers (Suetens & Walgrave, 2001). MC seem to fit more in the political rationality compared civil servants (Majersdorf & Dierickx, 1992; Dierickx, 2003). On top, cabinets are characterised by a more flexible personnel management and organizational structure compared to the administration (Pelgrims, 2002). Besides, they owe also specific expertise. 96 % of MC obtained a university degree or other higher education. Many MC obtained more than one degree. If we asked MC which criteria were decisive to recruit them, they ranked technical expertise and work experience were on top (Pelgrims, 2001; Pelgrims, 2002).

In the previous paragraph we mentioned already that due to politicization of the civil service, ministers do not trust the administration. Suetens and Walgrave notice two types of administration: the senior civil service may be neutral or may be a politically appointed bureaucracy (Suetens & Walgrave, 2001). This distinction goes back to the traditional concept of administration as a merit or spoils system. However, Belgium displays a hybrid concept. Brans en Hondeghem state that the informal service models clash with the formal Weberian one (Brans & Hondeghem, 1999). Officially recruitment and promotions of civil servants are apolitical, however top positions are politicized. Senior civil servants are appointed for life and cannot be dismissed (Suetens & Walgrave, 2001). Due to this hybrid system, minister doubt on the loyalty of civil service. In their MC they find unconditional loyalty. 40 % of MC states they were personally asked by the minister and 60 % indicated the minister as decisive for their recruitment (Pelgrims, 2001). Moreover, a quarter of MC of the federal and regional governments lived in the same constituency as their minister (Suetens & Walgrave, 1999; Pelgrims, 2001).

Out of these arguments, we may conclude that MC are loyal agents towards 'their' minister. Due to this loyalty we could expect if a minister leaves government, his loyal agents will leave too. A new minister will have little reason to trust MC of his predecessor and would like to appoint MC of his/her own. On top when competences are transferred from one minister towards another minister, ministers tend to appoint a new MC on the basis of loyalty, rather than transfer the MC from another minister. This leads towards hypothesis 1a and 2a.

Hypothesis 1a: "If a minister leaves government, his/her members of cabinet will also leave government"

Hypothesis 2a: "When a competence is transferred towards another minister, cabinet members will leave government."

Research shows also other indicators which gives reason to doubt on the 'personal' loyalty. The average career of MC was 6 year, although legislatures take normally only 4 years. 25 % of MC indicated that their career in cabinets took more that 7,5 years while 53 % of the MC in the Flemish

government between 1996 and 1999 had already experience in ministerial cabinets in the past (Pelgrims, 2001). Other research registered the same results (Suetens & Walgrave, 1999). Half of the population in this research was already present in other ministerial cabinets in the past. One third spent 4 to 10 years in cabinets, while 15 % had a career over more than 10 years. These figures indicate the opposite idea of loyal agents. MC appear to build careers in cabinets, over legislatures and perhaps even over different ministers. Ministers seem to come and go, while ‘personal’ advisors stay. If MC do not only show ‘personal’ loyalty and if they are recruited on their technical and work experience we could state that they are more linked to an expertise field rather to ‘their’ minister. Therefore we could expect that when a competence is transferred from one minister towards another, MC also transfer in the same direction. Therefore we formulate hypothesis 1b and 2b.

Hypothesis 1b: “When a minister is leaving government, the cabinet members stay in government”

Hypothesis 2b: “When a competence is transferred towards another minister, cabinet members are transferred in the same direction”

The period of time politicians and civil servants are in office is a crucial variable to understand politico-administrative relations (Aberbach, Putnam, & Rockman, 1981; Peters, 1987; Hood, 2000). Traditionally, politicians are only ‘in town’ for a short period of time (Peters, 1987). In contrast, in the typically Weberian concept, civil servants have permanent tenure. Through this, permanent civil servants take care of the stability of policy while politicians change. Although during the last years many non-statutory or contractual officials were recruited, top civil servants used to be career civil servants in Belgium and Flanders (Brans & Hondeghem, 1999). This was recently changed due to the introduction of mandates for top civil servants (Hondeghem & Putseys, 2003). In the traditional concept of personal advisors, MC leave together with their minister while civil servants take care for the stability. However, if hypothesis 1b and 2b will be verified we may conclude ministerial cabinets are more than only ‘personal’ advisors but also look after stability in government while ministers change overtime.

5 Research Design

To test our hypotheses we designed a single holistic case study (Yin, 1994) namely, the Flemish government between 1999 and 2003. The Flemish government appointed in 1999 by the parliament was composed of 9 ministers offered by 4 different political parties.³ At the end of December 2003, six months before elections, government was composed of 10 ministers. Only 3 ministers were as well present in 1999 as in December 2003.⁴ Between 1999 and 2003 even 2 ministers were introduced and replaced in the same legislature (for overview see Table 1). Different reasons caused these changes, though this article is not the place to go more into detail. These changes brought also a

³ The political parties which were member of the government were the Liberal Party (3 ministers), Socialist Party (2 ministers), The Greens (2 ministers) and at last the Flemish-nationalist party (1 minister).

lot of transfers of competences. Complete packages of competences transferred from a minister towards a new one. Besides, sometimes competences were also divided over a few ministers when replacement took place.

Firstly, we registered MC over different time periods. We started registering MC in December 1999 and ended in December 2003. In between we gave special attention to MC when a minister was replaced. We counted 384 MC in ministerial cabinets during the period 1999-2003.⁵ To register the members, we used official information on the website of the Flemish Government (www.vlaanderen.be). Although this information might not be completely correct, it is the only available date. After registering MC, we contacted the different ministerial cabinets to check our data. This control makes data more valid for analysis.

The methodology of the IDU-matrix constructed by Evers and Verhoeven was used to analyse the list of MC (Evers & Verhoeven, 1999). Both authors use this instrument for personnel accounting. Thus, although the instrument was not originally constructed for the purpose of analysing MC, it provided a practical instrument for our research. The construction of the matrix took place in five different steps. First, on the rows (horizontal) the starting position (December 1999) has been visualised. Each row represents a ministerial cabinet with at the end of each row the total number of members in December 1999. Secondly, the amount of members which left a ministerial cabinet is stated. In the third phase the members changed their position are mentioned and the new members were included. At last each column (vertical) represents a ministerial cabinet on December 2003 and at the end of each column the total amount of people in the ministerial cabinet on this moment is mentioned. After constructing the IDU matrix, we could calculate influx, outflow and more important flow between ministerial cabinets. The IDU-matrix only represents a certain moment of an organisation namely December 1999 and December 2003. This shows immediately a shortcoming of this instrument. Movements in between are invisible in the matrix. Because we checked MC after each change in government and we updated our data by contacting ministerial cabinets we could optimize our data. Apparently newcomers in cabinets, turned out to be already in other cabinets during the legislature. Therefore we constructed a group of *adjusted influx* and *adjusted flow* between ministerial cabinets. Really newcomers showed up in the adjusted influx, while MC already present in cabinets (except in our data) were registered as adjusted flow. Through this, we were able to protect our instrument against inter-legislature blindness.

⁴ Between December 2003 and the elections another minister was replaced. Although, this change is not included this research.

⁵ The amount of MC on our list was the amount which was present during the whole legislature. This means not that in December 2003, 384 cabinet members were present. Some could have left the ministerial cabinets during the legislature

6 Changes in the Flemish Government

Table 1 shows the changes in ministers over the concerning period. The left hand side column represents the Flemish government in December 1999. The column on the right illustrates ministers in December 2003. In between, changes in government are represented according to the period in which change took place.

Table 1: Changes in ministers (december 1999-december 2003) here

Besides the changes in ministers, lots of transfers in competences took place during the concerning period. We turned the available information into a matrix visualising the transfers of competences (Table 2). Because some competences were transferred more than once, we divided our matrix into two components.

The first period is found on the left side. The members of government in December 1999 are mentioned. In the middle of the matrix, members of government are mentioned in June 2003. The interpretation of the left side starts left under and moves towards the middle of the matrix (as visualised by the arrow).

The shaded cells illustrate the diagonal in each side of the matrix. This represents a crossing between two different periods. Crossings made by the same abbreviation of a minister's name, means the minister stayed in office, otherwise he or she was replaced. For example the minister for Education and Training (VD) is as well mentioned in December 1999 as in June 2003. When the crossing is not made by the same minister, replacement is visualised. For example, the left area of the matrix (December 1999) shows minister Sauwens (SU), however the crossing in the shaded cell is made by minister Van Grembergen (VG). Consequently, minister Sauwens (SU) left government between December 1999 and June 2003. Same conclusion might also draw out of Table 1. The different cells represent the transfers competences made during the period. For example, minister Stevaert (ST) left government, (December 1999 vs. June 2003) his competences namely Mobility, Public Works and Energy went to Minister Bossuyt (BO). The "vice-minister president" transferred towards minister Landuyt (LA).

The right side of the matrix visualises the second period namely, December 2003 (as mentioned in the row under). This makes a comparison between June 2003 and December 2003. The interpretation of the right side part is equal as the left side period, only starting in the middle and moving right under (see arrow). Again, shaded cells symbolise the diagonal on which movement of ministers can be found. The competence 'Housing' transferred from minister Gabriëls (GA) towards his successor, minister Keulen (KE).

The combination of both sides of the matrix allows seeing an evolution in transfers. The competence ‘sport’ moved initially from minister Sauwens (SU) towards minister Van Hengel (VH). Because he left government for minister Keulen, ‘sport’ moved from Van Hengel (VH) towards minister Keulen (KE). Another example is the competence ‘Brussels affairs’. In the first place it was moved in March 2003 from minister Anciaux (AN) towards minister Van Hengel (VH). After he left government the competence moved to the successor of the minister president in June 2003. In total, we counted 21 competences which changed over the period. Some competences changed even more than once.

Table 2: transfers in competence here

7 Flow between ministerial cabinets

The construction of the IDU matrix included the ministerial cabinet members, adjusted with the information we received in-between. This gave us the possibility to verify how many members of the ministerial cabinets stayed in the Flemish government, although the changes.

Table 3: amount of MC moved between ministerial cabinets here

Table 3 shows the amount of members (in bold) who changed ministerial cabinet. The abbreviation in the first row and column symbolises the ministers, as in Table 2. Keep in mind that ministers in Table 3 are only those in December 1999 and December 2003. The changes in between were corrected by the adjusted inflow and adjusted flow combined with the corrections out of the contacts we had with ministerial cabinets. Table 3 folds in the different periods in Table 2. Normally we would lose information, because our instrument of analysis only visualises two periods. Through the adjusted flow we could correct our calculations and include MC moving due to competences which changed more than once. For example, if we considered only the situation in December 1999 and the situation in 2003, we would assume that the competence ‘Housing’ moved from minister Anciaux (AN) towards minister Keulen (KE), although we know that the competence first passed minister Gabriëls (GA). Table 3 would not visualise this transfer and thus would bias our calculations. Creating adjusted flow and inflow allows clarifying transfers of MC in between December 1999 and December 2003.

The italic figures symbolise the amount of MC present in the ministerial cabinets of ministers who stayed in office between December 1999 and December 2003. The underlined figure symbolizes a minister stayed in office but received more competences.

To calculate the percentage of MC stayed in office although ministers changed, we counted the total amount of MC still in cabinets summarized by the adjusted flow and divided it over the average

amount of MC present in between the two periods.⁶ We noticed 76.17 % of MC stayed in office, nevertheless ministers changed. Out of the group which stayed during the period, 80.51% moved from one ministerial cabinet towards another [total MC (corrected by adjusted flow) minus not-transferred MC and divided by the average of amount MC). These results seem to support hypothesis 1b.

8 Linking changes to competences.

After we found most MC stayed in government, we will link the movements of MC to movement of the competences. In other words we will try to verify whether MC follow the transfer of competences. Therefore we compared data in Table 2 and Table 3.

The change of the 'Minister-President' shows a movement of 9 MC between the old and the new Minister-President. While the transfer of 'Finance and Budget' shows an equivalent of 7 MC. In the third row of Table 3 (ST), transferring 'Mobility, Public Works and Energy' is consistent with the movement of 12 MC from ST towards the new minister (BO). The transfer of 'Vice-minister President' indicates a transfer of 8 MC. The changes of the Green Party ministers clarify that leaving the government for minister Dua (DU) meant a shift of 18 MC towards the new minister for Environment and Agriculture (SA). Changing the minister of 'Welfare, Health and Equal opportunities' (BY) moves 13 MC. Transferring 'Culture and youth' from minister Anciaux (AN) towards minister Van Grembergen (VG) also shows a movement of 13 MC. Leaving government for minister Sauwens (SA) and transferring competence 'Civil Service' and 'Home Affairs' shows a movement of 9 MC towards minister Van Grembergen (VG).

Besides these explicit changes, we also see more less obvious movements. The transfer of 'Brussels Affairs' meant transfer of 1 MC. Moving 'Media' shows 4 MC. We have to keep in mind that both tables only make a comparison between December 1999 and 2003. The changes in between makes it more difficult to understand changes of the replacement of replacing ministers. Therefore adjusted flow might be interesting. In the ministerial cabinet of minister Keulen (KE) and minister Ceysens (CE) we found an adjusted flow of 8 and 7 MC. Although we could not link these members to specific competences, the chance they could may be high. Next these two ministers, there are also other ministers where the adjusted flow is quite high. This shows immediately that data which is officially published is not always complete. The contacts we had with ministerial cabinets show again their importance. We could expect that the trends and indicators might be more marked in reality.

⁶ The percentages below were worked out on the basis of the average amount of members who were present between December 1999 and December 2003 ($x=256$).

Combining changes in government and the transfer of MC allows us to state that MC are linked towards 'their' expertise rather than towards 'their' minister. This conclusion supports hypothesis 2b.

9 Stability in change

If MC are more than just loyal agents and are also connected towards 'their' expertise they may fulfil a stabilizing role on the political level. A stability which normally might become under pressure due to changes in ministers.

Therefore, we constructed three categories of change. In the first category, ministers did not change at all. In the second category, a minister stayed in office but received one or more competences. The third category, classifies the replacements of a minister by another minister. We assume that these categories rise from no change in government, towards high change in government. If ministerial cabinets fulfil a stabilizing role we could expect that the higher change in government; the higher the amount of transferred members. Therefore we considered the latest period (December 2003) and calculated the amount of MC in ministerial cabinets, coming from another ministerial cabinet.⁷

The minister for Education and Training (VD) is a minister which can be characterised as an example of this first category. In this ministerial cabinet, no MC was noticed coming from another cabinet (the only one in this case).

In the second category we noticed two ministers. Firstly, the minister for 'Employment and Tourism' (LA) stayed in office, but received also the function of 'Vice-Minister-President'. In total we calculated 55.2 % MC in this cabinet transfer from another ministerial cabinet. Besides also the minister for 'Finance and budget, Town and Country Planning, Sciences and Technological Innovation' (VM) stayed in office. He acquired the competence of 'Finance and Budget' from the first Minister-President. In his ministerial cabinet we found 24.1 % MC already active in another ministerial cabinet.

In the third and last category replacements of ministers are classified. Here 7 ministers find their position. One of the new ministers replaced the previous 'Vice-Minister-President'. Although the competence 'Vice-Minister-President' went to the minister of 'Employment and Tourism', the new executive took over the competences of 'Mobility, Public Works and Energy' (BO). The total amount of MC from another cabinet turns out 86.7%. The new minister for 'Home Affairs and Civil Service' (VG), also obtained the competence 'Youth and Culture' when the minister for 'Culture, Youth and Brussels Affairs' left government. In the ministerial cabinet of the minister for 'Home Affairs,

⁷ The percentages below were worked out on the basis of the average amount of members who were present in each ministerial cabinet between December 1999 and December 2003.

Culture, Youth and the Civil Service' we notice 94.1 % of MC coming from another ministerial cabinet.

Both ministers of the Green Party were replaced by other ministers. The cabinet of the minister of 'Environment and Agriculture' (SA) consists of 94.8 % MC of another cabinet. Same figures although not that striking, could be found in the ministerial cabinet of the minister of 'Welfare, Health and Equal Opportunities'. This ministerial cabinet is constructed out of 70.4 % of another ministerial cabinet.

We mentioned already that 2 out of 7 new ministers were already successors of successors. The latest Minister for 'Housing, Media and Sport' (KE) replaced the minister for 'Sport and Brussels Affairs' (VH), losing 'Brussels affairs' but obtaining the competencies 'Housing' and 'Media'. In his ministerial cabinet we count 70 % of MC from other ministerial cabinets. The latest minister for 'Economy, Foreign Policy' (CE) replaced the minister for 'Economy, Housing and Foreign Policy' (GA). Due to this change we see again transfers in competences. 'E-Government' was included in the title of the minister; 'Housing' was again transferred towards the other newcomer as mentioned above. Notice this was already the fourth minister responsible for 'Housing'.⁸ Our research shows that the total amount of members found in other ministerial cabinets ran up till 58.8 %.

At last Flanders saw a change in 'Minister-President' (SO) during 2003. The new 'Minister-President' became also responsible for 'Brussels Affairs'. The total amount MC from another ministerial cabinet from the latest Minister-President is 77.8 %.

Although most changes took place between ministers of the same political party, there are also exceptions. 'Housing', 'Brussels Affairs' and 'Sport' were competences under ministers from different political parties. This makes it also possible that we counted 5 MC transferred between ministers from a different political party. Although this is only small minority, it would be unimaginable in the past (Pelgrims, 2001). The table present an overview of the mentioned numbers above.

Table 4: amount of MC from another ministerial cabinet in December 2003. here

The results show the effect of changes in government on the different ministerial cabinets. Although most of the ministers changed, the majority of their MC were already involved in other ministerial cabinet during the legislature. The results above show a clear difference between the three categories.

⁸ The first change was only a minor shift between two ministers due to the differences between Regional competences and Community competences

A minister who stayed in office (cat. 1) and which competences were not changed, scored a “0” on the number of MC involved in other ministerial cabinets. Ministers from category 2 display higher number MC out of other cabinets. The ministers in category 3 are most apparent. Their rate’s can be found between 58.8 % and 94.8 %. We could conclude here by postulating: the higher the change, the higher the amount of MC from other ministerial cabinets.

10 Outflow and influx through change

Of course changes in government do not only mean that MC move between different cabinets. We noticed also outflow and influx in cabinets. Previous research showed that the average outflow in the Flemish government between 1995 and 1999 was 7.5 % (Pelgrims, 2001). Compared to the initial period of our research, 45 % MC left government.⁹ Changes show an increase of outflow. Nevertheless it was not possible to draw a line in the outflow. Ministers staying in government showed a higher outflow compared to ministers who left government and vice versa. We could state here that changes during the legislature shows a noticeable increase, but no conclusions could be draw. Table 5 shows the flow of ministerial cabinets of the minister who were in government on December 1999.

Table 5: outflow for ministerial cabinets for the ministers present in December 1999 here

The same conclusion could be drawn out of the influx. In general we registered an average adjusted influx of 19.1 %. Previous research showed an average influx of 31.8% in the period 1995-1999 (Pelgrims, 2001). We may conclude that new ministers recruit some new MC, although we may not state that a new minister recruits more or less MC compared to another minister. Table 6 shows the influx for the ministerial cabinets of December 2003. It would not be correct to link the outflow and influx, because they are concentrated on different ministers.

Table 6: inflow for the minister present on December 1999 here

11 Conclusion

Ministers in many countries are surrounded by personal advisors. In Belgium and Flanders personal advisors are institutionalized in ministerial cabinets. Therefore, they may be a good indicator for other countries to gain insight into the impact of personal advisors on politico-administrative relations. Traditionally, they are considered as an extension of politicians. However research showed already that they also fulfil policy functions and have an impact on politico-administrative relations. Members of ministerial cabinets are often considered to be trustees of ministers. They are supposed

⁹ Notice that it would not be correct to count the flow, inflow and influx, due to changes in the amount of ministers. The increase of ministers in government showed an increase in the total amount of cabinet members (Art 7 §1 1° f en art 7. §1 3° c Treaty September, 14th 2001). The total amount of cabinet members raised in between. Due to this reason counting flow, inflow and influx would create a distortion. It is important if numbers are shown to state always to which they are compared.

to be loyal agents. Therefore if 'their' minister leaves government, MC also left. On the basis of this article we can not hold on this assumption.

On the basis of a single holistic case study, we tested constructed hypotheses. The Flemish government appointed in 1999 by the parliament was composed of 9 ministers offered by 4 different political parties. At the end of December 2003, six months before elections, government was composed of 10 ministers. Only 3 ministers were as well present in 1999 as in December 2003. Between 1999 and 2003 even 2 ministers were introduced and replaced in the same legislature. Due to changes in ministers, also competences were transferred from one minister towards another during legislature.

Although lots of ministers left government, we calculated that 76.15 % of the MC stayed. Besides, out of the group which stayed 80.51 % moved from one ministerial cabinet towards another. On the basis of these results we could falsify hypothesis 1a and thus, verifying hypothesis 1b. Linking transfers of competence to transfers of MC, we concluded MC are linked towards their 'expertise' rather than towards 'their' minister. This supports hypothesis 2b and falsify hypothesis 2a.

The strong impact of political parties on society and administration might be an explanation for our result (Walgrave, Caals, Suetens, & De Swert, 2004). We noticed MC transferred over political parties. Although it is only a minority, but it shows political party as a variable might not be sufficient explaining the facts. Uncertainty and signaling theory (Hondeghe, 1990) may be used as an addition to explain these social facts. According to Kanter uncertainty consists of four dimensions: time, information, frequency and function (Kanter, 1977). Selecting people in top positions for non-routine functions, enforced by bounded rationality (Simon, 1976) raises uncertainty. New coming ministers selecting their personal advisors are confronted with a high uncertainty. Therefore, they focus on signals as degrees, status, experiences in other ministerial cabinets etc. Political affiliation may be another signal on which ministers may trust to recruit personal advisors. Recruiting MC from another ministerial cabinet is a possibility for new-ministers to reduce uncertainty.

Further we constructed different categories, to classify changes in government. We assumed that the higher the category the more impact change would have on MC. Our results showed that the higher the category, the more MC were in cabinets, which were in other cabinets during the same legislature. This gave us the possibility to conclude MC stabilize changes in government. Traditionally, stability and continuity is fulfilled by civil servants, although on the political level MC take over this function.

12 Tables

Table 1: Changes in ministers (december 1999-december 2003)

December 1999	May 2001	July 2001	March 2003	June 2003	December 2003
Dewael (DW)				Somers (SO)	Somers
Van Mechelen (VM)					Van Mechelen
Stevaert (ST)			Bossuyt (BO)		Bossuyt
Dua (DU)				Sannen (SA)	Sannen
Anciaux (AN)			Van Hengel (VH)	Keulen (KE)	Keulen
Vogels(VO)				Byttebier (BY)	Byttebier
Van der Poorten (VD)					Van der Poorten
Landuyt (LA)					Landuyt
Sauwens (SU)	Van Grembergen (VG)				Van Grembergen
		Gabriëls (GA)		Ceysens (CE)	Ceysens

Table 2: transfers in competence

Foreign policy	Economy			Housing					GA					Housing					Foreign Policy/ Economy
				Culture /Youth				Civil Service/ Home Affairs	VG										
		Vice-Minister President							LA										
									VD										
					Welfare / Health/ Equal Opportunities				BY										
				Brussels Affairs				Sport	VH	Brussels Affairs				Sport					
			Environ- ment/ Argriculture						SA										
		Mobility/ Public Works							BO										
Finance/ Budget									VM					Media					
									DE	Minister President									
DE	VM	ST	DU	AN	VO	VD	LA	SU		SO	VM	BO	SA	KE	BY	VD	LA	VG	CE
DECEMBER 1999									JUNE 2003	DECEMBER 2003									

Table 3: amount of MC moved between ministerial cabinets

	SO	VM	BO	SA	KE	BY	VD	LA	VG	CE
DE	9	7								1
VM		<i>13</i>			4					1
ST			12					8		
DU				18						
AN	1				2				13	1
VO	1			6		13				
VD							<i>12</i>			
LA								<u>13</u>		
SA								1	9	
Adjusted inflow	4	9	1	2	6	8	4	6	2	7
Adjusted flow	3	0	2	13	8	6	0	0	10	7

Table 4: amount of MC from another ministerial cabinet in December 2003.

	Category	%
Minister-President of the Government of Flanders	3	77.8
Vice-Minister-President of the Government of Flanders Flemish Minister for Employment and Tourism	2	55.2
Flemish Minister for Education and Training	1	0
Flemish Minister for Finance and Budget, Town and Country Planning, Sciences and Technological Innovation	2	24.1
Flemish Minister for Home Affairs, Culture, Youth and the Civil Service	3	94.1
Flemish Minister for Mobility, Public Works and Energy	3	86.7
Flemish Minister for Environment, Agriculture and Development Cooperation	3	94.8
Flemish Minister for Welfare, Health and Equal Opportunities	3	70.4
Flemish Minister for Economy, Foreign Policy and E-Government	3	58.8
Flemish Minister for Housing, Media and Sport	3	70

Table 5: outflow for ministerial cabinets for the ministers present in December 1999

	Category	%
Minister-President of the Government of Flanders Flemish Minister for Finance and Budget, Foreign Policy and European Affairs	3	60
Flemish Minister for Economy, Town and Country Planning and Media	2	21.73
Vice-Minister-President of the Government of Flanders Flemish minister for Mobility, Public Works and Energy	1	25
Flemish Minister for Environment and Agriculture	3	30
Flemish Minister for Culture, Youth, Housing and Brussels Affairs	3	48
Flemish Minister for Welfare, Health and Equal Opportunities	3	50
Flemish Minister for Education and Training	1	52
Flemish Minister for Employment and Tourism	2	48
Flemish Minister for Home Affairs, Civil Service and Sport	3	60

Table 6: inflow for the minister present on December 1999

	Category	%
Minister-President of the Government of Flanders	3	22.2
Vice-Minister-President of the Government of Flanders Flemish Minister for Employment and Tourism	2	20.7
Flemish Minister for Education and Training	1	25
Flemish Minister for Finance and Budget, Town and Country Planning, Sciences and Technological Innovation	2	31
Flemish Minister for Home Affairs, Culture, Youth and the Civil Service	3	5.9
Flemish Minister for Mobility, Public Works and Energy	3	6.7
Flemish Minister for Environment, Agriculture and Development Cooperation	3	5.1
Flemish Minister for Welfare, Health and Equal Opportunities	3	29.6
Flemish Minister for Economy, Foreign Policy and E-Government	3	41.2
Flemish Minister for Housing, Media and Sport	3	30

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