The Belgian agenda-setting project

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2. **Status of the project:**
   a) *History of the project*
      o The Belgian agenda-setting project, a major research project brining together four Belgian universities, received funding from 2001 till 2003 from the Scientific services of the Belgian national Government. During these three years, three full time graduate–level researchers were hired doing the entire data collection (see below) and drawing on a multitude of student encoders.
      o The final report for the Belgian government was delivered in May 2004 (Walgrave, S., De Winter, L. and Nuytemans, M. (Eds.) (2005) *Politieke agenda-setting in België (1991-2000). De moeilijke dialoog tussen publieke opinie, media en het politieke systeem,* Academia Press, Gent).
      o The Antwerp team of Stefaan Walgrave received new funding from the University of Antwerp Research Council to hire one full-time graduate-level researcher (michiel.nuytemans@ua.ac.be) to continue the Belgian agenda-setting project. No new data collection can/will be carried out during this second funding period. Funding goes from 2005 till 2007 (June).
   b) *Present activities within the project*
      o All 1991-2000 data are collected and at this moment the Belgian team is busy drafting papers about different aspects of the agenda-setting process.
      o All data are available on simple request.
      o The present Antwerp team is foremost interested in analyzing the media's impact on the political agenda-setting project. Several papers are being prepared, have been submitted, or accepted mostly regarding the media's role in setting the political agenda:

      Walgrave, S., Dumont, P. and Varone, F. (2006) "Policy with or without parties? A comparative analysis of policy priorities and policy change in Belgium (1991-2000)." *Journal of European Public Policy,* **13**.

      Walgrave, S. and Van Aelst, P. (2006) "The Contingency of the Mass Media's Political Agenda Setting Power. Towards A Preliminary Theory." *Journal of Communication,* **56,** 88-109.

      Walgrave, S., Nuytemans, M. and Soroka, S. (2005) "The mass media's political agenda-setting power. A longitudinal analysis of media, parliament and government in Belgium (1993-2000)." *Submitted for publication to Comparative Political Studies.*

Stefaan Walgrave and Frédéric Varone, 2005, Agenda-setting and focussing events: bringing parties back in. Policy change after the Dutroux crisis in Belgium, *Submitted for publication to Governance.*

Walgrave and Michiel Nuytemans, 2006, Party manifesto change: friction or smooth adaptation? A comparative and longitudinal analysis in 25 countries (1945-1998), Paper prepared for delivery at the *ECPR joint workshop* sessions, April 2006 in Nicosia, Cyprus.

Stefaan Walgrave and Joris Verhulst, 2006 Where does issue ownership come from? From the party or from the media? Issue-party identifications in Belgium (1991-2005), 2006, Paper prepared for delivery at the *annual APSA meeting,* Philadelphia, August 31 - September 3, 2006.

3. List of available data sources

Agenda		Frequency	Period	N
1. Media	TV news (4 stations)	Daily	1993-2000	115,700
	Newspapers (5 newspapers) – front page	mo-we-fr-sa	1991-2000	73,800
2. Civil Society	Demonstrations + # demonstrators	Daily	1991-2000	4,000
3. 'Lower' Parliament	Oral questions	Daily	1991-2000	12,100
	Written questions	Daily	1991-2000	25,200
	Interpellations	Daily	1991-2000	3,000
4. 'Higher' Parliament	Laws proposed by Parliament	Daily	1991-2000	9,500
	Laws proposed by government	Daily	1991-2000	1,400
	Passed bills (initiated by Parliament)	Daily	1991-2000	110
	Passed bills (initiated by government)	Daily	1991-2000	1,200
5. Budget		Once a year	1991-2000	12,000
5. Council of ministers		Once a week	1991-2000	6,000
6. Party manifestoes		Every 4 year, every party	1991/1995/1999	45,000
8. Government agreements		Every 4 year	1991/1995/1999	1,800

4. Coding scheme and adjustments to the US code book

- As we were unaware of the existence of the American Policy Agendas project when we started coding in 2001 we did <u>not</u> use the US topic coding system.
- We drew upon another self-developed system based on the so-called EUROVOC thesaurus used by the European Parliament to classify all parliamentary pieces. The original EUROVOC thesaurus 6,075 different hierarchically structured 'descriptors'.

Being designed to capture parliamentary activities, EUROVOC needed to be adapted to our needs, especially to code the media. We devised a coding scheme with 143 topic codes and 36 main categories.

- An exploratory conversion table translating the American in the Belgian coding system and vice versa has been developed.

5. **Funding status and funding sources**
   - Present funding stops in 2007. We plan to submit a new grant proposal to the Belgian Fund for Scientific Research (start approved projects in 2008 and running till 2011).
   - Apart from the Belgian track, we hope to be part of an international consortium of researchers that submits a major grant proposal (to ESF).
   - This new project would concentrate on political parties and on federalism. More concretely we plan five things:
     o Recode all available data (1991-2000) from the Belgian to the (revised) US codebook
     o Add new data (same series) on post-2000 period (2001-2006)
     o Integrate newly available public opinion data (new data series)
     o Collect better, more frequent data on political party preferences (new data series)
     o Systematically compare impact of Flemish and Walloon actors on the national political agenda

6. **Data collection and coding devices**
   - When data were collected a few years ago (see above) almost everything was done manually, even the enormous media database was compiled by skimming through paper versions of the newspapers
   - For the Parliamentary data (interpellations, bills, passed laws, oral and written questions) we got the database of Parliament but had to recode all entries because the Parliamentary coding system differed a lot from ours.