Crises, elections and state reforms in Belgium: A long and winding road to confederalism?

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Abstract

The federal, state and European Parliament elections that were held in May 2019 shook the political party landscape, with an unprecedented rise for extreme parties and a more driven preference for the left on the Walloon side, and for the right on the Flemish side. As a result, the demand for confederalism is put back on the table, even though the door to further constitutional state reforms has been kept locked after the sixth state reform of 2012-2014. In this country report, the confederalism debate is situated in a theory of dynamic federalism, which reveals the dynamics that move Belgium from a unitary system towards an increasingly loose multi-tiered system. It discusses the government crisis of December 2018 and the results of the 2019 elections, showing that the growing divide between the Flemish and the francophone side is mostly of a political nature, which gives a poor reflection of public opinion, but inevitably pushes the Belgian system towards further reform.