

International Francqui Chair – Classes of Excellence 2017  
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# Figuring out public finance – The politics of European statistical harmonization

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# 1) Introduction

- **Euro** as one of the most ambitious achievements of the EU
- Common monetary policy goes along with economic and **budgetary coordination**:
  - Public deficit  $\leq 3\%$  of GDP
  - Public debt  $\leq 60\%$  of GDP
- **How are these data figured out?**
  - ESA as harmonized framework
  - Eurostat as “center of calculation”

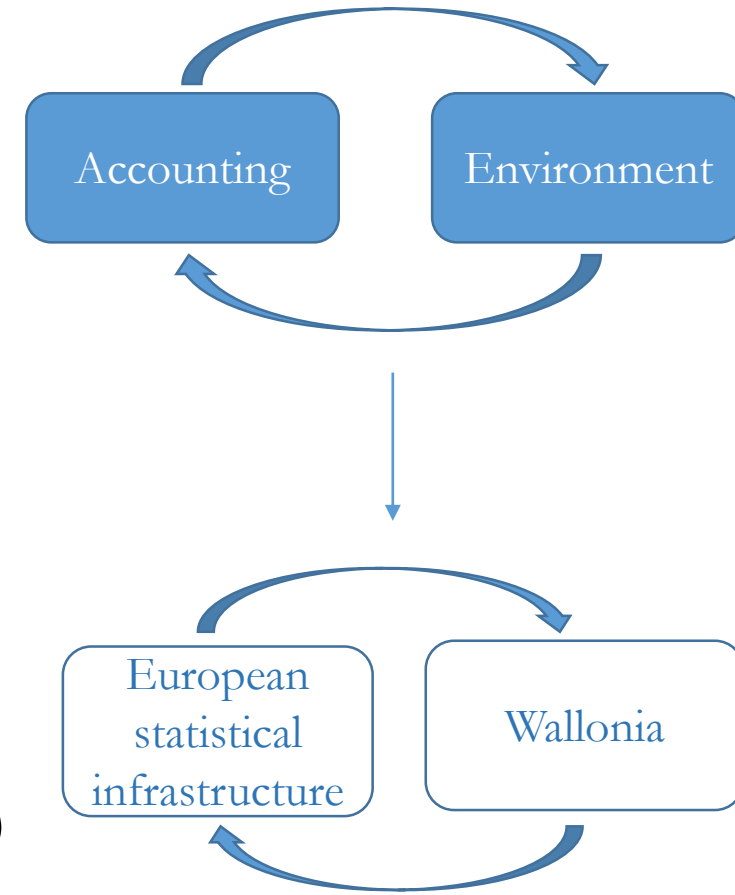


## 2) Literature review: the sociology of accounting

- **Constructivist perspective on accounting** (LSE: Miller, Hopwood, Power, etc.) → Interactions between accounting and its environment

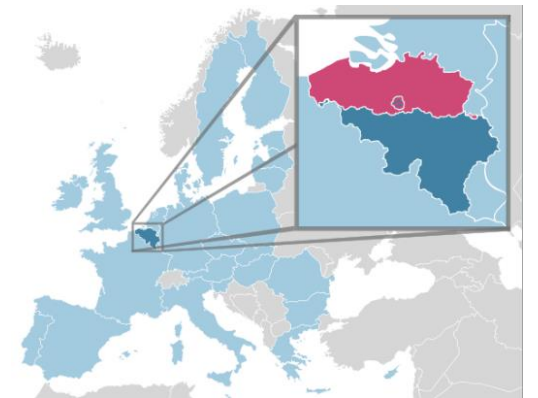
A constructivist perspective on national accounting:

- National accounting figures are **inscriptions** (Latour)  
→ How dense is the *network* in which they are embedded?
- National accounting is a **tool of government** (Foucault)  
→ How does it shape the ‘*conduct of budgetary conducts*’?



### 3) Context of the case study

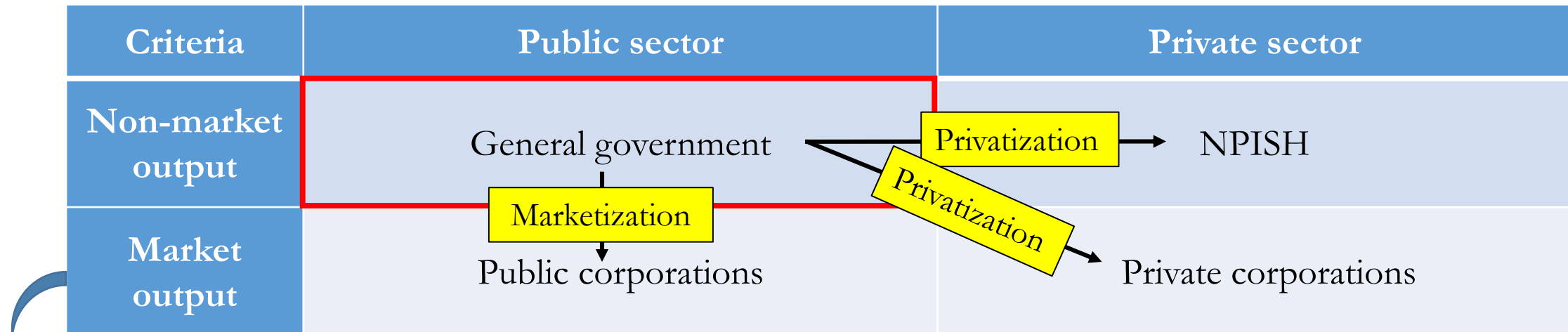
- Strengthening of the **European statistical apparatus** after the second Greek crisis (2010):
  - (Quasi-)auditing powers
  - Significant increase of staff: from 15 to 65 people
  - Ability to fine countries for misreporting of statistical data
- Controversy: **how to figure out Wallonia's public debt?**
  - Walloon government: legal approach → € 6,2 bn in 2012
  - CoA: economic approach → € 11,2 bn in 2012
- Outcome: **reincorporation of Wallonia** within the European statistical network → Effect?



# 4) Discussion: Wallonia reshaped by national accounting

## Reintegration within the EMU and its fiscal framework

- Wallonia as a “dunce” → How to react to this new “fact”?
- Austerity measures: spending cuts, delayed investments, etc.
- Playing at the margins of accounting: privatization and marketization



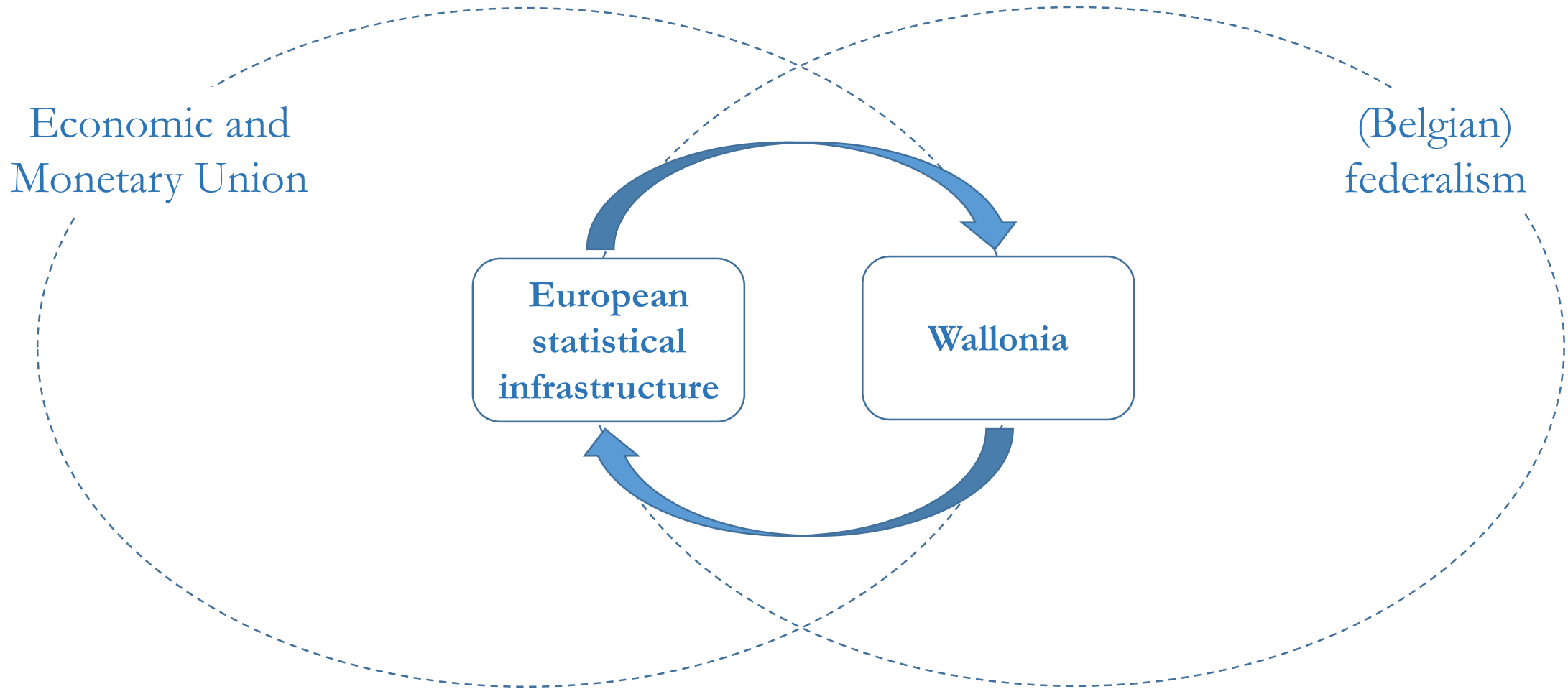
- Sales > 50% of costs
- Competition

# 5) Conclusion

- Statistical harmonization is the result of **hard-fought struggles**:
  - Strengthening of a genuine statistical architecture at European level
  - Controversy about public finance statistics in Belgium
- **Main effect** of the incorporation of Wallonia within the European statistical network?
  - Reintegration of Wallonia within the (orthodox) EMU: incentive to privatize and/or marketize public service delivery
- Need to pay closer attention to the interactions between mundane calculative practices and public policies: **numbers are much more than 'facts'**



# 5) Conclusion



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