

BELGIUM

Date of Elections: March 10, 1974

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for the totality of the elective seats of Parliament, which was dissolved prematurely by more than one year. General elections were not normally due until May 25, 1975.

Characteristics of Parliament

The Parliament of Belgium is bicameral, consisting of the House of Representatives and the Senate. Members thereof simultaneously represent the Belgian people and the Flemish and French-speaking linguistic communities.

The House of Representatives consists of 212 members elected for 4 years.

The Senate has 181 members, all of whom have 4-year terms; of these, 106 are elected directly by the electorate, 50 by the provincial councils and 25 are co-opted. One seat is moreover reserved for Prince Albert, brother of the King, who is Senator *ex-officio*.

Electoral System

All citizens of either sex at least 18 years of age, who have resided for at least 6 months in the same commune and who possess full civil rights, have the right to vote. Persons without such right include the insane, criminals, undischarged bankrupts, vagrants, prostitutes, persons violating the military penal code, and persons found guilty of electoral offenses.

Electoral registers are drawn up at the level of the commune and revised every 2 years. Voting is compulsory so that any unjustified abstention is punishable, ranging from a fine to taking the elector off the register.

Any citizen of Belgium at least 25 years of age who resides within the country and is in full possession of his civil and political rights may be a candidate to the House of Representatives.

A candidate to the Senate must meet the same aforesaid requirements but be 40 years of age. Senators popularly elected must furthermore belong to one of certain categories, among which former Minister or member of Parliament, holder of a university degree, high-ranking civil servant or military officer, owner of a large industry and present or former Burgomaster.

No member of Parliament may simultaneously be a public official, minister of religion funded by the State, lawyer in public service, agent of the State Bank, inspector of a limited company, or member of both Houses of Parliament.

Nomination of candidates to the House of Representatives must be supported by 200 to 500 electors (depending on the size of the constituency) and be submitted to the president of the central voting office no later than 21 days before the election; required support for Senators is 100 electors. Political parties wishing to unite must make a declaration to that effect no later than 10 days before the election.

Belgium is divided into 30 constituencies for election to the House of Representatives and into 20 for election to the Senate. Voting takes place according to the party-list system, in a single ballot, with proportional representation in accordance with the d'Hondt method; remainders are distributed within each of the 9 provinces. Vote-splitting is not provided for but preferential voting is possible, as the elector may cast a specific vote for the main candidate and for the substitute candidate of the list for which he is voting. Each individual candidate is regarded as constituting a separate list. Moreover, with the consent of the electors who sponsored them, candidates of a particular list may join with candidates specifically chosen from lists submitted in other constituencies of the same province.

Substitute members who are chosen at the same time as elected members fill parliamentary seats which become vacant between general elections.

General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

The trail to premature elections was blazed by the resignation of the three-party coalition Government — formed one year earlier and led by Socialist Party leader Edmond Leburton — on January 19, 1974, following a Cabinet crisis which developed after Iran withdrew from a joint \$200 million oil refinery project with Belgium. King Baudoin subsequently charged Mr. Leo Tindemans, chairman of the Flemish wing of the Christian Socialist Party (CVP), with the formation of a new Government. Mr. Tindemans' attempt failed, however, when the French-speaking faction of his party refused to support him. The King thereupon dissolved Parliament on January 30.

Although the refinery project — which had the strong backing of the Socialists and many Walloon Christian Socials — was a major source of debate, equally conflicting issues during the election campaign, which opened on January 19, stemmed from differences between Flemish and French-speaking groups on how regional interests should best be served. Mr. Tindemans' party,

together with Linguistic groups of the Opposition, considered the principle of " regionalization " (introduced in 1970) a failure and foresaw the consequent need of revising the Constitution, particularly in view of simplifying it. The Socialists, on the other hand, opposed amendment of the Constitution, believing that economic and social problems were more pressing. Of the three members of the former coalition, the Socialists called for increased State intervention in industry and other fields, which economic views were rejected by the Liberals and the Christian Socials.

Campaign discussions thus generally centered around predictable subjects: economic problems — the energy crisis, international monetary difficulties and unemployment —• as in other European countries, as well as the traditional linguistic and community relations questions confronting the country.

One upshot of the internal Christian-Social split was that the French and Flemish-speaking factions of the party in Brussels figured, for the first time, on separate party Usts. As a result, no party presented a bilingual list within the capital.

Election day results were noteworthy for the gains registered by the Christian Socials versus the losses incurred by the WaUoon federahst parties — the *Front democratique des francophones* (FDF) and the *Rassemblement Wallon*. Of the Christian Socials' 5 additional seats, 3 came from the Dutch-speaking areas. The FDF maintained its primacy in Brussels.

Results in elections for the Senate, also held on March 10, further evidenced gains for the Christian Socials and losses by the federalist parties.

The formation of the new Government, with Mr. Leo Tindemans as Prime Minister, was announced on April 24, 1974.

Statistics

1. *Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats in the House of Representatives*

Number of registered voters	6,322,227
Voters	5,710,008 (90.3 %)
Blank or void baUot papers.	453,354
VaUd votes.	5,258,531

Political Group	Votes obtained	%	Number of Seats in the House of Representatives
Christian Social Party (P.S.C.-C.V.P.)	1,700,855	32.34	72 (+5)
Belgian Socialist Party (P.S.B.-B.S.P.)	1,401,725	26.66	59 (—2)
Party for Liberty and Progress (P.L.P.-P.V.V.) (liberals)	798,818	15.20	30 (—1)
French-Speaking Democratic Front (F.D.F.) - <i>Rassemblement Wallon</i> - dissident Brussels liberals (P.L.D.P.)	575,487	10.94	25 (—2)
<i>Volksunie</i>	536,287	10.20	22 (+1)
Belgian Communist Party (P.C.-K.P.)	166,008	3.16	4 (-1)
Others	79,351	1.50	—
			212

2. Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats in the Senate

Number of registered voters	6,322,227
Voters	5,709,883 (90.3 %)
Blank or void ballot papers	523,125
Valid votes	5,184,716

Political Group	Votes obtained		Number of Senators elected by Universal Suffrage	Num of Sena elect by Provin Counc
Christian Social Party.	1,650,322	31.83	37	19
Belgian Socialist Party.	1,384,681	26.70	29	14
Party for Liberty and Progress	777,476	15.00	16	7
French-Speaking Democratic Front - <i>Rassemblement Wallon</i> - dissident				
Brussels liberals.	589,553	11.38	13	6
<i>Volkswijde</i>	545,215	10.51	10	4
Belgian Communist Party.	171,676	3.31	1	—
Others.	65,793	1.27	—	—
			106	50

3. *Distribution of Parliamentarians according to Professional Category*

	House of Representatives	Senate
Members of the legal profession	46	27
Salaried clerks	39	26
Teachers	32	29
Businessmen	19	17
Political party and trade union officials	15	17
Journalists	10	4
Doctors	9	5
Civil servants (incl. retired)	7	7
Social workers	4	10
Insurance agents	4	4
Manual workers	4	6
Farmers	2	6
Notaries	1	3
No profession	1	9
Others	19	11
	212	181

4. *Distribution of Parliamentarians according to Sex*

	House of Representatives	Senate
Men	198	173
Women	14	8
	212	181

5. *Distribution of Parliamentarians according to Age Group*

30-34. . . . .	.14	—
35-39. . . . .	.30	—
40-44. . . . .	.35	21
45-49. . . . .	.50	41
50-54. . . . .	.34	62
55-59. . . . .	.34	24
60-65. . . . .	.13	29
Over 65. . . . .	.2	4
	212	181