

BELGIUM

Date of Elections: April 17, 1977

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the members of the Parliament following the premature dissolution of this body on March 9, 1977. General elections were not normally due until May 1978.

Characteristics of Parliament

The bicameral Parliament of Belgium consists of the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate.

The Chamber of Representatives is composed of 212 members elected for 4 years.

The Senate has 181 members, all of whom have 4-year terms; of these, 106 are directly elected, 50 are elected by the provincial councils (in the proportion of one for every 200,000 people) and 25 are co-opted by the remaining Senators. The King's sons or, if he has no sons, Princes of the Belgian Royal Family who are successors to the throne are, for their part *ex-officio* Senators.

Electoral System

All Belgian citizens at least 21 years of age who have resided for at least six months in the same community have the right to vote. Criminals are deprived of this right, while the rights of certain categories of persons, such as the insane and prisoners, are suspended as long as these remain in an incapacitated state.

Electoral registers are revised every two years. Since voting is compulsory any unjustified abstention is punishable, penalties ranging from a fine to removal from the register. Proxy and postal voting is permitted for certain electors.

Any qualified elector at least 25 years old who resides in Belgium and is in full possession of his civil and political rights may be a candidate for the Chamber of Representatives. Candidates for the Senate must meet the same aforesaid requirements but be at least 40 years of age; popularly elected Senators 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 retired military officer, owner of a large industrial concern and present or former Governor, member of a provincial council or Burgomaster.

Except for Ministers, no member of Parliament can simultaneously be designated by the Government to undertake a salaried function. Senators elected by provincial councils cannot belong to the assemblhes which have elected them.

Nomination of candidates for the Chamber of Representatives must be supported by 200 to 500 electors (depending on the size of the constituency), or three retiring members of Parliament, and be made between 23 and 22 days before the election; required support for popularly-chosen Senators is 100 electors, or three retiring members of Parliament. Nomination of indirectly elected Senators must be made at the latest six days prior to polling day and be supported by at least five provincial councillors, and, for co-opted Senators, five days in advance, supported by at least 10 Senators.

Belgium is divided into 30 constituencies for Chamber of Representatives elections and into 20 for direct Senate elections. 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 nine provinces. Vote-splitting is not provided for, but preferential voting is possible, as the elector may cast a nominal 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 ally themselves with candidates nominally designated on lists submitted in other constituencies of the same province.

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

General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

Parliament was dissolved on March 9, five days after Prime Minister Leo Tindemans had expelled two Cabinet Ministers, members of the French-speaking *Rassemblement Wallon* (RW) party, who had refused to support the Government on a budget vote on March 3. The withdrawal of the support of the RW left the remaining partners of the coalition Government (Christian Socials and Liberals) two seats short of a majority in the Chamber of Representatives.

The incident reflected a conflict between Belgium's two language groups (French and Flemish) which has in fact long been a major factor in the country's politics. In February 1977, pressure on the Government from the French region was heightened by trade union protests and strikes, this

unrest being attributed to tax increases, a high unemployment rate and attempts to impose wage restraints.

These economic issues shared the campaign spotlight with the fundamental question of whether to grant increased autonomy to Belgium's three main regions: Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels.

Over 95 % of the registered electorate turned out on polling day; the Christian Social Party was particularly successful in Flanders and obtained eight more Representatives seats to widen its leading position in this Chamber. Of the 212 seats in the Lower House, 121 passed into the hands of the Flemish-speaking community. A four-party (Christian Socials, Belgian Socialist Party, *Front démocratique des francophones* and *Volksunie*) coalition Cabinet was subsequently formed by Prime Minister Tindemans.

Statistics

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

Number of registered voters.	6,316,662	
Voters.	6,005,195	(95.07%)
Blank or void ballot papers.	430,965	
Valid votes.	5,574,230	

Political Group	VoteB obtained	/o	Number of Seats
Christian Social Party (PSC-CVP)	2,003,605	35.94	80 (+8)
Belgian Socialist Party (PSB-BSP)	1,473,329	26.43	62 (+3)
Freedom and Progress Party (Liberals) (PW-PRLW-PL) . . .	867,524	15.56	88 (-)
<i>Volksumie</i>	559,634	10.04	20 (—2)
<i>Front dimocratique des franco- phones</i> (PDF)	237,280	4.26	10 (+ 1)
<i>Rassemblement wallon</i> (RW)	158,559	2.84	5 (-8)
Belgian Communist Party - Democratic Union (PC-UDP). . .	151,421	2.72	2 (-2)
PSB-RW Alliance	33,862	0.61	- (=)
Others	89,016	1.60	- (=)
			212

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

Number of registered voters.	6,316,662	
Voters.	6,006,272	(95.08%)
Blank or void ballot papers.	485,032	
Valid votes.	5,521,240	

Political Group	Votes obtained	%	Number of directly elected Senators	Number of Senators elected by Provincial Councils	Number of co-opted Senators	T Nu S Se
Christian Social Party	1,967,200	35.63	39	21	10	
Belgian Socialist Party	1,475,148	26.72	32	13	7	5
Freedom and Progress Party (Liberals)	868,412	15.55	Hi	(i	4	
<i>Volksunie</i>	561,148	10.16	10	5	2	
FDF-RW.	399,613	7.24	8	5	2	
Belgian Communist Party — Democratic Union.	.127,679	2.31				
Others.	.132,040	2.39				
			106	50	25	18

3. *Distribution of Senators according to Professional Category*

Members of the legal profession	31
Businessmen	22
Social workers	22
Teachers	20
Retired civil servants	20
Salaried clerks	19
Political party and trade union officials	16
Journalists	5
Doctors	4
Workers	4
Farmers	4
Notaries	2
No profession	5
Others	7
	181

4. *Distribution of Senators according to Sex*

Men	166
Women	15
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5. *Distribution of Senators according to Age Group*

40-50 years	53
50-60	102
60-70	26
	181