

BELGIUM

Date of Elections: 17 December 1978

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for members of Parliament following the premature dissolution of this body on 14 November 1978. General elections had previously taken place in April 1977.

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 for their part become *ex-officio* Senators at the age of 18.

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 assemblies 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

On 11 October 1978, Prime Minister Léo Tindemans of the Flemish wing (CVP) of the Christian Social Party resigned after this same political group had objected to certain details contained in the devolution proposals known as the "Egmont pact", a plan for the creation of a federal structure of government which had been agreed to in principle in Parliament in March 1978 by all six parties of the coalition Government—the Flemish (CVP) and Walloon (PSC) wings of the Christian Social Party, both wings (PSB and BSP) of the Socialist Party, the Brussels-based *Front Démocratique des Francophones* (FDF) and the Flemish nationalist *Volksunie*. Under the Egmont pact, Belgium was in fact slated to have four different Governments and eight parliamentary bodies in order to grant autonomy to the country's various linguistic communities: Flemish-speaking Flanders, French-speaking Wallonia, bilingual Brussels and the German-speaking region.

On 20 October, former Deputy Prime Minister and President of the PSC Vanden Boeynants became the Head of a transitional Government. He announced the December election date on 29 October.

While the question of devolution of power from the central Government was naturally in the forefront of the ensuing campaign, economic problems—in particular that of unemployment—were for their part much discussed.

Polling results led to only slight changes in the different parties' parliamentary strengths and, according to observers as well as Mr. Vanden Boeynants, thus failed to clarify an already confused political situation in which legislative seats were split among

numerous groups. In this context, several months passed before a governing coalition could be found. A five-party Government was finally formed on 3 April 1979, with all but the *Volksunie* former coalition partners uniting under Mr. Wilfried Martens of the CVP. Prime Minister Martens' Cabinet was announced the same day.

Statistics

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

Number of registered electors	6,366,655
Voters	6,020,411 (94.56%)
Blank or void ballot papers	498,256
Valid votes	5,536,164

Political Group	Votes obtained	%	Number of Seats
Christian Social Party			
– CVP	1,447,131	26.19	57 (+1)
– PSC	560,540	10.12	25 (+1)
Belgian Socialist Party			
– PSB	720,030	13.00	32 (–3)
– BSP	684,961	12.37	26 (–1)
Freedom and Progress Party (PVV)	572,558	10.34	22 (+5)
Wallon Liberal Party (PRLW) <i>Parti libéral</i> (PL)	} 330,103	5.96	15 (–1)
<i>Volksunie</i>			
Front Démocratique des Francophones (FDF)	231,197	4.17	11 (+1)
<i>Rassemblement Wallon</i> (RW)	158,602	2.86	4 (–1)
Belgian Communist Party (PCB/KPB) .	180,233	3.25	4 (+2)
Other parties	262,821	4.74	2 (+2)
			212

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

Number of registered electors	6,366,655
Voters	6,022,168 (94.59%)
Blank or void ballot papers	544,132
Valid votes	5,478,080

Political Group	Votes obtained	%	Number of directly elected Senators	Number of Senators elected by Provincial Councils	Number of co-opted Senators	Total Number of Seats in Senate	Number of Seats held at Dissolution	Number of Seats won at Previous Elections
Christian Social Party								
- CVP	1,956,498	35.71	29	15	7	51	70	70
- PSC			12	7	3	22		
Belgian Socialist Party								
- PSB	1,395,588	25.47	18	9	5	32	52	52
- BSP			13	5	3	21		
PVV	902,564	16.47	11	5	2	18	26	26
PRLW			5	2	1	8		
PL			1	—	—	1		
FDR-RW	397,168	7.25	9	4	2	15	15	15
<i>Volkswunie</i>	384,316	7.01	7	2	2	11	16*	17
Belgian Communist Party	182,893	3.33	1	1	—	2	1	1
Other parties	259,053	4.72	—	—	—	—	1*	—
	106		50	25	181	181	181	181

* One Senator left the *Volkswunie* to found a new Flemish party.

*3. Distribution of Members of Parliament according
to Professional Category*

	Senate	Chamber of Representatives
Businessmen	27	19
Teachers	27	44
Social workers	23	12
Members of the legal profession	23	39
Political party and trade union officials	18	20
Retired civil servants	17	10
Salaried clerks	17	34
Journalists	6	7
Doctors	4	5
Manual workers	4	3
Engineers and architects	3	3
Notaries	2	2
Insurers	2	—
Farmers	2	—
Others	2	10
No profession	4	4
	181	212

4. Distribution of Members of Parliament according to Sex

	Senate	Chamber of Representatives
Men	162	196
Women	19	16
	181	212

5. Distribution of Members of Parliament according to Age Group

	Senate	Chamber of Representatives
30-40 years	—	37
40-50	39	78
50-60	110	79
60-70	32	18
	181	212