

BELGIUM

Date of Elections: 13 December 1987

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the directly-elected members of Parliament following the premature dissolution of this body on 8 November 1987. General elections had previously taken place in October 1985.

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 184 members, all of whom have 4-year terms; of these, 106 are directly elected, 51 are elected by the provincial councils (in the proportion of one for every 200,000 people) and 26 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 become *ex-officio* Senators at the age of 18.

Electoral System

All Belgian citizens at least 18 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 continually kept up to date in each district. Since voting is compulsory, any unjustified abstention is punishable, penalties ranging from a fine to removal from the register. Proxy and postal voting are 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. 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. Nomina-

tion 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 directly-elected members fill parliamentary seats which become vacant between general elections. By-elections are held in the event of vacancies for the other seats.

Background and Outcome of the Elections

On 15 October 1987, the centre-right coalition Government (comprising the French- and Flemish-speaking branches of the Christian Social and Liberal parties) in power since 1981 and headed by Prime Minister Wilfried Martens (CVP) tendered its resignation after a language dispute had split the coalition. Parliament was then prematurely dissolved on 8 November 1987 and general elections were called for the following month.

A total of 3,172 candidates (2,129 for the Chamber of Representatives, 1,043 for the Senate) contested the parliamentary seats, while 2,411 candidates (1,448 for the Chamber, 963 for the Senate) were in the running as substitute members. The month-long campaign was dominated by economic and linguistic issues. Mr. Martens cited his leadership during six years of fiscal austerity, pointing to the reduction of Belgium's budget deficit and promising to introduce a tax cut. The opposition Socialist Party (also divided into French- and Flemish-speaking wings) called for increased government spending on social programmes and a lowering of the country's unemployment rate.

On polling day, the governing coalition lost a total of five Chamber of Representatives seats as the Socialists emerged for the first time in over 50 years as the largest single grouping in the Chamber. Mr. Martens resigned as Prime Minister but was asked by King Baudouin to head an unchanged coalition Government during negotiations on the formation of a new coalition. This indeed took months. On 2 May 1988, five parties (the two branches of the Christian Socials and the Socialists, as well as the Flemish nationalist *Volksumie*) agreed to unite in a centre-left Government, headed by Mr. Martens; its members were sworn in on 9 May.

Statistics

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

Number of registered electors.	7,044,211	
Voters.	6,276,997	(89.1%)
Blank or void ballot papers.	135,785	
Valid votes.	6,141,212	

Political Group	Votes obtained	%	f **
Christian Social Party			
- Flemish (CVP)	1,194,687	19.5	43 (-6)
- Walloon (PSC)	491,839	8.0	19 (-1)
Socialist Party			
- Walloon (PS)	961,429	15.7	40 (+5)
- Flemish (SP)	913,975	14.9	32(=)
Liberal Party			
- Flemish (Freedom and Progress Party - PVV)	709,137	11.5	25 (+3)
- Walloon {Parti reformateur liberal - PRL}.	577,897	9.4	23 (-1)
<i>Volksunie</i>	494,229	8.0	16(=)
Greens			
- Flemish (Agalev)	275,307	4.5	6 (+2)
- Walloon (Ecolo)	157,985	2.6	3 (-2)
<i>Front démocratique des francophones</i> (FDF)	71,340	1.2	3(=)
<i>Vlaams Blok</i>	116,410	1.9	2(+1)
Belgian Communist Party (KPB/PCB)	51,074	0.8	- (=)
Others.		2.0	- (=)

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

Number of registered electors	7,044,211	
Voters	6,573,045	(93.3%)
Blank or void ballot papers	431,833	
Valid votes	6,141,212	

Political Group	Votes obtained		Number of directly-elected Senators	Total number of Seats
Christian Social Party				
CVP	1,169,539	19.2	22	39
PSC	474,708	7.8	9	16
Socialist Party				
PS	958,760	15.7	20	36
SP	896,114	14.7	17	29
Liberal Party				
PVV	686,608	11.3	11	18
PRL	564,221	9.3	12	21
<i>Volkswijze</i>	494,432	8.1	8	13
Agalev	299,051	4.9	3	5
Ecolo	168,381	2.8	2	3
<i>Vlaams Blok</i>	122,925	2.0	1	1
FDF	77,596	1.3	1	2
Others	180,225	2.9	—	—
			106	183

3. *Distribution of Members of Parliament according to Sex*

	Senate	Chamber of Representatives
Men	168	194
Women	J 2 _	IX
	183*	212

4. *Distribution of Members of Parliament according to Age*

	Senate	Chamber of Representatives
25-30 years.	—	5
30-40 »	—	38
40-50 »	51	80
50-65 »	128	85
Over 65 »	4	4
	783*	212

* Plus one *ex-officio* Senator.