

The Flemish Republic

A quarterly newsletter explaining why
Flanders is seceding from Belgium

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A Shift to the Right

The general elections in Belgium, held on June 10th, marked a significant shift to the right as well as towards the independence of Flanders, the Dutch-speaking north of the country.

In Wallonia, the French-speaking south which lives off subsidies provided by Flanders, the elections led mainly to a shift from the *Parti Socialiste*, whose share of the Francophone vote dropped from 34.0 to 26.8%, to the far-leftist *Ecolo*, the French-speaking Greens (red at the core), who rose from 8.4 to 15.2%.

In Flanders, however, the Liberals and the Socialists lost heavily. The leftist Liberals of Prime Minister **Guy Verhofstadt** fell

from 24.7% of the Dutch-speaking vote to 20.1%. The Socialists did even worse and fell from 24.8% to 16.2%. The elections were won by CD&V, an alliance of Christian-Democrats and Flemish-Nationalists, progressing from 25.3 to 31.4%, and LDD, the party of the maverick **Jean-Marie Dedecker**, who won 5.5%. The Flemish independence party *Vlaams Belang* (VB) gained 19.2%, which is higher than the 18.2% of the previous general elections in 2003, marking the party's 14th consecutive election victory in a row.

Accident of history

Like the VB, Mr Dedecker, a Liberal senator who had been ousted from his party for his criticism of PM Verhofstadt is also an outspoken advocate of Flemish independence and a critic of multiculturalism and extremist

Islamism. The combined scores of LDD and VB constitute 24.7% of the Flemish electorate voting for outspokenly independentist candidates.

In addition, the Christian-Democrats of **Yves Leterme** have formed an alliance with the likewise independentist, but pro-Europeanist Flemish Nationalists. Mr Leterme, who is likely to become the next Belgian Prime Minister, is demanding a constitutional reform

which should give Flanders greater powers. Last year Mr Leterme, the son of a Walloon father and a Flemish mother, caused a stir when he told the French newspaper *Libération* that Belgium is an “accident of

history” which has no “intrinsic value.” He also criticised Belgian **King Albert II** for not being fluent in Dutch, the language of the majority of his people.

The left, again

If Mr Leterme were to form a government with the VB and LDD, he would have a sound majority of 56.1% of the Flemings in support of greater Flemish autonomy and centre-right economic policies. Such a coalition, however, is unlikely to happen, because Belgian governments need majorities in both Flanders and Wallonia.

Hence, the most likely outcome of the elections will be a coalition of the Christian-Democrats with one or both of yesterday's losers, Liberals and Socialists, saddling the Flemings with yet another centre-left government.

Our Goal

The next Belgian government will probably be led by the Christian-Democrats. During the election campaign, **Yves Leterme**, the Christian-Democrat leader, promised to grant Flanders more autonomy.

Will Leterme be a man of his word? Many Flemings have given him their confidence, hoping that he will keep his promise. The problem in Belgium, however, is that no decisions can be taken unless there is a majority in both parts of the country – in Dutch-speaking Flanders, where 60% of the population lives, as well as in French-speaking Wallonia. Hence, the Socialist-minded Walloons can veto any transfer of powers from the Belgian to the Flemish level.

We in the *Vlaams Belang* think that Wallonia will never agree to granting Flanders a bigger say over its own affairs. Wallonia lives off Flemish subsidies and does not want decisions concerning welfare, social security and economic policies to be taken on the regional level. We advocate the independence of Flanders, exactly because we do not think that within the Belgian context Flanders can ever be master of its own house.

If Mr Leterme fails in delivering his promise the Flemings will realize that Wallonia leaves Flanders no option but to go for full independence.



Frank Vanhecke, MEP

“We oppose the centralists in Brussels.”



VB election congress:
Vlaamse Kracht = Flemish Power

Vlaams Belang complains to OSCE: Belgian Elections Are Unfair and Undemocratic

For various reasons Belgian elections can hardly be called fair and democratic. During last June's election campaign the Vlaams Belang (VB) complained to observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) about serious violations of the rules outlined by the OSCE.

Belgium has a system of electronic voting but the procedures are not transparent. The voters do not receive a paper printout of their vote. The supervision of the automatic voting is carried out by a small group of government experts. The collected digital data are not processed locally but sent to Brussels. The constituencies learn their results from a central government agency.

Discrimination

The OSCE demands that where governments "provide funds for campaigning, this should be done on a fair and equitable basis." This is not the case in Belgium where the government has attempted to defund the VB because of its "anti-state" platform.

The public television and radio (VRT) systematically discriminate against the VB. This attitude was confirmed in

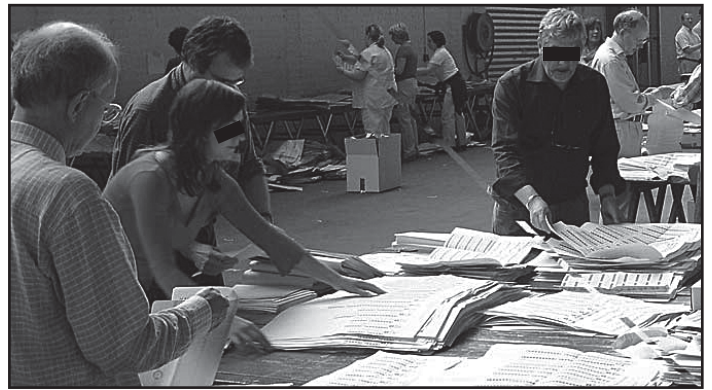
an official VRT memo stating "that it is advised that representatives of the VB are excluded from certain political debates and political coverage – including coverage of activities in parliament."

During the election campaign, all daily newspapers refused to accept paid political advertising by the VB. In Belgium, this is a very serious handicap in campaigning. The law on party financing has put stringent limits on the methods of campaigning. This leaves paid political advertising in newspapers as one of the few means for a party to get its message across to the voting public.

Meetings banned

There was also a government attempt to exclude the VB from door-to-door flyer distribution and to limit the party's access to the Belgian postal services. Only an appeal to the courts saved the VB from this type of censorship, but only for the duration of the election campaign. It still applies outside the election campaign term.

The VB was not able to stage any meetings at all in Brussels, the capital of the country. Private owners of convention and meeting facilities



OSCE/Lubomir Kopaj

were put under pressure not to let facilities to the party. This pressure was applied by officials, like the mayor of Brussels. When the VB managed to get a contract for the use of a meeting hall owned by the football club RSC Anderlecht the mayor intervened and had the contract annulled. A protest march by the VB against this undemocratic practice was banned by the authorities.

Expulsion

According to the OSCE, candidates "should be free from violence or intimidation." In Belgium VB candidates are systematically expelled from the official trade unions. During the past six months, 500 VB candidates have been expelled from the trade unions. This expulsion is not without

consequences. In Belgium, the official trade unions have considerable rights and privileges, granted them by the state, including the distribution of unemployment benefits. Belgium is the only country in Europe where such benefits are distributed by the trade unions, instead of by accountable government agencies.



Senator Jurgen Ceder:

"The Vlaams Belang was not allowed to convene in the capital."

Flemings Underrepresented in Parliament

In Belgium, the number of seats in the House of Representatives is not proportional to the size of the electorate. It is considerably cheaper for French-speaking Walloons to obtain a seat than for Dutch-speaking Flemings. In the general elections on June 10th, a Flemish seat required 45,944 votes, a Walloon seat 39,285 votes.

Hence, the Vlaams Belang with 11.99% of the Belgian vote got only 17 seats in Parliament, while the Parti Socialiste with 10.86% got 20 seats.

This is a violation of the OSCE rules, which state that "Equal suffrage

implies that each citizen's vote should have the same value. This means that, under proportional-representation systems, the number of representatives for each district should be proportional to the size of the electorate."

Moreover, a May 26th, 2003 ruling by the Belgian Constitutional Court stated that the current electoral circumscription of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde is discriminatory and unconstitutional because it allows French-speaking parties to participate in elections on Flemish territory, while the opposite is not the case. The government was given 4 years to remedy the situation, but it ignored the ruling.

Exhausting Generosity

"About six million Flemish subsidize four million Walloons with billions of euros a year through transfer payments. Such generosity could exhaust a homogenous society, let alone a linguistically riven one like Belgium."

(A quote from an editorial in The Wall Street Journal, 12 June 2007)

Flanders Loses Its Cities

Belgium has 10.5 million (legal) inhabitants. About 9 million of them are indigenous Belgians – of whom 6 million are Dutch-speaking Flemings and 3 million French-speaking Walloons. Belgium also has 900,000 legal aliens, and 650,000 so-called “new Belgians” – foreigners who acquired the Belgian nationality since 1980. At least 0.5 million Belgian inhabitants are Muslims, of whom 265,000 Moroccans and 155,000 Turks.

Since the acceptance of the so-called “Quick Citizenship” Act in May 2000, the Belgian nationality is notoriously easy to acquire. Belgian citizenship is a right for everyone who has lived in the country for 7 (but often only 3 or even 2) years. One does not need to speak the language or prove that one is willing to integrate in the host country. Obviously, the “new Belgians” are entitled to vote in all elections, while legal aliens have been given the right to vote in local elections.

Devastating result

The decisions to extend the local franchise to foreigners and to grant Belgian nationality virtually on demand were taken with the aim of countering the electoral surge of the Flemish independence party *Vlaams Belang*.

In February 2001, **Claude Eerdekens**, the parliamentary leader of the governing *Parti Socialiste*, admitted that “99% of the applications [for Belgian citizenship] made in Brussels are filed in French.” Indeed, in order to counter the demand for more autonomy on the part of the Flemings, the authorities have granted Belgian citizenship to as many French-speaking foreigners as possible. “We do more for the frenchification of Brussels

than the Flemings can ever do to prevent it,” Eerdekens boasted.

The result has been devastating. Half of the 650,000 “new Belgians” were created since 2000, at an average of over 4,200 each month. Most of the “new Belgians” live in the major cities. Today only 29.5% of the population of Brussels are indigenous Belgians, 26.9% are legal aliens and 43.6% are “new Belgians” (the latter figure was 34.8% in 2003 – an increase of 8.8% in barely 4 years).



From Maritime Expert to Member of Parliament for the VB

Flanders, the southern part of the Netherlands, has always been a maritime nation. One of the newly elected VB parliamentarians in the Belgian House of Representatives is Bruno Valkeniers. He is a maritime expert who spent 26 years in the maritime industry.

Until last year Mr Valkeniers was a member of the executive committee of PSA HNN (Port of Singapore Authority/Hesse-Noord-Natie), one of the world's major port operators.



Bruno Valkeniers, MP, is a world-renowned maritime expert.

Turkish Votes Influence Belgian Politics

The growing share of the immigrant vote has begun to affect the positions adopted by Belgian politicians on various issues, from the wearing of headscarves to the Armenian genocide. On June 3rd, during the past election campaign, **Ergün Top**, a Turkish born Belgian politician who is a local councillor in Antwerp, declared that if there were a war between Belgium and Turkey, he would join the Turkish army and fight Belgium.

Top holds the Belgian as well as the Turkish nationality and was standing for a seat in the Belgian Senate. During his campaign among Belgian voters of Turkish origin, he indicated that he feels more loyalty towards Turkey than towards Belgium. The message was well received by his audience, who feel the same. Mr Top indicated that he approves of **Cemal Cavdarli**, a Socialist member of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives who went to serve in the Turkish army while he was a member of parliament in Belgium.



Experts

Top was a top advisor of **Yves Leterme**, the leader of the Belgian Christian-Democrats and Belgium's likely next Prime Minister. Top prides himself on influencing Leterme's position on the Armenian genocide. According to Ergün Top the 1915 killings of Armenians by the Turkish army do not constitute a genocide.

In an interview with the Turkish newspaper *Zaman*, Mr Leterme said that he refuses to use the word “genocide” to refer to the 1915 killings, because “international experts disagree on the historical facts.” To the Belgian newspaper *De Morgen* Leterme explained: “As a politician it is not wise to talk about a genocide until the experts agree on a pronouncement. I am not the only one to take this position. I have nothing more to add.”

Apart from the Turks, however, all international experts agree that a genocide of the Armenians took place in 1915. During a parliamentary debate, the *Vlaams Belang* parliamentarian **Karim Van Overmeire** pressed the Christian-Democrat leader until the latter finally conceded that he does “not doubt the Armenian genocide.”

Karim Van Overmeire, MP, pressed Mr Leterme on the Armenian genocide.

Belgian King Refuses to Meet VB Politicians

Belgium is supposed to be a constitutional monarchy. In that type of system the King is meant to be the servant of the Nation, not the other way round. The unelected Belgian King, however, has real political power. After an election it is customary for the King to invite the leaders of the various political parties, especially the winning parties, to consult them about their views for a future government.

In Belgium, the King is entitled to appoint a "formateur." The latter is the person who has to form a new government coalition and who will become the coalition's leader, i.e. the new Prime Minister. Hence, by appointing a *formateur* the King can express a preference for a future Prime Minister.

Although the Vlaams Belang was one of the parties to win in last June's elections, **King Albert II** refused to invite the VB leaders over to the royal palace at Laken. Indeed, the King invited the leaders of *all* the parties, however small and insignificant, except the VB.

By publicly insulting the party and its voters – 12% of the Belgian population – the King showed his disrespect for a significant number of those who have to finance his family's annual income of over 10 million euros. Hence, it is only reasonable that VB voters should no longer pay taxes to foot the royal family's bills. Consequently, the VB will propose a bill to cut the royal stipend by 12%.

Dalai Lama Not Welcome in Brussels

Belgium pressured the Dalai Lama, the exiled leader of Tibet, not to attend the *Fifth International Conference of Tibet Support Groups*, which was held in Brussels from 11 to 14 May. The Belgian government repeatedly requested the Dalai Lama not to come to Brussels because the Communist regime in China, which occupies Tibet, would reproach Belgium for receiving the Tibetan leader. When the Dalai Lama intended to visit Belgium in 2005, the Belgian government also urged him not to come.

The Dalai Lama acceded to the Belgian request. He said, however, that "the decision not to visit Brussels was more difficult this time than it was in 2005" because so far he had attended and inaugurated all the international conferences of Tibet support groups. On his visit to the previous

conference, in Prague in 2003, he had even been joined by former Czech President **Vaclav Havel**.

Like Belgium the Czech Republic is a small nation. These are constantly bullied by China to restrict the movements of the Dalai Lama. Unlike Belgium, however, the Czechs do not give in to such demands.

Frans Goetghebeur, the spokesman of the Tibetan Institute in Schoten, near Antwerp, called the Belgian attitude, and in particular that of **Karel De Gucht**, the Belgian minister of Foreign Affairs, "shameful" and "unworthy." Mr De Gucht always talks about the need to defend human rights and prides himself on his opposition to the *Vlaams Belang*, which he calls "undemocratic," but grovels at the feet of the Chinese Communists.

VB Founder Deceased

Karel Dillen, the founder of the Flemish independence party, died on 27 April at the age of 81. In 1977 Mr Dillen established the *Vlaams-Nationale Partij* (Flemish-National Party), which became the *Vlaams Blok* (Flemish Alliance) in 1978 and the *Vlaams Belang* (Flemish Interest) in 2004.

Mr Dillen was born in 1925, the son of an Antwerp labourer. He started his political activities in 1947.

He was a member of the Belgian House of Representatives from 1978 to 1987, of the Belgian Senate from 1987 to 1989, and of the European Parliament from 1989 to 2003. Mr Dillen was his party's leader from 1977 to 1996, when he was succeeded by **Frank Vanhecke**.

3,000 people came to his funeral in Antwerp Cathedral, making it one of the most attended funerals of the past decade.



Karel Dillen (1925-2007), the founder of the VB.

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