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### The Mid-term Provincial Elections as a Springboard for the Flemish Nationalists

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## ELECTION REPORT

# The Mid-term Provincial Elections as a Springboard for the Flemish Nationalists

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**ABSTRACT** *The provincial elections in Belgium in 2012 provide a unique opportunity to measure the changes in vote shares that have occurred between the federal elections of 2010 and the federal, regional and European elections of 2014. The election results not only demonstrated significant differences between Flemish and Walloon provinces but also, and more importantly, the clear success of the Flemish nationalists (N-VA). In Flanders, almost all the other parties, including the extreme-right, lost significant vote shares. This victory of the Flemish nationalists increases the importance of the forthcoming elections of 2014 and their impact on the future of Belgium.*

**KEY WORDS:** Belgium, provincial elections, Flemish Nationalists, mid-term elections

Provinces are as old as the Belgian state. These institutions, intertwined between local (municipal) and national levels in the Belgian institutional design, were already recognized by the first Constitution in 1831. The ten provinces have a directly elected organ: the provincial council. On the 14 October 2012, on the same day as the local elections, 7 245 600 Belgian citizens elected 574 provincial councillors.

Soon after the first steps towards the regionalization of Belgium in the 1970s and 1980s, and particularly after the introduction of direct Flemish and Walloon regional elections, provinces were neglected by students of subnational elections. Even if the political relevance of the provinces has been slightly eroded in recent years, the 2012 provincial elections are interesting for understanding Belgian politics, not to mention the success of the Flemish ethno-regionalist movement.

Indeed, provincial elections are probably the best proxy for predicting national and regional electoral trends and they “offer an interesting electoral barometer of the upcoming federal elections” (Valcke *et al.*, 2007: 443). Previous studies demonstrate

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that provinces display similar election results to the national ones (see, for example, Toelen, 1986). Ideally located two years after the 2010 federal elections and almost two years before the next federal, regional and European elections in 2014,<sup>1</sup> provincial elections constitute a unique opportunity to assess the recent evolutions taking place in the party system and in the electorate. In addition, the electoral system used for the provincial elections is very similar to the federal and regional ones and the voters' behaviour is similarly more orientated towards ideology and national issues than in local elections. The provinces are also the electoral districts used for the federal elections.

This election report will be structured as follows. The first section will briefly review the electoral system used for the provincial elections and the most important changes that have occurred in recent years. The second section will set the political context, while the election results will be discussed in the third section. The third and fourth sections will comment on these results, distinguishing between Flemish and Walloon provinces.

### **Institutions and Electoral System**

Originally nine in 1831, there are now ten provinces in Belgium: five Flemish and five Walloon. Flemish provinces are unilingually Dutch-speaking while Walloon provinces are unilingually French-speaking. Since 1995, there are no longer provincial institutions in Brussels, even though the function of governor subsists in this bilingual region. The German-speaking community is part of the Walloon province of Liège.

Provinces have large competences and implement autonomous policies in domains such as education, agriculture, spatial planning, social policy, economic development, environment, mobility, cultural heritage, tourism and recreation. Similarly to the Dutch provinces, however, provinces have very limited financial instruments and are seen by the citizens as a purely administrative level or even simply as politically non-relevant (Coninckx and Valcke, 2006; Valcke *et al.*, 2007; 2008). Yet, compared to the other layers of government (municipalities, regions, communities and federal), since 1945 provinces probably have been the most stable institutions, undergoing very few organizational changes.

Similarly to other elections in Belgium, voting is compulsory. The electoral system is based on proportional representation with semi-open lists. Voters can either cast their ballot for their preferred candidate(s) or cast a vote for the entire list. Computer-based voting is used in 39 Walloon municipalities (out of 262) and in 151 Flemish municipalities (out of 308). Seats are allocated based on electoral districts. The number of seats in each district depends on the total number of members of the provincial council and on the district population but the minimum number of seats per district is also regulated (a minimum of six in the Flemish provinces and four in the Walloon ones). There are ten electoral districts in the provinces of Hainaut and Liège, eight in Limburg and Oost-Vlaanderen, seven in Antwerp and West Vlaanderen, six in Luxembourg and Namur, five in Vlaams-Brabant and two in Brabant Wallon.

Concerning the electoral calendar, provincial elections can be considered as 'mid-term' elections since they are located almost exactly in between previous (2010) and supposedly future federal elections (2014). In addition, provincial elections are organized on the same day as the municipal ones. Such simultaneity in election dates

reduces the campaign costs for the parties and the probability of voter fatigue. In the Flemish provinces, many strong candidates ran for both electoral contests. Still, the electoral system used for these simultaneous elections is significantly different.<sup>2</sup>

The very few changes that have occurred since 2006 regarding election rules primarily concern a reduction in the number of councillors (from 747 to 574 seats), mainly in the Walloon provinces. Rules are broadly the same across provinces,<sup>3</sup> with the notable difference that federal and regional cabinet ministers and parliamentarians are ineligible to stand for election in the five Walloon provinces. In the Flemish provinces, many of these federal and regional elites participate in the elections, and this partly explains some of the observed differences between the two main regions of the country.<sup>4</sup>

### Political Context

The context of the provincial elections of 2012 is unique. One should remember that there are no national parties in Belgium and that the party system is basically split into two language-based systems. Dutch-speaking parties compete in the five Flemish provinces while the French-speaking parties compete in the five Walloon provinces. The only exceptions are to be found in a French-speaking list in the Flemish province of Vlaams-Brabant and German-speaking lists in the French-speaking province of Liège. Yet, the two party systems are symmetrical regarding the competing party families: two Christian-democrat parties (CD&V—*Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams* and CDH—*Centre Démocrate Humaniste*); two socialist parties (SP.A—*Socialistische Partij Anders* and PS—*Parti Socialiste*); two liberal parties (Open VLD—*Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten* and MR—*Mouvement Réformateur*); two regionalist parties (N-VA—*Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* and FDF—*Fédéralistes Démocrates Francophones*); two green parties (*Groen and Ecolo*); and two populist parties (LDD—*Libertair, Direct, Democratisch* and PP—*Parti Populaire*).<sup>5</sup>

Compared to the elections in 2006, the party systems have undergone major changes. The two populist parties (the Flemish LDD and the French-speaking PP), that entered the federal parliament in 2007 and 2010 respectively, have almost disappeared. In the Walloon provinces, there is hardly any extreme-right party since the FN (*Front National*) was forbidden to participate in the elections following a court decision regarding its party name.<sup>6</sup> This led to the emergence of competing factions and parties with barely any political relevance, even though some of them managed to get some seats in local elections. The most important changes, however, concern the three ethno-regionalist parties. In the Flemish provinces, the N-VA left its electoral alliance with the CD&V and now participates in the elections independently. The Spirit similarly left its electoral alliance with the SP.A before being absorbed by Groen. In the Walloon provinces, the FDF also left its electoral alliance with the MR and now participates in the elections on its own.

In addition, the context of the provincial elections is dominated by the encompassing linguistic conflict between Dutch- and French-speaking political parties. Even though some local and provincial issues are discussed in the media, the linguistic issues remain high on the agenda, especially in the Flemish provinces. In the aftermath of the political crises surrounding the federal government formation of 2007 and

2010–11, the differences between Dutch- and French-speaking communities were discussed increasingly. The newly formed federal cabinet (December 2011) discussed and started to implement a sixth state reform, allowing more competences and financial autonomy for the regions and communities. These discussions directly concern the provincial elections since some parties advocate the suppression of that policy level.

Indeed, provincial issues have also been discussed during the campaign. First and foremost, the existence of the provincial institution itself is at stake. In their manifestos, parties such as Ecolo, VB, PP or LDD advocate, in the long term, the suppression of the provinces and the reorganization of the institutions located between regional and local levels. All other political parties believe that provinces are an essential tier of government, even if some admit that important reforms are needed. These reforms would include more transparency and the modernization of the provincial institutions (for example in the manifestos of Groen and PS) and the clarification and coherence of provincial competences, including the transfer of policy competences to other policy levels (for example in the manifestos of N-VA, CDH and MR). Secondly, most of the party positions on policies reveal the existence of a classic left–right divide on socio-economic issues, such as economy, health, housing, youth and elderly policies and education, mainly opposing socialist and liberal parties on both sides of the linguistic border. The remaining campaign issues deal with policy domains such as governance, democracy, environment, energy, agriculture, urban planning and mobility.

In the Flemish provinces, seven lists were present in all electoral districts (Open VLD, N-VA, VB, CD&V, SP.A, Groen and PVDA). The moribund LDD did not participate in the elections. In seven districts (out of 35), SP.A and Groen formed an electoral alliance but, since this list was presented under the number of the SP.A and Groen did not manage to obtain one seat in 2006, we added the results of this list to the results of the SP.A for the whole province of Limburg. In the Walloon provinces, seven lists were present in all electoral districts (CDH, Ecolo, PS, MR, FDF, RWF and PTB+).<sup>7</sup> The results for the German-speaking parties have been added to the results of their French-speaking parties since they were officially bound by the use of the same electoral number, i.e. the list number of the ballot: the CSP with the CDH, the PFF-MR with the MR and the SP with the PS. Overall, the number of lists competing in each electoral district is slightly higher than in 2006: 1.1 additional list per district on average.

## **Election Results**

Since voting is compulsory, participation in provincial elections is high. On average, turnout is above 90%. However, there has been a strong decline in turnout since the previous provincial elections (–3.19%). This may be explained by the specific context that followed the political crises of 2007 and 2010–11. Dissatisfaction with the Belgian institutions consequently increased. Yet, and even if the Minister of Justice declared a few weeks before the elections that no one would be fined for not voting, turnout figures are in line with those of the previous regional (2009) and federal (2010) elections. On average, turnout is slightly higher in Flemish provinces—probably due to the presence on the lists of many federal and regional cabinet ministers and parliamentarians—and there are relatively important differences

across provinces. The highest turnout rate is to be found in the Flemish province of Limburg (93.34%) and the lowest in the Walloon province of Liège (86.02%) (Table 1).

Even if Belgium consists of two separate party systems, symmetry in the party ideological positions allows for analysis of the national trends based on party families. The election results at the national level for the main party families demonstrate the changes that have occurred since 2006. From a party system dominated by three main party families (Christian-democrats, socialists and liberals), Belgium now witnesses a system dominated by four party families with exactly the same share of the votes: the Christian-democrats (19.81%), the socialists (19.83%), the liberals (18.71%) and the regionalists (19.81%). The three mainstream party families lost the elections while the winner is clearly the regionalist party family. There are, of course, huge differences across provinces and across linguistic communities (see section below).

These election results may also indicate the elections to be ‘second-order’ even if turnout is not significantly different across elections. The second-order election model hypothesizes that—compared to first-order elections—(1) provincial turnout should be lower, (2) government parties should lose votes and (3) small, new and opposition parties should gain votes in provincial elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). Compared to the first-order elections, i.e. the federal and regional elections in the Belgian context, most of the governing parties<sup>8</sup> lost votes in the provincial elections.

### Flemish Provinces

Traditionally, election results in the Flemish provinces are rather homogeneous (Valcke *et al.*, 2007: 472). The same applies for the 2012 elections. Overall, a party

**Table 1.** Turnout (in %)

	Provincial elections			Regional elections	Federal elections
	2006	2012	Diff.	2009	2010
Antwerpen	93.06	90.10	-2.96	91.00	89.63
Limburg	95.96	93.34	-2.62	93.73	92.55
Oost-Vlaanderen	94.95	92.34	-2.61	92.24	91.31
Vlaams-Brabant	94.00	91.14	-2.86	91.22	90.25
West-Vlaanderen	94.70	92.02	-2.68	92.13	91.23
Brabant Wallon	92.55	89.54	-3.01	89.89	88.72
Hainaut	91.68	88.01	-3.67	88.69	87.61
Liège	91.07	86.02	-5.05	88.10	86.43
Luxembourg	94.73	91.44	-3.29	91.65	90.24
Namur	92.68	88.72	-3.96	89.55	88.29
Total	93.54	90.35	-3.19	90.91	89.74

Source: Flemish Ministry (<http://www.vlaanderenkiest.be/verkiezingen2012/index.html>) and Walloon Ministry (<http://elections2012.wallonie.be/results/fr/index.html>).

Note: The results of the federal elections for the province of the Vlaams-Brabant are the sum of the nine electoral cantons of Leuven and of the six Flemish electoral cantons of Brussel-Halle-Vilvoorde.

either wins or loses in all five provinces. The party that clearly lost the provincial elections is the VB. The Flemish extreme-right party obtained 8.94% in the Flemish provinces, that is, a loss of almost two-third of its votes compared to 2006 (–12.47%). These results confirm the declining trends observed at other levels: 19.07% in 2007 (federal elections), 15.25% in 2009 (regional elections) and 12.6% in 2010 (federal elections). Together with the disappearance of the extreme-right party FN in the Walloon provinces, this—temporarily—diminishes the danger of these anti-migrant and anti-system parties for the Belgian state.

The Flemish nationalist party N-VA is the clear winner of the provincial elections and became the largest Belgian party. It obtained 1 165 938 votes, confirming its performance in the 2010 federal elections (1 135 617 votes). The party represents 28.53% of the votes in the Flemish provinces; its results remain stable compared to those of 2010 (28%). This is by far the best result for a regionalist party in any Belgian election since the creation of the country. When comparing these results with media opinion polls that were released just before the elections (36.3% in *De Standaard* and 40.1% in *La Libre Belgique*), some analysts talked of a decline in the N-VA. Nevertheless, the Flemish nationalist party does not perform traditionally well in provincial (and municipal) elections, partly explaining why the party did not obtain as many votes as expected.

The N-VA managed to attract new voters, not only from the extreme-right party but also from the traditional parties (CD&V, SP.A and Open VLD). These three parties lost a significant amount of votes in all five Flemish provinces. Partly due to the end of its electoral alliance with the N-VA, the Christian-democrat CD&V lost many of its voters compared to previous provincial elections. Similarly, both centre-right (Open VLD) and centre-left (SP.A) parties underwent significant electoral defeats in all Flemish provinces. Yet, when analysing electoral trends since 2006, the CD&V and the Open VLD managed to ‘stop the bleeding’ after the electoral defeats in the regional (2009) and federal elections (2010). Groen was the only party not affected by the success of the N-VA and even managed marginally to gain additional votes (Table 2).

There are, however, differences across provinces due to some local specificities. In the province of Antwerpen, the electoral campaign was dominated by the municipal elections that took place on the same day in Flanders’ largest city, Antwerp. Similarly to the so-called ‘presidential’ campaign between Patrick Janssens (SP.A) and Filip Dewinter (VB) in 2006, the race between Janssens and Bart De Wever (N-VA) was extensively reported in the media. This provided an important electoral bonus for the N-VA, which obtained 35.89% of the votes, i.e. about 10% more than in other provinces. The SP.A did not enjoy such an electoral bonus and the VB was heavily defeated and lost almost two-thirds of its electorate in this province.

The province of Limburg represents the specificity of the electoral alliance between the SP.A and Groen (that did not obtain a seat in 2006). Even if this alliance gathered 20.1% of the votes in this province, this is far from being a fruitful strategy since this list gathered fewer votes than the total of both parties in the four other provinces. These results confirm the sociological transformation of the province that was once a stronghold for the socialist party due to its important industrial activities. In this province, as well in West-Vlaanderen, the CD&V managed to remain the largest party. Besides

**Table 2.** Results in the Flemish provinces (in %)

		2006	2012	Diff.
Antwerpen	N-VA	—	35.89	+35.89
	CD&V	26.50	16.81	-9.69
	SP.A	19.46	12.80	-6.66
	Open VLD	16.18	10.13	-6.05
	VB	28.47	10.85	-17.62
	Groen	7.83	9.26	+1.43
	Others	2.44	4.26	+1.82
Limburg	N-VA	—	26.09	+26.09
	CD&V	32.1	27.49	-4.61
	SP.A	25.5	20.10	-5.40
	Open VLD	18.3	14.13	-4.17
	VB	18.1	9.07	-9.03
	Groen*	4.6	—	-4.60
	Others	1.48	3.13	+1.65
Oost-Vlaanderen	N-VA	—	26.11	+26.11
	CD&V	27.3	19.78	-7.52
	SP.A	16.8	12.70	-4.10
	Open VLD	23.8	19.33	-4.47
	VB	21.0	9.29	-11.71
	Groen	9.1	9.04	-0.06
	Others	1.87	3.74	+1.87
Vlaams-Brabant	N-VA	—	25.77	+27.77
	CD&V	29.4	19.46	-9.94
	SP.A	16.2	12.06	-4.14
	Open VLD	19.2	16.77	-2.43
	VB	18.2	6.71	-11.49
	Groen	8.5	9.60	+1.10
	UF	7.9	7.11	-0.79
	Others	0.59	2.52	+1.93
West-Vlaanderen	N-VA	—	25.30	+25.30
	CD&V	37.6	27.58	-10.02
	SP.A	20.0	15.78	-4.22
	Open VLD	16.8	13.37	-3.43
	VB	17.5	7.71	-9.79
	Groen	6.8	7.47	+0.67
	Others	1.31	2.78	+1.47

Source: Flemish Ministry (<http://www.vlaanderenkiest.be/verkiezingen2012/index.html>).

Note: CD&V and N-VA formed an electoral alliance in 2006.

\*Groen in electoral alliance with the SP.A in 2012.

Antwerpen, the N-VA became the largest party in Oost-Vlaanderen and in Vlaams-Brabant.

The province of Vlaams-Brabant is the only Belgian province in which Dutch- and French-speaking parties compete for votes, rendering the linguistic cleavage particularly relevant. The important French-speaking minority, mainly located at the borders of the province with Brussels, is represented by a specific party (UF) that intends to defend the interests of this French-speaking population. This party obtained



7.1% of the votes in the province. Despite a favourable political climate, it is rather surprising that this list did not receive more votes. Indeed, the electoral campaign was dominated by the linguistic issues, including the strong position of the Flemish government regarding the French-speaking lists and candidates; the non-nomination (since 2006) of three French-speaking mayors in the municipalities of Kraainem, Linkebeek and Wezembeek-Oppeem; the much publicized demonstration of Flemish nationalists in Sint-Genesius-Rode; etc. The province was at the centre of national media attention since the state reform agreement contains a re-definition of the borders of the province's electoral district. This issue has been a cause of fierce disagreement between Flemish and French-speaking parties since the 1970s. Yet, the important presence of linguistic issues during the campaign did not produce a peculiar electoral result for the Flemish national party (N-VA).

### **Walloon Provinces**

Compared to 2006, electoral results in the Walloon provinces are more stable than in the Flemish ones. The arrival of a new competitor—the regionalist party FDF—did not produce the same effects as in the Flemish provinces. The electoral breakthrough of this party was rather limited and its best result is recorded in the province of Brabant Wallon (4.78%). With the exception of the province of Luxembourg, its former electoral partner in 2006—the liberal MR—did not lose votes and even managed to obtain additional votes in three provinces. The two other traditional parties—the Christian-democrat CDH and the socialist PS—lost some voters compared to previous elections, but to a much lesser extent than in the Flemish provinces. The green party Ecolo managed to win some votes. Yet, similarly to Flanders, the party that clearly lost the elections in the Walloon provinces is the extreme-right party, since the FN was not allowed to participate in the elections (see above).

If the results of the 2012 appear very similar to those in previous provincial elections, they basically hide most of the changes in vote shares that occurred in between the elections. All French-speaking parties underwent important losses and gains at the occasion of the federal (2007 and 2010) or regional elections. For example, the MR obtained 27.33% and 27.72% in 2006 and 2012, respectively, in the Walloon provinces, but in between the party's gains rose to 31.17% in 2007 and fell to 22.22% in 2010. The green party Ecolo obtained very stable results over the period (between 12.14% in 2006 and 13.17% in 2012) with the notable exception of the regional elections of 2009 where it scored 18.54%.

While provincial elections produce rather homogeneous outcomes in Flanders, election results for the Walloon provinces tend to diverge. The 2012 provincial elections demonstrate that Walloon provinces remain very different. Indeed, the PS is clearly the dominant party in the two provinces of Hainaut (39.68%) and Liège (32.94%) (Table 3). These highly populated provinces are characterized by a declining industrial sector and unemployment issues. The MR is the dominant party in the province of Brabant Wallon (42.44%), the wealthiest Walloon province and home-base for many Brussels workers. Both parties share the leadership of the province of Namur (29.79% for the MR and 27.82% for the PS). The CDH remains the dominant party in the rural province of Luxembourg (34.95%) even if the party lost a significant

**Table 3.** Results in the Walloon provinces (in %)

		2006	2012	
Brabant Wallon	PS	20.13	17.33	-2.80
	MR	41.54	42.44	+0.91
	Ecolo	15.05	16.29	+1.24
	CDH	16.04	12.26	-3.78
	FDF	—	4.78	+4.78
	FN	4.43	—	-4.43
	Others	2.89	7.4	+4.51
Hainaut	PS	36.94	39.68	+2.74
	MR	23.25	23.17	-0.08
	Ecolo	10.90	10.88	-0.02
	CDH	16.41	14.39	-2.02
	FDF	—	2.31	+2.31
	FN	6.83	—	-6.83
	Others	6.00	10.58	+4.58
Liège	PS	34.83	32.94	-1.89
	MR	26.17	26.90	+0.73
	Ecolo	12.86	14.76	+1.93
	CDH	17.18	15.48	-1.70
	FDF	—	1.72	+1.72
	FN	3.66	—	-3.66
	Others	10.85	8.94	-1.91
Luxembourg	PS	25.64	23.03	-2.61
	MR	28.92	26.06	-2.86
	Ecolo	9.93	11.58	+1.65
	CDH	34.70	34.95	+0.24
	FDF	—	1.89	+1.89
	FN	—	—	—
	Others	0.81	2.56	+1.75
Namur	PS	28.76	27.82	-0.94
	MR	28.12	29.79	+1.67
	Ecolo	14.42	13.97	-0.44
	CDH	23.08	19.87	-3.21
	FDF	—	2.46	+2.46
	FN	1.56	—	-1.56
	Others	4.23	6.49	+2.26

Source: Walloon Ministry (<http://elections2012.wallonie.be/results/fr/index.html>).

Note: MR and FDF formed an electoral alliance in 2006.

amount of votes in the four other provinces. Finally, the green party Ecolo obtained a rather homogeneous score in all five Walloon provinces and remains the fourth Walloon party in terms of size, with the exception of the province of Brabant Wallon, where it ranks third.

## Conclusion

The provincial elections in Belgium in 2012 provide a unique opportunity to measure the changes in vote shares that have occurred between the federal elections of 2010 and

the federal, regional and European elections of 2014. The results displayed a surprising but very balanced pattern at the national level: four party families (Christian-democrats, socialists, liberals and regionalists) obtained almost exactly the same amount of votes. This balance hides two important phenomena, however: first, one party family is clearly on the rise while the three others lost the elections; and, secondly, there are important differences between Flemish and Walloon provinces.

In the Walloon provinces, the party system has not evolved much since the previous provincial (2006), regional (2009) and federal (2010) elections. Two main parties dominate the political landscape (the socialists and the liberals), followed by two smaller parties (the Christian-democrats and the greens). The unique change comes from the quasi-disappearance of the extreme-right party and the modest emergence of the regionalist FDF in Wallonia. This overall stability has led to marginal changes in the composition of the coalitions of the provincial governments.

The observed changes at the national level originate almost entirely from the Flemish provinces, i.e. the largest provinces in terms of population. The three mainstream parties (Christian-democrats, socialists and liberals) that dominated the Flemish party system since its creation lost a significant amount of votes in all provinces. Furthermore, the extreme-right party suffered its largest defeat and lost more than a half of its electorate compared to previous provincial elections. The declining Flemish populist party (LDD) did not even participate in the elections.

The Flemish nationalists (N-VA) are clearly the winners of these provincial elections. The party obtained an average of 28.53% of the votes in the Flemish provinces which is much more than its best result ever recorded (16.21% in the provincial elections of 1971). Compared to previous regional and federal elections, the party also managed to increase its vote shares. Even if the N-VA nowadays stands in opposition at the federal level—yet in the majority at the regional level—this will not be without consequence for the next years, not to mention the fact that the party is negotiating with the other Flemish parties in order to enter provincial governments.

In response to the pressure applied by the successful Flemish nationalists since 2007, the six parties in the federal government (as well as the two green parties) negotiated in 2011 a state reform that will lead to more policy and financial autonomy for the regions and communities and, more globally, to an important reform of the federal institutions. Since this state reform will be implemented gradually, the issues of state reform and linguistic tension will remain high on the political agenda and will, consequently, favour the Flemish nationalists. If the trend observed in these provincial elections is to be combined with a linguistic agenda in the Belgian political arena, the federal, regional and European elections of 2014 will undoubtedly lead to another victory for the N-VA.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>These elections will theoretically all take place on the same day (8 June 2014).

<sup>2</sup>For the local elections the Imperiali system is used while the d'Hondt system is used for the provincial ones. In addition, non-Belgian residents have the right to vote for local elections only.

<sup>3</sup>In addition, the effects of the list vote (vs. the preferential vote) have been reduced to one-third in the Flemish provinces while it remains one-half in the Walloon provinces.

<sup>4</sup>Compared to the Walloon provinces where they are ineligible, most of the lists in the Flemish provinces contain federal and regional cabinet ministers and parliamentarians as, for example, the minister-president of Flanders Kris Peeters (CD&V) and the federal minister of employment Monica De Coninck (SP.A); in the province of Antwerp, the CD&V president Wouter Beke and the president of the Flemish parliament Jan Peumans (N-VA); in the province of Limburg, the federal vice-prime ministers Johan Vande Lanotte (SP.A) and Vincent Van Quickenborne (Open VLD); in the province of West-Vlaanderen, the Open VLD president Alexander De Croo; and the federal minister of defence Pieter De Crem (CD&V) in the province of Oost-Vlaanderen.

<sup>5</sup>As well as a Flemish extreme-right party (VB—*Vlaams Belang*).

<sup>6</sup>Marine Le Pen, leader of the French extreme-right party *Front National*, filed a complaint in order to forbid the use of her party's name or initials in Belgium. Since its creation in 1985, the Belgian extreme-right party largely copied the French model and used the same party name. As a result, the Liège's Court of Appeal confirmed in March 2012 that the Belgian extreme-right party could no longer use the name and initials of the *Front National* in any public activities, including elections.

<sup>7</sup>CDH, Ecolo, PS and MR have lists in all 34 Walloon electoral districts, while FDF is present in 33 districts, RWF in 32 districts and PTB+ in 31 districts.

<sup>8</sup>These parties are the PS, CD&V, MR, SP.A, Open VLD and CDH in the federal cabinet; the CD&V, SP.A and N-VA in the Flemish regional cabinet; and the PS, Ecolo and CDH in the Walloon regional cabinet.

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