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Atelier 4: Les élections sont-elles comparables ?

Candidate selection for European lists: finding its place between the selection of federal and regional candidates in Belgium

La sélection des candidats pour les listes européennes: trouver sa place entre la sélection pour les listes fédérales et les listes régionales en Belgique

Résumé

Le 25 mai 2014, les citoyens européens sont appelés à voter pour renouveler le Parlement européen. En Belgique, ce jour est appelé « la mère de toutes les élections », car toutes les assemblées législatives sont renouvelées simultanément. Les élections générales de 2014 en Belgique offrent l'opportunité d'étudier les élections parlementaires européennes dans un contexte de cooccurrence d'élections. Prenant pour point de départ l'hypothèse que les élections européennes sont dites « de second ordre », le papier teste empiriquement une définition hypothétique d'un processus de sélection des candidats « de second ordre ». Ce faisant, la recherche ambitionne de combler le vide dans la littérature entre les recherches sur la sélection des candidats et le modèle qualifiant certaines élections d'élections de « second ordre ». Onze partis politiques belges sont analysés grâce à une analyse comparative détaillée des statuts des partis, des entretiens avec des acteurs clef des partis ainsi qu'une analyse de la presse. A l'approche de cette triple élection, le papier saisit l'opportunité de la cooccurrence d'élections tant de premier que de second ordre pour lancer la réflexion sur la conceptualisation d'un processus de sélection de second ordre.

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Introduction

The European Parliament, as political institution, is not merely the sum of formal rules and legal regulations. The European Parliament entails also individuals, “*their abilities, skills and experiences*” (Norris in R. Katz & Wessels, 1999). If many scholars analyse these individuals once they have become the so-called MEPs, this paper proposes to look at what happens before their election to the Parliament, namely their selection as candidates. The uncontested major actors of candidate selection are the political parties. They indeed play a key role in the recruitment of future deputies, thanks to often momentous and painful political decisions (Muller and Strom 1999).

This paper attempts to take ‘candidate selection’ not as independent variable but well as dependent variable. Scholars have long studied how candidate selection could affect society and politics (Hazan and Rahat 2010). Here it goes about how candidate selection reflects it. Starting from the assumption that EP elections are ‘second-order’ elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980), I assume that these second-order *elections* could result from a second-order *selection* process. Political parties are said to devote less time, attention and energy to these elections than to first-order elections such as national parliamentary elections. I suppose therefore parties to be coherent and thus devote less attention to the selection of candidates for their EP list. I come up with a first attempt of definition of a second-order selection process. In comparison with a first-order process, it would be shorter, involve fewer levels of the party organisation, and fewer actors and individuals.

Drawing on multiple data sources, one of which being in-depth interviews with party officials, I analyse eleven political parties in Belgium and their candidate selection processes in the run-up to the ‘mother of all elections’ of May 2014. On this day, Belgian voters are called to renew assemblies at three levels of power: the national level, but also the regional level and of course the European level. This co-occurrence of elections provides the unique opportunity to comparatively analyse selection processes, without being biased by temporary differences.

I start with a review of the literature with the aim of portraying the features of second-order elections. Next, I present a state of play of the new regulations coming into force in Belgium at the occasion of the triple election of May 2014. The next sections attempts to reconceptualise the second-order model by adapting it to the already well-developed concepts related to candidate selection. The paper further tests the hypothetical definition of a second-order selection process on Belgian parties. The final part sheds light on how political parties have adapted their selection procedures and strategy to the co-occurrence of elections.

Theoretical framework

It has long been argued that candidate selection is a key function of political parties (Hazan and Rahat 2010; Katz 2001). Hence, scholars have underpinned the relevance of studying processes of candidate selection. In our modern democracies there are indeed few or even any deputies that have been elected without once passing through a political party. That is why these organisations are often called the gatekeepers to elected office (Bochel and Denver 1983; Norris and Lovenduski 1995). In addition, in very few countries the method parties use to select candidates is regulated by law. There are some exceptions such as New Zealand, the United States, Norway (until 2002), Finland and Germany (Rahat 2007). For instance, the German federal electoral law stipulates that candidates for the Bundestag have to be selected either by party ran-and-file members or by party delegates elected by party members (Deiss-helbig 2013). In Belgium, no law stipulates guidelines parties have to respect when drawing-up their electoral lists.

However, in many countries some rules apply to political parties so as to who is entitled to run and where they can run. Belgian candidates must have reached 18 years old (federal and regional elections) and 21 years (EP elections). They must be Belgian (federal and regional elections) or have the nationality of one EU country (EP elections). They must enjoy their civil and political rights. While these three features apply to each candidate individually, another rule concern the list as a whole. Since 2002, there is in Belgium a legal obligation of strict parity of sexes on lists (half men, half women). Moreover, there must be a gender alternation on the first two spots on the list (i.e. if a man heads the list, a female candidate has to be second, and *vice versa*)¹. Legal rules impinge on who can run for office but also on where candidates can run. Since 2014, new electoral rules provide that dual candidacy is forbidden² and that the accumulation of local and parliamentary offices is limited for candidates to the Walloon Parliament³ (Dodeigne and Vandeleene 2013). Apart from these rules applying to candidates' characteristics, Belgian parties remain free on the manner they choose who is going to stand for election in their name.

The nearly absolute freedom given to political parties to decide on how they choose individuals that are going to run for office under their label holds true for EP elections as well. Yet, scholars often differently consider elections at the European level, and so do citizens. Since their introduction, EP elections have been labelled 'second-order elections' (Reif and Schmitt 1980), as opposed to 'first-order elections'. In parliamentary systems such as Belgium, the national parliamentary elections are the first-order elections (so are the regional elections as well⁴). Accordingly, elections to any other level of power are pushed into the background. This applies in particular to sub-national elections, i.e. local elections (in Belgium, municipal and provincial elections), but also on the other extreme of the spectrum, to supra-national elections, i.e. EP elections (Schmitt 2005).

¹ For more details, see Meier (2012)

² No dual candidacy means that candidates cannot be at the same time on the effective and on the substitute candidates' lists and that they cannot run for different levels of elections if the elections occur on the same day. Further developments in Dodeigne and Vandeleene (2013)

³ New regulation forbids three quarters of each political group to combine the mandate of Walloon deputy with an executive mandate at the local level. Who can hold both mandates concurrently is calculated according to preference votes. See Dodeigne and Vandeleene (2013)

⁴ Regional elections in Belgium can be considered as first-order because the same parties compete on the same territory as for the federal elections.

The reasons why European elections are second-order while national elections would be first-order are manifold. The main reason is that first-order elections are perceived to be more important (Schmitt 2005). In second-order elections, there is 'less at stake' (Reif and Schmitt 1980). All actors involved in the electoral activities seem to devote less attention to these elections, especially voters but also political parties. Considering EP elections, Hermann Schmitt (2005) presents some rationales behind this denomination as second-order. According to him, the role of the European Parliament in the daily life of European citizens is largely under-estimated. This justification is even more tangible now that the EP has gained power. Beyond the fact the European voters do not properly estimate the influence the EP holds, he adds that they cannot anyway link decisions made at the European level with the mere candidates' lists they face in the polling booth. This could result from a lack of communication in that respect. Further, citizens do not understand the power relations in the European political sphere since there is no classical majority-opposition antagonism. Next, the proportional nature of the electoral system combined to the fact that no government formation results from the election outcome (and that the agenda-setting power is allocated on a very proportional basis) makes that the elections could change the median position of MEPs only slightly to the left or to the right (Hix and Hagemann 2009). Moreover, Schmitt observes that two out of the three main bodies are 'non-partisan' (the Council and the Commission) whereas the Parliament is of course partisan, what creates confusion. Finally, political parties (and the media) at the national level tend to come up with national considerations in place of European topics during the campaign for EP elections. These are rather determined by domestic political cleavages (Reif and Schmitt 1980). European citizens "*rather express their opinions on national parties, national politicians, and national policy issues*" (Hix and Hagemann 2009). For these reasons and some more, EP elections receive less attention from European voters.

Nevertheless, when in the early eighties Reif and Schmitt (1980) labelled EP elections 'second-order', these supra-national elections were new in the European political landscape. More than thirty years later, we could review our judgment and assess that EP elections have gained importance, because "*there is still something at stake*" (Reif and Schmitt 1980). The European Union has grown dramatically, both in terms of number of Member States than in terms of policy domains covered at this level (Schmitt 2005). It seems however that European elections are still called second-order despite these positive evolutions, given the recent literature still arguing in this direction (Costa, 2008; Hix and Marsh 2008; Hix and Hagemann 2009; Petithomme 2012).

The implications of the second-order labelling are numerous. The most prevailing consequence of this backbench position is the lower mobilisation of voters around these elections. Abstentions' rates are traditionally higher than in first-order elections, what leads some scholars to call EP elections 'elections without electors' (Petithomme 2012). In addition, voters that actually cast ballots tend to vote differently than in first-order elections. In short, party governments score lower and smaller parties score higher. This comes from the fact that voters would vote with their heart instead of their head (Schmitt 2005). Moreover, one could add that larger parties tend to give less importance to second-order elections because these do not enter into consideration in the calculations linked to a government formation (Hix and Hagemann 2009). Electoral scores at European elections do not really count in the balance of power between national parties.

As a result, the campaigns for second-order elections have the tendency to be softer and less intense. Petithomme (2012) adds that European campaigns are more objectified and even depoliticised in opposition to first-order elections that are controversial and adversarial. A tangible proof of this assertion is the declining amount of money political parties spend for European campaigns compared to the stable expenditures for first-order elections (Petithomme 2012). Parties' behaviour regarding their financial choices clearly reflects low interest in campaigning (Garrigou 2009, cited in Petithomme, 2012). These considerations holds primarily true for mainstream parties.

EP elections' peculiarities also reside in candidates' characteristics. It appears that a specific profile is more likely to be found among candidates at the European level. Gherghina and Chiru (2010) argue that political parties would prefer to select incumbents over new aspirants. Incumbents would be better at networking – a crucial role in MEP activity – because they already know other members of the parliamentary groups. Overall, the European mandate would be rather for senior politicians, like a last stage before retirement (Verzichelli and Edinger, 2005). Candidates however are faced with a dilemma because deciding to candidate at the European level means leaving domestic politics. In turn, this leads candidates to loose a priority position within their party (Gherghina and Chiru 2010). In addition, some scholars assert that EP elections are less attractive for candidates because there is 'less at stake' (Chiva 2012; Vallance and Davies, 1986). Accordingly, female candidates would stand a better chance of getting elected in these second-order elections than in first-order elections. Where there is no power, there are women, as Freedman (2002) pointed. Chiva (2012) observes that this pattern of *"political parties being more inclined to recruit women to their EP delegations rather than to national legislatures"* is consistent since the first direct elections of the European Parliament. In conclusion, the profile of MEPs sketched in the literature is nuanced. We would find candidates accustomed to the European sphere, having agreed to leave their domestic sphere (rather at the end of their career). In addition, high profile candidates (among which more men) would prefer to candidate at first-order elections, letting second-order elections to lower profile candidates.

All in all, the literature suggests a weak commitment of political actors to EP elections. *"Political elites are less inclined to invest extensive resources in national second-order elections"* (Reif and Schmitt 1980). Petithomme (2012) stresses that political parties allocate limited energy to these elections *"not so much to win, but, rather, to not lose the elections"*. He insists on the lack of interest given by scholars to parties' behaviour's role in the backbench position of EP elections. Political parties play a crucial role by attributing lesser significance to EP elections. Next to political parties, Reif and Schmitt (1980) place also the responsibility on party activists and political journalists.

The consequences of this backbench situation on candidate selection have, to the best of my knowledge, not been studied thoroughly. Gherghina and Chiru (2010) merely observe that *"the second-order attribute of the European elections provides political parties with the opportunity to experiment"*. Political parties would test things at the European level in order to later implement them at other levels, if they prove successful. Applied to candidate selection processes, we would expect political parties to use different methods for the selection of European candidates than for 'first-order' candidates. Given the fact that political parties' activities regarding EP elections are said to be less labour-intensive, the global hypothesis tested in this paper is that candidate selection processes for European lists would be different from processes for other lists, and that this difference would come out in less

intensity. The proper research question and hypotheses are detailed in a next section. But, first, the Belgian case is situated in its context.

New rules in Belgium

Belgium is an appropriate case for a comparative research on European and national elections. Interestingly, 2014 elections are especially relevant to study since both types of elections occur on the same day. On 25 May 2014 three levels of power are simultaneously elected. Voters are called to renew the Belgian delegation to the European Parliament, but also the Belgian Chamber of Representatives (i.e. the federal level) and the regional assemblies (the Flemish Parliament, the Parliament of the Brussels Capital Region, the Walloon Parliament and the Parliament of the German-speaking Community). Belgian voters had previously to elect another assembly (the Senate) but this one is not directly elected anymore as a consequence of the sixth State reform that thoroughly transformed the second Chamber of the Belgian Parliament (Dodeigne and Vandeleene 2013). Accordingly, from 2014 onwards, Belgian voters elect at the national level only the deputies for the Chamber of representatives.

In addition, Belgium constitutes also a relevant case to study candidate selection mechanisms in particular, since political parties still hold a prominent power in the determination of the future deputies. The Belgian system is PR-list system, with semi-open lists (ordered system). This means that parties present candidates' lists on which voters can cast ballots. Voters are offered the possibility of choosing between voting for the entire list (what means that they fully agree on the list order decided by the party – and here the party power to determine who is going to seat is huge) and voting for one or more candidate(s) on the list (here voters give some candidates more chance to get elected than others – but few candidates usually manage to bypass candidates placed higher on the list (Vandeleene et al. 2013)). Political parties in Belgium remain thus powerful actors through choosing who gets a safe place on the list.

The changes brought by the sixth State reform also impact on the relevance of the Belgian case for this research. The reform provides that candidates for European elections are the only “community-wide” candidates⁵. Until the 2014 elections, Belgian voters could vote for community-wide candidates at the occasion of both European elections and Senatorial elections. In Belgium the denomination of community-wide candidates refers to candidates standing on a list presented to all citizens from one language community (Dutch-speaking, French-speaking, German-speaking). From 2014 onwards, the only level of power where parties present a unique list is the European level. For the other levels, each party has the possibility to present one list per constituency. For Flemish parties, this means that they present six lists at the federal level and seven lists at the regional level⁶. Francophone parties present also six lists at the federal level but fourteen lists at the regional level because the

⁵ There are no nation-wide candidades anymore in Belgium since national political parties have split apart in the late sixties and seventies (Dandoy & De Decker 2009). There are now Flemish parties competing in Flanders (including Brussels) and francophone parties competing in Wallonia and Brussels. There are also German-speaking parties competing in the German-speaking Community.

⁶ The Dutch-speaking inhabitants of Brussels can vote for Flemish representatives in the Brussels capital Region Parliament but also for representatives in the Flemish Community Parliament. There are thus two lists at the regional level for these citizens.

constituencies' size differ in Wallonia between federal and regional elections, and this does not hold true in Flanders.

Changes in the Belgian electoral design bring two elements making 2014 elections the first of their type. First, since all elections are held on the same day, political parties have to select their candidates for all fourteen/twenty-one lists at around the same period. Second, the suppression of the direct election of Senators results in a situation where the European lists are the only 'community-wide' lists. The combination of these two elements makes thus the 2014 elections in Belgium a fruitful case for comparative research on the singularity of the candidate selection process for European lists compared to the selection for national lists. Furthermore Belgium would be a least likely case for the second-order thesis because of the similarities between federal and regional elections' features and traditional EP elections' features making them second-order. There is indeed no final result of Belgian elections since there are no national party. In addition, the system is a consensus system where there is no clear majority-opposition cleavage. If the second-order thesis for candidate selection were to be confirmed in Belgium, this could apply to many other cases.

Candidate selection processes in comparative perspective

Research question and hypotheses

European elections are said to be second-order *elections*. By analogy, the selection of candidates for these elections could be categorised as second-order *selection*. Candidates for European lists would be selected in a different way than their federal and regional counterparts. Hence I raise the following questions. *How could a second-order selection process be defined? Could selection methods for EP lists be labelled second-order?* No literature has been found that defines a second-order selection process. Actually, selection methods are rarely classified or assessed according to any criteria, apart from the democratic character of the process (Cross 2008; Rahat 2007). Accordingly, I face the obligation of featuring myself a hypothetical definition of such process. So, how to find out which characteristics apply to a second-order candidate selection process? The Belgian case provides an easy solution to this question. The definition will be tested on Belgian parties, which face in 2014 both first-order and second-order elections.

Given the reasons explained in the theoretical part of this paper, mainly that there is 'less at stake' in a second-order process, I expect parties first to select their candidates differently for EP lists than for other lists, because they would like to test methods or people at this level. Second, I expect them to devote less time, attention and energy to EP list-making process than to the other processes. I therefore hypothesise that political parties treat the selection of candidates for the European list with a second-order attention compared to candidate selection for federal and regional lists.

Three axes of comparison are traditionally used to compare candidate selection processes (Hazan and Rahat 2010; Rahat and Hazan 2001). One is related to the process itself (differences in terms of complexity) while the others two refer to the level of centralisation and the level of inclusiveness of the so-called selectorate, i.e. the body that selects candidates. Based on these three axes, the following paragraphs aim to sketch the features of a second-order selection process, the hypotheses being always worded in relative terms between European selection process and the other processes (i.e. the federal and the regional ones).

The first hypothesis derives from an analysis of the degree of complexity of the process of candidate selection. The complexity of the procedure entails two different dimensions: the process is complex because multistage and/or is complex because assorted (Hazan and Rahat 2010)⁷. First, I will examine the number of stages the process counts. A second-order selection process would count fewer stages than its first-order equivalent, because the party would devote less time to the selection of these candidates. Second, a complex selection process differentiates among several types of candidates. That means that some candidates come up from a selection process different from other candidates' process. For instance, the head of list is selected according to another procedure than the rest of the list. This can hold true for eligible candidates versus others or for non-partisan versus partisan candidates. Again a second-order selection process would not apply different methods for different candidates. This leads to the first hypothesis: *The candidate selection process for European lists is less complex than the other selection processes, i.e. it counts fewer stages and differentiates less among candidates regarding the selection method.*

Next to the characteristics of the process, candidate selection procedures may also vary according to features of the selectorates. First, the degree of centrality refers to the extent to which the process is managed either at the party level or at a more decentralised level. If the parties were to devote less energy to the process, fewer levels in the internal organisation of the party would be involved. A second-order list would be managed exclusively at one level while first-order lists would be managed at several levels (e.g. the party level and one or more decentralised levels). However, one could argue that if only one level (the national level) decides on the list, this could mean that the national party attaches special importance to this list. Regarding this hypothesis however, the party is considered as a whole through the study of the extent to which the different levels of the party internal organisation are involved in the drawing-up of electoral lists. This enables me to formulate the second hypothesis: *The selectorates for European lists include fewer levels of power of the party internal organisation than the other selectorates, i.e. the European list is managed exclusively at one level (the party level) on the contrary of federal and regional lists whose lists also include decentralised levels.*

The third hypothesis deals with the level of inclusiveness of the selectorates. The total amount of people involved in the process may well impact on the categorisation of a process as second-order or first-order. First, different types of persons could participate in the selection of candidates. I categorize them in four groups: leaders, delegates from the decentralised level, delegates from party sections and party members. A second-order selectorate would be composed by fewer categories of party actors, conveying the less intense engagement from party actors in this selection process. Further, beyond the types of actors involved, the mere amount of selectors may count in the definition of a second-order selection process. The more individuals included, the more prominent the selection process in the party life. All in all, the third hypothesis states the following: *The selectorates for European lists are less inclusive than the other selectorates, i.e. the body is composed by fewer categories of party actors and by fewer individuals.*

⁷ Rahat and Hazan (2010) also foresee a third feature of a complex process: the weighted method. This method merely weights the different selectorates' choices among the same pool of aspirants. This possibility does not exist in Belgium. That is the reason why this is not included in the analysis.

Methodology

The paper focuses on eleven political parties in Belgium. All have at least one representative in the federal and regional Parliaments before the elections and present full lists at the triple elections of 2014. There are five Francophone parties and five Flemish parties, each fitting in one of the following party families: the greens (Ecolo, Groen), the socialists (PS, sp.a), the Christian-democrats (cdH, CD&V), the liberals (MR, Open VLD), and the nationalists (FDF, N-VA). In addition, one party does not have an ideological counterpart in the francophone side of Belgium: the Flemish extreme-right party (Vlaams Belang).

As already suggested by Norris and Carty (1990), an adequate understanding of the process of candidate selection passes through a broad range of inter-related research methods. This comparative analysis is indeed based on multiple sources of data, in order to go beyond the mere formal processes foreseen in party statutes. First, the analyses started by a comprehensive study of party documents. Party statutes constitute the main source used to discover how parties formally select their candidates for the elections. Next to central official documents, additional sources have been consulted such as party internal documents containing rules specifically related to the process of list formation. Other less formal documents have been used in order to contextualise and to exemplify some points of the procedures (e.g. posts on parties' pages on social media, parties' websites and parties' newsletters).

Second, the analysis of party statutes and documents is substantiated by interviews with key party figures. Acquiring a comprehensive idea of a candidate selection process without asking the key actors themselves is not conceivable. But one must keep in mind that candidate selection is a sensitive topic parties are often reluctant to talk about, because this notoriously secretive process is "*regarded as a sensitive intra-party matter*" (Matthews 2012), often called the 'secret garden of politics' (Gallagher and Marsh 1988) or party internal kitchen whose odours do not have to spread to the outside world (Duverger, 1959). Accordingly, semi-structured interviews have been cautiously conducted with the political secretary of each party (sometimes called general director or national secretary)⁸. This person is the party's head inside the party, next to the party president, the political head. Most of the time, the political secretary is responsible for the management of the party internal organisation, its remit going from a.o. contacts with all party entities, human resources management, communication management, definition of party strategy. But above all, the political secretary is in charge of the coordination of the candidate selection process to a greater or a lesser extent, depending on parties. In two parties, another person has been interviewed, as a complement of the first one. Interviews are used to supplement the formal information gathered in party documents, in order to grasp the crucial informal side of the selection process (Cheng and Tavits 2011).

Third, printed media provide additional information on the processes. Newspaper articles have been consulted with caution because of the relative degree of uncertainty related to this kind of information. But still, this type of source offers valid information about, for instance, the timing of lists' disclosure.

⁸ In total, 13 interviews have been conducted, between October 2013 and March 2014. All but one were recorded and taped. They lasted on average one hour.

Analysis

This analysis starts from the assumption that European elections are second-order *elections*. Hence, there should be before these second-order elections a second-order *selection*. An earlier section of this paper has attempted to sketch the main features of what would be a second-order selection process. This process would be (1) less complex, (2) more centralised and (3) less inclusive than a first-order process. The next sections draw on the hypothetical aforementioned definition of a second-order candidate selection process and test whether candidate selection processes in Belgian political parties in the run-up to the general elections of May 2014 fit with this categorisation as second-order.

A less complex process?

The most simple candidate selection process involves one selectorate meeting once in order to select all candidates for the party list. However it is seldom the case in practice. Empirically the selection of candidates entails several steps, not always identical from one type of candidate to the other, and often realised through the intervention of multiple selectorates. This section focuses on the process in itself and answers the following question. Are European candidates selected differently than federal and regional candidates? If so, does it go in the expected direction, i.e. less complex processes for the European lists? The next paragraphs study in turn differences in terms of number of steps and in terms of assorted methods depending on candidates' types.

Table 1: Complexity: Length of candidate selection processes

	European list	Federal and regional lists	<i>Fewer stages?</i>
Ecolo	3	4	<i>-1</i>
Groen	4	4	<i>0</i>
PS	3	3	<i>0</i>
sp.a	2	4	<i>-2</i>
cdH	3	3	<i>0</i>
CD&V	7	9	<i>-2</i>
MR	3	3	<i>0</i>
VLD	4	4	<i>0</i>
FDF	4	3	<i>+1</i>
N-VA	3	6	<i>-3</i>
VB	5	7	<i>-2</i>

In Belgium no candidate selection process counts a unique step. All lists result from a process where the pool of aspirants (i.e. those that candidate to become a candidate) is being reduced to form the pool of candidates. Table 1 shows the number of steps in each party, for the European list and for the federal and regional lists (the number of steps is in all parties identical for these two types of lists). What has been considered as a step is a formal moment when a body holds the possibility to change the on-going list of candidates regardless whether the body indeed changes something to the list or of it was merely a formal approval of a decision already taken. Informal contacts between party actors have been counted as a step when information gathered during interviews (sometimes corroborated by press articles) provides that these have brought actual changes to the list of candidates without the legitimacy of the decision being contradicted by another party body or actor.

What can first be observed from table 1 is the great heterogeneity among the respective lengths of processes in each party. The sp.a selects its European candidates in two steps and, on the opposite, the CD&V selects its federal and regional candidates in not less than nine steps. Most parties however use a three- or four-steps format.

If EP lists' selection were a second-order selection, it would be expected a shorter process to select European candidates than other candidates. What emerges from the study of Belgian political parties' selection processes is that the European process is indeed shorter than the federal and regional process in half of the parties and equal in the other half. At Ecolo the difference lies in the absence for the EP list of a body operating a pre-selection of candidates for the strategic places. The candidates on those places are directly selected at the occasion of a general members assembly whereas for federal and regional lists a committee makes a short list of candidates for strategic places before rank-and-file members have the opportunity to approve the list. There is a two-steps difference in the processes for the sp.a: for the 'national' processes, a list committee prepares the work of the provincial board, before that the list goes to the party board and then a congress of delegates. The last two steps only are part of the European list formation process. The cdH formally provides that a local committee may complete the federal and regional lists if they were not full at the moment of the members' vote. This possibility is not foreseen for the EP list. Regarding the CD&V, the difference in length of both processes results from a greater coordination (so-called ping-pong list formation) of several bodies for federal and regional lists than for the European list. At the N-VA, a provincial committee intervenes in the process for the federal and regional lists, what leads to an increased number of steps. The VB also selects its European candidates thanks to a shorter process than the other candidates. The two-steps difference comes from the absence of a separate selection of candidates for eligible places. After having decided on the head of list, the list is directly completed with all other candidates. In short, the process of list drawing up entails fewer steps for the European list in six parties out of eleven.

Yet for three parties, all processes look alike in terms of length. The process is identical for all Groen lists, with the difference lying in the level of the bodies (either national or provincial). It is the same situation regarding the MR and Open VLD processes. The procedures for the PS lists count in practice the same number of steps but differ in the party statutes because no detail is given about how federal and regional lists should be drawn up. The one-step difference at FDF lies in the special intervention of the party top in the search of the head of list. In sum, only one party applies a longer selection procedure for the European list than for federal and regional lists, but not all parties know a shorter process. The first part of the hypothesis related to complexity is not completely confirmed.

Beyond the number of steps a selection process can count, the processes can also be more or less complex as far as the procedures for different types of candidates are concerned. In the literature the Belgian case is often used to exemplify a country where many parties use an assorted method of candidate selection (Hazan and Rahat 2010). Still in 2014, there is indeed a good deal of Belgian parties that have used assorted methods to select their candidates. That means in concrete terms that some candidates are selected differently than others, be it by other selectorates and/or at different moments. Three types of candidates benefitting from a differentiated process in some Belgian parties have been identified. The head of list is a prominent figure in the campaign and for most parties a safe seat (i.e. the selected candidate is certain to seat in the Parliament). Next to the first on the list, some parties select the candidates for eligible places differently from the rest of the list. These spots refer in most

parties to the number of seats obtained at the last elections eventually adapted according to recent polls. The last type of candidates facing another process than the rest of the list is the non-member, the non-partisan candidate. These candidates do not hold the party card, and are most of the time well known to the large public for another reason than political.

Table 2: Complexity: Assorted candidate selection processes

	European list			Federal and regional lists			<i>Less assorted process?</i>
	Head	Elig.	Non-mbs	Head	Elig.	Non-mbs	
Ecolo	0	X*	X	0	X*	X	0
Groen	0	X	X	0	X	X	0
PS	0	0	0	X	0	0	-1
sp.a	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
cdH	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
CD&V	X	X	0	X	X	0	0
MR	X	0	0	X	0	0	0
VLD	X	0	0	X	0	0	0
FDF	X	0	0	0	0	0	+1
N-VA	0	X*	0	0	X*	0	0
VB	X	0	0	X	X	0	-1

A second-order process of candidate selection would be less complex than a first-order process. Concretely it would provide fewer differences for particular types of candidates. It must be noted that it is not the case in most parties, as reflected by table 2. In Belgium in 2014, when a party applies an assorted process of selection, it does so for all levels of elections and certainly not more for the federal and regional ones. Only two parties out of eleven fit the expected pattern: the PS and the VB. Regarding the socialist party, some heads of list for federal and regional lists have been clearly selected long before the other candidates (by a wise committee in cooperation with the party top), what does not hold true for the head of the European list. The VB adopts a less complex process for the European list in that only the head of list is selected separately, whereas for the federal and regional lists the head of list is first selected, then candidates for other eligible places are selected and finally decisions about the rest of the list are made. The FDF on the contrary selects the head of the European list particularly on a different manner than other candidates. Party members approve the whole list, at the exception of the first name – that remains in the remit of the party top figures (later validated by the party board). The FDF is the only party fitting in the expected pattern; the second part of the first hypothesis is therefore not confirmed.

A vast majority of parties do not differ across lists in that respect. Yet it is interesting to analyse which candidates have to pass through an assorted process. The head of list in particular is selected for all lists along another procedure than his/her fellow candidates in the three following parties: CD&V, MR and Open VLD. The Christian-democrats choose their heads of lists at a congress of delegates. The party president with the electoral commission (provincial presidents) chooses the MR's heads of list. Once selected, the head of list joins the electoral commission to select her fellow candidates. The heads of list of the other liberal party (Open VLD) also join the selectorate (the so-called model list working group) after having been selected by the party board for the European first candidate, and the provincial

board for the other heads of list. Besides, as already explained, the PS and FDF know assorted method for some heads of list, but not all.

Four parties apply an assorted procedure for the safe and resting places. It should be noted that in two of them (Ecolo and N-VA), they consider these places more broadly than merely the eligible places. Ecolo names them the strategic places (more eligible than others and/or more visible in the campaign, e.g. the last candidate) and the N-VA names them the protected places (mainly eligible places, in practice). Ecolo applies nearly the same procedure twice: a committee (or board) makes a proposition of candidates that has to be approved by rank-and-file members. As developed hereinabove, the double process is not used for the European list since no committee preselects the candidates for strategic places. Groen also uses a similar procedure for candidates for eligible places and for the rest of the list. The difference lies in the body that approves the final list. For the strategic places, party members have a say whereas for the other candidates the selecting body is less inclusive (i.e. party board). The CD&V, next to selecting the heads of list differently, chooses also the candidates for eligible places according to other rules than the rest of the list. Concretely, a committee preselects the eligible candidates and this short list has to be approved by rank-and-file members (alongside other party bodies). The party board or the provincial board completes the lists after the members' intervention. Finally, the top candidates for the N-VA European list pass through a similar process than the other candidates, but earlier. There is here a difference for the federal and regional candidates, for protected places. The names for eligible candidates are proposed by a national body and approved by a provincial body (and finally approved by a congress of delegates) while the names for the resting places are proposed by the provincial level and approved by the national level. The allocation of responsibilities thus differs.

Only two parties provide other procedures for non-members. Ecolo and Groen, the two green parties, ask non-partisan candidates to pass through an additional step compared to the other candidates. Non-members that wish to stand on an Ecolo list should be accepted by the general assembly of all members (a specific vote on their candidacy is organised before the vote on the list). Furthermore campaign boards must audition these candidates – while for party members auditions are not compulsory. At Groen, the national committee has to motivate the inclusion of a non-partisan candidate and the party board must approve the candidacy. This does not mean that other parties do not select non-partisan candidates. The 2014 Belgian lists actually comprise several non-partisan candidates. In most cases, these candidates become party members either before the election or at last before taking an oath, if elected. As Rahat and Hazan (2010) point out, at times, parties could however ignore their own candidacy regulations, largely due to electoral considerations.

After having tested how different processes are in terms of complexity, it can be concluded that selection procedures are more frequently different in terms of length than regarding the assorted methods. Accordingly, we may start the definition of a second-order candidate selection process by saying that this may well be shorter than a first-order process (six parties fit the pattern, three are neutral), but that the assorted factor should be left aside from the analysis (only one party fits the pattern). The next section adds to the definition by analysing the degree of centralisation of the process.

A more centralised process?

The centrality of the selection process refers to the degree to which the national level of the party decides on everything or whether the decentralised levels could have a say (and to what

extent). I expect a second-order selection to involve fewer levels of the party internal organisation, because less energy would be devoted to such process.

For some, it is perhaps obvious to expect European lists to be managed at the party level. Belgian parties can submit only one list for these elections, since the constituency size equals the size of the linguistic communities' territories, with the exception of the German-speaking community as already explained. One could however imagine a decentralised process where each province would have the right to present one/several candidate(s) for pre-determined spots on the list. This situation occurs in Romania where there is a proposal by the county branches (decentralised level) later approved and ordered by the national executive, as explained by Gherghina and Chiru (2010).

Nevertheless, in Belgium no party works this way. All candidates for European lists are selected at the party level, without the intervention of a provincial party body. Moreover, in all parties but one (FDF), the provincial level intervenes in the selection process of federal and regional candidates. In addition, all Belgian parties (again with one exception – the Open VLD in this case) provide in their procedure a national intervention in the selection process for federal and regional lists. We face thus here a nearly perfect symmetry between all parties: European list are only managed at the party level, and both the national and the provincial level manage federal and regional lists. The second hypothesis is therefore confirmed. A second-order selection process may well entail fewer levels of the party internal organisation than first-order processes.

It is worth to notice that a national selectorate does not mean that the decentralised level is not represented. This means that the body is situated at the highest level in the party structure. The next section goes precisely into further detail in the composition of selectorates, among which delegates from the decentralised level.

A less inclusive selectorate?

Candidate selection is crucial to the life of a party for multiple reasons among which that it involves many party actors, deciding together on the future faces called to personify the party image towards the large public. The selectorate may be more or less comprehensive depending on parties. This section portrays who are the selectors along two lines of analysis: what type of actors selects the candidates and how many they are. I expect parties to involve fewer actors' types and individuals in the preparation of the EP list.

There are mainly three types of actors involved in the processes of candidate selection in Belgium: leaders, delegates and rank-and-file members. In some parties even voters or party sympathisers could cast ballots (via the so-called party primaries. For a comprehensive description of the range of possibilities, see Rahat and Hazan (2010, 39–41)), but this is not to find in Belgium. Three types of actors remain. First, leaders are actors elected or appointed in a body at the party level without having been delegated by another party body. *In concreto* this means the party presidency and other national party leaders (chairmen of parliamentary party, political secretary, director of the party study centre, ministers, etc.). Delegates are actors appointed or delegated by a party body in order to represent it in another party body. I distinguish between delegates from the decentralised level and delegates from party sections. Delegates from the decentralised level are most of the time party actors representing the provincial level of the party (provincial presidency but also mere rank-and-file members appointed for that reason). In some parties there are also delegates from the arrondissement level (smaller than the provinces). Next to these delegates, there are also delegates from party

sections (women's sections and youth sections, but seniors' sections as well). Finally, party members are rank-and-file members, called in to cast ballots, be it in Belgium via the party magazine, the party website or a personal letter.

The European processes, compared to federal-regional processes, should entail fewer types of party actors, if European lists result from second-order selection processes. According to this first criterion, no difference appears. Table 3 shows that parties involve various kinds of actors in the processes but in all but three parties, these are exactly the same for both processes. For two parties, members are either called to vote for the European list or for the other lists. The PS calls on members to vote on the lists in several constituencies but there is no members' vote organised for the European list. On the contrary, sp.a's members are called to vote on the European list, not on the other lists. The Open VLD differs also as far as actors' types are concerned. Party leaders intervene for the European list (through the party board), but, and this is the only party for whose it is the case as already mentioned, has no formal say in the federal and regional lists. Of course party leaders are involved when they personally hold a function at provincial level or are themselves candidates, but it is then not in their party leader's capacity. However the Open VLD does not provide an approval by the party board on the lists presented at the provincial level.

What emerges from the study of selection processes for the European lists is that the party leadership intervenes in all parties, but as a member of various party bodies. In a vast majority of parties, the so-called party boards play a role. Their size is extremely variable: it ranges from just under ten people to nearly two hundred people. Half of the parties have created a committee especially charged with candidate selection. In five parties, the party president(s) officially intercedes in the process of candidate selection (be it stipulated in the party statutes or openly mentioned by interviewed party figures).

Table 3: Inclusiveness: Selectorates' types

	European list				Federal and regional lists				Fewer actors' types?
	Lead	Decent	Sect	Mbs	Lead	Decent	Sect	Mbs	
Ecolo	X	X	0	X	X	X	0	X	0
Groen	X	X	0	X	X	X	0	X	0
PS	X	X	0	0	X	X	0	X	-1
sp.a	X	X	0	(X)	X	X	0	0	+1
cdH	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	(X)	0
CD&V	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	0
MR	X	X	0	0	X	X	0	0	0
VLD	X	0	0	X	0	X	0	X	+1
FDF	X	X	X	0	X	X	X	0	0
N-VA	X	X	X	0	X	X	X	0	0
VB	X	X	X	0	X	X	X	0	0

Note: Crosses are in brackets when rank-and-file members' participation to the process has to be nuanced.

Even though the European list concerns the party at the national level, in all but one party (Open VLD), delegates from the decentralised level are present in the selectorate. For eight parties (PS, cdH, FDF, Ecolo, sp.a, CD&V, N-VA and VB) the holding of a party congress or council reflects their presence in the process. It is worth to notice that in seven out of the eight parties this party actor is the last in the decision chain (taking into account that procedures are

foreseen if the council does not approve the list). In four parties however, the delegates from the decentralised level are part of a committee dedicated to candidate selection (Ecolo, Groen, MR, N-VA). Again in four parties (cdH, CD&V, FDF, Groen), these delegates seat in the party board. In six parties (Ecolo, Groen, N-VA, FDF, cdH, CD&V), these actors are member of two party bodies. In other words, delegates from the decentralised level intervene at least two times in half of the parties. Next to delegates from the decentralised level, some parties also involve delegates from party sections. Three parties let delegates from seniors' sections and women's sections play a role in candidate selection (cdH, CD&V, FDF). In these three parties plus two others (N-VA and VB), delegates from the youth section participate in the decision about the electoral lists.

As presented in table 3, six parties out of eleven open the selection process to party members. In three parties (Ecolo, Groen, CD&V), rank-and-file members vote on the eligible places, not on the whole lists. Open VLD's members cast ballots on the full lists exception made of the head of list. All candidates on the list have to be approved by party's members of sp.a and cdH. At sp.a however, the extent to which members actually weight on the final list has to be qualified. Members of sp.a are called to come to a party congress where they vote on the European list, per local section. Then, the sections' delegates vote on the list. Five parties ask the physical presence of party's members. Ecolo, Groen, CD&V, sp.a and cdH organise a members' assembly that gathers on average 700 individuals. The Open VLD organises the members' vote online, via their website. Although in more than half of the parties, members have a say, their real influence on the decisions should be nuanced. As pointed by Raunio (2002), Peter Mair argued in 1997 that *"greater inclusiveness through [...] postal ballots atomizes membership participation, because the integrated national elite faces a disorganized mass of members."* In addition, it is interesting to note that in no party (with the noticeable exception of Ecolo), members directly decide on the basis of the mere aspirants' list. The decision is always prepared by another selectorate.

In any Belgian party a single actor selects the candidates. The selectorates are numerous both in terms of number of individuals and of actors. So as to compare European selection process to the two others, the next paragraphs evaluate the differences between the actors actually involved in the selection. The analysis takes into account which party actors play a role and, if they are different, which actors are the largest in terms of number of individuals. Again what is expected is that the European selectorate is smaller than the other selectorates.

Only one party shows no differences in reference to the size of the selectorate. The MR's actors are indeed perfectly comparable from one selection process to the other. For the rest, one party goes in the opposite direction to what was expected. The FDF board at national level intervenes in the process for the European list and not for the others.

All other parties however stick to the hypothesis. Ecolo and the Open VLD count the same number of actors but these are different in terms of size from one process to the other. Four actors select the ecologist candidates among which the party presidents (two people) that formally step in into the European process, and a list committee (about ten people) playing a role in the other processes. The processes for the Open VLD look similar, but are quite dissimilar if we count the number of people involved. For the European list, the party board selects the head of list and approves the list and the provincial boards do the same for the other lists. There is a substantial difference in the size of these boards: 27 members in the party board versus more than one hundred members in the provincial boards.

In five parties, one or more additional actors are involved in the selection process at federal and regional versus in comparison with the European level. At Groen, there is a regional committee charged with the non-strategic places of the list whereas for the European list only the national committee plays a role. Two additional actors (at the provincial level) intervene in the process of sp.a: the provincial board and a list committee. The process for the European list of CD&V involves three additional actors: a provincial list committee (about ten people), the provincial board (about one hundred people) and another smaller provincial board (about twenty people). The N-VA procedures provide a role in the federal and regional selection processes for a provincial committee (about twenty people), next to other actors also interceding in the choice on the European list. The VB calls on provincial presidents to build the federal and regional lists – and these people do not intervene in the decisions on the European list.

Finally, there are two additional parties for which the selectorate is more inclusive for the federal and regional lists than for the European one. The PS does not call on party rank-and-file members to approve the European list whereas for the other lists, it is up to the decentralised entities to decide whether party members have a say or not. The cdH formally provides a members' vote on all lists, except for the European list. There is thus formally a difference in selectorates' size but in practice, the ballot papers are never counted.

In conclusion, the analysis of the number of types of involved actors provided no result confirming the inclusiveness hypothesis. But the analysis of selectorates' degrees of inclusiveness shows that selectorates choosing candidates for the European list are in all but one party less inclusive than these for the federal and regional lists. In the majority of Belgian parties, fewer actors are involved and in nearly all parties, the number of individuals having a say on the lists is reduced when making to European list. A second-order selection process may therefore well involve fewer actors and fewer individuals.

Up to now, the definition of a second-order candidate selection process based on the analysis of Belgian political parties entails three characteristics. A second-order process would be shorter, involve fewer levels of the party organisation, and fewer actors and individuals. *A contrario*, I cannot link some traditional features of candidate selection processes to the second-order definition: the degree of differentiation among several types of candidates and the degree of inclusiveness in terms of types of actors.

Finding its place

The previous sections have gone into detail in the processes of candidate selection for European lists and the features of selectorates, comparing both to the federal and regional counterparts. Drawing mainly on data collected during in-depth interviews, the next section tackles the singularity of the European selection process, again trying to answer the research question of whether the selection of candidates for the European elections could be labelled second-order. What makes the European selection process different? How do parties allocate their energy when facing a triple election?

Intentional differences in methods

Candidate selection for the European list is realised through a differentiated process in a majority of parties. Letting apart the fact that national bodies are charged with the list formation, there are still parties where the process for the European list intentionally differs

from the process for the federal and regional lists. Ecolo is a good example of a party that has changed its process for the provincial constituencies' lists and has kept (part of) the process alike for the community-wide constituency list. The old model is still used for the European list whereas pragmatism prevailed for the other levels. The model in use for the European list is direct democracy (for the eligible places). The party realised however that this model could be harrowing because of the absence of a third party intermediating between the candidates and the members. This could result in undesirable effects such as internal dissensions. A list committee prepares now the decision of the members' assembly, for all lists with the noticeable exception of the European one. Another good example illustrating a differentiated process depending on levels of power is the PS. In this party, there is no candidacy call for the European list. The party reports that because the president and the party top lead the process, there is no need to make a formal call. They know all potential candidates. These two opposite cases exemplify how decisions on the selection process could impact on the output. In the first one, the party decides to let full power to party members on the European list, what could result in unintended candidates (from the perspective of the party top). In the second one however, the party top fully controls who is selected for the European list, what could result in frustrations (from the perspective of party actors not involved in the process). In both cases, the selection for the federal and regional lists is a healthy mix between the two types of processes (openness and control).

Coordination

Given the triple election, there is of course in all parties a need for coordination. In some cases, this happens quite informally. In others however it is formalised in the procedures. For instance, the CD&V sets up a national accompanying committee. This body prepares the draft of the European list but also gives advice for the other lists. There is a similar committee at Groen (the so-called common poll committee). This body auditions all candidates for all lists and makes model lists for the eligible places, for all lists at the same time. In these two parties, the national level holds a formal power to impinge on the key decisions. The same holds true for MR and FDF where the main selectorate is the same for all lists. Their list committees supervise all lists, what should prevent from coordination problems. The N-VA has another system of coordination. The party designates a provincial coordinator in each province, charged with the coordination of the two lists. The party president himself is charged with the European list. All coordinators are high profile figures, which are *de facto* often in contact with each other. The Open VLD is a particular example in that there is no specific coordination foreseen between the selectorates. The European list is the only one managed at the party level. For the other lists, even the candidacy occurs at the constituency level without the obligation of informing the national level.

Timing of selection

The analysis turns now to another issue for which the European selection differs to a substantial extent from the other selection processes: the timing of the selection. In many parties, when asked how the coordination between the three selection processes is being managed, the question of temporality rose. Several parties intentionally thought about the sequence of list formations. What could be argued is that the party would consider the first constituted list as more important than the other lists. Candidates selected for the first list cannot indeed decide to change list. If candidates for the European list are first selected, they have to explicitly state that their preference goes to this list. The European list cannot be

thought of as a stopgap list. In contrast, when parties decide to make the European list after that all other lists are made, one could hypothesise that (some) European candidates would have liked to stand on another list but did not get this opportunity. As a consequence, they chose for the European list, their second choice list. Selectorates face in this case a reduced pool of aspirants from which they select the European candidates. Yet one has to bear in mind that for some candidates there is no doubt about at which level they wish to run for office. No matter which level of power the party starts with, they will stand at a given level (Dodeigne 2014).

Four parties acted strategically regarding the timing of candidate selection for the European list, among which one decided to manage first the European list and three discussed the European list after the other ones. Ecolo clearly decided to launch the selections with the community-wide list. They organised the selection programme starting from the largest constituency towards the smallest constituencies. By contrast, the PS wishes to end with the European list. The same holds true for cdH and MR. The CD&V European list has been approved some weeks before the other lists. For this party however it seems that the reason lies in the legal requirement of the earlier official submission the European list (one month before the other ones). It is interesting to note that no Flemish party reports to act strategically in that matter. Some parties however report to strategically think about the timing of the selection process in general, without distinguishing between the lists. In many parties, it seems that politicians tend to wish to start as late as possible (keeping the candidates' names secret until the other parties have disclosed their lists) whereas the party management would like to launch the process earlier in order to be sure to have all full lists on time.

It can be concluded that the European process is in few parties intentionally different for strategic reasons. What makes the selection of candidates in 2014 different is the need for coordination. But again, not all parties have foreseen mechanisms to supervise the three concomitant processes. Finally, a majority of parties do not disclose the final lists at the same time for all lists, and certainly not for the EP list and the rest. Most of the time a press conference is held separately.

Conclusion

European elections are singular elections. Voters are less keen to go and cast ballots. If they do so, they tend to vote differently than in national elections. Political parties as well behave differently as regards to European parliamentary elections. They select different types of candidates compared to other elections. But this paper has not gone into these topics. The aim of this paper was to assess whether European elections – that are often and rightly labelled second-order elections – result from a second-order selection process.

I comparatively analysed eleven Belgian political parties in the run-up to the 2014 triple elections (European, federal and regional). I attempted to test a hypothetical definition of a second-order candidate selection process. Out of the five features of a selection process, three have proven to be successful. This backbench process would entail fewer steps than a first-order process. It would also involve fewer levels of the party internal organisation (most of the time only the national level). Lastly, fewer individuals would participate in the decision-making.

Next to testing the mere definition of a second-order process, I studied how Belgian political parties managed the fact that they have to draw up multiple lists for several levels of power at the same time. And, more interestingly, how the unique European list performs among the fourteen/twenty-one lists to be made. A number of conclusions flow from this analysis. In short, few parties acted strategically in that matter, be it through adapting the sequence or the timing of the different processes or thanks to specific coordination bodies. Political parties mainly handled the European list apart than integrated it to an overall strategy (at least in an institutionalized manner)

The paper attempted at bridging the existing gap in the literature between researches on candidate selection and the second-order elections model. I assume that both topics deserve to be studied together. Candidate selection is more often studied as independent variable. This research assesses how candidate selection could reflect society and politics. Future researches on this topic should test whether the definition of a second-order process hold true in other countries, in other time-periods. The European elections do not start with candidates' lists, but are already launched long before, when political parties decide who is going to stand on these lists. Here too the singularity of the European level could come to light.

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Appendix

Belgian political parties

	Flemish parties	Francophone parties
Greens	Groen	Ecolo
		<i>(Écologistes Confédérés pour l'Organisation de Luttes Originales)</i>
	Green	Confederate Ecologists for the Organisation of Original Struggles
Socialists	sp.a	PS
	<i>(socialistische partij anders)</i>	<i>(Parti socialiste)</i>
	Socialist party in a different way	Socialist party
Christian-democrats	CD&V	cdH
	<i>(Christen-Democratisch & Vlaams)</i>	<i>(Centre démocrate humaniste)</i>
	Christian-democrat & Flemish	Humanist democratic centre
Liberals	Open VLD	MR
	<i>(Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten)</i>	<i>(Mouvement Réformateur)</i>
	Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats	Reformist Movement
Nationalists	N-VA	FDF
	<i>(Nieuwe Vlaamse Alliantie)</i>	<i>(Fédéralistes démocrates francophones)</i>
	New Flemish Alliance	French-speaking democrat federalists
Far right	VB	
	<i>(Vlaams Belang)</i>	
	Flemish Interest	