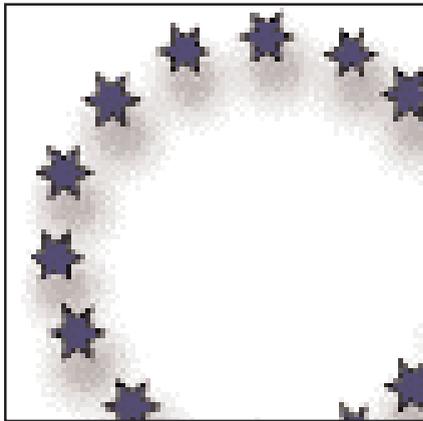


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THE BELGIAN FEDERAL ELECTIONS OF 18 MAY 2003

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Key points:

- Although the Socialist parties made a spectacular return, the Liberals maintained their position as the largest party family in the federal Kamer (lower house).
- The Christian Democrats were unable to regain their former influence and continued to lose votes.
- The Green parties suffered a major defeat.
- The extreme-right, Eurosceptic Vlaams Blok continued to gain support.
- The Liberal breakaway party, Liberal Appeal, articulated some Eurosceptic

positions comparable to those of Vlaams Blok.

- As usual, Europe was absent from the election debates although there is some potential for it to emerge as a more significant issue in the future.

The Belgian party system(s)

In the 1960s the problematic relationships between the Dutch-speaking north of Belgium, the French-speaking south and the bilingual city of Brussels came to play an increasingly prominent role in Belgian politics. Eventually this was to have a major impact on the Belgian party system. Attempts to take on board regionalist demands and the indirect pressure exerted by the success of the regionalist parties (Volkunie in Flanders, Rassemblement Wallon in Wallonia and Front Démocratique Francophone in Brussels) led to the break-up of the traditional unitary parties: the Christian Democrats (in 1968), Liberals (in 1971) and the Social Democrats (in 1978). The Green parties – the Flemish Agalev and Francophone Ecolo – developed separately later on.¹

Since then Belgium has, in effect, had two party systems. The Dutch-speaking parties present their candidates only in Flanders and Brussels, the French-speaking parties only in Wallonia and Brussels.² Voters from Brussels choose between a Dutch and a French voting list. Election results are, therefore, provided and interpreted at the regional, not federal level. It is only in the federal government that French- and Dutch-speaking parties come together. Until now federal coalitions have always been symmetrical, that is, the two parties of a party family have remained together in both government and opposition.

What was at stake?

After the previous 1999 elections, for the first time in Belgian history a coalition government was formed, comprising the Liberals, Socialists and Greens.

Flanders

As Table 1 shows, the Flemish Liberal VLD had ousted the Flemish Christian Democratic CVP as largest party in the federal Kamer (lower house) by a small margin. The VLD's renewal process, which was aimed at the party becoming the most important 'people's party' in the Flanders region, was finally bearing fruit. The party had dropped its radical liberal stance, had included social issues in its programme and had been able to attract some important politicians from the Flemish regionalist Volksunie grouping. After 1999, the Flemish Liberals continued this renewal process, attracting politicians from the Flemish Social, Progressive, International, Regionalist, Integration and Future-Oriented grouping (Spirit – a left-liberal breakaway from the Volksunie; see below) and absorbing a breakaway movement from the Christian Democrats, led by their former president and MEP Johan Van Hecke. On the other hand, its more centralizing course also led to some internal (rightist) dissidence, resulting in the formation of two small new parties: the Liberal Appeal and Safe Blue. In 1999, the Christian Democrats' share of the vote in Flanders fell below the symbolic 25% of the votes, contributing to the end of forty years of Christian Democratic participation in Belgian government. The party went into opposition at both the federal and regional levels in the hope that it would be able to return as the largest single party at the next elections, and changed its name to Christian Democratic and Flemish (CD&V). The 2003 elections in Flanders were therefore seen as a race between the Liberals and Christian Democrats.

The Flemish Socialist Party (SP) had also suffered a historic defeat in 1999, having lost significant numbers of votes since the beginning of the 1990s, mainly to the extreme-right Vlaams Blok. The party suffered from a combination of factors: its lack of attention to so-called 'post-materialist' issues, its narrow focus on social security, the loss of its 'natural' grassroots support and its involvement in a series of corruption scandals. After 1999 the SP also engaged in a major renewal process, led by a new president, Patrick Janssens, who had not worked for the party before but rather in a private advertising agency. The name of the party was changed to 'SP.other' (SP.anders or SP.a) and in the 2003 elections it presented a single electoral list with the left-liberal regionalist Spirit grouping.

Since the so-called 'Black Sunday' in 1991 when Vlaams Blok suddenly gathered more than 10% of the Flemish votes, this extreme-right party has increased its level of support at every election. However, it has been kept from power by the so-called 'cordon sanitaire', an agreement among all the other parties not to govern with it. In 2003 Vlaams Blok was hoping to increase its share of the vote even more.

The Flemish regionalist Volksunie made some progress in 1999 but its 9% share of the vote in the Flanders region led to (renewed) discussions about the party's future and after internal divergence over a proposed change to the country's constitution it split in two. The New Flemish Alliance (N-VA), the official successor of the Volksunie, is more nationalist than its predecessor and is situated on the centre-right side of the political spectrum. The Spirit grouping emerged from the Volksunie's more leftist and liberal wing. However, Spirit was also quickly plunged into internal debate and several of its elected members joined the Flemish Liberals or the Flemish Green party, Agalev. The remaining part of Spirit decided to form a cartel and a common electoral list with the Flemish Socialists.

TABLE 1: ELECTION RESULTS, FEDERAL ELECTIONS 1999 AND 2003: WHOLE COUNTRY

| Party | % votes | | Seats | |
|--|---------|-------|-------|------|
| | 1999 | 2003 | 1999 | 2003 |
| Flemish Liberals (VLD) | 14.3 | 15.36 | 23 | 25 |
| Christian Democratic and Flemish (CD&V) ^a | 14.1 | 13.25 | 22 | 21 |
| Francophone Socialists (PS) | 10.2 | 13.02 | 19 | 25 |
| Reform Movement (MR) | 10.1 | 11.40 | 18 | 24 |
| Vlaams Blok | 9.9 | 11.59 | 15 | 18 |
| Socialist Party.other/Spirit ^b | 9.5 | 14.91 | 14 | 23 |
| Ecolo | 7.3 | 3.06 | 11 | 4 |
| Agalev | 7.0 | 2.47 | 9 | 0 |
| Democratic Humanist Centre (CDH) ^c | 5.9 | 5.47 | 10 | 8 |
| Volksunie | 5.6 | – | 8 | – |
| New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) | – | 3.06 | – | 1 |
| National Front (FN) | 1.45 | 1.98 | 1 | 1 |
| Vivant | 1.1 | 1.29 | 0 | 0 |
| CDF | – | 0.58 | – | 0 |
| Liberal Appeal | – | 0.45 | – | 0 |
| Resist | – | 0.15 | – | 0 |
| Safe Blue | – | 0.05 | – | 0 |

^a CVP in 1999.

^b Socialist Party (SP) only in 1999.

^c PSC in 1999.

TABLE 2: ELECTION RESULTS, FEDERAL ELECTIONS 1999 AND 2003: THE REGIONS OF FLANDERS AND WALLONIA^a

| Flanders | 1999 | 2003 | Wallonia | 1999 | 2003 |
|----------------------------------|------|------|----------------------------|------|------|
| Christian Democratic and Flemish | 22.2 | 21.3 | Socialists | 29.2 | 36.4 |
| Socialists | 15.0 | – | Democratic Humanist Centre | 16.8 | 15.4 |
| Socialist Party.other/Spirit | – | 23.9 | Reform Movement | 24.7 | 28.4 |
| Flemish Liberals | 22.6 | 24.6 | Ecolo | 18.3 | 7.5 |
| Volksunie | 8.8 | – | National Front | 4.1 | 5.6 |
| New Flemish Alliance | – | 4.9 | | | |
| Agalev | 11.0 | 3.9 | | | |
| Vlaams Blok | 15.3 | 18.1 | | | |

^a Figures per region and thus per party system (Brussels excluded).

Source: <http://verkiezingen2003.belgium.be>.

Agalev had been growing steadily since it first participated in the 1981 federal elections. Like its Walloon counterpart, Ecolo, it benefited from the so-called 'dioxin crisis' that occurred during the 1999 campaign.³ Agalev gained 11% of the Flemish vote, while Ecolo won 18% in Wallonia, and both Green parties entered the government at all levels. The 2003 elections were to be the first test of the voters' judgment on their participation in government.

Wallonia

The party landscape in French-speaking Wallonia is much less fragmented than in Flanders. It has a clear and stable right-left divide in which the Socialist and the Liberal parties predominate. Like their Flemish sister party, the Francophone Liberals have worked conscientiously since the mid-1990s to mould themselves into a broader 'people's party'. After concluding an agreement in 1995 with the Brussels nationalist party, FDF, they were also able to persuade the Movement of Citizens for Change (MCC), led by the former Francophone Christian Democrat president (and MEP), Gérard Deprez, to join their ranks in 2002. The party adopted a new name, the Reform Movement (MR), in 2002 and went into the 2003 polls under that name.

Like the Flemish Socialists, the Francophone Christian Democratic PSC had always taken advantage of the political weight of its sister party to participate in federal government. After performing poorly in 1999 (winning even fewer votes than the Green Ecolo party), it too engaged in a process of change and renewal, going to the 2003 polls with a new name, as the Democratic Humanist Centre (CDH).

The Francophone Socialist PS had to cope with the same problems as the Flemish Socialist SP in the 1990s but realized the urgency of modernization much later than its Flemish counterpart because it was able to remain the strongest party in Wallonia throughout this period. However, a 5% loss of support in 1999 served as an important warning and the party embarked upon a major process of reform. It also made some overtures to Ecolo, and the two parties decided to defend some leftist positions together in a 'convergence to the left' (*convergence à gauche*) without formally joining together in an electoral cartel.

The federal elections of May 2003

Despite early predictions that the heterogeneous Liberal-Socialist-Green government would not survive very long, the federal government lasted its full four-year term. The so-called 'open debate culture' led to high-profile internal divisions within the government, mainly between the Liberals and the Greens. The other coalition partners did not hesitate to point out on many occasions how difficult it was to govern with the Green parties. However, the parties remained committed to continuing with this rainbow coalition experiment. At the same time, the Christian Democrats clearly had some difficulties with their new role as an opposition party and were not able to present themselves as a valid alternative to the governing parties.

The campaign

Once the end of the government's term of office came in sight, the other coalition partners' benevolence towards the Greens disappeared. The Liberals in particular, but also the opposition Christian Democratic and Flemish Party, attacked them harshly on all fronts. Opinion polls also showed that the voters had not forgiven the Greens for certain compromises that they had made. Meanwhile, on the Flemish side, the creation of the SP.a-Spirit cartel offered progressive, leftist voters a new alternative that the old Flemish Socialists were not able to provide. In general, the election campaign was focused on who would become the biggest party family in Belgium. Would the Liberals continue to grow or would the Christian Democrats regain their influence in Flanders and the Francophone Socialists recapture their 1999 losses in Wallonia?

As the opinion polls appeared it became clear that it would not be a struggle between Liberals and Christian Democrats in Flanders. The SP.a-Spirit cartel scored very highly in the polls. Its success was largely attributed to two factors: the popularity (and famous one-liners) of the Flemish Socialists' charismatic new leader, Steve Stevaert, and the good performance of the Socialist ministers in the outgoing government.

Media interest in the elections was enormous. However, the content of the debate was much less remarkable or elevated. The main campaign themes were employment, security and taxes, and the parties carefully

avoided major 'clashes' in order to safeguard their chances of participating in the next government.

Both the Flemish and Francophone Liberal parties promised a (further) reduction of taxation and the creation of more jobs, notwithstanding the disturbing analyses of the state of Belgium's finances and economy produced by the National Bank and other important economic actors.

The message of the SP.a–Spirit cartel ('We stand for everything that's good for the people') was simple but very successful. Spirit focused mainly on younger voters with themes such as soft drugs and peace, while its more explicit Flemish nationalist profile was softened. The Francophone Socialists also presented themselves as a new, fresh, open and explicitly leftist party, prepared to cooperate with the Greens on specific leftist issues.

Although engaged in a race for the number one position in Flanders, the Christian Democratic and Flemish party was unable to push its campaign themes to the fore. With the Liberals and Socialists wanting to continue to govern together, the CD&V always came across as the third and smaller partner in the election debates. Exactly the same happened on the Francophone side, where the Democratic Humanist Centre struggled for attention as well.

Vlaams Blok made the 'cordon sanitaire' its main election theme. Nevertheless, it was not really interested in government participation at the federal level. Its ultimate goal was participation at the local level, beginning with Antwerp in 2006. Apart from this, immigration and security remained the most important themes of the Vlaams Blok programme.

Ecolo and Agalev both realized that they would lose the 'dioxin bonus' of 1999. But the severity of the counter-attack from both the coalition partners and the opposition was more unexpected. Both groupings attempted to present themselves as parties that 'made the difference' but did not focus much on their own achievements. Successive opinion polls saw the Greens tumbling in the rankings and suddenly Agalev began to hover dangerously close to the 5% threshold. However, the Greens remained unconcerned about this threat right up until polling day, probably hoping that their 'underdog' position would rescue them in the end.

In contrast to Spirit, the other Volksunie successor, the New Flemish Alliance, presented itself as the defender of the rights of the Flemish population. It called itself the only democratic alternative for those who did not agree with either the government policy or the 'anti-politics' of Vlaams Blok. The party generally benefited from a very positive evaluation of its work as an opposition grouping in the federal parliament.

The Flemish Liberal Appeal party tried to fill the gap in the political spectrum between the Flemish Liberals and Vlaams Blok, focusing mainly on dissatisfied Liberals and blaming this party for the more centralizing course that it had pursued over the previous decade.

The results

As the Christian Democrats lost further ground, it immediately became clear that the Liberals and Socialists would form the new federal government. As Tables 1 and 2 show, both of these groupings picked up votes in Flanders and Wallonia. The Flemish Socialists overtook the Christian Democrats to become the second largest party in this region. The biggest losers were the Liberals'

and Socialists' erstwhile coalition partners, the two Green parties. The elections turned out to be a disaster for both of them. Agalev lost all of its seats in the federal parliament. Ecolo lost heavily as well but kept four seats in the Kamer and one in the Senaat (upper house). None of the new, small parties were successful in either Flanders or Wallonia.

The main victory on the Flemish side was for the SP.a–Spirit cartel. Although the Liberal VLD remained the biggest party in Flanders, the cartel came very close to overtaking them. SP.other–Spirit appeared to be a very attractive alternative for former Green voters. The CD&V suffered a further election defeat. Notwithstanding the party's renewal efforts, it did not succeed in distinguishing itself sufficiently from the Liberals and the progressive front. Indeed, it is the Flemish Liberals rather than the Christian Democrats that have now become the most important centre party in Flanders. At the same time, the extreme right does not yet seem to have reached the limit of its growth in Flanders. While the Flemish Liberals and Christian Democrats fought over voters in the centre, Vlaams Blok encountered no real competitor on the right side of the political spectrum. The party increased its share of the vote by more than 3% in Flanders, although this did not cause the same alarmed reactions as did the party's 1991 and 1995 electoral breakthroughs. Filip De Winter, a popular Vlaams Blok politician from Antwerp, declared with joy that Vlaams Blok was 'tearing down the Berlin wall around the party stone by stone'. In other words, as the support for Vlaams Blok grows, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the other parties to defend the 'cordon sanitaire'. The New Flemish Alliance emerged as stronger than the Green Agalev party but passed the 5% threshold in only one province.

Both the liberal Reform Movement and the Socialists gained votes in Wallonia, although the Socialists' success was much more pronounced. The growth of the extreme-right National Front in Wallonia was also striking.

The European dimension

Belgium combines a pro-European attitude among its political elite with a broad permissive consensus among the population. The Belgian political elite agrees that the government should play a proactive role in the EU, moving the organization towards a federal construction with broad supranational powers.

Belgium took over the Presidency of the European Council in the second half of 1999. As always, this was a very important event in the country and it dominated the first year of the 'Purple–Green' government. Both the media and the political parties followed every move of the Liberal Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt, and his government very carefully. At the end of the Presidency, Verhofstadt proudly unveiled the 'Laeken declaration' and the Convention on the Future of Europe. The Liberals reminded voters of these achievements on numerous occasions during the election campaign.

The only Eurosceptical party of any importance in Belgium is Vlaams Blok, mainly because it does not accept the EU of 'artificial member states' and the idea of a federal construction. It takes a tough stance on immigration and security issues at the European level, as it does at the national level.

The new Liberal Appeal in part copies Vlaams Blok's Eurosceptical discourse. It focuses on security in a broad sense, and also in the European context. Liberal Appeal called for a delay in EU enlargement until the European institutions are better prepared to receive the new members and argues that enlargement should be subject to national referendums. Like Vlaams Blok, Liberal Appeal opposes the accession of Turkey to the EU. It wants to overturn the Schengen agreement and calls for more thoroughgoing protection of the external borders of the EU. There is not enough information available on the party to know whether or not it can be labelled 'Eurosceptical'. What is certain is that it is moving towards Vlaams Blok in some areas of European policy as it is in other policy areas. However, the EU is currently not a priority for Liberal Appeal.

Both Spirit and New Flemish Alliance took over some of the views and issues from the Volksunie's European policy such as ecological and social sustainability, conflict prevention and a common defence policy, fair trade and development aid, and democratic governance. However, New Flemish Alliance distinguishes itself from both its predecessor and Spirit by its tough stances on the place of Flanders in Europe. Like Vlaams Blok, it wants Flanders to become an independent member state of the EU. Spirit, on the other hand, backs a 'Europe of the Regions' with a separate Flemish voice in the EU institutions and a European Senate comprising regional representatives.

The manifestos

The European issue has an extremely low salience in Belgian politics and, as usual, it was simply not an issue in the 2003 election campaign. For example, although the Convention was highly praised by all the parties there was never a political discussion about its content or future. In both the Francophone and Flemish written media, observers complained about the lack of interest in European politics and the absence of a 'European' debate in the otherwise extensive media coverage of the elections. However, the parties' election manifestos did offer some potential for discussions about Europe. In their programmes all the major parties, and even some smaller parties such as Liberal Appeal and Safe Blue, considered the future of the EU, mainly in relation to the prospect of enlargement, but also other European policy fields.

The Christian Democratic, Socialist and Green parties expressed their fears of a 'liberal Europe', mainly warning about the dangers of the liberalization of public services. The Liberals, on the other hand, agreed with this liberal tendency in the EU because, as the Francophone Liberal Reform Movement put it, 'reforms are necessary'.

A second potentially conflictual policy area was the Common Agricultural Policy. The Francophone parties, and also the Christian Democratic and Flemish grouping opposed reductions in the levels of support and protection for farmers. Both Agalev and Spirit wanted better access to the European and world market for products from the developing countries of the South, and Safe Blue argued CAP subsidies should be scrapped and production moved to countries where farming is cheaper. The Flemish Liberals also wanted liberalization of trade within the context of the CAP.

As at the national level, considerable attention was paid to security issues, mainly in relation to international

crime, migration and enlargement. The most extreme positions could be found, not surprisingly, in the programmes of the extreme-right parties: Vlaams Blok and the Francophone National Front (FN). These parties did not reject EU enlargement as long as certain (stringent) conditions were met. As noted above, Liberal Appeal called for stronger protection of the European borders and a dismantling of Schengen. The other major parties supported policies such as closer cooperation in the fields of police and justice, an asylum policy, and discussion about migration policy. Vlaams Blok, Liberal Appeal and the FN did not want what they regarded as 'non-European' countries to become EU members, focusing mainly on the possible accession of Turkey, which they included in this category. The CD&V grouping also expressed some reservations about the accession of such countries. It did not say explicitly that Turkey could never join but ruled out the possibility for the moment. The Francophone Liberal Reform Movement also argued that Turkey's progress 'should be followed closely'.

All parties agreed that the EU has a legitimacy problem in one way or another. While the CD&V, Flemish Socialists, Greens and Liberals wanted a more federal Europe, Vlaams Blok preferred an explicitly confederal Europe, and the Francophone National Front wanted to reduce the powers of the Commission.

The Christian Democrats, Socialists and Greens all drew attention to the underdeveloped nature of EU social policy. The Liberals and extreme right remained silent on this topic.

Foreign policy has always been an important item for Belgian political parties in the European context. Generally, all parties agreed on a common security and defence policy and greater coordination of policy positions in this field. But Agalev, Ecolo and Spirit gave more centrality to the idea of conflict prevention. Spirit and Agalev also rejected increases in defence expenditure.

Some other specific national or regional issues were also translated into the European policy context. Vlaams Blok and New Flemish Alliance, for example, feared 'Anglicization' and the disappearance of the small languages in the EU. Several parties called for more regional autonomy and even splitting up the Belgian vote in the European institutions. It was not surprising that Vlaams Blok and the New Flemish Alliance were in favour of this. It was more unexpected that these ideas could also be found in CD&V's programme. The Francophone Socialists and Spirit made more general pleas for a bigger role for regions in the European project. Vlaams Blok also rejected the concept of European citizenship and an extension of citizenship rights. The Francophone Liberal Reform Movement and the Green parties, on the other hand, wanted to extend its practical application.

However, these kinds of arguments were not really heard very much during the election campaign itself. Probably the most important conclusion here is that we can clearly discern some protest against the present course of the EU, mainly with respect to liberalization, social protection and the future of the CAP. As the EU will impact increasingly on the direct needs and concerns of the population, politicians will not be able to avoid political confrontations on these topics. The protest against the EU directive affecting the status of Belgian dockers was probably the first manifestation of a longer series of protests to come.⁴

The candidate lists

Persisting in our search for some 'traces of Europe', we end up looking at the candidate lists. In terms of the presence of European parliamentarians on the lists, a striking difference can be seen between Wallonia and Flanders. In Flanders, only three of the fourteen MEPs were not on the list. These three (from Vlaams Blok, CD&V party and the Flemish Liberals) are '*anciens*' and are not expected to run for political office again anyway. On the Walloon side (including the one German MEP), only four of the eleven MEPs were included on the candidate lists.

Some Flemish MEPs played a prominent role during the campaign. Anne Van Lancker, a Flemish Socialist MEP, placed a personal advertisement in the regional newspapers stating that 'Europe starts in Flanders'. Her colleague from Antwerp, Katleen Van Brempt, directed her campaign towards the dockers, saying that she would fight in the European Parliament for their status.⁵ One Flemish Liberal MEP, Dirk Sterckx, accompanied the party's top national politicians wherever they went, although the party itself hardly uttered a word about European issues. Ward Beysen, the founder of Liberal Appeal, headed the party's list for the Kamer in Antwerp and for the Senaat. The president of Vlaams Blok, Frank Vanhecke, also an MEP, headed the lists for the West-Vlaanderen province and for the Senaat. The president of the Francophone Liberal Reform Movement, Daniel Ducarme, was candidate for the Kamer in Brussels. Again, little mention was made of their European mandates. One Spirit MEP, Bart Staes, who joined Agalev in 2003, was also present on two lists but in a less prominent position.

Three MEPs were elected. The presidents of Vlaams Blok and the Reform Movement received very high personal votes (respectively 197,641 votes for the Senaat and 36,150 votes for the Kamer; and 40,744 for the Kamer), but the election of Katleen Van Brempt in Antwerp was more surprising given her lower position on

the list (11,577 votes). Her campaign focusing on the dockers really seemed to pay off, although she eventually decided to continue her work in the European Parliament, as she had promised during the campaign. She is very likely to stand again in next year's Flemish regional elections. The president of Vlaams Blok, on the other hand, decided to leave the European Parliament. The (now former) president of the Reform Movement will become minister-president of the Brussels region; to date no one has asked questions about his position in the European Parliament.

Conclusion

Europe was, once again, the main absentee in the federal election campaign. The party manifestos do allow us to discern some potential discussions on Europe. As the impact of European policies on daily life increases, we can expect that Belgian politicians will no longer be able to avoid such discussions. This will certainly be the case as Europe continues to impact upon what are seen as historical achievements such as the social protection system. It may be interesting to keep an eye on Liberal Appeal, as this party has adopted some very critical stances towards the EU, reminiscent of Vlaams Blok's Euro-scepticism. For its part, Vlaams Blok promises to pursue a prominent campaign, in the 2004 regional and European elections, against Turkey's accession to the EU.

Although Europe may not have been present in the election debates, MEPs were prominently represented in the campaign in Flanders. Only rarely did they use their presence to promote European issues, however. Indeed, it is worth noting that three of the breakaway parties were led by MEPs. This means that three out of Belgium's 25 MEPs were spending their time restructuring the regional party landscape. It raises serious doubts about their European commitment and demonstrates how the European level is being used as a breeding ground for major national strategies.

Endnotes

¹ They are the only parties, however, with a federal cooperation structure, which they use, among other things, to prepare their parliamentary work.

² Belgium also has German-speaking parties but they are too small to carry substantial weight in federal politics.

³ Motor oil had been mixed into chicken and cattle food, and this led to the removal of many products from the shelves.

⁴ Belgian dockers have a recognized and highly valued status in the country. In February 2003 the European Commission proposed a regulation that would liberalize services in European ports. The dockers contested the loss of the prohibition on '*zelfhandeling*'. This meant that they would lose their privilege to load and unload ships that berth in the port.

⁵ The party had taken up this issue right from the beginning and was carefully continuing to sell it as a socialist one in the media, although also other Flemish MEPs were also working on it.

Convened from the Sussex European Institute, the Opposing Europe Research Network is a group of academic researchers studying party politics within the European Union and candidate countries and seeking to understand in particular why Euroscepticism exists in some states and not in others. Like the Royal Institute of International Affairs, the Network itself retains an independent stance on the issues under consideration. The views presented are those of the authors.

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