

Coalition talks well underway in Belgium to form new government

Belgians have become used to lengthy coalition negotiations, but Sunday's election results are clear, and the parties' negotiation process is already well underway



Belgium's King has nominated Bart De Wever (right) as 'Informateur'

Lessons from the election

For once, the results of the Belgian national and regional elections are pretty clear. Here's what we make of them:

More extreme parties didn't win. Contrary to what the polls indicated, in the Dutch-speaking part of the country, the far right clearly made progress but did not become the leading party in Flanders. Nevertheless, It won 20 seats, two more than in 2019. On the opposite side of the political spectrum, the far left gained three seats, but its total of 15 seats was well below what the polls predicted (up to 20 seats). The extreme parties are, therefore, not in a position to block the process of forming a federal government.

Overall, there was a shift to the right throughout the country. The N-VA, the Flemish nationalist party with a more right-wing socio-economic stance, won the elections, remaining the largest party in Flanders (24 seats). In the French-speaking part and in Brussels, the Liberals (MR) and the centrists (centre-right, Les Engagés) made significant gains.

The Greens fell back sharply, as they did in much of Europe.

A clear coalition is coming into view

A number of parties have already decided not to participate in the formation of federal and regional governments. This is the case for the French-speaking socialists (at the federal level, in Wallonia and Brussels), the Dutch-speaking ecologists (at the federal level and in Flanders) and French-speaking ecologists (at the federal level, in Wallonia and Brussels).

So now, the makeup of a coalition is becoming clearer. At the federal level, the leader of the N-VA, Bart De Wever, was today appointed as 'Informateur', someone who leads the coalition negotiations, by King Philippe. In principle, a coalition should emerge between the N-VA, the Flemish Socialists (Vooruit) and the Christian Democrats (CD&V) on the Dutch-speaking side, and the Liberals (MR) and the centrists (Les Engagés) on the French-speaking side. All these parties scored well during the elections and, together, have a majority in the federal parliament.

That national coalition would have the advantage of being able to be replicated at a regional level in Flanders (N-VA, Vooruit, and CD&V) and Wallonia (MR and Les Engagés). Given the major challenges facing the Belgian economy, and we've written about that [here](#), this is an important factor for the coherence of the socio-economic policies that will be pursued in the coming years.

The unknown factors

The start of negotiations has come surprisingly quickly, given how the country has been beset by long periods of uncertainty in the past. That said, we're only at the beginning, and tensions could arise, notably on the institutional front, with the N-VA calling for greater regional autonomy.

Three other unknowns remain. First, the Dutch-speaking socialists (Vooruit) are entering these negotiations somewhat hesitantly. They would be the only (centre) left party and fear the future government's economic policy could be too conservative.

Secondly, what will the party of former Prime Minister Alexander De Croo (Open-Vld, Dutch-speaking liberals), which lost five seats in the federal parliament, do?

Thirdly, the situation in the Brussels Region is not at all clear. Forming a coalition appears much more difficult as the electorate is more divided. Some political parties that have announced their intention to remain in opposition could reverse that decision to gain a majority, but they could then come back with pressing demands.

To conclude, while the European elections created uncertainty in some countries, notably in France, the elections in Belgium produced a relatively straightforward result, providing potential stability and a clear direction for the economic policy to be pursued in the coming years. It now remains for the winning parties to turn these results into an agreement, which is not the easiest part of the electoral process in Belgium.

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