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## Belgium

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Table 1. Cabinet composition of Di Rupo I

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For the composition of Di Rupo I on 1 January 2012, see Rihoux et al. (2012: 43–44).

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*Changes during 2012:*

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Pensions/*Vice-Eerste Minister en Minister van Pensioenen*: Vincent Van Quickenborne (1973 male, Open VLD) *resigned* and was *replaced* by Alexander De Croo (1975 male, Open VLD) on 18 October

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## Changes in parliament

In the House of Representatives, M. Beuselinck (NV-A) resigned on 6 November and was replaced by C. Coudyser. In addition, G. Coëme (PS; former regional minister and vice-prime minister in the 1980s and 1990s) resigned on 25 October and was replaced by C. Lacroix, and O. Deleuze (Ecolo; see below) resigned on 28 March and was replaced by F. Lahssaini.

In the Senate, L. Savenhans (NV-A) resigned on 30 September and was replaced by S. Vermeulen on 9 October; M. Temmerman (SP.a) resigned on 14 October and Alexander De Croo (Open VLD) resigned on 22 October and they were replaced, respectively, by L. Detiège on 18 October and Y. Vastersavendts on 25 October. P. Van Rompuy (CD&V) resigned on 18 December and was replaced by E. Schouppe (former minister, CD&V) on 21 December. Finally, C. Niessen (Ecolo) resigned and was replaced by B. Hellings on 21 December.

The party composition of the House and of the Senate was not modified as a result of these changes.

## Issues in national politics

Most issues in Belgian politics were genuinely national, driven by the political reform agenda of the federal government or events that struck the nation as a whole, such as the coach accident in Sierre (Switzerland) or the closure of major plants of multinational

1 companies (e.g., Ford Genk in Flanders and Arcelor-Mittal in the Liège Region, with tens  
2 of thousands of job losses), for which neither the federal nor the regional governments had  
3 a remedy.

4 The Flemish executive (Christian Democrats, Socialists and NV-A) was destabilised by  
5 the lack of consensus on major public works initiatives and educational reforms. However,  
6 the Flemish political agenda was mainly determined by the preparation, results and  
7 impact of the 14 October local elections, which acted as a kind of mid-term elections and  
8 which resulted in another landslide for the right-wing independentist NV-A – the largest  
9 Flemish opposition party. The Flemish Liberals and Christian Democrats participating  
10 in the Di Rupo Government were an easy victim for the attacks of the NV-A. They  
11 were initially lukewarm in their defence of the federal government's reforms, but later  
12 adopted a more affirmative style with the passing of the law splitting the Brussels-Halle-  
13 Vilvoorde constituency, which had been a demand of the Flemish-nationalist movement  
14 for decades.

15 In Flanders the agenda became entirely focused on the 14 October local elections when  
16 NV-A party leader B. De Wever announced in April that he would run for the position of  
17 mayor of Antwerp, Flanders' largest city and a Socialist stronghold. It was the start of a  
18 presidential campaign throughout Flanders. The NV-A managed to recruit many local  
19 incumbents, mainly from the Liberals and the extreme-right wing Vlaams Belang, with the  
20 latter causing some concerns about the immigrant position of the NV-A. This was the only  
21 party to conduct a campaign on national issues (i.e., in opposition to the Di Rupo Govern-  
22 ment), with De Wever figuring on every local election poster and pamphlet. As in the  
23 general election of June 2010, about three out of ten Flemish voted NV-A, which allowed  
24 the party to access many local executives, including De Wever becoming mayor of Antwerp  
25 (in a coalition with the CD&V and the Open VLD). In some NV-A-led communes,  
26 coalition agreements caused some concern because they include law and order, anti-  
27 migrant, anti-Francophone and anti-Belgian policies.

28 The local elections did not cause any big surprises as they confirmed the trends wit-  
29 nessed in the federal elections of 13 June 2010 (Rihoux et al. 2011: 913–918). In the  
30 French-speaking community the PS confirmed its leading position, particularly in the  
31 Walloon region. In the Flemish-speaking community, however, if the coalition parties  
32 generally held their own or declined slightly, the opposition party Groen! made some  
33 progress, while the extreme right-wing Vlaams Belang continued to crumble. The **commu-**  
34 **ist** PvdA/PTB's significant progress in the north and the south of the country was also  
35 worthy of note.

36 The outcome of the local elections produced some party leadership changes. When the  
37 VLD vice-prime minister in the federal government, V. Van Quickenborne, managed unex-  
38 pectedly to oust the Christian Democrats from power in his city (Kortrijk), his cabinet seat  
39 was taken by the incumbent VLD party leader A. De Croo. The party organised a campaign  
40 to elect a new party president. The election was won on 8 December by G. Rutten, the  
41 candidate of the party establishment, who obtained 59.42 per cent of the membership vote.

B. Valkeniers, president of Vlaams Belang, which lost about two-thirds of its votes at the  
local elections (mainly to the NV-A), resigned. The party council gave a narrow majority of  
55.4 per cent to one of the party's founding fathers, G. Annemans, and a 92.1 per cent vote  
by the membership confirmed his leadership position on 16 December.

1 By contrast, on the francophone side, leadership remained stable in most parties during  
2 that year. The only exception is Ecolo, in which the co-presidency switched on 4 March from  
3 the duo of charismatic leader J-M. Javaux and S. Turine to a new tandem of O. Deleuze and  
4 E. Hoyos. Ecolo's statutes require that the two co-presidents be from two different genders  
5 and two different regions (Brussels and Wallonia).

6 In terms of substantive policy issues, as in 2011 the social climate continued to be riven  
7 by tensions. On 30 January, the general strike organised by the three major trade unions in  
8 protest against the government's austerity measures was generally observed – more clearly  
9 so in Wallonia and Brussels. Around mid-February the government maintained its commit-  
10 ment to an increase in retirement age but agreed to some adjustments to make the reform  
11 more incremental.

12 On 23 October the coalition reached an agreement to respect its budget commitments  
13 *vis-à-vis* the EU and to bring the deficit back to 2.8 per cent of gross domestic product  
14 (GDP). The requested cuts of €811 million were coupled with economic and employment  
15 incentive measures. Measures of degressivity of unemployment benefits entered into force  
16 on 1 November. They implied significant cuts after one year of unemployment.

17 On 13 July the splitting of the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde bilingual electoral district was  
18 adopted by the lower house. This longstanding Flemish demand, which was part of the  
19 government agreement, was supported by the six coalition **and two** ecologist parties, while  
20 the Flemish NV-A, Vlaams Belang and the francophone FDF voted against it.

21 On 17 April the coalition approved the reduction of the numbers of judicial districts  
22 from 27 to 12. They now correspond to the ten provinces, plus the Brussels Region and the  
23 German-speaking community.

24 Finally, in terms of demography, by the end of the year Belgium passed the 11 million  
25 inhabitants threshold.

## 26 27 **Sources and further information**

### 28 29 *Publications:*

30  
31 Rihoux, B., Dumont, P., Deruette, S., De Winter, L. & Bol, D. (2012). Belgium. *European Journal of Political*  
32 *Research Political Data Yearbook* 50(1): 43–48.

33 Rihoux, B., Dumont, P., De Winter, L., Deruette, S. & Bol, D. (2011). Belgium. *European Journal of Political*  
34 *Research Political Data Yearbook* 50(7–8): 913–921.

### 35 36 *On the Internet:*

37  
38 See, for many specific institutional and political topics, well-documented analyses in the weekly publications  
39 of the *Courrier Hebdomadaire du CRISP* – catalogue available online at: [www.crisp.be/librarie](http://www.crisp.be/librarie)

40 Belgian Federal Portal: [www.belgium.be/en/index.jsp](http://www.belgium.be/en/index.jsp) [global official portal for Belgium]

41 Detailed electoral results: [www.ibz.rrn.fgov.be/index.php?id=4&L=0](http://www.ibz.rrn.fgov.be/index.php?id=4&L=0) [official results, all elections]