

Gender quotas or electoral reform: why more women got elected during the 2003 Belgian elections

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Abstract The article analyses the 2003 Belgian elections from a gender perspective. It is argued that the increase of the number of women elected is mainly due to the recent reform of the electoral system and not to the new gender quotas imposed by law although the latter impose an alternation of fe/male candidates at the top of candidate lists. The analysis of the 2003 elections further shows that the new features of the electoral system partly undermine the potential impact of the simultaneously passed gender quotas legislation. The explanation for this is to be found in the fact that the double quotas are not adapted to the increased size of the new electoral districts.

Author Keywords Gender Quotas, Electoral Reform, Women, Belgium

1. Introduction

Belgium has traditionally been a laggard when it comes to the number of women in political decision-making. Until the second half of the 1970s there were about 5% women in the House of Representatives and in the Senate. From then until the middle of the 1990s women made up about 10% of the MPs and Senators. However, during the 1995 federal elections the number of female Senators doubled and the same happened with the female MPs during the following 1999 federal elections. At the last 2003 federal elections the number of women elected rose again. But while the increase was spectacular in the House of Representatives the same cannot be said of the Senate. Nonetheless, on the whole the rise of the number of women elected made Belgium join the top 10 of countries with the highest number of women in national parliamentary assemblies (www.ipu.org, 14.07.2003).

Judging by the extremely small number of women that Belgian politics had known for decades, it was generally assumed that there were gender-related thresholds. So far this issue of the existence of barriers for women has been dealt with in the context of gender quotas and the political debates related to them. Both the gender quotas enforced by law in 1994 and more recently in 2002, as well as quotas or target figures introduced by parties themselves, were argued to be necessary in order to overcome gender-related barriers in the procedure of selecting candidates. The rise of the number of women in Belgian politics during the 1990s did indeed go hand in hand with gender quotas imposed by law. However, the argument of this article is that these gender quotas only had and have a limited effect on the rise of the number of women elected. Especially the increase of the number of women during the last 2003 elections should not be attributed to the new gender quotas act even though this gender quotas for the first time focused on eligible list positions. Instead it is the simultaneously undertaken reform of the electoral system that was to a large extent responsible for the rise of the number of women elected, even though the enhancement of women's representation in politics had not been an objective of this reform. Furthermore, the argument of this article is that the recent electoral reform does even undermine a full impact of the new gender quotas act because the extent to which the new gender quotas act focuses on eligible list positions is not adapted to the increased size of electoral

districts.

This argument and the 2003 Belgian federal elections are interesting for they show how various institutional innovations (electoral reform and gender quotas focusing on eligible positions) can undermine each others' potential effect although in themselves both are considered to facilitate the election of a higher number of women, as will be discussed in the next section. The present article therefore joins recent research on the interaction between the features of electoral systems and measures meant to promote the political participation of social groups in politics such as gender quotas (Baudino, 2002; Deschouwer and Meier, 2002; Htun and Jones, 2002; Jones, 1998; Marques-Pereira and Nolasco, 2001; Mossuz-Lavau, 2003). The underlying hypothesis is that such measures can only have effect in case they are tailored to the features of the electoral system in which they are applied. The present article explores how the new Belgian gender quotas act could maximise its potential to increase the number of women in political decision-making. Belgium is internationally speaking one of the few examples where governments impose gender quotas by law, which does but amplify the illustrative value of this case.

The article starts with a brief discussion of the general features of the Belgian electoral system before dealing with its reform and with the Belgian gender quotas acts. The subsequent sections respectively analyse the lists of candidates presented for the 2003 federal elections and the electoral outcome in terms of wo/men elected. The final section assembles the various conclusions.

2. The reform of the electoral system and the new gender quotas act

Belgium has a proportional representation system with what could be called semi-closed party lists. The system allows for multiple preferential voting (Smits and Thomas, 1998) but seats are mainly awarded to candidates in the order in which they appear on the list. This is due to the fact that voters tend to make little use of their possibility to cast a vote for several candidates on the same list but rather give their preferential vote to the top candidate.¹ On the whole, the Belgian electoral system belongs to those electoral systems that do provide members of traditionally under-represented social groups with more chances to getting selected or elected. Proportional electoral systems are

characterised by twice as many elected women than plurality-majority systems, about 20% as compared to 10% (Norris, 2000). In this respect Belgium scores points in the hierarchy of women-friendly electoral systems (Leijenaar, 2000; Matland, 1993; Rule, 1994).

In the run up to the federal elections of May 2003 a reform changed the electoral system, especially with regards to the House of Representatives. First, the former electoral districts were merged into provincial ones. Actually one fourth of the electoral districts were not affected by this rule since their boundaries already corresponded to those of the province.² Furthermore, an exception was made for the electoral district of the capital given its bilingual character. But in the other 5 provinces a large number of smaller districts disappeared.³

Second, a provincial electoral threshold of 5% was established. In the past there had only been a de facto electoral threshold that depended on the number of votes a party needed to attain in a given district in order to win a seat. The new provincial threshold made the minimum requirement to obtain a seat vary less from district to district.

Third, the impact of the list vote – and hence of the list order – was divided by two. In the past seats were awarded to candidates starting at the top of the list adding list votes needed to match the eligibility figure to each candidate's preferential votes until all votes were distributed. The ranking on the list had no impact when a candidate's number of preferential votes attained the eligibility figure or when all list votes had been distributed while there were still seats to be allocated. As mentioned before both situations were exceptional because few preferential votes were cast and most of them went to candidates at the top of the list. Throughout the previous century less than 1% of the members of the House of Representatives and Senate managed to get elected without occupying eligible positions (Craeghs and Dewachter, 1998) and even the multiple preferential voting in the middle of the 1990s did not make the electorate change its voting behaviour in this respect (Smits and Thomas, 1998; Smits and Wauters, 2000). Reducing the impact of the list vote by 50% as established by the electoral reform implied that the relative weight of preferential votes cast for individual candidates increased while that of the prior to the elections set list order decreased. It would therefore become easier for candidates to breach the list order and to get elected without occupying an a priori eligible

position on the list. The provincial threshold and the halving of the impact of the list vote also held for the Senate. For the rest nothing changed regarding the elections of the Senate in May 2003.

Next to the reform of the electoral system a new gender quotas act was applied to the 2003 federal elections. During the summer of 2002 a number of acts were passed which were meant to guarantee an equal representation of wo/men on candidate lists.⁴ The quotas impose an equal number of fe/male candidates to the list as a whole. Furthermore, so-called double quotas were introduced. These quotas do not only apply to the number of candidates as such but also to the distribution of candidates over the eligible list positions. In the Belgian case the double quotas apply to the first two list positions, which may not be occupied by candidates of the same sex. Non-compliance implies a rejection of the list by the public authorities. Finally these acts contain temporary measures. At the first elections after its putting into force the first three positions of electoral lists may not be occupied by candidates of the same sex. Whereas the final quotas will award women at least the second position on the list, the temporary ones only guarantee them a third position. The former 1994 gender quotas act ‘to promote a balanced representation of men and women on electoral lists’⁵ had stipulated that electoral lists may not comprise more than 2/3 of candidates of the same sex but it did not contain double quotas. In case of non-compliance lists would have been rejected, too. The act became effective in 1996 with the exception of the 1994 local and provincial elections. During those elections, as well as all other elections held between 1996 and 1999, lists would have had to comprise a maximum of 3/4 of candidates of the same sex. From 1999 onwards electoral lists had to respect a 2/3 quotas. In practice the 1994 local and provincial elections were the only ones applying the temporary quotas, but the full version of the quotas act had been applied to all electoral levels between 1999 and 2000.

From a theoretical point of view most aspects of these two major innovations for the 2003 federal elections should improve the gender balance in the federal assemblies and especially in the House of Representatives. The provincial boundaries of electoral districts made their size increase. The old districts for the House of Representatives contained on average 7,5 seats, but some of them had but two. The new ones count on average 12,6 seats and the smallest one still has four. Larger electoral districts provide a setting in which women or candidates of other under-represented social groups have

a bigger chance of getting selected and elected. A constant finding is that women are represented in larger numbers in systems characterised by large electoral districts, unless a high number of parties undermines the diversifying effect of a proportional system. The higher party magnitude is in a proportional system, the more a party is stimulated to diversify a list of candidates in order to appeal to various subgroups within the electorate. This attitude is beneficial for female candidates especially since the Belgian public opinion increasingly considers lists with too few female candidates to be politically incorrect. What is important in this context is that it is not a matter of relative but of absolute party size (Darcy et.al., 1994; Jones, 1996; Matland, 1993; Matland and Studlar, 1998; Norris, 1996; Rule, 1994). Empirical research in 25 modern Western democracies by Paskeviciute (2001) detected a positive correlation between a minimum number of parties and the percentage of female delegates. The limit of this positive effect lay, according to the findings, at 6 effective parties. While the reform of the electoral system increased district size there was no increase of the number of parties likely to win a seat. Hence party magnitude increased, which should improve women's chances of getting selected or even elected.

The provincial electoral threshold should further reinforce this positive gender-effect. Thresholds keep small parties out at the advantage of bigger ones. While a threshold reduces the number of parties, it increases party magnitude. In other words, while diversity at the level of party ideologies is likely to decrease, there should be more intra-party diversity in terms of candidates. Given the fact that a threshold increases party magnitude it stimulates the tendency to balance lists in order to appeal to various subgroups in the electorate (Leijenaar, 2000). On the whole the expectation was that the introduction of a 5% provincial electoral threshold would not have much impact on the electoral outcome in Belgium, given the fact that in many cases it came close to the former de facto threshold. Prior to the 2003 elections it was thought that only the Flemish Regionalists might be affected by it, because the party fell apart into a number of smaller groups of which only one (N-VA) decided to participate in the elections on its own. The electoral outcome did however show that not only the Flemish Regionalists were more or less eliminated (they could save but one out of the 8 former seats in the House of Representatives). The Flemish Greens (Agalev) were also eliminated and their

Francophone counterparts (Ecolo) received a serious blow. But this was due to a loss of voters rather than a consequence of the threshold because without it these parties would not have won considerably more seats. On the whole, the provincial threshold did not make the number of parties decrease and in this respect it did not stimulate an increased party-internal diversity. But it should at least not have a negative effect on the number of women selected or elected.

The reduction of the impact of the list vote by half and its impact on the fe/male balance among the candidates elected is more difficult to assess. Theoretically speaking it should be negative for women given their actual position in political decision-making. The halving of the impact of the list vote makes it easier for candidates to breach the list order and to get elected on the basis of preferential votes. However, this requires that the candidate is well known and has a certain name, which gives incumbencies the lead on new candidates. Given the actual sex-balance in federal politics the halving of the list vote should be disadvantageous for female candidates. However, to what extent the halving of the impact of the list vote would make candidates jump over colleagues ranked higher on the list was difficult to assess in advance. It actually depends on the number of preferential votes cast for the various candidates and in that respect on the electorate's voting behaviour. But since preferential voting is low at the federal level not too much of an impact was expected.

However, the halving of the list vote is at odds with the new double quotas. The halving of the list vote increases the open character of candidate lists while double quotas require closed lists in order to have a maximum impact. But as such the new gender quotas acts should have favoured a higher number of women. First, it raised the number of women candidates from minimum 33% to 50%. Such a measure increases the visibility of female candidates. Second, double quotas focusing on the two top positions of an electoral list touch upon an important aspect of the Belgian electoral system, the relative importance of the list order when it comes to the determination of eligible positions. Empirical evidence has shown that the number of women on eligible positions matters rather than the number of women on a candidate list as such. And in Belgium women have traditionally been under-represented on eligible positions even when the number of female candidates started to rise during the 1990s. The first gender quotas act of 1994 did not change this situation given the fact that it did not contain any

obligations concerning eligible list positions (Meier, 1998, 1999; Verzele, 2000). With double quotas obliging parties to have a male and a female candidate occupy the first two positions on the list the new gender quotas acts focus on the traditionally most important list positions. But the halving of the impact of the list vote combined with a strategic placing of well-known candidates at the lower end of the list increases the likeliness that the list order will be breached. Well-known candidates at the bottom of the list are meant to attract a lot of votes for the party. Generally they do not have the intention to get elected or to take up their mandate. But even if they refuse their mandate, they can get elected at the disadvantage of less well-known candidates on theoretically eligible positions because their mandate will be taken up by someone from the list of succeeding candidates. In this respect the halving of the list vote can undermine the impact of double quotas. But as mentioned before it was difficult to assess the impact of the halving of the list vote prior to the 2003 elections.

Next to the halving of the impact of the list vote the increased district size in the House of Representatives can also blur the impact of the new gender quotas acts. Double quotas have a maximum effect in case they focus on all eligible positions. In Belgium they would therefore imply a most balanced outcome in terms of wo/men elected in case parties would be likely to win two or maximum three seats per district. However, the electoral reform increased party magnitude and as we will see in that respect weakened the impact of the double quotas.

On the whole, both the reform of the electoral system and the new gender quotas acts are as such conducive to more balanced gender relations. Large districts, provincial threshold and double gender quotas all favour the selection of more female candidates and the election of more women. And even the halving of the impact of the list order was not supposed to have too much of an impact. However, the point is that a combined application of these measures makes the reform of the electoral system undermine an optimal impact of the new gender quotas, due to the increased size of electoral districts and possibly to the halving of the list vote in case it would have an effect. Hence, establishing various measures, which might all in themselves promote a gender balance in politics, does not per definition imply an aggregated result, on the contrary.

3. The gender composition of candidate lists for the 2003 elections

The analysis of the gender composition of candidate lists comprises the following aspects: i) the share of fe/male candidates on eligible positions, which makes it possible to measure the evolution since the previous elections; ii) the position of fe/male candidates on the first three list positions, which indicates how parties interpret the temporary double quotas; iii) the position of fe/male candidates on the first two list positions, which gives an idea of how many lists already respect the final double quotas. Furthermore, the number of wo/men on eligible positions on a whole is a good indicator for the extent to which parties apply the logic of double quotas to all eligible positions since several parties can count on more than three (or in the future two) seats per district.

All seats won during these 1999 elections were considered to be an eligible seat. The electoral results of smaller former districts were thereby aggregated at the provincial level. It goes without saying that this definition did not necessarily correspond with the expectations of several parties, expectations that were partly fed by changes in the party landscape prior to the 2003 elections. In this respect the data for the Flemish Regionalist N-VA over-estimate what they could expect and those for the Flemish Socialists under-estimate their outcome since part of the former Flemish Regionalists joined their ranks. But this definition of eligible positions made it possible to analyse the candidate lists of all parties represented in the House of Representatives or in the Senate prior to the 2003 elections. These are respectively the Flemish and Francophone Liberals (VLD and MR), Socialists (SP.A-Spirit and PS), Greens (Agalev and Ecolo), Christian-Democrats (CD&V and cdH), Right-Extremists (Vlaams Blok and FNB), as well as the Flemish Regionalists (N-VA). Other candidate lists were not analysed. Neither did any of them win a seat during the 2003 federal elections.

The estimations were corrected in order to account for the changing number of seats per province since the previous 1999 elections of the House of Representatives, changes which are due to an evolution of population figures.⁶ In the case of the Senate the electoral results of the previous 1999 elections were used.

Furthermore, the estimations respect the list order in order to determine which candidate occupies an eligible position. First it was impossible to estimate the impact of the halving of the list order and it

was, on the whole, not expected to have a considerable impact. Second, it was impossible to foresee which candidates would eventually not take up their mandate, either because they had no intention to leave their actual job or because they would enter the new federal government. In this last case there was also a more fundamental reason not to consider these potential successions even though they might blur the estimations. In this last case the succession of candidates and not the selection of candidates for eligible positions would influence the gender balance, whereas the gender quotas are meant to influence the composition of electoral lists no matter which expectations parties have when composing their lists.

3.1. Women on eligible list positions for the 2003 elections

Women occupied 35% of the eligible list positions for the House of Representatives and 43% of those for the Senate (see table 1). Within the Flemish parties they did a little better than the federal average when it comes to the Senate and a little worse than the federal average in the case of the House of Representatives. Within the Francophone parties the opposite is true. But on the whole the federal average is a good indicator for the fact that the percentage of women on eligible list positions is higher than during the previous federal elections, which took place in 1999. However, this goes to a larger extent for the candidate lists of the House of Representatives than for those of the Senate.

During the 1999 federal elections women already occupied 37,5% of the eligible list positions for the Senate, 40% in the case of the Flemish parties and 33% in the case of the Francophone parties. During the last elections both on the Flemish as well as on the Francophone candidate lists the percentage of women rose slightly, but one cannot speak of a spectacular increase of the number of women candidates on eligible list positions. However, in the case of the House of Representatives the number of women on eligible list positions is considerably higher in 2003 than it was during the previous elections of 1999. 35% of the eligible list positions in the House of Representatives went to women candidates as compared to 17% in 1999. Regarding the Flemish candidate lists these were respectively 34% and 19%, and in the case of the Francophone lists these were respectively 37% and 16%. The difference in the increase of the number of women candidates on eligible list positions for the House

of Representatives and for the Senate can partly be explained by the fact that in 1999 relatively many women had already occupied an eligible position for the Senate as compared to the House of Representatives. But the lesser increase of the percentage of women candidates on eligible positions for the Senate also indicates that the new double quotas only had a limited effect. It is likely that in 1999 the number of women candidates on eligible positions for the Senate was already high because of a higher party magnitude. In other words, the larger electoral districts for the House of Representatives, that imply a higher party magnitude, would be responsible for the increase of the number of women on eligible positions rather than the new gender quotas stipulations. This issue will be returned to below. Yet, it is a fact that the candidate lists for the House of Representatives and for the Senate differ less from each other than in 1999 when it comes to the number of women occupying eligible positions.

{Table 1 about here}

Splitting out the data per party reveals important differences among them when it comes to the number of women on eligible list positions, although this goes to a larger extent for the Flemish parties than for the Francophone ones. The different Francophone parties all stay close to the average percentage of women on eligible positions. Of the Flemish parties the lists of SP.A-Spirit and of the Vlaams Blok are way below the average while Agalev leaves it far behind. Neither did all Flemish lists contain a higher percentage of women on eligible positions than during the 1999 federal elections, as was the case with the Francophone parties. While the number of women candidates on eligible positions slightly decreased on the N-VA lists as compared to the 1999 lists of the former Flemish Regionalists (VU-ID), the number of women on eligible CD&V positions stagnated. But in 1999 the lists of both parties contained a relatively higher share of women candidates on eligible positions than did those of the other Flemish parties. In 2003 the VLD, SP.A-Spirit, Agalev and the Vlaams Blok caught up so to speak. Except for the FN, a minor party in terms of numbers, all Francophone parties saw their share of women candidates on eligible list positions rise to about the same extent.

Finally, it should be added that the percentage of eligible list positions attributed to women candidates does not seem to be related to the relative size of the parties nor to their ideological background. It cannot be said that only parties with the biggest share of eligible list positions distributed them most equally among fe/male candidates. Neither did certain political families consistently do the pioneering work in this field.

3.2. Application of double quotas to the candidate lists for the 2003 elections⁷

As table 2 reveals the double quotas were not respected in a merely minimalist way. While the temporary quotas implied that parties had to leave at least the third list position to a woman candidate, more lists actually followed the final quotas attributing the two first positions to candidates of a different sex (63%) than having the first woman candidate occupy position three (31%). Yet, women candidates remained rare when it comes to the first list position. On the whole only about one fourth (24%) of all candidate lists for the House of Representatives and for the Senate were headed by a woman candidate.⁸ The only exception upwards was Agalev with 6 out of 7 lists headed by a woman candidate, which was due to a conscious operation meant to feminise the lists. The Vlaams Blok was the only party having no woman candidate heading a list. In all other cases a woman candidate headed maximum two out of the 7 lists.

Anticipating the final stipulations of the gender quotas acts is a phenomenon, which has also been observed in the case of the former gender quotas act of 1994. At the occasion of the elections held during the second half of the 1990s a large number of candidate lists corresponded to the gender quotas stipulations that were still to be enforced. This form of anticipation can be explained by the fact that gender quotas acts determine the standard for candidate lists in terms of what is politically correct from a gender perspective. Given the fact that they define the standard parties which want to profile themselves in this area are forced to anticipate the stipulations of the gender quotas acts or to make a bigger effort than what is required by law. In this respect the gender quotas acts did have an impact even though the legal instrument as such did not enforce it (Deschouwer and Meier, 2002).

{Table 2 about here}

These findings only tell how the various parties interpreted the new double quotas. The question however is how parties reacted to the new gender quotas acts considering their number of eligible list positions. The answer can be deduced from table 1. Half of the 12 lists where parties could expect two seats had candidates of both sexes occupy these first two positions. Yet, none of these lists attributed both top positions, and hence all eligible ones, to women candidates. Furthermore, only one fourth of the 23 candidate lists where parties could expect only one seat did attribute this unique eligible position to a woman candidate.

Even though the absolute numbers are not high in this case, they clearly show that parties do not tend to attribute eligible positions to women candidates in case these positions are sparse. The less eligible positions there are per list the greater the number of men candidates becomes. The only party forming an exception to this during the 2003 elections was Agalev. The lists of VLD, SP.A-Spirit, CD&V and Ecolo did not contain a single woman on the first two positions of the candidate list in case these were the only eligible ones. Yet, with the exception of SP.A-Spirit these parties did come close to the federal average of women candidates on eligible positions. Hence they compensated for the absence of women candidates where eligible positions are sparse by placing them on lists likely to win a larger number of seats. This confirms the conclusion that the chances of women increase as party magnitude rises. The lists from SP.A-Spirit are an exception to this conclusion, but they confirm the generally weak position of the party when it comes to the number of women on eligible list positions. This does not only hold for the 2003 elections. Also during the previous 1999 federal elections SP.A did badly in this respect (Deschouwer and Meier, 2002).

These findings also confirm the assumption that the new gender quotas were only to a limited extent responsible for the increase of the number of women candidates on eligible positions, especially when it comes to the House of Representatives. The provincial districts led to an elimination of a large number of cases where parties could expect but one eligible position. In case the old electoral districts would have been applied in 2003 61 lists could not have counted on more than one eligible position.

That is nearly three times as much as in the new system of provincial districts. Also about one third of the lists disappeared that could have counted on no more than two eligible positions, because under the old electoral districts there would have been 19 of such lists. Given the weak presence of women candidates on eligible positions when they are scarce it should be assumed that parties would have interpreted the new double quotas in a more minimalist way in case the old electoral districts would still have been in use for the 2003 elections. Empirical evidence regarding the 1999 elections does confirm this assumption: 22 of the 26 women occupying an eligible position on a list for the House of Representatives were candidate on a list with at least two eligible positions (Verzele and Joly, 1999). In 2003 parties mainly took advantage of the higher party magnitude in order to place more women candidates on eligible list positions.

Given these findings it can be concluded that the provincial districts partly undermine the optimal impact of the new double quotas, even if this conclusion seems to be wrong at first sight. If parties can count on only one seat per list the new double quotas would not have an effect since they do not oblige parties to attribute the first list position to alternately a male and a female candidate. The same goes for the temporary double quotas in case parties can only count on two seats per list. In order to have an impact parties should count on three seats per list. The final double quotas would have an impact from the moment parties can count on two seats per candidate list. Furthermore, double quotas have an optimal effect in case parties cannot count on more seats than the number of list positions the double quotas focus on. The conclusion was that parties tend to attribute eligible list positions to men candidates rather than to women candidates whenever they can only count on one or two eligible positions. In this respect the provincial districts strengthen the potential impact of the new double quotas because a large number of lists winning but one or two (from the perspective of the temporary double quotas) seats disappeared with the new provincial districts. While in 1999 61 lists for the House of Representatives won but one seat, 19 lists won two seats, 14 lists won three seats and two lists finally won four seats or more, in 2003 these figures were respectively 11, 13, 5 and 18. Hence, 50 lists on which the double quotas would have no impact at all disappeared. However, the provincial districts increased the size of many districts to an extent that they undermine the optimal impact of the

double quotas, because especially the number of lists winning four seats or more rose considerably. It is evident that these data depend on the electoral outcome and that at the next elections of the House of Representatives some lists might win a smaller number of seats. But on the whole the provincial districts did increase party magnitude. Nothing hinders parties to attribute more than one eligible position to women candidates in case they can count on three seats or more and the findings showed that parties mainly used the extra space created by the larger provincial districts to have more women candidates on eligible positions. But not all parties did so and neither did all parties consistently attribute all eligible seats to men and women candidates equally. Yet, gender quotas acts are mainly of importance for parties that do not by themselves promote a gender balance among their candidates and representatives. While the new double quotas would have had an impact in small districts where parties can only count on two or three seats, they were not adapted to the size of the new provincial districts. In the context of the new electoral districts their potential impact impoverished because they lost grip on part of the eligible positions.

4. The gender composition of the candidates elected in 2003

The analysis of the gender composition of candidate elected in 2003 comprises the following aspects:

i) the share of fe/male candidates elected per party, which makes it possible to measure the evolution since the last elections; ii) the share of fe/male candidates elected in a system of closed lists and the share of fe/male candidates elected on a priori non-eligible positions, which are indicators of the impact of the halving of the list order.

4.1. The number of men and women candidates elected in 2003

Over time the percentage of women Senators has been slightly higher than that of women MPs, with the exception of the period 1954-1974. But on the whole there was never much of a difference between the two assemblies when it comes to the number of women elected. The gap between the two assemblies increased in 1995 when the share of women Senators rose considerably to attain 24%, while that of the House of Representatives remained at 12%. This rise is generally explained by a

decrease of the Senate's power in the wake of the 1993 constitutional reform. Yet, part of it can also be attributed to the considerable increase of the Senate's electoral districts in 1993 (Deschouwer and Meier, 2002). In 1999 the percentage of women elected for the House of Representatives climbed to 19%, but in the Senate the share of women Senators rose further to attain 28%. As table 3 shows a similar evolution can be found for the 2003 elections, but with the difference that the House of Representatives nearly managed to close the gap which had been created in 1995.

In 2003 35% women were elected to the House of Representatives as compared to 19% in 1999. This is the highest increase ever of the number of women elected to the House of Representatives, but the results are not surprising when the number of women candidates on eligible positions is taken as an indicator for the number of women elected. In 1999 the number of women elected came also close to the number of women candidates on eligible positions.

Splitting up the data shows that much the same as in 1999 the Francophone parties did better than the Flemish ones during the 2003 elections. In the South of the country 39% of women were elected as compared to 32% on Flemish lists, but as has been mentioned before, women candidates also occupied more eligible positions on Francophone lists. With the exception of the Greens, the N-VA and the FN, which are of little importance in terms of numbers, all parties see their absolute number of women elected increase. This does even go for the Christian-Democrats, which both see their numbers of seats drop. SP.A-Spirit, MR and the Vlaams Blok see their number of women increase to the same extent as they win seats and for the PS and the VLD a higher increase of the number of women than of the number of seats can be noted. Among the Flemish parties SP.A-Spirit and not the CD&V counts most women in its ranks since the vanishing of Agalev, although these last two parties traditionally led in terms of gender-sensitivity. SP.A-Spirit is followed by the VLD. Among the Francophone parties the Socialists and the Liberals also count the highest number of women elected, which means that the biggest parties contain the highest number of women elected. This confirms the earlier conclusion that not so much the new double quotas but party magnitude are responsible for the increase of the number of women elected.

{Table 3 about here}

In the Senate the number of women elected climbed less than in the House of Representatives. While in 1999 28% women were elected there were 38% of them at the last elections. Contrary to the House of Representatives the number of women elected is lower than the number of women figuring on eligible list positions. As will be discussed later this is due to the fact that in the Senate men candidates breached the list order to the detriment of women candidates. The data for the Senate also imply that in 2003 the House of Representatives nearly managed to close the gap with the Senate, that arose in 1995 with a considerable increase of the electoral districts for the Senate. And it seems that it is about to disappear now that the districts for the House of Representatives increased, although future elections have to confirm this assumption. Nonetheless, here is another indicator for the fact that higher party magnitude rather than the new double quotas were responsible for the higher number of women in politics, at least in the case of the House of Representatives.

Yet, in the Senate party magnitude did not increase and the number of women elected still rose as compared to 1999. In this case the new gender quotas did have an effect, although it was not so much the instrument as such than the dynamic it created. Due to the reasons mentioned before parties had used the candidate lists for the Senate to give in to the growing claim for more women in politics during the second half of the 1990s. And given the dynamic created by new gender quotas parties had to place even more women on eligible positions than they did before. But the size of the electoral districts for the Senate implies that the new double quotas as such only have grip on a small part of the eligible list positions.

Breaking down the findings shows that in the case of the Senate again more women were elected from the Francophone lists than from the Flemish ones, even though women candidates occupied proportionally less eligible positions on the Francophone lists. As compared to the House of Representatives it is not necessarily parties with the highest number of Senators elected which count the highest number of women. Furthermore, SP.A-Spirit is the only party where the victory is reflected in the number of women elected and where this number rose considerably. Here again the party takes

over from Agalev in terms of the number of women elected, even though CD&V manages to maintain its position.

4.2. The impact of the halving of the list vote on the number of wo/men elected

An easy indicator for the impact of the halving of the list vote consists in analysing how many women would have been elected in case there would have been closed lists because in such a situation preferential votes have no impact on who gets elected whereas double quotas have a maximum impact. It could have been that parties would have ranked their candidates differently in such a system, but at least in the past lists were pretty closed due to the voting behaviour of the electorate, even though in theory the list order could have been breached. In the House of Representatives one more woman would have been elected with closed lists, but this would not have affected the general percentage of women MPs elected. In the Senate two more women would have been elected, which would have raised their share to 43%. In this respect the halving of the impact of the list vote did not affect the gender balance in the House of Representatives but it did in the Senate. In case the list order would not have been breached in the Senate as many women candidates would have been elected as there were figuring on eligible list positions.

In total 21 candidates for the House of Representatives and 6 for the Senate were elected due to the fact that they managed to breach the list order. As such this is a much higher number than during previous federal elections. In the House of Representatives 9 of them were women and the other 12 were men, in the Senate there were respectively two and four. In both cases less women than men breached the list order but in the House of Representatives the difference is not big. Furthermore, male candidates did not necessarily breach the list order to the detriment of women. In the Senate three male candidates breached the list order to the detriment of women and only one woman candidate managed to do the opposite. But in the House of Representatives 5 women breached the list order to the detriment of men and 6 male candidates did the opposite. This confirms the outcome of the electoral results under a system of closed lists. Yet, the findings also show that the halving of the impact of the list vote did not have a negative effect on the number of women elected to the House of

Representatives. This is due to the fact that a large number of candidates breached the list order to the detriment of a candidate of the same sex. But it is also due to the fact that women candidates managed to breach the list order to the detriment of a candidate of the other sex to nearly the same extent as men.

Hence, the halving of the impact of the list vote thwarts the new double gender quotas to the extent that the candidate order on the list did not necessarily correspond to the order in which they were elected. But at least in the case of the House of Representatives the halving of the impact of the list vote did not really thwart the new gender quotas at the level of the number of women elected.

Therefore, contrary to the expectations the halving of the impact of the list vote did not have a negative effect on the new double gender quotas. However, these were the first federal elections held whereby the impact of the list vote was halved. Future elections will have to show to what extent men and women candidates will again equally manage to breach the list order. At least the example of the Senate shows that the halving of the impact of the list vote can be disadvantageous for women candidates.

5. Conclusion

The initial question was which impact the reform of the electoral system as well as the new gender quotas acts would have on the number of women elected during the Belgian 2003 federal elections. The underlying question was how the reform of the electoral system and the new gender quotas acts would interact in this respect. Both the increase of the electoral districts (for the House of Representatives) and the new double gender quotas were expected to make the number of women elected rise. The starting point of this article was however that their combined application would not necessarily be beneficial for women because the larger electoral districts would partly undermine the effect of the gender quotas. The other aspects of the reform of the electoral system were expected to have no impact on women (the provincial threshold of 5%) or a possible negative one (the halving of the impact of the list vote). In case the halving of the impact of the list vote would have an impact on the number of women elected this was also supposed to undermine part of the effect of the new gender

quotas.

The findings show that the provincial threshold did indeed not make a difference for women because it did not affect party magnitude. Contrary to the expectations the halving of the impact of the list vote did not really have a negative effect on the number of women elected to the House of Representatives although it did in the case of the Senate. This aspect of the reform of the electoral system did therefore not necessarily undermine part of the effect of the new gender quotas, although future elections have to show whether women and men will equally be able to breach the list order to the detriment of a candidate of the opposite sex.

The new gender quotas themselves were only to a limited extent responsible for the increase of the number of women elected, especially in the case of the House of Representatives where the larger districts caused the spectacular increase of women elected. Indicators for this are the fact that in the Senate the number of women did not rise as spectacularly, that the House of Representatives managed to close the gap in terms of women elected now that its districts also increased in size, and that most parties used the extra space provided by larger districts in order to place more women on the new eligible positions. In the Senate all this had already happened at the occasion of the 1995 and 1999 elections and the new gender quotas did not make the number of women elected rise spectacularly. Furthermore, the new and larger districts for the elections of the House of Representatives partly also undermine the potential impact of the new gender quotas (and the same goes for the district size in the case of the Senate). They have a positive effect on the new gender quotas because they eliminate a large number of cases where candidate lists can only expect to win one seat, a seat parties tend to attribute to men candidates and on which the new double gender quotas have no impact. But due to the new provincial districts the number of cases where parties are likely to win four seats or more increased considerably and this makes the new gender quotas lose grip on part of the eligible list positions. Even though parties tend to use the extra space available in larger districts to place women on eligible positions, they do not attribute an equal number of winnable seats to men and women.

The simultaneous application of measures, all of which promote a gender balance in politics, does not necessarily imply an aggregated result at the level of gender balance as demonstrates the Belgian case.

In order to maximise the potential impact of the new gender quotas these double quotas need to apply to all eligible list positions. This implies either a reduction of party magnitude or, which seems easier to realise, an extension of the double quotas to all eligible list positions. In order to really maximise their effect eligible list positions should be defined as being the number of seats won during the previous election plus one. At a more general level it should also be concluded that future debates on the position of women in politics should focus more explicitly on the extent to which the features of the electoral system themselves set the conditions for the number of women in politics and for the potential impact of gender quotas.

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¹ At the local and provincial level multiple preferential voting has a longer tradition and is better exploited.

² These were the electoral districts of Limburg, Luxemburg, Namen, Vlaams and Waals Brabant.

³ The new provincial districts are Antwerpen, Henegouwen, Luik, Oost-Vlaanderen and West-Vlaanderen.

⁴ Wet van 17 juni 2002 tot waarborging van een gelijke vertegenwoordiging van mannen en vrouwen op de kandidatenlijsten voor de verkiezingen van het Europees Parlement (Belgisch Staatsblad 28/08/2002). Wet van 18 juli 2002 tot waarborging van een gelijke vertegenwoordiging van mannen en vrouwen op de kandidatenlijsten van de kandidaturen voor de verkiezingen van de federale Wetgevende Kamers en van de Raad van de Duitstalige Gemeenschap (Belgisch Staatsblad 28/08/2002). Bijzondere wet van 18 juli 2002 tot waarborging van een gelijke vertegenwoordiging van mannen en vrouwen op de kandidatenlijsten van de kandidaturen voor de verkiezingen van de Waalse Gewestraad, de Vlaamse Raad en de Brusselse Hoofdstedelijke Raad (Belgisch Staatsblad 13/09/2002). Wet van 13 december 2002 houdende verschillende wijzigingen van de kieswetgeving (Belgisch Staatsblad 10/01/2003).

⁵ Wet van 24 mei 1994 ter bevordering van een evenwichtige verdeling van mannen en vrouwen op de kandidatenlijsten voor de verkiezingen (Belgisch Staatsblad 01/07/1994).

⁶ There was one extra seat in Limburg and in Luxemburg and one less in Oost- and in West-Vlaanderen.

⁷ The FN is left out in this analysis due to the fact that it disposed of only one eligible list position.

⁸ Yet, there are more women candidates at the top of a list than there were during the previous federal elections when about 15% of the candidate lists (of the parties discussed) were headed by a woman (data derived from: Verzele and Joly, 1999).

Table 1: Women candidates on eligible positions for the 2003 federal elections

	VLD	SP.A-Spirit	CD&V	Agalev	Vlaams Blok	N-VA	Total
House of Representatives							
Antwerpen	2/5	1/3	3/5	1/3	2/6	0/2	9/24
Limburg	1/3	0/2	1/3	1/1	½	1/1	5/12
Oost-Vlaanderen	2/5	1/3	2/5	1/2	1/3	1/2	8/20
West-Vlaanderen	1/4	1/3	1/5	1/1	0/2	0/1	4/16
Leuven	0/2	0/1	0/1	1/1	0/1	0/1	1/7
Brussel-Halle-Vilvoorde	2/3	0/1	1/3	0/1	0/2	1/1	4/11
Total	8/22	3/13	8/22	5/9	4/16	3/8	31/90 (34%)
1999: women on eligible positions	3/21	1/20	10/29	0/5	1/11	2/5	17/91 (19%)
1999: women elected	4/23	0/14	4/22	4/9	1/15	3/8	16/91 (18%)
Senate							
Total	2/6	2/4	3/6	2/3	¼	1/2	11/25 (44%)
1999: women on eligible positions	3/6	3/6	3/7	1/1	0/3	0/2	10/25 (40%)
1999: women elected	2/6	¼	2/6	2/3	¼	0/2	8/25 (32%)

	MR	PS	cdH	ECOLO	FN	Total
House of Representatives						
Brussel-Halle-Vilvoorde	2/5	1/2	1/1	1/3		11
Nijvel	1/2	0/1	0/1	0/1		6
Luik	2/4	2/5	1/3	2/3		15
Namen	1/2	0/2	0/1	0/1		6
Henegouwen	2/4	4/8	1/3	1/3	0/1	19
Luxemburg	0/1	0/1	0/1	0/1		4
Total	8/18	7/19	3/10	4/12	0/1	22/60 (37%)
1999: women on eligible positions	3/18	3/21	2/12	1/6	0/2	9/59 (16%)
1999: women elected	4/18	2/19	1/10	6/11	0/1	13/59 (22%)
Senate						
Total	2/5	1/4	1/3	2/3		6/15 (40%)
1999: women on eligible positions	1/5	2/5	1/3	½		5/15 (33%)
1999: women elected	1/5	1/4	1/3	1/3		4/15 (27%)

Data for the 1999 elections: Peirens, 1999

Table 2: Ranking of fe/male candidates on the lists for the 2003 federal elections

	VLD	SP.A-Spirit	CD&V	Agalev	Vlaams Blok	N-VA	MR	PS	cdH	Ecolo
woman heading candidate list	1/7	1/7	1/7	6/7	0/7	2/7	1/7	1/7	2/7	2/7
alternation first two positions	5/7	3/7	2/7	4/7	3/7	5/7	4/7	5/7	6/7	7/7
first woman on 3 ^o position	2/7	4/7	4/7	0/7	4/7	2/7	3/7	2/7	1/7	0/7

Table 3: Women candidates elected during the 2003 federal elections

House of Representatives	VLD	SP.A-Spirit	CD&V	Vlaams Blok	N-VA	PS	MR	cdH	Ecolo	FN
Women elected	9/25	9/23	6/21	4/18	0/1	10/25	10/24	2/8	2/4	0/1
Women elected with closed list	9/25	8/23	7/21	4/18	0/1	10/25	10/24	3/8	2/4	0/1
Women breach list order at the expense of men ^a	1/2	2/3	0/0	1/1	0/0	1/2	0/1	0/0	0/0	0/0
Men breach list order at the expense of women ^a	1/1	0/2	1/2	1/3	0/0	1/1	2/3	0/0	0/0	0/0

Senate	VLD	SP.A-Spirit	CD&V	Vlaams Blok	PS	MR	cdH	Ecolo	FN
Women elected	2/7	4/7	2/6	1/5	2/6	1/5	1/2	1/1	1/1
Women elected with closed list	3/7	3/7	3/6	1/5	2/6	2/5	1/2	1/1	1/1
Women breach list order at the expense of men ^a	0/0	1/1	0/0	0/0	0/1	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0
Men breach list order at the expense of women ^a	1/1	0/0	1/1	0/1	0/0	1/1	0/0	0/0	0/0

data: www.vrtnieuws.net, www.destandaard.be, www.lesoir.be, www.verkiezingen2003.belgium.be

^a data after the slash indicate the number of candidates of the corresponding sex breaching the list order, data before the slash indicate the number of candidates doing so to the detriment of a candidate of the other sex