The regional elections in Flanders turned into an unexpectedly convincing victory for the Vlaams Blok (24.15%). Compared with last year’s federal elections, the far-right party gained 6.28%, and 9.14% compared with the regional elections of 1999. The cartel of Christian Democrats and Flemish Nationalists, the CD&V/N-VA, became the biggest political formation in Flanders (26.09%), but only gained 0.26% compared with the federal elections of 2003. That is nothing like the predicted 30% of the Standard/VRT poll. The governing Purple parties took a beating. The Liberal VLD-Vivant cartel lost 5.57% compared with 2003 and 4.25% compared with 1999, the left-wing SP.A/Spirit cartel lost 3.86% compared with last year, but gained 4.13% compared with the SP’s results in 1999. With a joint loss of 9%, the Purple parties appear to have been punished by the Flemish voter. Scarcely one year ago the Socialists and Liberals together won almost two-thirds of the seats in the National Parliament. Groen!, which was fighting for its life, achieved the electoral threshold in all provinces except Limburg thanks to a strong final sprint in the campaign and gained 3.75%. In the SP.A/Spirit cartel people are pointing out that Groen! and SP.A/Spirit are communicating vessels. The cartel’s loss in fact tallies remarkably well with Groen!’s gains.

The only possible two-party coalition in the Flemish Parliament is that of the CD&V/N-VA cartel with the Vlaams Blok. However, CD&V Chairman Yves Leterme, who is seizing the initiative to forge a new Flemish coalition, has already made it clear that there is no possibility of working with the Blok because of its conviction for racism. A three-party coalition is therefore unavoidable, but a Purple-Green reissue will not achieve a majority. Which left: either a coalition of the CD&V-N/VA with Groen! and a Liberal or Socialist partner, or a tripartite of the three main political cartels: the CD&V/N-VA, VLD-Vivant and SP.A/Spirit. This last combination is strongly reminiscent of the coalition in the current Antwerp city council. And it is now clear that this has made the Blok rich with very little effort.

Twelve victories in a row. In any normal situation such a party would be voted straight into government. In the case of the Blok that is not possible, because it has no allies and a conviction for racism, but that does not detract from the fact that each election it becomes harder to keep the Blok at bay. How is that possible?

Well, the other parties were asking for it. For months they discussed a Blok theme, immigrant voting rights, as if it were a matter of life and death. Then the country’s biggest party (the VLD) fought a sort of Sicilian internecine struggle and finally a campaign was conducted in which one democrat reproached the other for plunging the country into chaos with a shameful debate on television as the absolute epitome of
me of bad taste. At times, Filip Dewinter was the friendliest and most constructive of the lot. It is not the whole of Flanders that should be ashamed, as Professor Vermeersch (philosopher and ethicist) said, but the ruling political class. The ’knock ‘em dead’ approach of the Blok has led from one defeat to another. A party with 25% of the votes is a ‘mainstream party’, a people’s party, said Karel De Gucht (VLD). The Blok has already spent several years trying to propagate common-sense solutions. That is the main problem: in any conversation, the Blok is becoming ‘more normal’. That will not be changed by screaming blue murder.

**Paul Geudens • Gazet van Antwerpen • 14 June**

This is a personal defeat for Guy Verhofstadt. Even though he committed himself so emphatically to the campaign. He turned the Flemish elections into a federal test. He turned himself into what was at stake in the elections and now he must bear the consequences. On Sunday evening Verhofstadt stated that his (Federal, ed.) Government would simply continue, but is that possible! Will the VLD rank and file not demand an explanation for this election defeat? He made some serious mistakes in the immigrant voting rights dossier and with the internecine struggle with former chairman Karel De Gucht. Guy Verhofstadt heads a left-wing government, while a large part of his party is on the right.

The CD&V and N-VA have already said that they do not wish to negotiate with the Vlaams Blok, let alone govern. That is their democratic right, but they must realise that around one million Flemings see things differently. It is too simple to dismiss the Blok’s victory as purely an expression of anti-politics.

**Stefaan Huysestruyt • De Tijd • 14 June**

The Vlaams Blok is unmistakeably the main victor of yesterday’s elections. I will gauge the success or failure of my policy by the Vlaams Blok’s election results, Federal Premier Guy Verhofstadt let slip a few years ago. There is only one possible conclusion to be drawn from the Blok’s results yesterday: the Purples botched things up. Worse still, they themselves are in ruins. In one year the Liberals have managed to fall out of favour with the voter. That is not only down to the quarrelling within the VLD on immigrant voting rights, but also to the all too explicit central course of the party and, lest we forget, the arrogance of power. The formation of a Flemish coalition is made more difficult by the possible repercussions the results of the federal state elections may have on the Federal Government, and by the formation of a coalition in Francophone Belgium. Either federal Belgium learns to live with asymmetrical coalitions, different majorities in the federal states and at federal level, or the Purple federal coalition will have to be reviewed.

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**Mathias Danneels • Het Nieuwsblad • 14 June**

Together with the N-VA, CD&V Chairman Yves Leterme has managed to haul the Flemish Cartel to the fore with a victory. The revaluation of the concept of respect, reliable and practical government, a better balance between rights and obligations for society as a whole has demonstrated its pulling power. For his message, Leterme followed the example of the Purples’ confusing culture of promises. To this he added a set of Flemish demands for which it appears there is actually an electoral market. Compared with the federal results of 2003, SP.A/Spirit provided part of the gain. If Groen! had accepted the outstretched hand of Steve Stevaert, we would also have had another starting position for a progressive, pleasant Flanders today, apart from another campaign. The Greens and Socialists have become each other’s communicating vessel. The tenors of the two related families will just have to put their heads together to see how they can bake a bigger cake together.

**Yves Desmet • De Morgen • 14 June**

How do you explain that in what is still one of the safest and most prosperous regions in the world, almost one quarter of the population wants to place its fate in the hands of a party that has made the exploitation of every sort of problem its trademark? The answer is emotional, and lies primarily in the concept of fear. It was the famous American economist John Kenneth Galbraith who once described the sociology of prosperity as ‘the culture of contentment’. The more people have, the more afraid they are of losing it. The more prosperity people see around them, the angrier they become that they do not yet have it. The more isolated people become, the more fearful they become of an outside world that they increasingly perceive as a threat. When faith was placed in the Purples last year, it was because they had been able to dispel this fear with positive and sympathetic progressive thinking, the promise that society could be made better. Over the past year they have failed to fulfil this promise: the Purples have done little more in the past twelve months than keep things ticking over in a pre-electoral climate, and apart from that simply quarrelled. The optimism and progressive thinking began to
The Blok triumphs and explains why

The cordon sanitaire, immigrant voting rights and the conviction for racism by the Ghent Court of Appeal are the most plausible explanation for the victory

The Vlaams Blok won 24% of the votes and 32 of the 124 seats, making the second biggest party in Flanders behind the CD&V-N-VA cartel. What is remarkable is that the Blok not only scored far more in its stronghold, the province of Antwerp, but across the whole of Flanders. In each province the party gained more than 20% of the votes. In the province of Antwerp as much as 30%. The call to break the cordon sanitaire is getting louder and louder. ‘It’s time for the rue de la Loi to listen to the people,’ chorused the party leadership. Filip Dewinter even demanded the right to be allowed to form the Flemish Government, but no party is willing to begin negotiations with the Blok. CD&V Chairman Yves Leterme even refused Dewinter’s outstretched hand in the debate of the big guns in the VRT studio on Sunday evening. He said that the Blok was a party that had grown rich on problems instead of solving them. But Leterme cannot deny that 50% of his voters feel that the parties should remove the cordon sanitaire from around the Blok (FF).

BART HAECK • DE TIJD • 14 JUNE

What is the explanation for the victory? There are three main elements in the comments of the Blok leaders. The cordon sanitaire, immigrant voting rights and the conviction for racism by the Ghent Court of Appeal. The latter in particular appears to rankle with the Blok. ‘It was an unfair ruling,’ said Gerolf Annemans, Parliamentary Party Leader in the Chamber, ‘but it’s also a politically ineffective ruling.’ Vanhecke said that a party cannot be criminal if one in four Flemings vote for it. He is also unhappy with the reporting on acts of violence by Vlaams Blok representatives. He spoke of a legal and media witch-hunt. And then immigrant voting rights. Dewinter said he was happy not only because his party had won, but also because the VLD had lost. He was critical of the fact that the Liberals were quick to lie down before the PS in the discussion on immigrant voting rights. He therefore finds it a good thing that VLD-Vivant has been punished. Straightaway the arrows were also directed at the Federal Government. The Purple-Green experiment has failed, said Dewinter. Vanhecke agreed. ‘On a purely technical level Verhofstadt can remain in power, but he would be better off handing the reins to someone else.’
Winning CD&V/N-VA cartel asks Yves Leterme to form a new government

Because Groen! decided not to participate in the next government, Leterme is faced with accomplished facts. Only a coalition between CD&V/N-VA, SPA/Spirit and VLD/Vivant seems possible to form a majority.

The CD&V/N-VA cartel is now the biggest political formation in Flanders, with 26.1%. If the results of 2003 – when there was no cartel – are added together both parties achieved 25.8%. There is therefore a gain, albeit a small one. And yet there was cheering with the announcement of the results in De Bottelarij in Brussels, where the cartel celebrated its election victory. According to CD&V Chairman Yves Leterme, there are several reasons for this. First and foremost his cartel has become the biggest political formation in Flanders, and secondly Leterme has put an end to the negative spiral in which the Flemish Christian Democrats found themselves. For the first time in almost 20 years they had won. And with the 26-year-old leading Antwerp candidate Inge Vervotte the party has a new vote-winner who is even competing with Vlaams Blok big gun Filip Dewinter in Antwerp.

Leterme is nevertheless refusing to accept any responsibility for the Blok’s mega-score. He points out that between 1999 and 2004 the Blok grew under the policies of the Purple-Green government. The onus is now on him, however, to form a new Flemish Government. The first phase of this will be the exploratory talks he will initiate as informateur. Because Groen! decided not to participate in the next government, Leterme is faced with accomplished facts even before he has begun. Only a coalition between CD&V/N-VA, SPA/Spirit and VLD/Vivant seems possible to mobilise a majority (FF).

Yesteray Leterme got the go-ahead from the political administration of the CD&V to begin exploratory talks on the formation of a government. For the time being he is being assisted at the head of his party by a triumvirate. This comprises Political Secretary Jo Vandeurzen and the Vice-Chairs Wouter Beke and Cathy Berx. Over the next few days and weeks they will be responsible for the practical organisation of the party. Today Leterme is holding talks with Norbert De Batselier, Chairman of the Flemish Parliament. On Wednesday he starts an initial information round ‘cautiously but with all possible speed’. N-VA Chairman Geert Bourgeois, who yesterday sat alongside his CD&V colleague during a press conference, emphasised that Leterme will hold talks with representatives of the ‘broad social field’. From the poverty movement to the economic top. The CD&V member will also talk with people from difficult districts.

Leterme intends meeting representatives from a wide range of organisations. ‘This is not a classic election result,’ he said. ‘It is important that a new Flemish Government is not only supported by politicians. There must also be support in social and economic circles.’

The CD&V member announced that he would publish a list of partners today or tomorrow. He refused to comment on whether he would hold talks with politicians from the Vlaams Blok. Questions to this effect were answered several times with a Sybilline ‘I will publish a list of partners at the right time.’
Groen! back on its feet again; SPA-Spirit loses as much as Groen! wins

**The party is now back to its average score of the past 20 years**

In addition to the Vlaams Blok, at the other end of the political spectrum, Groen! is the other victor in the elections. With a rise of 3.75%, the party has recovered from the blow it received in 2003 that meant it disappeared from the Federal Parliament. With six seats, two of which in the province of East Flanders, the home base of Chairwoman Vera Dua, Groen! has become a fully fledged faction in the Flemish Parliament, for which six MPs are required. This status of parliamentary party guarantees better party funding, and a presence on the various parliamentary committees. In particular, a ‘Groen! is nodig’ (‘We need Groen!’) campaign clearly convinced a great many voters to switch from SPA/Spirit to the Greens. And yet the number of Green seats has halved compared with 1999, when the large-scale dioxin contamination of chickens plunged the country into crisis right before the elections and gave the party a record score of 12 seats. The party is now back to its average score of the past 20 years, and does not intend letting this go again by participating in government, mindful of the mental blow of 2003. The Groen! Party council therefore decided not to participate in a Flemish government (FF).

**WOOUTER VERSCHelden**

**DE STANDAARD • 14 JUNE**

In contrast to her predecessor Jos Geyesels, party Chairwoman Vera Dua decided not to choose strategic moves, like trying to attract ACW voters. The Ghent woman opted for a back-to-basics approach, with the globe on election posters and the party candidates on bicycles in front of the cameras. The fact that the voter began to see Groen! as an opposition party was well received. Driven by a clever campaign strategy with old recipes such as an ‘onze partij is nodig (‘our party is needed’) campaign and a Vera zoekt (‘Vera seeks’) message, the party again climbed in the polls. The call to give the progressive side a choice was answered in en masse by intellectual Flanders. This is evident from, among other things, the remarkably good score in the university city of Leuven.

280,000 voters was Dua’s objective, and this she achieved, since leading European candidate Bart Staes is to return to the European Parliament. In her home base of Ghent Dua also drove Groen! to unknown heights, the party winning 16% of the votes. After the latest polls, the party had quietly been counting on one seat in East Flanders. Thanks to the Dua effect that became two, and the current parliamentary party leader Jos Stassen can go back to Brussels.

WWW.GROEN.BE

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**SP.A/Spirit shares in purple punishment**

The missed opportunity for left-wing unity is no excuse for SP.A-Spirit’s less-than-convincing election campaign

The comment that a cartel of SP.A-Spirit and Groen! could well have been the biggest political formation was still frequently to be heard after the disappointing result of SP.A-Spirit. That this is not speculation was clear from a calculation by the Department of Political Science of KULeuven. Together the big left-wing cartel would have won 35 seats, or four more than the current total. Of those four, three would have been snatched from the CD&V/N-VA (in Limburg, Antwerp and East Flanders) and one from the Vlaams Blok (in Brussels). We should, however, add that a cartel would not necessarily have provided the total of SP.A-Spirit and Groen! votes. Nevertheless, the missed opportunity for left-wing unity is no excuse for SPA-Spirit’s less-than-convincing election campaign, says De Morgen (FF).

**FILIP ROGIERS • DE MORGEN • 14 JUNE**

Steve Stevaert wanted to wake up in the centre of the bed on 14 June. This he achieved. In practice it has become impossible to form a Flemish government without SP.A-Spirit. The SPA Chairman warmed himself up with the thought that his cartel won five more seats than in 1999. But his eyes revealed his disappointment. The modest objective of winning 20%, one year after the dream result (23.4%) was not achieved. These are corrective elections, said Federal Vice-Premier Johan Vande Lanotte. ‘Last year the voter pushed the VLD and the SP.A to unknown heights. This has now been corrected on two fronts. From the VLD to the Vlaams Blok and from SPA-Spirit to Groen! Although the shifts in votes are perhaps a little more complex than this, he still put his finger on the wound. No SPA leader spoke yesterday, therefore, without congratulating the Greens. But these congratulations had a grudging side. ‘The progressives have not lost the elections. What we’ve lost compared with last year we’ve passed on to Groen!,’ said Frank Vandenbroucke (Federal Employment Minister). ‘It is still a fact that had we combined forces, we would have been the biggest.’ But Stevaert and his campaign team will not be able to ignore the fact that the cartel slid quietly through the campaign, entirely devoted to the quality brand of its figureheads. As a result the cartel has heavily sacrificed its trendy image of modernisation and rejuvenation. It was that aura in particular that was the cause of last year’s unexpectedly large victory.

WWW.SP.BE

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**focus on FLANDERS • 15 June • Number 24**
Europe: figureheads Dehaene and Verhofstadt boost own party results

Dehaene won the duel with Verhofstadt by a considerable margin (651,000 compared with 388,000). CD&V/N-VA, the Blok and the left-wing cartel won an extra seat.

FF EDITOR

We had to wait until 10 p.m. on the evening of Sunday 13 June, when the polling stations closed in Portugal, for the first results of the European elections to be announced. The CD&V/N-VA cartel has also become the biggest Flemish party in the European Parliament. Of the 14 Flemish seats, it bagged four. Elsewhere the titanic struggle between Jean-Luc Dehaene (CD&V), the former prime minister, and Guy Verhofstadt, (VLD), the current prime minister, did not do their respective parties any harm. Both parties fared better in the European elections than in the regional ones. The CD&V/N-VA won 27.9%, the VLD 22.1%. Dehaene won the duel with Verhofstadt by a considerable margin (651,000 compared with 388,000). Just like the cartel of Flemish Socialists and Spirit (17.5%), the Vlaams Blok (22.8%) achieved a worse result than in the Flemish elections. Nevertheless, both the Blok and the left-wing cartel won an extra seat and both now have three seats, while the Liberals retain their three seats. Groen! dropped back from two to one seat.

In 1999 Belgium elected 25 Euro-MPs, one more than now. Flanders retains its fourteen seats, but Wallonia has given up one, dropping back to nine. Of these, the PS won four (+1), while the Greens lost two, dropping back to one. The Liberals (MR, three seats) and Christian Democrats (one seat) remain unchanged. German-speaking Belgium has also retained its seat.
Blok loses in Brussels compared with federal elections of 2003

Compared with the last regional elections, the Vlaams Blok made hardly any gains in the Brussels Region, but remains the biggest Dutch-speaking party there. Nevertheless, the Vlaams Blok had hoped to pick up Francophone votes with leading candidate Johan Demol, thereby gaining an overall majority in the Dutch linguistic group and making the Brussels region ungovernable. But it failed to do so. With 4.69%, the Blok did slightly better than in 1999, but less well than in last year’s federal elections (6%). This gives the party six seats. VLD-Vivant (2.74%) became the second-biggest party, followed by SPA-Spirit (2.31%). In Brussels the CD&V-N-VA lost against the trend in Flanders, and as a result is only the fourth-biggest party. On the Francophone side the PS ousted the Liberal MR from its throne in its own stronghold and will probably have Charles Picqué form a government (FF).

Compared with last year, the party even dropped back slightly (from 38.8 to 34% in the Dutch linguistic group), a loss of votes that may well be down to the Front National. The Blok gained six seats, and thus remains the biggest Flemish party in the Brussels Metropolitan Council. But the main fear, that the far-right party would block Brussels institutions and paralyse Belgium’s institutional mechanisms, has proven to be unfounded. To do this the party would have had to gain a majority, or 9 of the 17 guaranteed Flemish seats. In the Council, Flemings and Francophones must first each form a majority separately, coalitions which are then combined to form the Brussels regional government. On the Flemish side, VLD-Vivant has become the second-biggest formation. With almost 20% of the votes, the cartel raked in four seats. Apart from the Vlaams Blok, a comparison with the regional elections of 1999 is impossible for the Flemish parties, because at the time these presented themselves to the voter in different cartels. The SPA-Spirit and CD&V-N-VA cartels were evenly matched. They each gained three seats, with 17.7 and 16.8% respectively. With 9.8%, Groen! easily achieved the electoral threshold, but is stranded on one seat.

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### PREFERENTIAL VOTES OF FLEMISH CANDIDATES, EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Party</th>
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<td>CD&amp;V/N-VA</td>
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<td>VL.BLOK</td>
<td>4.34%</td>
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Source: Het Laatste Nieuws