

Belgium

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Table 1. Cabinet composition of Leterme II

For the composition of Leterme II on 1 January 2011, see Rihoux et al. (2010: 902–903).

Changes during 2011¹:

Minister of Development Cooperation/*Ministre de la Coopération au développement*: Ch. Michel (1975 male, MR) *resigned* and was *replaced* by Secretary of State for European Affairs, attached to the Minister of Foreign Affairs/*Secrétaire d'Etat aux Affaires Européennes (adjoint au Ministre des Affaires étrangères)*: O. Chastel (1964 male, MR), who became Minister of Development Cooperation, in charge of European Affairs/*Ministre de la Coopération au développement, en charge des Affaires Européennes* and was therefore not replaced as Secretary of State.

Note: ¹ A minor change, undocumented in Rihoux et al. (2011), occurred on 20 July 2010 when Government Commissioner, adjunct to the Minister of Budget, Guido De Padt (1954 male, Open VLD) resigned and was not replaced.

Changes in parliament

As federal cabinet members cannot sit in any parliament, assigned ministers and secretaries of state, most of whom are elected MPs or senators, had to resign upon cabinet formation. However, as most of them were already part of the Leterme II cabinet, there were not that many resignations. In the House of Representatives, the most notable exception is E. Di Rupo (PS), the new Prime Minister, who was replaced by B. Van Grootenbrulle. The same occurred with less prominent politicians such as H. Bogaert (CD&V, replaced by B. Slegers), S. Verherstraeten (CD&V, replaced by K. Waterschoot) and M. De Block (Open VLD, replaced by L. Van Biesen). In the Senate, J. Vande Lanotte (SP.a) had to resign in favour of D. Douifi, and F. Vandembroucke (SP.a) resigned in favour of F. Talhaoui. Following the split of the FDF away from the MR (see **Issues in national politics** below), the three FDF MPs, B. Clairfayt, O. Maingain and D. Thiéry, left the MR parliamentary group.

Table 2. Cabinet composition of Di Rupo I

A. The party composition of Di Rupo I:
Date of investiture: 6 December 2011

Party	Number and percentage of parliamentary seats	Number and percentage of cabinet posts ¹
<i>Parti Socialiste</i> – Socialist Party (PS), French-speaking	26 (17.3)	4 (21)
<i>Christen-Democratisch & Vlaams</i> – Christian-Democrat and Flemish (CD&V), Flemish-speaking	17 (11.3)	4 (21)
<i>Mouvement Réformateur</i> – Reform Movement (MR), French-speaking	15 ² (10)	3 (15.8)
<i>Socialisten en Progressieven Anders Sociaal Progressief Alternatief</i> – Social Progressive Alternative (SPa), Flemish-speaking	13 (8.7)	3 (15.8)
<i>Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten</i> – Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats (Open VLD), Flemish-speaking	13 (8.7)	3 (15.8)
<i>Centre Démocrate Humaniste</i> – Democrat Humanist Centre (CDH), French-speaking	9 (6)	2 (10.5)

B. Cabinet members of Di Rupo I (13 full ministers and six secretaries of state):
Prime Minister/*Premier ministre*: Elio Di Rupo (1951 male, PS)
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Sustainable Development, in charge of Civil Service/*Vice-Eerste Minister en Minister van Financiën en Duurzame Ontwikkeling, belast met Ambtenarenzaken*: Steven Vanackere (1964 male, CD&V)
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, External Trade and European Affairs/*Vice-Premier Ministre et Ministre des Affaires étrangères, du Commerce extérieur et des Affaires européennes*: Didier Reynders (1958 male, MR)
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Economy, Consumers and the North Sea/*Vice-Eerste Minister en Minister van Economie, Consumenten en Noordzee*: Johan Vande Lanotte (1955 male, SPa)
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Pensions/*Vice-Eerste Minister en Minister van Pensioenen*: Vincent Van Quickenborne (1973 male, Open VLD)
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Equal Opportunities/*Vice-Première ministre, ministre de l'Intérieur et de l'Égalité des chances*: Joëlle Milquet (1961 female, CDH)
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Social Affairs and Public Health, in charge of Beliris and Federal Cultural Institutions/*Vice-Première ministre, Ministre des Affaires sociales et de la Santé publique, chargée de Beliris³ et des Institutions culturelles fédérales*: Laurette Onkelinx (1958 female, PS)
Minister of Small and Medium-sized Companies, the Self-employed and Agriculture/*Ministre des Classes moyennes, des PME, des Indépendants et de l'Agriculture*: Sabine Laruelle (1965 female, MR)
Minister of Defence/*Minister van Landsverdediging*: Pieter De Crem (1962 male, CD&V)
Minister of Public Companies, Science Policy and Development Cooperation, in charge of Urban Policy/*Ministre des Entreprises publiques, de la Politique scientifique et de la Coopération au développement, chargé des Grandes Villes*: Paul Magnette (1971 male, PS)
Minister of Home Affairs/*Minister van Justitie*: Annemie Turtelboom (1967 female, Open VLD)
Minister of Budget and Administrative Simplification/*Ministre du Budget et de la Simplification administrative*: O. Chastel (1964 male, MR)
Minister of Employment/*Minister van Werk*: Monica De Coninck (1956 female, SPa)
Secretary of State for Environment, Energy and Mobility, adjunct to the Minister of Interior and Equal Opportunities, and Secretary of State of Institutional Reforms, adjunct to the Prime Minister/*Secrétaire d'Etat à l'Environnement, à l'Énergie et à la Mobilité, adjoint à la Ministre de l'Intérieur et de l'Égalité des chances, et Secrétaire d'Etat aux Réformes institutionnelles, adjoint au Premier Ministre*: Melchior Wathelet (1977 male, CDH)

Table 2. Continued

Secretary of State for Social Affairs, Family and Disabled People, in charge of Professional Risks, adjunct to the Minister of Social Affairs and Public Health/ <i>Secrétaire d'Etat aux Affaires sociales, aux Familles et aux Personnes handicapées, chargé des Risques professionnels, adjoint à la Ministre des Affaires sociales et de la Santé publique</i> : Philippe Courard (1966 male, PS)
Secretary of State for Institutional Reforms, adjunct to the Prime Minister, and Secretary of State for the Building Authority, adjunct to the Minister of Finance and Sustainable Development, in charge of the Civil Service/ <i>StaatssecretarisvoorStaats hervorming, toegevoegdaan de Eerste Minister, en Staatssecretarisvoor de Regie der gebouwen, toegevoegdaan de Minister van Financiën en Duurzame Ontwikkeling, belast met Ambtenarenzaken</i> : Servais Verherstraeten (1960 male, CD&V)
Secretary of State for Asylum, Immigration and Social Integration, adjunct to the Minister of Justice/ <i>StaatssecretarisvoorAsiel en Migratie, Maatschappelijke Integratie en Armoede bestrijding, toegevoegdaan de Minister van Justitie</i> : Maggie De Block (1966 female, Open VLD)
Secretary of State for the Civil Service and the Modernisation of Public Services, adjunct to the Minister of Finance and Sustainable Development, in charge of the Civil Service/ <i>StaatssecretarisvoorAmbtenarenzaken en Modernisering van de Openbare Diensten, toegevoegdaan de Minister van Financiën en Duurzame Ontwikkeling, belast met Ambtenarenzaken</i> : Hendrik Bogaert (1968 male, CD&V)
Secretary of State for Combatting Social and Fiscal Fraud, adjunct to the Prime Minister/ <i>Staatssecretarisvoor de Bestrijding van de sociale en de fiscale fraude, toegevoegdaan de Eerste Minister</i> : John Crombez (1973 male, SP.a)

Notes: ¹ Counting all 19 positions (Secretaries of State included). ² From September onwards, the MR lost three parliamentary seats as the FDF component left the party (see **Issues in national politics** below). ³ *Beliris*: Cooperation Agreement between the federal state and Brussels-Capital Region dedicated to the promotion of the national and international role of Brussels through infrastructures, renovation and mobility initiatives.

Cabinet report

The whole year was marked by the prolongation of very tense negotiations to form a government after the 13 June 2010 elections (Rihoux et al. 2011: 917–918). J. Vande Lanotte (SP.a), who had been nominated by the King as mediator on 21 October 2010, issued a proposal on 3 January. Five of the seven parties involved in the negotiations agreed to Vande Lanotte's proposal: the French-speaking PS, CDH and Ecolo, and the Flemish SP.a and Groen!, but the Flemish N-VA and CD&V rejected it. Therefore, on 6 January, Vande Lanotte submitted his resignation to the King, who rejected this request and asked B. De Wever (N-VA) and E. Di Rupo (PS) to help Vande Lanotte reach an agreement. This could not be achieved and, on 26 January, Vande Lanotte was relieved of his mission by the King.

On 2 February, the King appointed D. Reynders, acting Finance Minister (MR), as 'informateur' – a mission extended to 1 March. On the basis of the Reynders report, the King one day later appointed W. Beke (CD&V) as 'négociateur' to find an agreement on state reform. On 12 May, Beke asked to be relieved of his mission and, four days later, E. Di Rupo (PS) was appointed 'formateur', with the task of forming a coalition. He presented a negotiation proposal on 5 July. As the NV-A rejected it immediately, Di Rupo tendered

his resignation on 9 July. The King refused it and asked him to carry on the negotiations.

From 15 July onwards, new negotiations started without the N-VA, but included the CD&V who had previously refused to take part in the discussions without the N-VA, and the Liberal parties (Open VLD and MR). On 15 September, a deal was finally reached on the issue of the splitting of the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde (BHV) constituency. It led, on 11 October, to an agreement on the state reform between the Flemish parties (CD&V, Open VLD, SP.A, Groen!) and the French-speaking parties (PS, MR, CDH and Ecolo). The agreement included the splitting of BHV; more fiscal autonomy for the Regions; the transfer of competencies in the fields of health, employment and justice to Regions and Communities; and the reform of the finance law in order to provide them with more autonomous financial means.

The next step was to attempt a coalition. It excluded the Green parties Groen! and Ecolo, as requested by the Open VLD. An agreement on the 2012 budget was reached on 26 November. The new coalition was sworn in by the King on 6 December 2011, 541 days after the June 2010 elections (i.e., the longest political crisis of the kind in postwar Europe). The governmental agreement included the state reform as agreed in October, a public finances consolidation, social and economic reforms implying a rise in the retirement age, cuts in health care and in unemployment benefits, and reform in the fields of justice, migration and asylum.

Issues in national politics

Contrary to 2010 (Rihoux et al. 2011: 918–920), the never-ending government formation barely intervened in parties' leadership structures. On the Flemish side, the party presidents of the Flemish Christian-Democrats, Liberals and Greens did not change, nor were they really contested internally as in the end their parties seemed satisfied with the role they played in the formation process. The Flemish socialists (SP.a) elected a new leader, B. Tobback (his father had also been party leader and Vice Prime Minister). As the only candidate, he obtained 96.9 per cent of member votes. N-VA party president B. De Wever, the architect of the 2010 electoral landslide, media face of the party and key formation negotiator, was also re-elected as the only candidate with 99.4 per cent of member votes.

By contrast, the internal crisis of the Vlaams Belang, triggered by the 2010 electoral defeat, widened. The authoritarian leadership and anti-Islam rhetoric of hardliner P. Dewinter were challenged by the highly mediated death of M-R. Morel, a soft-line dissident and wife of former president F. Van Hecke.

Her funeral was exploited by her former fellow traveller, N-VA leader De Wever. Van Hecke left the party (as did the son of party founder Dillen), and so did many lower level moderate elites (the party now scores less than 10 per cent of the Flemish vote in the polls).

Note that in several Flemish parties, former leaders with large followings beyond their party quit politics as a profession at a (relatively) young age, including former Prime Minister Y. Leterme. This raised concerns about the apparent increasing replacement of self-made ‘politicians by vocation’ with ‘politicians by pedigree’ (sons and daughters of politicians) and non-political media celebrities.

On the francophone side, among the main parties, the MR went through the most difficult time. It has consisted of the aggregation of three parties (PRL, FDF and MCC) since 1998. In late September, the FDF component left the party and chose to continue as an autonomous party. The FDF (French-speaking Federalist Democrats Front/*Fédéralistes Démocrates Francophones* under the name adopted in January 2010, previously known as French-speaking Democratic Front/*Front Démocratique Francophone*), as a party dedicated to the defence of French-speaking interests in and around Brussels, was unhappy with the institutional reform agreements being negotiated. This divorce caused the loss of three MPs for the MR (there were no elected senators under the FDF banner).

Other parties went through quite smooth leadership transitions – particularly the PS where T. Giet replaced E. di Rupo (the new Prime Minister) and the CDH where the historical party leader and founder (since 2002) J. Milquet, Vice Prime Minister in the Di Rupo I cabinet, was replaced by B. Lutgen on 1 September. Finally, on 2 February, L. Louis, the single MP of the newly formed French-speaking radical right populist party, the *Parti Populaire* (PP), decided to defect from his party and create his own *Mouvement pour la Liberté et la Démocratie* (MLD). This decision resulted from personal disputes with PP leaders R. Aernoudt and M. Modrikamen.

With regards to substantive political issues, as a result of the protracted political crisis, the mandate of the caretaker government Leterme II was expanded, with many socioeconomic and finance issues high on the agenda. The 2011 budget, the first ever proposed by a caretaker coalition, was adopted by the House of Representatives on 19 May. It presented a deficit of 3.6 per cent, slightly better than originally planned. In February, as two of the three national trade unions (FGTB/ABVV and CGSLB/ACLVB) rejected the collective bargaining agreement, the government had to intervene. It decided among other things to maintain the automatic cost-of-living adjustments mechanism and to fix the payroll standard at 0.3 per cent (cost-of-living adjustments excluded) for 2011–2012. It also made appointments of senior

administrative officials. A major one was that of L. Coene as Governor of the National Bank. The government entrusted the National Bank with the mission of controlling the integrity of financial markets.

On 10 October, the government, rushing to support the Dexia Bank Belgian unit, decided to nationalise it. The dismantled Franco-Belgian Bank was the first bank to fall victim to the two year-old eurozone debt crisis. Belgium paid €4 billion to buy this largely retail Belgian division (four million customers) as part of a restructuring of the bank which faced a severe liquidity squeeze.

Overall, the socioeconomic climate was grim, with high figures for bankruptcies and closures of businesses, including closure of two new blast furnaces by ArcelorMittal in the Liège area, signaling the ending of the liquid phase steel production in the region and resulting in protests and strikes. At the end of the year, the social climate was agitated. The country was paralysed by a general strike on 7 October against the measures envisaged for the social security system by the negotiators of the coming coalition. On 2 December, a national demonstration organised by the trade unions gathered 80,000 workers. On 15 December, after the new coalition was formed and had precipitously forced the passage of a law increasing the retirement age, all main unions called for a national general strike on 30 January 2012.

On the issue of undocumented immigrants continuing to be confronted with judicial repression and internment in closed centres, new accommodation networks were created. Finally, in March, invoking humanitarian purposes, the government, although being a caretaker one, did not hesitate to take part in the military intervention to subdue Gaddafi's regime: the F-16s of the Belgian Air Force participated under NATO command in the bombing of Libya.

Sources and further information

Publications:

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On the Internet:

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Courrier Hebdomadaire du CRISP catalogue: www.crisp.be/librairie/ [many specific institutional and political topics, as well as well-documented analyses]
 Detailed electoral results: www.ibz.rrn.fgov.be/index.php?id=4&L=0 [official results, all elections]