



A free and strong Brussels

Views on Brussels and Brussels within Belgium

Open Vld Congress “For a Free and Strong Country”

14 May 2023

Views on Brussels and Brussels within Belgium at the Open Vld Congress “For a Free and Strong Country” (14 May 2023)

For the national election congress of May 2023, Alexia Bertrand and Sven Gatz presented texts from their Brussels perspective, which were adopted by the party members and now determine the party’s program. The texts make the institutional division of both Brussels and Belgium understandable to citizens and more impactful for policymaking.

1. About Brussels

Brussels as a metropolis

Brussels is a cosmopolitan city that can compete with London and Paris. As the capital of Europe and with the headquarters of NATO, it enjoys a great diversity and has the largest concentration of diplomats in the world. Brussels is multilingual and international, but it is also cozy, colorful, and progressive. The city is dynamic. It is also an economic hotspot, contributing to almost 20% of our country's economic prosperity.

A free and strong Brussels

However, there are also challenges in terms of mobility, security, and employment its own (young) population is confronted with, including with respect to governance. Brussels is a complex city with different governments and administrative bodies responsible for various aspects of governance: the Brussels-Capital Region Government, the French Community Government, the Flemish Community Commission, etc. Certain powers are also fragmented at the (supra) local level. This complex and fragmented structure often makes strong governance difficult. Additionally, the Brussels structures often do not provide answers to the cosmopolitan reality of the city. It is up to liberals to come up with innovative solutions.

Proposals

1. We reduce the number of elected members of the Brussels Parliament from 89 representatives to 50 (i.e. 40 French-speaking members & 10 Dutch-speaking members).
contact per language is required. Additionally, we ensure that the legally established bilingualism is adhered to and, if not, sanctions will follow.
2. We conduct elections using mixed-language lists rather than lists divided in language groups.
3. EU citizens with long-term residency in Brussels obtain regional voting rights.
4. We introduce English as an additional administrative language.
5. We move towards trilingual services and administration: Dutch, French and English. Not every civil servant needs to be perfectly trilingual, but the presence of at least 1 point of
6. We align the election date for the current Brussels-Capital Region and the municipal elections within that territory, which will take place every 5 years; thus increasing the likelihood of coinciding and cooperating political majorities at both levels.
7. We ensure integration of the police zones to strengthen command unity.
8. We integrate the public welfare centers (CPAS/OCMW) into the local governments.

2. About Brussels within Belgium

A strong federation

Over the past sixty years, our country has evolved from a unitary to a federal state. This was achieved through successive state reforms, difficult negotiations, and complex compromises. However, this political bargaining has often resulted in opaque structures and budgetary irresponsibility. These, in turn, fueled new communal discussions. The federal model, which, as said earlier, came about through successive state reforms, contributes to the deadlock of the Wetstraat (the federal government district in Brussels) and its inability to reform. Moreover, the ambitions and expectations of the dominant parties in the North and South are increasingly divergent. To break this stalemate in our country, we need to reform, simplify, and make our state structure more transparent, regardless of a historical or biased view of our state structures, without dogmas that hinder good solutions. But more than rearranging powers, our federalism needs structures and rules that promote cooperation, prevent deadlock, and allow decisions to be made. We need to move away from sabotage, umbrella federalism, and organized irresponsibility.

Federal electoral district

A mature federation needs politicians and political parties that unite the country and can represent all citizens. To achieve this, we need to adjust the electoral system, as currently politicians can only run for election in one province during parliamentary elections. In a federal electoral district, all voters can express their support for a prime ministerial candidate.

Proposals

1. A substantial portion of parliamentary seats is elected in a district representing all voters: 20 federal representatives in a federal district without language parity, 20 Flemish representatives in a Flemish district. The remaining seats are elected in smaller electoral districts. Seat distribution is based on a proportional representation system.
2. We also opt for a single federal electoral district for European elections.
3. Each voter thus casts two votes: a local vote (A) and a federal vote (B). In the federal electoral district, joint lists are allowed. Political families will now be able to decide to present joint multilingual lists with Dutch, French, and German-speaking candidates. Within the federal electoral district, each list puts forward a prime ministerial candidate.

4. The most popular candidate on the list with the most votes in the federal or Flemish electoral district is given the right of initiative to form a government and automatically becomes the formateur. If (s)he cannot conclude a coalition agreement within a month, the right of initiative is transferred to the most popular candidate

from the second most popular list, unless the Chamber of Representatives allows an extension of the mandate.

Four fully-fledged constituent entities

As liberals, we advocate straightforward efficiency in our state structure with well-defined and clear powers at the federal or regional level. The past crises have demonstrated the need for a strong federal policy. What we do better together, should be organized at the federal level. Even matters for which we have opted for regionalization in the meantime. Supported by a strong executive and legislative power. However, other powers are better suited at the regional level, closer to the citizen. Especially in areas where strong divergent views exist between the regions. For these powers, we advocate four fully-fledged constituent entities, including the current Brussels-Capital Region, perfectly complementary to each other and to the federation. Community powers are transferred to the most suitable region. We take into account the fact that Brussels, as the capital, hosts many government agencies linked to cultural, educational, or sports competences. Through specific bilateral cooperation protocols, agreements are made for each of these institutions or powers between Brussels on one hand, and Flanders or Wallonia on the other, regarding both the competences and tasks within the other region and the financing.

Proposals

1. We turn our country into a clear federation. The constituent entities of the federation are Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels, and East Belgium. The distinction between communities and regions – with separate politicians, parliaments, and commissions – ceases to exist.

2. We merge the Capital Region with the Common Community Commission ('Gemeenschappelijke Gemeenschapscommissie' in Dutch).

3. We turn the Flemish Community Commission ('Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie' in Dutch) and the French Community Commission ('Commission Communautaire française' in French) into institutions without separate structures, and we integrate them into the region.

4. The exercise of former community powers is regulated in cooperation with the other constituent entities. Cooperation (e.g. on education) can take the form of identical decrees or other financial and organizational measures.

Quick determination of competences

A mature federation has methods to avoid standstills and blockages. It should no longer occur that discussions about who has which power and who should finance the expenses drag on for months or sometimes years without resolution. Currently, there is no referee who can make a decision quickly when this happens. For example, the Council of State can only give advice in response to a specific legislative initiative, and the Constitutional Court can only pronounce itself in the context of an annulment procedure.

Proposals

In case of a dispute – whether it be imminent or not – over the competences of the federation or the different entities, the Constitutional Court must be able to provide a ruling on who has authority quickly.

The federation decides during crises and international obligations

To avoid our country falling short in its international obligations or addressing extreme crises due to conflicts between governments, we formulated proposals in the first ‘Liberaal Vuur’ (Liberal Fire) congress of March 2022 to allow the federal level to make final decisions in some circumstances. If constituent entities fail to fulfill their international obligations within a certain period or if they cannot reach an agreement on international commitments or the ratification of treaties among themselves, the federation can decide on their behalf. This prevents Belgium from being penalized or appearing without a position in international negotiations. Also, in crises, both within our borders and on the international level, the federation can temporarily take action and manage the crisis. This allows us to quickly respond to challenges and avoid a fragmented approach to acute problems. The question now is how this mechanism should work in practice.

Proposals

1. Our local and regional governments are effective and strong. extension of the substitution right (as already present in article 169 of the Constitution and article 16 of the Special Law on Institutional Reforms).
2. In case of crises or in case of international obligations that need to be fulfilled (such as European budget agreements, trade agreements, or climate agreements), a referee is needed when the negotiation model fails to produce results. This can be done through an

Housing Education Business

We believe in a free and prosperous city. To achieve this, we highlight three main themes in this campaign: housing, entrepreneurship, and education. Encouraging business creators and entrepreneurs stimulates the Brussels economy, allowing us to create more jobs, innovation, and economic growth. Through education, we invest in the future of our children and therefore also in the future of our city. Quality housing is essential to allow every Brussels resident to thrive. Housing must be affordable so that they are accessible to all. Housing also plays a key role in our transition to a sustainable city. Together, we aspire to a city where everyone feels at home, in complete freedom.

