Greens in Belgium: from local to governmental participation in power

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More than a draft
I would be very proud if you quote
The elections and the government formation of 1999 in Belgium were called ‘historical’ for different reasons. For the first time the Christian Democrats lost their position of largest party in the country and after 40 year of government participation, they were excluded by a coalition of Liberals, Socialist and Greens (Agalev and Ecolo). For the first time greens participate in the regional and the federal government. In the past, green parties did participate at negotiations for coalition building (Ecolo in 1987, Agalev and Ecolo in 1991) without any result. The list of demands was far too long and one might say that the threshold of coalition was not yet passed. (Buelens 1998) The support for the St-Michael agreement of 1992 was the first great move towards participation in coalition at the national level. At the same time local groups were already participating in municipal executives, even in large cities. The lifespan of both parties was different, and so was the attitude of the rank and file.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the opinion of the party members and the party militants toward the participation in a majority. From the very start Agalev and Ecolo has different stories. Some specific research was done in the past on party members of the greens in Belgium. (Kitschelt and Hellemans 1990; Delwit and De Waele 1996) In 1994 a study focussed on local chairmen of national parties in the Flemish part of Belgium. (Buelens and Deschouver 1996) In 2000 nearly the same questions were asked but now for the whole country (Buelens, Deschouver, Dewinter, Rihoux) As the response of green party members was high, these data can be used to analyse the attitudinal change and the influence of local participation in coalitions.

Since grassroots democracy is so important for green parties, it will be interesting to see if the strategy of party leaders will coincides with the opinion of the members. The threshold of becoming a party was already high for some members, the threshold of coalition was certainly as high. The following expression is relevant in this matter: (Frankland and Schoonmaker 1992) ‘An early critic, after describing the (German) Greens as a ‘protest or nuisance party’, concluded that they were not a real party because they were not prepared to govern.’ It proves that we must agree on what a party has to do and what its goals are.

1. About thresholds and goals
Coalition building is only one possible act in the life of a party. Pedersen describe the evolution of a party in a lifespan-model. (Pedersen 1982) This idea was further elaborated (Buelens 1996) into a model with five thresholds, that a party might take: to participate at elections, to gain representation, to negotiate, to participate in a coalition and to gain an absolute majority. With the exception of the last threshold, the others must be taken in a consecutive order. A party can not be part of a coalition without any negotiation. There will be no negotiation, if a party is not able to gain representation. In our western political system it is not possible to have representatives if a party refuses to participate at elections. Every threshold might cause a problem in the evolution of the party. We will see that the threshold of negotiation and coalition was high for the Belgian green parties. This is not necessarily true for every party. All depends on its goals. Müller and Ström looked at the theory on party goals and take into account three goals, to explain how parties make hard decisions. (Müller and Strom 1999) They describe Office-Seeking, Policy-Seeking and Vote-Seeking parties. Harmel and

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1 We accept the idea of Panebianco, that an organization becomes a party once it participates at elections Panebianco, A. (1988). Political Parties: organization & power. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
Janda used these three goals, but added a fourth goal at the list: the intraparty democracy maximization. (Harmel and Janda 1994, p. 269) The last goal was added to understand the change in certain green parties. Agalev was one of them. Müller and Ström raised the question of intrinsic goals, like internal party unity and classified them as purely instrumental. This explains why the fourth goal was rejected. They make and exception for the goal of vote-seeking, which might also be considered as intrinsic, because it allows them to gauge the time horizons (temporal discounts) of party leaders. (Müller and Strom 1999, p. 32) To negotiate or to participate in a coalition will be a hard to decide for those parties with an important policy-goal. The green parties will be one of them.

The goals of office-seeking and policy-seeking can also be found in the coalition theories, although in a more hidden way. All concepts of ‘minimal winning’ and ‘minimal weight’ refer to parties who want to keep as much power (and seats) as possible. (Pridham 1986) The other traditional dimension is the ‘minimal policy range’. If it’s important for a party that a partner has a related ideological position, the party is clearly (also) oriented toward the policy goal. It proves the importance of these goals in understanding coalition building.

These few ideas on party goals and thresholds create a framework, which we will use in this article. It might give us better tools to explain the difference between the two Belgian green parties and their behaviour in coalition building.

2. The party

2.1. The story of the national coalition building

Belgium has a tradition of coalition formation. The last time one single party reached an absolute majority of seats in the national parliament was in 1950, when the still unitary Christian-Democrats managed to do so. As all parties split afterwards due to the linguistic cleavage, a national majority became out of reach. But even a regional majority was never attained afterwards. At the 1999 parliamentary elections the highest score in Flanders was 22.7% (Flemish Liberals). For Wallonia the Socialist Party did better with 29%, but the result remains the same: coalition formation is a must, even for regional governments.²

The main participants in these formations were always the three traditional parties. Until the nineties they were able to cover together more than 70% of the electorate. In Wallonia the global score of the three traditional parties was even higher with 89,3%. The explanation was quite simple: the political arena became more and more different in the two regions.³ In the sixties regionalist parties were popular in all the regions. With an overall national score of 11% in the 1971 elections, three regionalist parties became important players in the political system. The individual score in each region was far more remarkable: in Flanders the VU obtained 19.4%, the RW in Wallonia 20.9% and the FDF was the most successful in Brussels with 34.5% of the votes. (De Winter and Türsan 1998) As the traditional parties adapted their organisations due to this linguistic challenge, the electorate changed afterwards.

² Belgium has no tradition of minority governments. It only happened once in 1974 for about 2 months, when Tindemans created a minority government with the support of the RW, a regionalist Walloon party. After 2 months the RW gained their own ministers. Witte, E., J. Craeybeckx, et al. (1997), Politieke geschiedenis van België. Brussel, VUBPress.

³ In this paper we only deal with Flanders and Wallonia. The bilingual region of Brussels has a very specific political situation. Explaining this dynamic would lead us much too far from the aim of this article.
In Flanders the VU remained, although with less success. At their right side a new party, the Vlaams Blok, would start as a regionalist Flemish party. This extreme-right party remained small until the nineties and became successful due to its anti-immigrant program. The growing electoral results of Agalev, the greens in Flanders, completed the picture of a highly fractionalised region at the most recent elections: Christian Democrats and Liberals about 23% each, Socialists and Extreme Right 15,5 % each, Greens 11% and VU 9%.

The political evolution in Wallonia was different. The Rassemblement Wallon collapsed in 1977, due to some RW ministers, who went to the Liberals. However, the electorate went (back) to the Socialists, who were able to assimilate regional demands in their program. Extreme-Right was not successful in the long run in Wallonia, so the political arena remained less complex. Four parties are in the game: The PS (socialists) is still the largest party with 29%, followed by the Liberals with 24,5% of the votes. Ecolo, the French-speaking greens, has a far better score than its Flemish partner with 18,2% and the PSC, the Christian democrats in Wallonia, are the smallest with 16,7%.

To understand fully the complex situation of coalition building in Belgium, some additional remarks have to be made. Until today, regional and national governments were built at the same moment. This reinforces the tendency to a global negotiation for both levels. Some of the national and regional responsibilities are still so related, that it is easier to discuss them among the same party families. Also this argument reinforced the idea of a unique deal. However, the respective weight of the party families in each region is not equally divided. This inequality can limit the number of possible coalitions. At the Flemish side it is also excluded that the Vlaams Blok should enter the government. A last element can influence the negotiations too: to change some articles in the Constituency a two-third majority is needed. In 1999 the liberals, socialists and greens negotiated a coalition for the national government. The same partners were present in the Flemish and the Walloon majority, but in Flanders also the VU was needed. For the first time in Belgium, the green parties accepted governmental power. They had already experience in negotiations at the highest level, but for the first time the results were green ministers.

2.2. The history of greens and governmental participation

Although the two Belgian green families always collaborated more closely than any other party family in this country in the recent period, a different story has to be told. Not only the roots of those two parties were different, also the political context invited them to have their own dynamic. Other books and articles describe the different backgrounds of Agalev and Ecolo (Kitschelt and Hellemans 1990; Delwit and De Waele 1997) We will limit ourselves to the specific history related to government support and government participation. As both parties started as protest parties, a

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4 Before 1995, the regional councils were not directly elected. Members of the national parliament became automatically councilors in the regional council. In 1995 and 1999 direct elections were held, together with the national ones. From now on, a different time table is used.

5 It was an agreement among the other parties, called the cordon sanitaire, not to negotiate with an extreme-right party. A manifesto was signed in may 1989.

6 The executive of the Brussels region was different. At the Flemish side all parties, also the Christian Democrats were needed due to the electoral success of the Vlaams Blok. At the french-speaking side only Liberals and Socialists build a majority. Ecolo was excluded at the last moment.
switch was needed to lead them to this stage. In the first part we will focus on the act of both parties. In the second part we will look much closer at the attitude of the rank and file.

2.2.1. The start

_Ecolo: the fast grown-up_

Ecolo was confronted in a very early stage with the demand to participate in a majority. Already in 1982, only one year after the first elected representatives in the Parliament, Ecolo accepted to participate in 4 local majorities. One of them was the city of Liège, the largest and most important town of Wallonia. This might be surprising if we compare this act with the image of a ‘protest party’ and the green movement. Ecolo has its roots in several movements and political parties, which already participate at elections. After the split of the RW, a part of the section of Namur created an ‘ecological, grassroots-party’. (Delwit and De Waele 1996, p32) So the threshold of participating at elections was no problem (as for Agalev). The results were good, so also the threshold of representation provoked no problems, certainly in the large cities. No wonder Ecolo could give it’s attention so soon at the threshold of negotiation and coalition. But this would be a high one.

The negotiations were of course followed at a national level. The signal to other parties was clear: Ecolo was willing to deal with compromises. It was not surprising that Ecolo was asked in 1985 for the regional government. and one year later the same governmental parties asked the French-speaking greens to support their very close majority in the regional parliament. These offers caused a profound cleavage in the party. (Delwit and De Waele 1996, p.61) A strategic problem rose: how to deal with compromises, if the party wants to stay more of a movement with a pure ideology? The choice between office-seeking and policy-seeking was clearly high on the agenda. It was a grown-up problem for a party that was only in its childhood.

The choice to support the government was highly challenged by the section of Brussels. In 1986 the party went from internal crisis to crisis. (Delwit and De Waele 1997, p.157) Three important party leaders resigned. The number of members decreased from 959 in ’85 to 617 in ’87. The most ‘fundamental’ members left and created other more leftist (unsuccessful) parties. (Delwit and De Waele 1996, p68) Ironically, the offer to support was rejected by the Liberals. (Deschouwer 1989, p51)

Ecology was again on the agenda after the disaster of Tchernobyl. The local elections of 1988, the European elections of 1989 and the national elections in 1991 would result in a good score for Ecolo. The negotiations for a new government were held together with Agalev, but the starting point was different. Ecolo was willing to negotiate just for one level, and not for both the regional and the national. Agalev didn’t want to negotiate, but continued in order ‘not to shoot Ecolo in the back’(1991). In 1992 both green parties would sit around the table for the Saint-Michael agreement. The differences with Agalev were clear. The explanation might be found in the different backgrounds of both parties.

_Agalev: too small, too firm at the start_

Until 1991 one could say that Agalev was too small and to firm to talk about government participation. First of all: the Flemish greens were not as successful as Ecolo. The political landscape of Flanders was also more fractionallised than in Wallonia and not so divided on the left-right cleavage. There was a strong center with the Christian Democrats. The Volksunie remained and the extreme-right party Vlaams Blok gained more and more votes. As we already mentioned, the traditional
parties covered a large part of the electorate. If a small party was needed to deliver a 2/3 majority to change the constituency or some institutional reform, there was always a regionalist party to help the traditional partners. Agalev was still too fundamentalist to take the threshold of negotiations. Even the threshold of participation was too high at the beginning. The first parliamentary seats were won in 1981. At that time Agalev was only a political wing of an organization (Anders Gaan Leven), that was opposed to the formation of a political party. (Kitschelt and Hellemans 1990, p42) One might say that the threshold of representation was taken before the one of participation. No wonder that the goal of office-seeking was not even thinkable. The attention for the goal of intra-party democracy (Harmel and Janda 1994) proves that there was still no clear distinction between party and movement.

At the local elections of 1988 some rules were established in case of negotiations to create a local executive. Local groups should work with a list of ‘breaking points’. It was a matter of ‘all or nothing’. No wonder Agalev was considered to be a tough negotiator and local agreements with other parties were rather exceptional7. The 1991 parliamentary elections would change the attitude of the party leaders. The opinion polls were in favour of the greens. There was a transitional rule in the formation of the Flemish regional government. The executive should be formed on a proportional basis. An electoral score of 10% or more was enough to gain at least one governmental seat. Already in may 1990 this scenario was discussed.8 What would be the attitude of Agalev? Was it possible to continue the strategy of the firm negotiators, without making compromises? Should the offer be refused? Was this a reasonable option, without losing the credibility as a party? Agalev was hesitating. The threshold of coalition was at the agenda. The goal of office-seeking was disturbing the policy goal for the first time. A few days before the elections, the ‘Stuurgroep9’ came to an agreement. The decision was ambiguous: only negotiations for the two levels (regional and national government), the regional government should be for the full term (and not a transition for nine months). No breaking points would be used, but a list of topics to negotiate. The abolition of the political appointments in the administration was considered as very important, but hard to realize. (1991)

The election day of the 24th of November 1991 has been labeled ‘Black Sunday’. The Vlaams Blok gathered about 10% of the Flemish votes and reached a score of 25% in Antwerp, the largest city of Flanders. Agalev was disappointed, although it was among the winners. It was not possible to maintain the idea of a proportional regional government with the same standards. To accept the greens would also mean to give an extreme-right party a seat as a minister10. The score of the greens was indeed inferior to that of the extreme right. (9.4% for Agalev to 10.4% for Vlaams Blok) The negotiations with the socialists and the liberals didn’t lead to a participation in government. These parties blamed the greens for their ‘immature’ attitude. Agalev suffered of an organizational dilemma: to negotiate means to have representatives who have the power to decide. On the other side stood the grassroots democracy of the party. The rank and file was displeased with the lack of information and felt itself left out the decision process. The intra-party democracy goal was not forgotten. The party leaders were surprised by the lack of trust of the members. So the result was

7 In 1982 Agalev was member of a local executive in 2 municipalities. The agreement was broken after 2 years.
8 In 1988 Agalev participated in 4 municipal coalitions. (on 308 municipalities)
9 Partijberaad van 18-20/05/1990 at Westmalle.
10 The steering group was the highest decision organ, after the party congress

The score of the greens was indeed inferior. (9.4% for Agalev to 10.4% for Vlaams Blok)
rather disappointing: no government participation, an unhappy rank and file as well as unhappy party leaders. In spite of that, these negotiations became a turning point in the history of the party. For the first time Agalev was invited as a potential partner in government, and the organization showed for the first time its will to negotiate. The threshold of negotiation was taken. Yet the goal of policy advocacy was still too important to accept compromises. One year later, a new invitation from the government arrived to support a change of the constitution. The demands of the greens became less firm.

2.2.2. The Saint-Michael agreement: the greens supporting the government

In 1992 the government of Christian democrats and Socialists wanted to change the Constitution once again in order to move further in the direction of a fully-fledged federal country. The liberals refused to give support for a two-third majority, and the Vlaams Blok was excluded on moral grounds. The greens found themselves in an interesting position. They were not very interested in the state reform, but would rather put new ecological topics on the agenda. The ecotax was an important one. The name ‘Ecotax’ covers a system of taxes and refunds to stimulate people to consume in a more ecological way. In 1992 the most contested proposal was a tax on the packing of drinks. It became a highly symbolic file in the negotiations. That was a common point for Agalev and Ecolo. For the Flemish greens there was also a serious threat with the direct election of the Flemish Parliament. There was an agreement on the idea not to increase the total number of representatives. The traditional parties were in favor of the idea to leave the constituencies as such, but to decrease the number of seats in each constituency. This would be the worse for small parties like Agalev. The Flemish greens, in order to survive, negotiated larger constituencies, to keep their changes for representatives. Ecolo was less interested in this matter, as the political arena was less fragmented in Wallonia and the constituencies remained fairly the same for that part of the country. They insisted on more finances for the regions, and the full regional status of Brussels. (Delwit and De Waele 1996, p76)

The signing of this Saint-Michael agreement was a turning point in the history of both parties. Although it was not really a participation in government with ministerial posts, the fact that compromises were negotiated and finally accepted at this level, was the proof that both parties had office potential. For Ecolo, the negotiations and acceptance of participation in the majority at the city of Liège in 1982 was already a major step in that direction. For Agalev it was completely new. The ecotax was heavily contested. The industrial lobby proved that this tax would be the end of many factories. Unions demonstrated against the greens, as they were responsible for the lost of jobs. As this was not a European tax, Belgian factories would be disadvantaged, etc. The constitutional reform was voted, the ecotax wasn’t. The pressure of the Trade unions and the industry on the Socialists and Christian Democrats was too high. The greens felt betrayed. The ecotax became the symbol of the introduction of green politics in governmental policy and at the same time the example of a green political failure.

The local elections in 1994 were mediocre for both green parties. The victory of the Vlaams Blok, especially in Antwerp, created for Agalev the specific situation of a

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11 It’s important to know that the subsidies of a party, which is the main income of this organization, is related for a great deal to the number of seats in parliament.
party ‘potential in office’. Like for Ecolo in 1982 in Liège, accepting 2 seats in the local executive in the largest town of Flanders was for Agalev the proof that it could be considered as grown-up.12

The 1995 national and regional elections were rather disappointing for Agalev and Ecolo. For the first time the green parties were losing votes. The most important campaign theme was the social security system. The greens could not create a distinct profile on this subject. By supporting the government it was not longer possible to maintain the image of a protest party. Again socialists and Christian-democrats could go for another term. Four year later, things would change.

2.3. **For the first time in government**

The 1999 elections would change the political landscape. First of all, there was the defeat of the Christian democratic family, as well in the North as in the South. They lost their position as largest family of the country and of Flanders. The greens had an unexpected breakthrough. Part of their success was due to the dioxin-crisis13. These problems putted ecology on the political agenda, a few months before the elections. Both Christian-democrats and Socialists were held responsible. In Flanders the Liberals gathered the highest score, and in Wallonia the greens became the third party to the detriment of the PSC. After a long period of opposition, the Liberals took their chance to build a coalition without the Christian-democrats. As we already mentioned, coalition formation was negotiated for the regional and the national level at the same time. In Flanders, Socialists, Liberals, Greens and Volksunie were needed to build a regional government without CVP and Vlaams Blok. In Wallonia Socialists and Liberals together had enough seats. Agalev and Ecolo decided to negotiate together. It would be both or none. The difficulty of making a common program with both socialists and liberals was considered to be an inferior problem. The drive to create a government without CD was too great. After a remarkably short period of negotiations, Agalev and Ecolo obtained their first ministers, in both the national and the regional governments.14

Nearly two years after this first participation, feelings are mixed in the green parties. The local elections of 2000 gave no indication for Agalev in which direction voters did evaluate the situation. Ecolo was more successful. The question remains if local success can be interpreted as a positive evaluation of the government participation.

2.4. **The local coalition building**

We already mentioned a few times that the green parties were also involved in local coalitions. The importance of this fact cannot be denied. Frankland and Schoonmaker argue: “… Thomas Scharf maintains that the Greens'involvement in the ‘everyday compromises demanded of local politics’ has reinforced the dynamic of Realpolitik, even for fundamentalists.” (Frankland and Schoonmaker 1992) If a member is willing to think in terms of negotiation and coalition on the local level, (s)he

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12 There were other small cities, where the greens entered the executive. They also had their first mayor. ( in Zwijdrecht)
13 Machine oil appeared to have been mixed in chicken food. Traces of dioxin were found in chicken meat a few weeks before the elections. The government was blamed for keeping this information secret and for having acted inappropriately.
14 Once again the Brussels region has its own dynamic. Ecolo was refused at the last moment by socialists and liberals at the French part of the government, and at the Flemish side all parties, except the Vlaams Blok, form the executive.
will do the same at the national. So the more members involved in local coalition, the more the idea of government participation will be accepted. Tabel 1 gives an overview of the number of municipalities, where Agalev or Ecolo was or is still part of the majority.

Tabel 1: the number of coalitions with greens.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Agalev</th>
<th>Ecolo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Agalev

The 2 coalitions in 1982 didn’t survive until the end. In 1988 only 2 coalitions with Agalev survived the whole period. In 1994 the Flemish greens have their first Mayor. The number of coalitions increases. Among the 14 municipalities, one ever had a coalition with greens before. In the largest town of Flanders, Antwerp, the greens were pushed into a coalition against extreme-right. Two other towns, Mechelen and Hasselt, had greens in the executive. Although the most recent local elections were not that successful for Agalev, the number of coalitions doubled. In 8 of the 14 coalitions of 1994, Agalev stayed in the majority. This is the case in the three towns, we have mentioned before. Agalev has now 2 mayors.

Ecolo

The local coalition building of Ecolo is rather similar to Agalev. The first two elections the number of coalitions was very low. In 1982, Ecolo joined the majority in Liège, the largest town of Wallonia. We already mentioned the importance for the evolution of the party. In 1988 they only participate in 3 coalitions, but one of them was Brussels, the capital of the country. In 1994 Ecolo stayed in power in Brussels and also in 6 other municipalities. From these 7 coalitions, only 2 were lost at the 2000 elections. But the total number increased to 35. Also Ecolo has now its Mayors. One can say that Ecolo and Agalev passed the threshold of coalition also at the local level.

The importance of coalition in large cities is obvious. The political weight of the executive is similar to that of a parliamentary mandate. Local politicians in these cities are also involved in national politics, not only in parliament, but also in the own party organization. As Agalev and Ecolo are especially popular in large cities, the majority of members came from the city. So if the goal of office-seeking is accepted in the local city group, the more it will be accepted at the national level. One remark has to be made: Belgium has also ten Provincies, which has elected councils and executives. The importance of the Provincies is rather low. Until today, not once the greens have been part of the majority.

3. The rank and file

One of the main characteristics of green organizations, and certainly of their ideology, is the importance of the rank and file. Grassroots democracy is a basic element in green political thought. The aim of this article is not to evaluate whether this idea has
been realized in these parties. The question is: what was the opinion of the rank and file on coalition building and was it also their goal to gain office? If we look at goals, we will also find other topics like party programs and ideology. Several surveys were held among green members of Agalev and Ecolo. We will try to put the opinions of these members next to the acts of the organization at that time.

### 3.1. The members in the party

The number of members of Agalev and Ecolo was never high. At every local election the number increases, but Ecolo never got more than 2500 members. For Agalev, the maximum number was 4200, until the recent elections. They are now proud to celebrate their 6000th member. In comparison with other parties, the number is still modest. At the French-speaking side the socialists had 104975 members in 1998, the liberals 38.904 and the Christian-Democrats 25283.(Biondi 2000) In Flanders there is a comparable situation: the socialists had 74058 members in 1998, the liberals 76941 and the Christian-Democrats 108441.(Biondi 1999)

In spite of, and perhaps due to the reduced number, green members are very active. This fact has been studied for Agalev in 1988 and 1994 in comparison with other parties at the local level (Deschouwer 1996).

### 3.2. The main goal for the rank and file

#### 3.2.1. The idea of coalition building in 1985

In 1985 Kitschelt and Hellemans conducted a survey among green party–militants of Agalev and Ecolo.(Kitschelt and Hellemans 1990) Unfortunately the raw data are lost, but the results in the study give us an idea on how green militants in Belgium think about government-participation. Question 49 was: Assume that Agalev/Ecolo will receive even more votes in the future years, would you want to give Agalev/Ecolo a chance to participate in a government coalition or not?

- I would like to give Agalev/Ecolo the chance to participate.
- I would like to give Agalev/Ecolo the chance to participate, but with reservations
- Usually, I would not wish to give Agalev/Ecolo the chance to participate
- Certainly, I would not wish to give Agalev/Ecolo the chance to participate

The responses on this question were different for Agalev and Ecolo., as we can see in table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agalev %</th>
<th>Ecolo %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, give a chance</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, with reservations</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, tends give no chance</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, definitely no chance</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The distribution of the questionnaire was done at a party congress, where only militants were present, and not the broader rank and file. The difference is obvious
between the two parties. In general the militants of Agalev are in favour of participation, but less than Ecolo and with much more reservations. The French-speaking greens did not have full opponents of coalition participation. Agalev has 8%. It was not possible anymore to see how the presence of militants from Liège, with coalition practice, influenced the results.

Kitschelt and Hellemans linked these results with a self-positioning on strategic choices. They asked the members to describe themselves as fundamentalists or realists. ‘Fundamentalists insist on strategies that preserve the purity of the party program …Realists put greater emphasis on electoral success and winning political office …’ (Kitschelt and Hellemans 1990, p.86) Party program and ideology were placed in opposition with electoral success and the office-seeking goal. Within our framework the positioning between fundamentalists and realists, as described by the authors, does not fit. They mix the votes and office goal. On the other hand, the opinions on policy were well elaborated.

Kitschelt and Hellemans discovered that the often quite profound differences between the two Belgian green parties are due to the relationship between subgroups and ideological positions. The more ideology they had, the less members were oriented toward coalition. Agalev was, at that time, far more fundamentalist than Ecolo. An explanation was found in the different background of both parties.

3.2.2. Local chairmen of Agalev in 1994

In 1994 a study focussed on local chairmen of national parties in the Flemish part of Belgium. (Buelens and Deschouwer 1996) The response was high (50%) and 64.8% of the Agalev spokesmen give their answers. One of the questions was: ‘Is it a clear ambition of your local party branch to be part of the majority?’ A second related question described the ambition to obtain the seat of the Mayor. Tabel 3 gives an idea of the responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>N=</th>
<th>Valid % mayor</th>
<th>Valid % coalition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agalev</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVP</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>67.9</td>
<td>92.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>87.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VLD</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>89.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VU</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>63.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vl.Blok</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>736</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>74.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The percentage of responses was only 15.3%. The relevance is doubtful.

It is obvious that the local chairmen of Agalev were at that time not really interested to be part of a majority. Only 33.1% had the ambition to join the local executive. The score is far below the average for all the parties.

15 These terms were used by the West-German greens.
3.2.3. The members of Ecolo in 1996

In 1996 Delwit and De Waele sent 2400 questionnaires to all the Ecolo-members. (Delwit and De Waele 1996, p192) The response was high with 60,8% and with a good regional coverage. The question was asked: Does Ecolo has a vocation to participate in a coalition on a local/provincial/regional/national level? There was a scale going from ‘totally agree’, ‘more or less agree’, ‘more or less not’ to ‘I don’t agree’. 88,2% were in favour of a participation in local government, and 9,3% were more or less convinced. The score for the federal level was lower with 75,4% of the members who fully agreed and 15% who did more or less agree with government-participation. The conclusion was obvious: ‘Anyway, the idea of limiting ‘in principle’ the political action of the movement to a simple opposition, whether it is constructive or protest, is non existent anymore.’ (Delwit and De Waele 1996, p230).

In Ecolo local participation seems to be even more accepted than national. But also at the national level one might speak of a quasi consensus. These results confirmed the differences between Agalev and Ecolo. Ecolo was far more oriented toward the office-seeking goal. There was one remarkable element in these results: although nearly everyone did agree on coalition building, there was a significant weak negative correlation between the degree of agreement with government participation and the duration of the membership. It meant that there was still an ‘old’ die-hard group that persisted in its protest attitude. Women tend to be more in favour of a coalition.

3.2.4. Local chairmen in 2000 from Agalev and Ecolo

Again in 2000, the opinion of all local chairmen of the national parties was researched. Nearly the same questions as in 1994 were asked, but now for the whole country. The questionnaire of 2000 contained a set of questions to discover the weight of every goal for these local chairmen. They were asked to evaluate the importance of 6 possible goals. They got 6 sentences to be judged from unimportant to very important in 4 categories.

1) To have a large number of members
2) To be part of the majority
3) To keep or gather the seat of the mayor
4) To realize the program as much as possible
5) To create a pleasing atmosphere in the local group
6) To progress at elections
7) To keep the ideological specificity
8) Others …

16 With a special thanks to Pascal Delwit and Jean-Michel Dewaele to let us use the rough data of the questionnaire.
15 A discriminant-analysis was run with ‘participation’ as the dependent variable. 59,8% of the cases were correctly classified. The function consists of three variables: age, duration of membership and sex. The duration of membership correlated with the discriminant function for .826, Age .534 and sex -.487. Wilks’Lambda .992 Sig.: .016 Thank you, Koen Pelleriaux.
18 Some results will be published in Buelens, Deschouwer, Dewinter, Rihoux, Dexia……?
Three items, 1, 2 and 3, could be compared with the 1994 questions for the Flemish parties. We only look at the majority and the mayor goal at this time.

Tabel 4: scores for majority and mayor in 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N=</th>
<th>Valid% mayor</th>
<th>Valid% majority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agalev</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVP</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
<td>93.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vl.Blok</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>99.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VLD</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>67.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VU</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecolo</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>77.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>67.4%</td>
<td>96.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>92.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRL</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>74.6%</td>
<td>95.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDF</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>81.8%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1166</td>
<td>51.3%</td>
<td>84.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

56% of the local Agalev chairmen want to be in the majority. In 1994 this percentage was only 33.1%. The ambition to have the seat of the Mayor is also a little bit higher. This is a global tendency for all parties. All scores increase. If we compare the results of Agalev and Ecolo for this survey, there is still a difference to be seen in the positions of both parties. Ecolo remains more oriented towards majority, but the results are less overwhelming than those of 1996. At the time of the survey, both parties were already one year in the national government, and both had local majority experiences in large cities.

In the past we only looked at the individual scores of parties on one item. With the set of items in the present survey, it is possible to look at all statements, and see whether some items can be grouped. The theory deals with three or four possible goals. Müller and Ström look at office seeking, policy-seeking and vote-seeking models of party. (Müller and Strom 1999, p.5) Especially for the greens Harmel and Janda added the goal of intra-party democracy (Harmel and Janda 1994). With a factor analysis we can see if items can be put together and if local party leaders can be plotted in this frame of goals.

It was not surprising to see that ‘To be part of the majority’ and ‘To keep or gather the seat of the mayor’ pointed in the same direction. In order to follow our framework we called this factor ‘office’. The items ‘To realize the program as much as possible’ and ‘To keep the ideological specificity’ became the factor of ‘policy’. The three other items ‘To have a large number of members’, ‘To progress at elections’ and ‘To create a pleasing atmosphere in the local group’ clustered in a third factor. It was larger than the goal of ‘vote-seeking’. In this context we can consider vote seeking also as an instrumental goal, as Müller and Ström also mentioned (cfr. Supra). We called this factor ‘instrumental’ as the three goals can be seen as useful to gain office or to fulfill the program.

In our analysis the three factors explained a total variance of 66.3%.

Figure 1 shows us a plot of the parties on a two dimensional scale of the office and the policy factor.
Figure 1: plot of factor analysis on policy and office

The green parties are in a distinguished area: they score low on the office-dimension and high on the policy–dimension. This means that in relation to the mean of all local chairmen’s opinion, green spokesmen tend to be less interested in the office seeking goal, and more oriented towards ideology and program. The Extreme-right party is the only one that is more extreme on both dimensions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>Instrumental</th>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agalev</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVP</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vl. Blok</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VLD</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VU</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecolo</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRL</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDF</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This plot shows only the mean of all the opinions. It is also important to see the standard deviation. The higher this deviation, the more the individual opinions within a party differ. Table 5 gives the results.

For the office-seeking goal the deviation is the lowest for CVP and VLD (.53 and .66). The highest deviation is for the VU with 1.0 and the Vlaams Blok with .98. Agalev is high with .93; Ecolo has less different opinions with .81. Agalev and the Vlaams Blok have the lowest deviation on the policy-seeking goal (.70 and .67). Ecolo is near with .75. Local chairmen of VU and VLD have difficulties to find an agreement within their party on the importance of policy. A deviation of 1.30 and 1.11 is high.

For the green parties the conclusions are somewhat the same. Both parties give more importance to policy, program and ideology. The standard deviation is low on that axis, so all individual green chairmen think roughly in the same way. The opinion on coalition formation, the office seeking goal, is much more difficult. Green chairmen hesitate between coalition or not. We already met this attitude of the chairmen of Agalev, but this picture of Ecolo does not correspond with the more confident attitude in other surveys toward participation in a majority.

4. The relationship between facts and surveys

Different questions were asked, in different periods and at different groups of members. Hellemans and Kitschelt looked at party members at a congress. Buelens and Deschouwer did a survey with local chairmen. Delwit and De Waele were able to look at all members of Ecolo.

From the start Ecolo was more oriented toward the office-seeking goal. The topic was very soon on the agenda of Ecolo, but not of Agalev. The choice of Ecolo to support the Walloon government in 1986 was not surprising, if we only look at the results of the Hellemans and Kitschelt survey. As a grassroots-party the opinion of the rank and file was followed. The fact that some members defected, due to the decision of the party, only proves that the most ‘fundamentalist’ of the rank and file didn’t saw any future in this ‘governmental’ party. On the other hand, if we see the results of the votes at the party congress of May 1986, the picture is not that clear. The motion, which described Ecolo as a party potential in office, was accepted with 50.7% of the valid votes. (Delwit and De Waele 1996, p.66) This is very different from the overwhelming ‘yes’ in the 1985 survey. Apparently, there is a gap between survey and practice.

Still in 1991 Agalev was not willing to negotiate, but felt itself pushed by Ecolo in that direction. The reasoning was somewhat remarkable: ‘Perhaps we are ready for government participation, but the voter is not.’ (1991) The distrust of the members was clearly expressed (cfr. supra), the fear of an electoral defeat was also obvious. This sentence in the rapport proves that also the vote-seeking goal was in the mind of the party leaders at that time. At the same reunion some advocates of participation referred to the local coalitions. ‘We do criticize some local coalitions with Agalev, but we still support them. How can we explain to the voters that we do not negotiate at a national level?’ (1991) We can say that the reactions of the rank and file pushed the party leaders to a more radical programmatic position. The negotiators of Ecolo followed. At a press conference they explained: ’The proposals from the other parties were not negotiable. We could not accept these propositions.’ (Deweerdt and Falter 1992, p.330)
In 1992 the ‘Stuurgroep’ of Agalev accepted to support the Saint-Michael agreement without any negative vote. (1992) There was no enthusiasm, but more a feeling of: ‘It is better than nothing’. It is surprising that this important political decision was never submitted to the rank and file. At the national level, Agalev created at that time an image of potential in office. It is not so sure that the rank and file was in favour of this shift. This new way of acting didn’t pass at the local level. The number of coalitions with greens increases in 1994, but the local groups were still acting in a ‘protest’ framework. The results of the 1994 survey of local chairmen confirm this idea. One can not say that the number of local coalitions was that high for Agalev or Ecolo to provoke the attitudinal change at the top of the organization. In 2000 one might think that it happens the other way round.

In July 1999 395 members of Agalev voted at a party congress to join the national government with socialists and liberals. The result was clear: 356 votes in favour, 2 votes against, and 9 abstentions. There was no doubt anymore that Agalev could participate in government. At the local elections of 2000 the number of coalitions with Agalev increased to 30, with Ecolo to 35. Also at the local level, the greens became apparently fully acceptable as a coalition partner for the other parties. The attitude of the local chairmen still remains reluctant. In spite of a higher number of coalitions, the goal of policy comes first.

5. The green parties in Belgium: like the others after all?

Green parties are studied as new parties. Created in the eighties, they now exist in Belgium for about 20 years. The use of the framework with party goals and thresholds showed us the different evolution of Agalev and Ecolo. At the start the threshold of participation was high for Agalev but not for Ecolo. From the very beginning the threshold of negotiation seemed to be logic for Ecolo, at least on the local level. The survey of Hellemans and Kitschelt proves us that there was indeed less ideology among the party members than at Agalev. No wonder that ideology and the party program was pushed forward as the main goal of Agalev, as protest was its only weapon. The fractionalized political landscape in Flanders and the modest results of Agalev kept this policy-seeking goal alive. The issue of government participation is only on the agenda, if other parties ask for it. The demands of support by the government for Ecolo in 1985 and 1986 increased the gap between both green parties. The threshold of negotiation was taken by Ecolo, but the rank and file, and some party leaders could not accept the weakening of the policy goal. In spite of the crisis, Ecolo was already at that moment a party that was potential in office. Most of the ‘fundamentalists’ left the party. Only the electoral results could be better. The support of the Saint-Michael agreement in 1992 was the pivoting point for Agalev. They finally took the threshold of negotiation. Two years later they took the threshold of coalition building in Antwerp and other cities. Finally Agalev and Ecolo became governmental parties in 1999.

Green parties in government are no exceptions anymore. Do they become like all the others? For Belgium, some results don’t point in that direction, others do. At the national and regional level the rank and file seem to accept the participation in the majority. The number of votes on the party congress showed a large support. The last survey of 2000 proves that there is still a difference at the local level. The ambition of being part of the majority is increasing, but there is still a gap. Agalev and Ecolo remain to have this ‘protest’ attitude with ideology and party program as the main goal. The traditional parties make other choices.
The future will tell if the increasing local coalition-building shall harmonize the picture, so that Agalev and Ecolo might be mentioned in the future as ‘the new traditional parties’.

6. Bibliography

Buelens, J. (1996). To change or not to change. the ECPR joint sessions, Oslo.