

# Översikter och meddelanden

## The Influence of the Mergers of Municipalities on the Political Composition of the Local Political Elite in Flanders 1946-1988

### Introduction

In spite of the fact that municipalities constitute the basis of our form of government, researchers working on local politics are still given to understand that local politics, compared with national politics, are nothing more than "Kirchturmspolitik" (Kühr, 1981: 74). This conclusion does not only count for Belgium but for other countries as well.

It therefore is not surprising that local political life in Belgium and more specifically in Flanders, has been so far a subject that was treated in a stepmotherly way and thus has been neglected to a large extent. Moreover, the view that local politics are nothing more than "Kirchturmspolitik" is clearly revealed when one compares scientific literature on micro and macro politics. We can conclude, as Ackaert rightly notices (1994: 9), that scientific research is much more interested in macro politics than in what happens in the local field. Moreover, it appears that when local politics focused in a certain type of scientific literature, one mainly concentrates on aspects of administrative law, social administration and finances of local policy.

In spite of the fact that research on local politics is rather restricted, local entities still occupy a very important place in our form of government. As the administrative layer that generally speaking is nearest to the citizen, they are primarily responsible for most of the matters with which a citizen is confronted in his daily life. The daily lives of most people are circumscribed by the

locality in which they live. In some respects this may seem to be a strange observation. It is usual nowadays to think of people as members of a 'global village'. The news media bring into our homes pictures of political events on other continents. International economic changes render people unemployed in industries across the world. The structure of society is shaped by forces which have their origins outside the local arena and which arrange all countries within the same mode of economic organisation. International organisations legislate across national boundaries. Meanwhile, within particular countries the State is increasingly able to surmount the resistance of local administration and institutions. Clearly local political events, such as elections for councils, are often heavily influenced by conditions of national politics. Finally, people are far more mobile than before and able to have a much wider range of experiences (Mabileau, ..., 1989: 1) and (Collinge, 1995: 1). Indeed, despite all of this, the own locality remains the field within which most lives are led.

Municipalities derive from it all their importance. Moreover, local policy, more than other governmental layers, can be directly influenced by the citizens. It is on the local level that democracy takes shape – also by the say and the participation of the citizens – in the most direct way (Castenmiller, 1994: 2).

One could be inclined to conclude from this that everybody, or in any case the majority, is involved in local political decision-making. In a parliamentary democracy it is assumed that convictions and interests of citizens obtain free entrance to play a part in political decision-making (Dekker, ..., 1988: 401).

Within the scope of this article we have tried to find out what was the political composition of the local political elite (locally elected people), on the basis of a number of research results from my PHD: An Analysis of the local political elite

in Flanders 1946-1988 (1996)<sup>1</sup>, and more specifically, to what degree the mergers of municipalities had an impact on political compositions.

As a starting date of my investigation I have chosen 1946, being the year of the first postwar municipal elections. From the analysis of the provisional results of P. Gunst it appears that one can carefully state that the war structurally as well as on the level of work force has brought a split in local governmental tradition (Gunst, 1994: 427). 1988 is the year of the last municipal elections we examined. When we closed our data base, the municipal elections of 1994 still had to take place. In other words, our data base concerns the municipal elections of 1946, 1952, 1958, 1964, 1970, 1976, 1982 and 1988.

## 1. The Municipal Council and the Board of Mayor and Aldermen

The two most important bodies of municipal government are the municipal council and the Board of Mayor and Aldermen. Local government is headed by the municipal council. Its executive committee is the Board of Mayor and Aldermen presided over by the mayor. The Board of Mayor and Aldermen is not merely an executive committee. It really dominates the political apparatus of local government. Having no Board of Mayor and Aldermen portfolios means that a party will have considerably less power and scarcely any basis of influence in local politics. Aldermen are elected by the municipal council from among its members, whilst the mayor is designated by the municipal council (normally from among its members but not necessarily so) and appointed by the central government.

Elections for municipal councils are held every six years on the second Sunday of October. The distribution of municipal council seats between the different political parties is based on their electoral results, according to the principle of proportional representation. Both the number of municipal council seats and the number of Board of Mayor and Alderman portfolios are determined by the population size of the municipality (Mellors & Pijnenburg, 1989: 35). A mu-

nicipality with less than 1000 inhabitants has seven councillors and a Board of Mayor and Aldermen of two aldermen plus the mayor. A municipality with more than 300000 inhabitants has fifty-five councillors and a Board of Mayor and Aldermen of ten aldermen plus the mayor.

## 2. The Mergers of Municipalities

By the law of 14 February 1961, amended by the law of 23 July 1971, the reduction of the number of municipalities and cities was started. Between 1961 and 1971 304 municipalities were dissolved so that of the 2663 Belgian municipalities of 1961 there remained 2359. In the government policy statement of the Tindemans government on 12 June 1974 the prospect of an overall plan for the total adaptation of the number of municipalities was held out. The Home Secretary J. Michel was put in charge of it. On 6 October 1975 he introduced a bill into Parliament. The deliberations in Parliament took place from 12 till 22 November 1975 and they were often very turbulent. On 22 November the final vote took place, and the bill was passed with 100 votes for, 84 votes against and 4 abstentions. Finally the Senate confirmed the bill on 23 December 1975 with 100 votes for and 15 against. Thus Parliament finished the debate the stake of which was the most radical reform of the local legislation in the history of our country after 1831 (Luyckx & Platel, 1985: 674-675; Ackaert, 1991: 27). This merger, which was enforced from 1 January 1977 onwards, meant that the local entities in Belgium were reduced from 2359 to 596 (law of 30 December 1975) (Luyckx & Platel, 1985: 675; Collinge, 1995: 5). However, this merger operation was not complete before seven Antwerp municipalities had been incorporated into the city of Antwerp on 1 January 1983.

There was an average of four or five municipalities per merger. Before the mergers of 1977 Belgian municipalities averaged 4164 inhabitants against 16678 afterwards. The average surface of municipalities increased from 13km<sup>2</sup> to 52km<sup>2</sup>.

The most important motive for the merger process was the following: to provide the citi-

zens the services which are expected from them, they (the municipalities) must have the disposal of qualified personnel and a sound financial situation, as well as an adequate population figure and an equivalent surface area (Ackaert, 1991: 27). This motivation has often been translated as "quality of life" or "administrative power". Democratic criteria came, according to Ackaert, far less to the forefront. But he does make an exception for the option to provide small, rural municipalities with an adequate composition of population, so that a well functioning municipal council could be composed (Ackaert, 1991: 28).

### 3. The Political Identification of the Lists

In the search for an answer to the question of the impact of mergers on the political composition of the local political elite in Flanders in the period from 1946 till 1988, one is immediately confronted with one of the biggest problems in the study of elections for the municipal council, viz. the political identification of the lists. This is a problem which has already extensively been discussed by W. Dewachter (1970: 292).

Notwithstanding the fact that political parties have been insisting that local departments should come up under the recognizable national party names, it is often not the case. Various examples could be quoted. First of all, one has the splitting up of the traditional national parties into their tendencies. Mainly with the C.V.P. the splitting up into A.C.W., N.C.M.V. and Farmers lists is frequent.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, a local (dissident) department of a national party is often established. Moreover, many lists have a purely local character. These are lists (a.o. list of the Mayor, Municipal Interests, Interests of the People, New, ...) which in other words, have no links with national parties. They simply work on the level of local politics and they restrict their place of action to one municipality or city. Finally, there are also a lot of cartel lists which neither can be easily identified politically. In order to identify the different lists as best as possible one should have made a separate study of every single municipality or city. Since this was not pos-

sible owing to the large number of municipalities/cities examined (more than three hundred) the following method was chosen: first, each local department with a recognizable national party name was given the name of the national party (C.V.P., Socialist Party, Liberal Party, Volksunie, Agalev, Vlaams Blok, Communist Party); secondly, the term "local parties" is used for all lists which do not refer to a recognizable national party name; finally, there is also a limited category "others".

### 4. The Global Impact of Merger Operations on the Political Composition of the Local Political Elite

No doubt the structure and nature of the local political life in Flanders have changed a lot since the Second World War. In 1970 Dewachter described a number of these changes. He based his analysis on the concept "verkiezingsgestalte" (Dewachter, 1970: 289-310). It refers to the entirety of the competing parties as well as to the final electoral success of each of the lists by which they are given a representation in the municipal council. The central point is the relation between the number of local and national lists that take part in the municipal elections of a municipality. Thus, Dewachter distinguishes between elections without any contest, exclusively local elections, mainly local elections, mixed and mainly national elections. One of the trends which Dewachter refers to in this typology is: the more the degree of urbanization of municipalities increases the more exclusively and mainly local "electoral shape" variants gradually disappear. This typology was therefore extremely suitable to examine the effect of the merger operation on local political life in Belgium. The analysis clearly showed that elections without contest and purely local elections are becoming more and more exceptional. The most frequent electoral shape was now the mixed type. It therefore is not surprising that the conclusion was reached that the municipal elections of 1976 were characterized by a clear "nationalisation" (Pijnenburg, 1988: 225-226). The results of the 1976 elections have indeed clearly shown that

the national parties, and mainly the three traditional big ones (C.V.P., Liberal Party and Socialist Party), have strengthened their positions, to the detriment of local parties (Ackaert, 1988: 37).

An examination of the evolution of power relations between the different political parties in Flanders during the period 1946-1988 shows that in the course of time there have been a number of important shifts.<sup>3</sup> In spite of the fact that the C.V.P. and local parties dominated the whole period 1946-1988, one still can distinguish two periods. During the period 1946-1970 between 76,3% (1970) and 83,6% (1958) of local mandates were occupied by these parties. It is mainly the impact of local parties which increased in this period, while the local power of the C.V.P. diminished. From 1976 onwards this percentage is between 60,4% (1988) and 67,1% (1976). At the moment the C.V.P. is the party that supplies the most important part of the local political elite. It is clear that the merger operation of 1976 worked against local parties, and that of all parties it was the C.V.P. which gained most from it.

With the Socialist Party only a restricted kind of evolution can be found. During the period 1946-1988 the percentage of mandates occupied by socialists varies between 11,9% (1946) and 17,2% (1952 and 1988). Nevertheless, the socialists have slightly taken advantage from the merger operation of 1976. Whereas in 1970 14,7% of the mandates were occupied by socialists, the percentage rose to 16,7% in 1976. The supplementary votes from smaller municipalities where the socialists hadn't come up before, and the desintegration of local lists will undoubtedly not be foreign to it (Vanschoenbeek, 1994: 110). Vanschoenbeek also mentions that the merger operation of 1976, which in socialist circles was often considered as a "C.V.P.-manoeuvre", finally had a positive effect on the social-democratic proliferation. The old tension between a rather strong national and a weak local representation was smoothened to a quasi identical presence on the different levels of power (Vanschoenbeek, 1994: 127). However, from 1976 onwards the share of the Socialist Party in the local political elite has stagnated.<sup>4</sup>

Initially the share of the liberals was rather limited. In the period 1946-1970 the percentage of liberals belonging to the local political elite varied between 4,1% (1958) and 6,1% (1964). From 1976 onwards the share of the liberals has become larger and larger (1976: 7,7%; 1982: 9,8%; 1988: 14,2%). Thus the Liberal Party too gained from the merger process.

As far as the Volksunie is concerned, one can clearly notice an evolution. During the period 1964 till 1976 there is an increase of its share in the local political elite. The contribution increased from 1% in 1964 to 8,1% in 1976. In 1982 (7,9%) the Volksunie more or less managed to maintain the level of 1976, but from 1988 (5,2%) onwards the decline is clearly visible.

The mergers created possibilities for the national political parties to further break through from the national down to the municipal level. The outcome of the elections also proved this, since to a certain degree they clearly mirrored the opportunities provided by the organisers of the mergers (Holvoet, 1976: 458-459).

So far the municipal political play had managed to keep away from the classical practice of party making that was characteristic of national politics. This certainly held for smaller municipalities (Suykens, 1982: 472).

By means of nationally supported propaganda the big parties tried to introduce their lists in as many municipalities as possible. By doing so they succeeded in freeing local politics from the sphere of village politics. However, as it will appear from what follows, this does not so far apply to the smallest municipalities. The increased interest of national parties which only now had started to participate in local elections was politically speaking a normal consequence of scaling up (Anthoon, 1982: 476). This became apparent in the accelerated development of local branches of the national parties and in the fact that the different national parties became more active on the local level (Pijnenburg, 1988: 226). Owing to the mergers, municipalities indeed became more important, they engaged in larger financial transactions and provided a larger proportion of employment. Within such a context there was not a single party that could afford to neglect the local level (Anthoon, 1982: 476).

## 5. Power Relations between Various Political Parties in the Different Categories of Municipalities and Cities. Impact of the Merger Operation

Within the scope of this article it is not only important to know how power relations changed during the 1946-1988 period. For the same period one also must examine how the power relations between the different political parties in the five categories of municipalities/cities<sup>5</sup> have changed.

An inquiry into the evolution of power relations between different political parties in the five categories of municipalities/cities over the period 1946-1988, shows that the C.V.P. has almost continuously held the largest share of the local political elite in Flanders during the successive election years, with the exception of the smallest municipalities/cities. Moreover, for the different election years there is a clear relation between the impact of political parties and the size of the municipality/city. First, there is constantly a clear negative relation between the size of municipalities/cities and the share of the local political elite elected on local lists. On the other hand, there is a positive connection for the socialists and liberals, as well as for the Volksunie between the size of municipalities/cities and the share in percents of the local political elite that through these parties makes its entry in the municipal council. However, one must make here some slight distinctions. In the period 1946-1964 the Socialist Party had its largest share of the local political elite in the municipalities/cities having between 27 and 35 councillors. In 1970 this is the case in municipalities/cities having 23 and 25 councillors, while from 1976 onwards the socialists had their largest share of the local political elite in the largest municipalities/cities. Within this context it must be pointed out that the liberals, with the exception of 1958, have always found their largest share in the local political elite of the largest municipalities/cities. The Volksunie too always had its strongest presence within the local political elite of the largest municipalities/cities during the period 1964-1988, with the exception of the municipal elections of 1970. Finally, the share of the C.V.P. in the local

political elite of the smallest and the largest municipalities/cities, with the exception of 1952 and 1976, was the "slightest".

These are of course important conclusions for the study of the impact of the merger operation on the political composition of the local political elite. From the classification of municipalities according to their number of citizens before and after the mergers it has become clear that before the merger operation 68,3% of the municipalities in Flanders belonged to the category with less than 5000 inhabitants, while this percentage dropped to 5,1% after the mergers (Maes, 1976: 283). In other words, notwithstanding the fact that the local parties are still most successful in the smallest municipalities, this is now the case only for 5,1% of Flemish municipalities, while earlier 68,3% of the municipalities were involved. Since one can also conclude that there is a clear negative coherence between the size of the municipalities/cities and the share of the local political elite elected on local lists, the merger operation was an ideal way (or political strategy?) to "eliminate" local parties and to drastically raise the impact of the national political parties on local politics.

## 6. Impact of the Merger Operation on the three Local Levels of Power (Councillor, Alderman and Mayor)

Next to the study of the evolution of power relations between political parties in the period 1946-1988 in Flanders and for the different categories of municipalities/cities one must examine how power relations between different political parties vary as one gets to a higher level of local power.

For the period 1946-1970, between 72,4% (1970) and 79,4% (1958) of the councillors belonged to the C.V.P. and local parties. From 1976 onwards, the percentage can be situated between 64,2% (1976) and 56,8% (1988). Moreover, one should note that for the period 1946-1970, with the exception of 1946, local parties had always more councillors than the C.V.P.. From 1976 onwards, the reverse situation is seen. Because of the merger operation the share

of local parties on the level of councillors diminished by 20,6%, while the share of the C.V.P. rose by 12,4%. For the socialists the share of councillors in percentage did not change a lot in the period 1946-1988. In 1946 they had 14,9% councillors, while the percentage increased up to 18,2% in 1988. In the period 1946-1970 the percentage of liberal councillors varied between 4,9% (1958) and 7,5% (1964). From 1976 onwards, the share of liberal councillors is getting larger and larger (1976: 8,3%; 1982: 10,1%; 1988: 15,3%). For the Volksunie, a clear evolution on the level of councillors can be noticed. In the period from 1964 up to 1976 inclusive, there is an increasing number of Volksunie-councillors. From 1982 onwards there is a sharp decrease.

For aldermen two periods can be distinguished as well. In the period 1946-1970 the C.V.P. and local parties occupied between 84,1% (1970) and 92,6% (1958) of the alderman's seats. From 1976 (74,6%) onwards there is a sharp decrease (1988: 70,2%). Particularly striking are the big losses of local parties (-24,6%). The big increase of the C.V.P. (+15,1%) should be emphasized as well. It should be noted, however, that, contrary to the level of councillors, in the period 1946-1970 there is here no question of preponderance of local parties. However, in 1970 local parties occupy more alderman's seats than the C.V.P. In view of the importance of the merger process, this is undoubtedly a striking conclusion. With regard to the socialists, the number of alderman's seats, in contrast with that of councillors, sharply increased during 1946-1988. In the period 1946-1970 the party held between 5,2% (1958) and 11,6% (1970) of the alderman's seats. The Socialist Party reached its highest percentage in 1976 (16,7%). From then onwards, one can see a slight decrease. For the liberals a similar evolution is perceptible as with the councillors. Up to 1970 inclusive the liberals occupied no more than 4% of the alderman's seats. From 1976 (5,7%) onwards, this percentage increased continuously reaching in 1988 10,4%. As to the Volksunie, the number of alderman's seats has always been rather limited. The Volksunie here reached a peak in 1982 (5,5%).

Concerning the mayors one can see more or less the same evolutions as with the aldermen. In the period 1946-1970 the C.V.P. and local parties occupied between 90,8% (1952) and 94,4% (1958) of the mayor's seats. From 1976 (81,3%) onwards, this percentage went down to 73% in 1988. Again the big losses of local parties (-27,2%) and the important increase of the C.V.P. (+16,8%) are remarkable. It should be noted that in the period 1946-1970 local parties really had more mayors than the C.V.P. This is, in the context of the merger process, again a very important conclusion. For the period from 1976 onwards, the C.V.P. occupied slightly more than half of all alderman's and mayor's seats. As to the socialists the number of mayors in the course of the period 1946-1988 increased remarkably. In the period 1946-1970 the party held between 3,3% (1958) and 7,5% (1970) of the mayor's seats. From 1976 onwards, the number of socialist mayors can be situated between 11 and 12%. For the liberals the same evolution can be seen as for councillors and the aldermen. Up to 1970 inclusive, the liberals occupied no more than 4% of the mayor's seats. From 1976 (6,5%) onwards this percentage continuously increased, reaching in 1988 13%. In other words, for the socialists as well as for the Liberal Party the merger operation had an important impact on their number of mayor's seats. Volksunie's number of mayors has always been rather restricted. The Volksunie reached a peak in 1982 (3%).

## 7. The Impact of the Merger Operation on the three Local Levels of Power in the Smallest Municipalities/Cities

One could finally go into the question of how power relations in the five categories of municipalities/cities evolves as a higher local level of power is considered. We will however only discuss the evolution in the smallest municipalities.

The table below proves that in the smallest municipalities during the different election years<sup>6</sup> the local parties are best represented for all levels of power. Moreover, through the years one can see a consistent increase of the share of local parties in the field of councillors (C), aldermen (A)

Table 1. The evolution of the share (%) of the different parties on local power levels in the smallest municipalities/cities in Flanders 1946-1988.

		1946	1952	1958	1964	1970	1976	1982	1988
C.V.P.	C	41,9	36,0	37,2	30,5	25,1	30,2	14,3	16,7
	A	52,5	46,3	44,6	40,9	34,2	28,6	16,7	16,7
	M	51,2	46,7	45,4	40,0	38,3	28,6	16,7	16,7
Socialists	C	10,8	12,2	10,9	10,6	10,6	3,8	2,4	-
	A	3,6	4,7	2,7	6,0	7,0	-	-	-
	M	2,1	3,2	1,8	2,6	4,9	-	-	-
Liberal Party	C	6,0	5,2	4,3	6,6	3,4	1,9	7,1	7,1
	A	1,9	2,2	2,0	2,1	1,7	14,3	16,7	16,7
	M	3,9	2,8	2,1	3,0	0,5	14,3	16,7	16,7
Volksunie	C	-	-	-	0,3	2,5	5,7	-	-
	A	-	-	-	-	1,3	-	-	-
	M	-	-	-	-	0,5	-	-	-
Local Parties	C	41,0	46,5	47,6	51,9	57,9	58,5	76,2	76,2
	A	41,9	46,6	50,7	50,9	55,5	57,1	66,7	66,7
	M	42,8	47,4	50,7	54,3	55,8	57,1	66,7	66,7

and mayors (M). Taking into account the fact that before the mergers 68,3% of the municipalities belonged to the category with the smallest municipalities, the political power of local parties in the local field of Flanders before the mergers is very clear. Notwithstanding the fact that the political impact of local parties in the smallest cities is still considerably high, it relates to only 5,1% of the municipalities in Flanders. In spite of the fact that the local parties have partly moved their "field of action" to other categories of municipalities/cities, one can conclude that the overall impact of local parties diminished considerably because of the mergers.

## Conclusion

Within the scope of this article we went more deeply into the question to what extent the mergers had an impact on the political composition of the local political elite in Flanders during the period 1946-1988. The conclusion was reached that the mergers have got local politics definitively out of the sphere of village politics.

The local lists, which originated more from the rivalries between local "clans" than from ideologically inspired contrasts, considerably lost importance. While formerly local politics was

dominated by these lists, in 1976 they only got 16% of the valid votes. In 1988 this percentage went further down to 13% (Ackaert, 1990: 33).<sup>7</sup>

In spite of the fact that there are a number of converging developments, events and decisions considerably complicating the effect of the mergers on municipal elections<sup>8</sup>, one could wonder whether or not the merger operation was an intentional strategy of the big national political parties, aimed at maximally nationalizing local politics and eliminating the impact of local parties on the local political field. Not only the C.V.P., which traditionally scored "low" in the smallest municipalities, but also the Socialist Party, the Liberal Party and the Volksunie, all of which saw a clearly positive link between the size of municipality and their impact on the local level, had every interest in moving on to the merger operation. Therefore it can be questioned whether the above mentioned official motive of the merger operation: to provide the citizens the services which are expected from them, they (the municipalities) must have the disposal of qualified personnel and a sound financial situation, as well as an adequate population figure and an equivalent area, (Ackaert, 1991: 27) was the only aim of the merger operation. In other words: to what extent have objectives of party policy

influenced the decision to proceed to the merger operation?

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## Notes

1. The most important aim of my PHD was to describe the locally elected people during the period 1946-1988 on the basis of several variables (sex, profession, age, the party they belonged to, function (councillor, alderman, mayor), the size of their municipality or city, the province and the year of election) and to prove the existence of a local political elite in Flanders during the period investigated. Moreover, I worked out to what extent the locally elected people changed. To put together my data base (which amounted to 23465 locally elected people in Flanders for the period covered) I turned to various record offices in the Flemish provinces. In these records I could retrieve practically all lists of candidates and councils after their inaugural meetings.

2. Within the C.V.P. there are different factions. The A.C.W.-faction (Algemeen Christelijk Werkersverbond) represents a confederation of all kinds of union related organisations. The N.C.M.V. (Nationaal Christelijk Middenstandsverbond) is a large pressure group acting on behalf of Catholic middle classes and their social and economical interests (Mellors & Pijnenburg, 1989: 41). The B.B. (Belgische Boerenbond) is a pressure group acting on behalf of Catholic farmers and their social and economical interests.

3. A clear survey of the evolution in the distribution of seats over the years 1976-1988 in Flanders can be found with Ackaert (1989: 366).

4. This also appears from Ackaert's study where he compares the results of the political parties in Flanders after the municipal elections of 1976, 1982 and 1988 (Ackaert, 1989: 363).

5. The five categories of municipalities/cities used in our research are the following: municipalities/cities having between 7 and 15 councillors, between 17 and 21 councillors, 23 and 25 councillors, between 27 and 35 councillors and the category of municipalities/cities having between 37 and 55 councillors. As is apparent, these categories are divided on the basis of the numbers of councillors so that indirectly also an indication of the degree of urbanization could be reached.

6. Only for 1946 there is an exception to this conclusion. In that election year the C.V.P. had the best scores on the three levels of power.

7. However, within this context it should be noted that J. Buelens points out that the local lists keep up their numbers. The decrease in the number of local lists immediately after the merger, does not seem to be continued (Buelens, 1993: 62).

8. In this connection the following factors can be mentioned: first an increasing tendency of the Belgian party system to fractionize, second an increase of electoral propaganda campaigns from the seventies onwards, and finally an increase in the number of preferential votes (on a whole list of candidates under the same party name the name(s) of one or more candidate(s) is/are ticked off) during the period examined. Besides, there are a number of legal regulations as well which, however limited they may seem, must not be lost sight of in the pattern of explanation. It concerns the abolition of the possibility to "panache-ren" (splitting up one's vote on the same ticket by ticking off names of candidates belonging to different parties and with a maximum of the same number of councillors that are to be chosen in the community); the possibility to print the party name (an acronym or an abbreviation) on top of the list, in other words, the necessity to clearly identify the list. Finally, there is the possibility for political parties that are represented in parliament to receive a national number for use in municipal elections, which makes it possible that their lists can come up under the same number all over the country (or region). Moreover, that number is earlier known than the other numbers drawn in the municipalities themselves. All of these are legal regulations which have also influenced the "nationalization" of municipal elections (Dewachter, 1982: 445-446).

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