

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND ELECTORAL IMPACT OF EU-CITIZENS IN THE BRUSSELS CAPITAL REGION: THE OCTOBER 2006 LOCAL ELECTIONS.

Dirk Jacobs, Pascal Delwit & Florence Delmotte

In October 2000 some of the foreign residents were for the first time able to vote and stand as a candidate in Belgian municipal elections. Indeed, due to the implementation of the Maastricht Treaty, non-Belgian EU citizens were able to register as voters and participate in the local elections. Non-EU residents, however, were not allowed to vote or stand as a candidate. EU-citizens hardly made use of their newly granted rights to local participation. Nevertheless, the October 2000 elections did constitute a landmark for the political participation of immigrant origin citizens, at least in the Brussels Capital Region. There was a remarkable increase of elected Belgian politicians of non-EU – mainly Moroccan - origin (Jacobs, Martiniello & Rea, 2002). Six years later, in October 2006 EU-citizens could make use of their right to vote and to stand as a candidate for a second time. Once again their participation rate was rather low. Few EU-citizens not holding Belgian citizenship got elected. This time around, non-EU residents could equally vote for local council but they still could not stand as candidates. Their participation rate was equally rather modest. Belgian politicians of foreign (non-EU) origin, in contrast, once again had quite some success, mainly due to preferential voting, and consolidated their position in the local political arenas.

In this contribution we will analyse the electoral registration rates of EU-citizens in the Brussels municipalities. We will furthermore look into the participation degree of different nationalities in the local suffrage. The aim of this exercise is to calculate the actual electoral impact of EU-citizens and compare this to their potential electoral impact in the Brussels context. We will show that the electoral impact of EU-citizens remains fairly limited due to the low registration rates of potential voters. Even though EU-citizens could have considerable political clout because of their potential electoral weight, this does not materialise in actual fact on the local level – at least not in the democratically elected local councils. Nevertheless, a number of non-Belgian EU-citizens still did take the decision to stand as a local candidate. In this contribution we will assess their sociological profile and discuss their mobilisation strategies. Do they see themselves foremost as politically active EU-citizens or merely as local politicians who happen to be European?

1. A brief look at EU-citizens' participation in the 2000 local elections

EU-residents for the first time participated to local elections in October 2000. In Belgium voting is obligatory. The 1994 European directive on EU enfranchisement, implementing the Maastricht Treaty, does however not allow nation states to force EU-nationals from other countries to make use of their right to vote in local elections. To countervail this dilemma, it was decided to demand of EU-citizens to register as voters if they would want to make use of their right to vote in accordance with the Maastricht Treaty. To register as voters, they should send a written demand to the municipal administration well over two months prior to the election date. Once registered as voters, they would then be obliged to actually go and vote, just as is the case for all adult Belgians who are automatically obliged to participate in the elections. A number of municipalities (as Brussels city) systematically notified all their EU-citizens how to register to vote and the federal and regional authorities had distributed leaflets explaining the procedure. Nevertheless, only a small minority of the EU foreign residents did actually take the effort to register to vote. In the entire Region a mere 9.6% of the EU-citizens registered to vote. It is quite remarkable that mainly those municipalities which host important EU institutions (as the Commission, the Parliament, Council of Ministers) on their territory - Brussels, Ixelles, Etterbeek - had the lowest participation rates. The scores for the different municipalities of the Brussels Capital Region can be found in Table 1.

In most municipalities, the importance of the EU-foreign residents in the electorate is rather small due to the limited registration rate.¹ The overall percentage of EU-citizens in the electorate is a mere 2% in the entire region. In municipalities as Brussels and Ixelles the electoral strength of the EU citizens is remarkably limited (1.7 and 2.5%), although there is a much larger potential. If they would all have registered to vote, the EU foreign residents could have stood for 19.6% of the total electorate in Brussels city, while they could even have stood for 28.4% in Ixelles. Partly as a result of the low EU participation rate, not a single non Belgian EU citizen got elected in Brussels city, the historical heart of the so-called capital of the European Union. In neighbouring Etterbeek, however, a Dutch citizen² did get elected on the ecologist list. It is, however, unlikely that this is particularly due to EU votes since he did not target this group of voters in particular. It is more probable his election is due to support of Flemish Belgians.

With regard to electoral importance of the registered EU voters, Saint-Gilles was a notable exception within the Brussels Region. In Saint-Gilles the registered EU foreign residents accounted for 7.2% of the total electorate and thus constituted a considerable electoral force. The EU potential was, however, no less than 35% of the electorate. Only a fraction of this potential had been mobilised. It is nevertheless worth noting that the electoral importance of this group was anticipated. There is a significant Spanish working class community in Saint-Gilles – which has quite a different socio-professional profile than the *'Eurocrats'* and

1 Detailed data on registration rates can be found in JACOBS & SWYNGEDOUW (2003).

2 Mr. Rik Jellema, a translator working for the European institutions.

more transient young European professionals in most other municipalities of Brussels - which has been actively targeted by the local political parties. Candidates of Spanish origin figured prominently both on the list of the socialist mayor and on the list of opposition party Ecolo. As Jacobs & Swyngedouw (2003) pointed out, one socialist candidate had invested quite some energy in convincing fellow compatriots to register as voters. He scored accordingly in preferential votes.³

Municipality	Number of adult EU-citizens	% of the potential EU-electorate on the total electorate	Number of EU-citizens on electoral list	% of adult EU-citizens who registered to vote	% of EU-electorate on total electorate
Anderlecht	9,847	16,2%	1,132	11.5%	2.2%
Oudergem	2,766	12,6%	318	11.5%	1.6%
St-Agatha-Berch.	1,153	8%	125	10.8%	0.9%
Brussels	17,043	19,6%	1,196	7%	1.7%
Etterbeek	6,473	22,5%	501	7.7%	2.2%
Evere	2,044	9%	224	11%	1.1%
Vorst - Forest	6,383	19,8%	554	8.7%	2.1%
Ganshoren	1,204	7,7%	234	19.4%	1.6%
Elsene - Ixelles	15,566	28,5%	989	6.4%	2.5%
Jette	2,516	8,5%	317	12.6%	1.2%
Koekelberg	1,450	13,1%	146	10%	1.5%
Molenbeek	5,832	13,7%	489	8.4%	1.3%
Sint-Gillis	9,875	35%	1,425	14.4%	7.2%
Sint-Joost	2,116	19,8%	170	8%	1.9%
Schaarbeek	11,498	17,7%	971	8.4%	1.8%
Ukkel	10,105	18%	772	7.6%	1.6%
Watermaal-Bos.	2,043	10,9%	319	15.6%	1.9%
St-Lamb.-Woluwe	6,453	18%	685	10.6%	2.3%
St-Pieters-Woluwe	5,879	20,7%	953	16.2%	4%
Entire region	120,246	18,1%	11,520	9.6%	2%

Table 1

Number and percentage of EU-citizens who registered to vote in the municipalities of the Region of Brussels-Capital

Source: Ministry of the Interior, Department of Elections, 2000, treatment GERME - ULB

Overall one must conclude the political participation of EU foreign residents in the municipal elections of October 2000 was very modest. There was a very low participation rate and hardly any non Belgian EU-citizen got elected into a municipal council of the Brussels Capital Region. There can only be one conclusion: although the demographic importance of the EU residents was significant in the Brussels Capital Region, on the local political level they were of minor importance.

3 Mr. Pablo Alonso Arroyo secured 468 preferential votes, which is quite a good score in Saint-Gilles, and got elected.

In stark contrast, another feature of the 2000 local elections in Brussels was the remarkable increase of the number of elected Belgian politicians of non-EU origin (Jacobs, Martiniello & Rea, 2002). In the preceding municipal elections, held in 1994, the participation and success of Belgians of non-EU foreign origin was still modest. Only 14 Belgians of non-EU foreign origin were elected on a total of 650 local councillors for the 19 municipalities of Brussels. This was already a progress since until then the representation of immigrant non-EU ethnic minorities in local political life had been non-existing even in the municipalities and neighbourhoods where non-EU immigrant origin citizens were significantly concentrated. In 2000, this spectacularly changed: out of 653 municipal councillors, now 90 were of non-EU immigrant background (Jacobs & Swyngedouw, 2003). This amounts to a representation rate of 13,8%. Let us remind the reader that in 2000 non-Belgians not holding an EU-citizenship still did not have the right to vote.

2. Efforts to boost EU-citizens' participation in the 2006 local elections

Given the very modest participation in the 2000 local elections, the Brussels Regional Government and the *Brussels-Europe Liaison Office* decided to launch an information campaign in light of the 2006 local elections in order to boost participation rates of EU residents in Brussels. The *Brussels-Europe Liaison Office* has as one of its aims to strengthen European citizens' integration and European identity in Brussels. It is subsidized by the Brussels Regional Government. One cannot claim the *Liaison Office* has not done considerable effort in informing EU-citizens living in the Brussels Capital Region about their electoral rights. Several parallel strategies have been pursued to inform the 136.483 potential EU-voters on their right to participate to the local franchise.⁴

First of all, a special information leaflet was distributed on a large scale. In total 215.000 leaflets had been printed⁵, of which 33.000 were distributed by the European Commission, 4.000 by the European Council, 1.000 by the Committee of Regions and 600 by the Economic and Social Committee. The Commission equally put up a poster version of the leaflet at 70 locations in its Brussels buildings. The European Parliament sent out an electronic version of the leaflet. Leaflets were furthermore made available to associations, regional representations and embassies. The *Liaison Office* equally made copies of the folder available at the so-called “@seven”-events, popular networking meetings for young Europeans at Club Mirano. The bulk of the leaflets, about 142.000 of them, were given to the municipal authorities of the Brussels Capital Region. Several of them took the effort to

4 Information on the sensibilisation campaign undertaken by the Brussels-Europe Liaison Office is based on the contents of the internal evaluation document “*Gemeenteraadsverkiezingen 2006: Hoe de Europeanen overtuigen om te stemmen? Evaluatie*”, which the Office was so kind to provide us with.

5 The leaflets always contained four languages: the two official languages of the Brussels Capital Region (i.e. French and Dutch) and two other languages. English and German was used in 125.000 leaflets. In another 45.000 leaflets Spanish and Portuguese was used, and in the remaining 45.000 leaflets Italian and Greek was used.

send out this leaflet to all their EU-citizens, with an accompanying letter and a copy of the registration form. Most municipalities equally paid attention to the local franchise (and the registration procedure for foreigners) in their municipal house-to-house bulletins.

Independently the Brussels Region sent out an individual letter to all EU residents - and to all non-EU residents living in Belgium since more than five years - explaining their right to vote and the registration procedure. Once again, the registration document was attached to that letter which targeted potential foreign voters in an individual way.

The local European press was equally mobilised. End of April 2006 about 16.000 copies of the folder were distributed through the specialised EU-*expat* oriented magazine *the Bulletin*. In the same magazine a one page advertisement summarizing the main info of the leaflet was included early May and early June. Furthermore, in June 2006 the English programme *Brussels International*, oriented at EU citizens, of the local Flemish television channel *TV Brussel* dedicated an extensive item to the registration procedure for the local elections. The internal magazine of the European Commission, *La Commission en Direct*, equally paid attention to the Belgian local elections in several of its issues.

The *Liaison Office* furthermore undertook a targeted internet mailing (accompanied with a teasing “how well do you know Brussels”-quiz) and provided information on their website on how to register as a voter in eight languages (Dutch, French, English, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and Greek). The registration form was each time made directly available.

We can end this long list by mentioning information sessions in the European schools of Brussels and the organisation of a political debate at the end of June by *British Council* and the *British Chamber of Commerce* (attended by 180 EU-citizens) and by referring to special information stands in several EU-buildings.⁶ Overall, one could say there was no escaping for EU-citizens – and especially not for *Eurocrats* – to become informed of the fact that local elections were being held in Belgium and that they had the right to participate after registration. Did all these initiatives boost EU-citizens’ political participation in Brussels?

6 People of the *Liaison Office* manned information stands at several occasions in buildings of the Commission, the EP, the Council, the Committee of Regions and the Social and Economic Committee end June through mid July.

3. EU-citizens' registration rates for the 2006 local elections

For the entire region, of the 136.482 potential voters, 18.682 non-Belgian EU-citizens (or 13,7%) were registered as voters for the 2006 local elections in the Brussels' municipalities. This is a better result than the participation rate for October 2000 (9,6%), but can hardly be called a big success. Furthermore, with that score the Brussels Capital Region did significantly worse than Flanders (16,9%) and Wallonia (28,5%), as we can see in table 2. Moreover, the same table shows that the registration rate of non-EU residents (15,7%) was higher than the registration rate of EU-residents in Brussels.

	Number of potential EU (non-Belgian) voters	Number of inscribed EU (non-Belgian) voters	Registration rate of EU (non-Belgian) voters	Number of potential non-EU voters	Number of inscribed non-EU voters	Registration rate of non-EU voters
FLANDERS	170.006	28.713	16,9%	42.422	5.352	12,6%
BRUSSELS	136.482	18.682	13,7%	42.298	6.622	15,7%
WALLONIA	223.390	63.578	28,5%	23.897	5.091	21,3%
BELGIUM	529.878	110.973	20,9%	108.617	17.065	15,7%

Table 2

Registration rate for local elections (2006) of EU-citizens and non-EU-citizens in Belgium

Source: Ministry of the Interior, Department of Elections, 2006, treatment ULB

In the internal evaluation document of the *Brussels-Europe Liaison Office* a number of justifications are being cited which *Eurocrats* gave - during contacts with representatives of the *Liaison Office* at information stands - for not participating to the Belgian local elections:

“I do not want to be obliged to vote” (matter of principle)

“I do not yet know what I will do that weekend, maybe I will not be in Belgium” (practical issues)

“The procedure is too complicated. I will do anything to avoid contact with Belgian bureaucracy” (negative experience with Belgian administrations in the past)

“I am not inscribed in my municipality”

“I do not know who to vote for” (ignorance)

“It does not interest me” (indifference)

“The Belgian institutional system is too complicated”⁷

7 Source : Internal evaluation document “*Gemeenteraadsverkiezingen 2006: Hoe de Europeanen overtuigen om te stemmen? Evaluatie*”, Brussels-Europe Liaison Office, p.5

It is impossible to assess to what extent these justifications encountered by the *Liaison Office* reflect actual reasons for EU-citizens not to register as voters. They do, however, give us a first insight in possible motivations for not participating in the local franchise: the administrative hassle related to the registration procedure and the mandatory character of the franchise after registration. In order to have a proper assessment of motivations to register (and to *not* register) as a voter we would, however, need data based on a representative sample of potential EU-voters. Since we did not dispose of such data – and for the time being no one disposes of such data – it is impossible to say anything scientifically validated on this issue. Theoretically – and technically – it would be possible to set up a research design which allows us to assess the motivations of EU-citizens to register or *not* register as voters. From a practical point of view, this is, however, not that easily done. First of all, we should dispose of a reliable sampling frame (a list of all potential EU-voters). Secondly, we should have sufficient funding to organize a survey among a representative – i.e. random – sample. Especially the first issue raises problems. From a purely technical point of view it should be no problem at all to have a reliable list of potential non-Belgian EU-voters. The *National Register* has such a list. The problem is, however, that the current strict procedure for access to random samples produced by the *National Register*, under pressure of the *Commission for the Protection of Privacy*, does not allow scientists anymore to get hold of a truly reliable and valid sample. According to the current procedure (as used in 2006 and 2007), the *National Register* first has to ask permission to the individuals being sampled whether their contact data can be communicated to researchers.⁸ This introduces a substantial – and from a researchers' point of view unnecessary – bias. Traditionally, only a relatively small fraction of respondents explicitly agrees to have its data communicated and this fraction tends to be higher educated, to have higher levels of generalized trust and tends to be pro-research minded. They can hence not be considered to be truly representative of the overall population, thus inhibiting the possibility of statistical inference. In such unfavourable conditions it becomes questionable whether it is still worth while in trying to do survey research based on samples provided by the *National Register*. Suppose that researchers would no longer be confronted with this sampling problem, then the second practical problem, of course, kicks in: sufficient funding has to be available to practically organize the survey research. Unfortunately, in the current conditions we do not even get past the first hurdle of being able to guarantee a research design with a proper sampling procedure. In a nutshell, for the time being we cannot say anything valid about motivations to register (or not to register) and in order to be able to do so in the future, a number of preconditions should be satisfied.

Let us now look into the EU citizens' registration rates in the 19 municipalities in Brussels for the October 2006 elections in more detail. Table 3 provides us with data on the percentage of inscribed voters on three moments: the closing date of registration for the local elections of 2000, the starting date of registration for the local elections of 2006 (i.e. February 2006) and the closing date of registration for these elections (i.e. August 2006).

8 A better procedure would – in our opinion – be to ask persons in the sample whether they insist on refusing that their contact data will be transferred to researchers (as is the procedure used in Scandinavia). Thus an acceptable balance can be assured between privacy issues and research interests.

Let us first of all note that inhabitants who had already registered as voters for the 2000 local elections remained on the electoral list for the 2006 elections (unless they had asked to be struck from the list in the meanwhile). We see a slight drop in the registration rate of EU citizens between August 2000 and February 2006. This drop has two reasons: first of all, EU citizens who moved out of Brussels or had deceased pull the figure down. Secondly, since the 2000 local elections, an additional ten countries have become member of the European Union. All in all, at the time of the start of the new registration period in February 2006, the counter still reflected differential registration patterns across municipalities. At the end of the registration period for the 2006 local elections, all Brussels municipalities scored significantly better than in 2000. Nevertheless, it were still the municipalities which hold the European institutions (Brussels, Ixelles and Etterbeek) which showed some of the lowest participation rates.

	August 2000 (closing date of registration for elections)	February 2006 (starting date of new registrations)	August 2006 (closing date of registration for elections)
ANDERLECHT	11,5%	9,6%	14,45%
AUDERGHEM	11,5%	8,1%	17,31%
BERCHEM-STE-AGATHE	10,8%	9,7%	15,11%
BRUXELLES	7%	5,1%	13,44%
ETTERBEEK	7,7%	4,8%	10,55%
EVERE	11%	8,4%	12,48%
FOREST	8,7%	7,4%	13,00%
GANSHOREN	19,4%	13,5%	23,07%
IXELLES	6,4%	4,4%	9,82%
JETTE	12,6%	9,6%	16,55%
KOEKELBERG	10%	9%	16,76%
MOLENBEEK-SAINT-JEAN	8,4%	6,8%	11,20%
SAINT-GILLES	14,4%	10,2%	17,47%
SAINT-JOSSE	8%	6,1%	11,49%
SCHAERBEEK	8,4%	6,8%	12,63%
UCCLE	7,6%	6,4%	14,28%
WATERMAEL-BOITSFORT	15,6%	13,3%	24,15%
WOLUWE-ST-LAMBERT	10,6%	7,3%	12,80%
WOLUWE-ST-PIERRE	16,2%	12,5%	19,10%

Table 3

Registration rate of EU-citizens in the municipalities of the Brussels Capital Region (August 2000 – February 2006 – August 2006)

Source: Ministry of the Interior, Department of Elections, 2006, treatment ULB

What other patterns can be noticed in the registration rates? Although we should note that we are confronted with heteroscedasticity in the scatter plots, we can see that registration rates of EU-citizens tend to be higher in smaller municipalities⁹ and in richer municipalities¹⁰, as is shown in figures 1 and 2.

Interestingly, non-EU citizens (residing since five years in Belgium) had a higher registration rate than EU-citizens in a number of municipalities, as is shown in table 4. These municipalities are Brussels-city, Etterbeek, Evere, Forest, Ixelles, Jette, Koekelberg, Molenbeek, Saint-Gilles, Schaarbeek and Woluwe-Saint Lambert. Overall, this time around there is no statistically significant link between the registration rate of non-EU foreign residents and the size of the municipality or the mean income per person of a municipality.

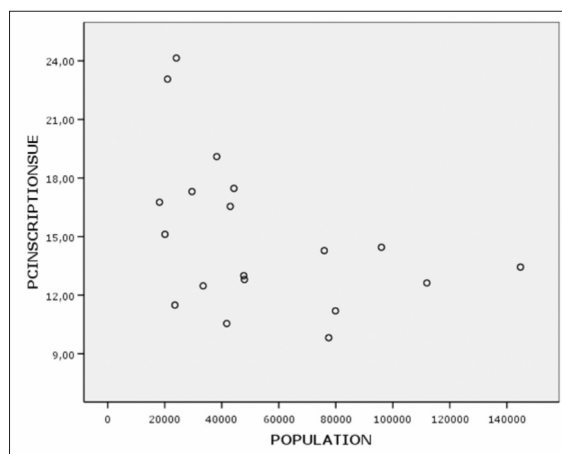


Figure 1

Scatter-plot of number of inhabitants (January 1, 2006) and the registration rate of EU-citizens in the 19 municipalities of the Brussels Capital Region

- 9 There is a correlation of -0.429 ($p < 0.05$) between the population figure of 2006 and the registration rate of EU-citizens in 2006.
- 10 There is a correlation of 0.521 ($p < 0.05$) between the mean income per person (fiscal data for the year 2001) and the registration rate of EU-citizens in 2006.

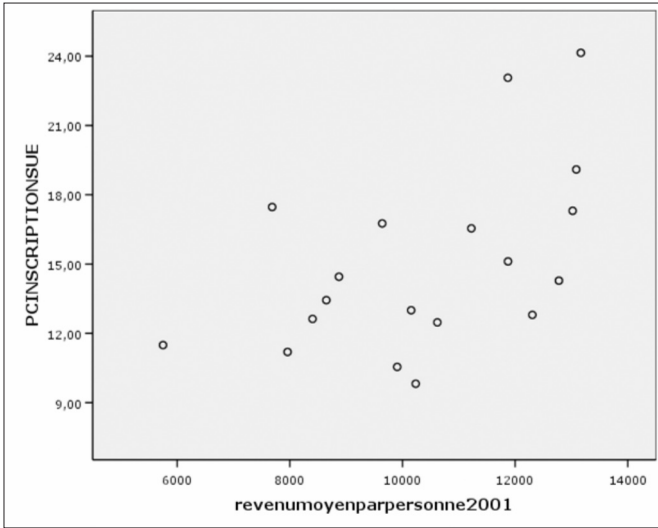


Figure 2

Scatter-plot of mean fiscal revenue per person (fiscal data 2001) and the registration rate of EU-citizens in the 19 municipalities of the Brussels Capital Region

At first sight, there seems to be an inverse relationship between the number of aldermen of foreign origin (correlation : -0.461 , $p < 0.05$) and the number of councilors of foreign origin (correlation : -0.423 , $p < 0.10$) but this effect disappears once we strike outlier Saint-Josse from the scatterplot.¹¹ There equally is no relation with the score of the extreme-right in municipalities (correlation: -0.075 , $p = 0.76$). For the moment we have no clear explanation for variations between municipalities. A survey among representative samples of non-EU foreign residents per municipality might help to shed light on divergent registration patterns. We do, however, not have such survey data to our disposal – and collecting them would, of course, face us with the same kind of practical challenges as raised above when discussing EU-registration rates.

11 Scatterplots are not shown here but can be obtained upon request from the main author.

	Registration rate EU-citizens	Registration rate of non-EU-citizens
ANDERLECHT	14,45%	12,84%
AUDERGHEM	17,31%	15,57%
BERCHEM-STE-AGATHE	15,11%	15,00%
BRUXELLES	13,44%	18,55%
ETTERBEEK	10,55%	16,50%
EVERE	12,48%	20,63%
FOREST	13,00%	14,76%
GANSHOREN	23,07%	18,35%
IXELLES	9,82%	14,36%
JETTE	16,55%	22,87%
KOEKELBERG	16,76%	19,04%
MOLENBEEK-SAINT-JEAN	11,20%	13,13%
SAINT-GILLES	17,47%	19,83%
SAINT-JOSSE	11,49%	7,02%
SCHAERBEEK	12,63%	15,93%
UCCLE	14,28%	12,67%
WATERMAEL-BOITSFORT	24,15%	21,23%
WOLUWE-ST-LAMBERT	12,80%	15,74%
WOLUWE-ST-PIERRE	19,10%	12,20%

Table 4

Registration rates of EU-citizens and non-EU-citizens for the 2006 local elections in Brussels' municipalities

Source: Ministry of the Interior, Department of Elections, 2006, treatment ULB

4. Potential and actual electoral impact of EU-citizens and non-EU citizens in the 2006 local elections

Suppose that all potential foreign voters had registered to vote. The first column of table 5 indicates the electoral impact EU-citizens would have in such a scenario, while the second column indicates the potential electoral impact of non-EU-citizens. As one can see, this potential electoral impact is quite impressive. In a municipality as Anderlecht, the first one in the table, EU-citizens would constitute no less than 14,78% of the electorate, while non-EU-citizens would constitute 6,02% of the electorate. It is clear that in all municipalities the potential electoral impact of EU-citizens is larger than the potential electoral impact of non-EU-citizens. It ranges from a substantial 8,48% in Ganshoren to a stragging 32,26% in Saint-Gilles. The potential electoral impact of non-EU-citizens is smaller but still important, ranging from 1,68% in Woluwe-Saint-Pierre to 13,24% in Saint-Josse.

	Potential electoral impact of EU-citizens	Potential electoral impact of non-EU-citizens	Actual electoral impact of EU-citizens	Actual electoral impact of non-EU-citizens
ANDERLECHT	14,78%	6,02%	2,60%	0,94%
AUDERGHEM	15,17%	2,03%	3,06%	0,37%
BERCHEM-STE-AGATHE	9,17%	2,50%	1,54%	0,42%
BRUXELLES	18,57%	7,39%	3,20%	1,76%
ETTERBEEK	28,63%	4,07%	4,25%	0,95%
EVERE	10,47%	3,70%	1,49%	0,87%
FOREST	19,77%	4,89%	3,27%	0,92%
GANSHOREN	8,48%	2,35%	2,14%	0,47%
IXELLES	30,80%	5,90%	4,50%	1,26%
JETTE	8,90%	3,83%	1,64%	0,98%
KOEKELBERG	12,29%	5,75%	2,42%	1,29%
MOLENBEEK-SAINT-JEAN	11,20%	9,18%	1,53%	1,47%
SAINT-GILLES	32,26%	6,83%	8,30%	1,99%
SAINT-JOSSE	14,60%	13,24%	2,24%	1,24%
SCHAERBEEK	15,90%	9,89%	2,58%	2,02%
UCCLE	19,88%	2,46%	3,51%	0,39%
WATERMAEL-BOITSFORT	11,87%	1,73%	3,20%	0,41%
WOLUWE-ST-LAMBERT	21,32%	2,31%	3,43%	0,46%
WOLUWE-ST-PIERRE	22,24%	1,68%	5,27%	0,26%

Table 5

Potential and actual electoral impact of EU-citizens and non-EU-citizens for the 2006 local elections in Brussels' municipalities

Source: Ministry of the Interior, Department of Elections, 2006, treatment ULB

Taken together, all foreign residents account for up to 39% of the electorate in Saint-Gilles. Given the relatively low registration rates of both EU-citizens and non-EU-citizens this potential electoral impact, however, fails to materialize. Columns three and four of table 5 indicate the actual electoral share which respectively EU-citizens and non-EU-citizens take of the overall electorate. Compared to the potential impact, the actual impact is quite modest.

Nevertheless, the actual electoral impact is still not negligible for EU-citizens, ranging from 1,49% in Evere up to 8,3% in Saint-Gilles. If EU-citizens would vote in block, they would definitively have the power in several municipalities to make the difference in deciding who would be in power and who would be in opposition. The picture is less impressive if we look at the actual proportional impact of the non-EU electorate. The impact is the largest in Schaerbeek, where the non-EU foreign voters stand for 2% of the electorate. In most other municipalities the non-EU-electorate stands for less than 1% of the total electorate.

Anderlecht		
	REAL SCORE	TRANSFER OF 328 VOTES LB => PS-SP.a-CDH
VLAAMS BELANG	3	3
ECOLO	4	4
FN	1	1
LISTE DU BOURGMESTRE	18	17
PS-SPA-CDH	17	18
ANDERL'2007	2	2
total	45	45
Schaerbeek		
	REAL SCORE	TRANSFER OF 151 VOTES LB => Ecolo
P.S.	13	13
ECOLO	6	7
FN	0	0
CDH	5	5
LISTE DU BOURGMESTRE	22	21
DEMOL	1	1
VLD-LIB	0	0
PTB+PVDA+	0	0
UNIE	0	0
MAS-LSP	0	0
total	47	47

Table 6

Simulation of small transfer of votes in municipalities of Anderlecht and Schaerbeek
Treatment: CEVIPOL, ULB.

It would, however, once again be a mistake to hence conclude that the impact of these new voters is without genuine importance. It is an open door to say that every vote counts. A simple simulation, as done in table 6, can show that even a relatively limited number of votes can make quite a difference in those municipalities where the election results showed a close call in determining what parties could together form a majority in the local council (or in determining what party would be able to provide the mayor). Let us, merely for illustrative purposes, focus on the municipalities of Anderlecht and Schaerbeek. A hypothetical movement of only 328 votes from the liberal list (LB) to the socialist and Christian-democratic list (PS-SP.a-CDH), could have led to a socialist mayor in Anderlecht instead of a liberal mayor. The simulation in table 6 equally illustrates that a mere move of 151 votes from the liberal list (LB) to the ecologist list (ECOLO) would have made a left-wing coalition in Schaerbeek more likely over there. These simulations show that it would be unwise for political parties to consider even relatively small groups of voters as the non-EU-citizens – let alone EU-citizens – as being irrelevant or uninteresting.

	Number of potential voters	Number of registered voters	Registration rate	Potential electoral impact	Actual electoral impact
Allemagne	7133	1256	17,6%	0,96%	0,21%
Autriche	1027	186	18,1%	0,14%	0,03%
Chypre	102	9	8,8%	0,01%	<0,01%
Danemark	1274	189	14,8%	0,17%	0,03%
Espagne	17408	2054	11,8%	2,34%	0,35%
Estonie	271	12	4,4%	0,04%	<0,01%
Finlande	1465	101	6,9%	0,20%	0,02%
France	35711	5125	14,4%	4,79%	0,87%
Grande-Bretagne	7310	984	13,5%	0,98%	0,17%
Grèce	7234	1282	17,7%	0,97%	0,22%
Hongrie	1002	42	4,2%	0,13%	0,01%
Irlande	1462	205	14%	0,20%	0,03%
Italie	23947	4340	18,1%	3,21%	0,73%
Lettonie	244	13	5,3%	0,03%	<0,01%
Lithuanie	311	17	5,5%	0,04%	<0,01%
Luxembourg	1078	223	20,7%	0,14%	0,04%
Malte	112	7	6,2%	0,02%	<0,01%
Pays-Bas	5004	965	19,3%	0,67%	0,16%
Pologne	8712	436	5%	1,17%	0,07%
Portugal	12327	978	7,9%	1,65%	0,17%
Rép. Slovaque	477	21	4,4%	0,06%	<0,01%
Rép. Tchèque	643	16	2,5%	0,09%	<0,01%
Slovénie	262	13	5%	0,04%	<0,01%
Suède	1966	208	10,6%	0,26%	0,04%
TOTAL UE	136.482	18.682	13,7 %	18,31%	3,16%

Table 7

Impact of different EU-nationalities in the entire Brussels Capital Region

Source: Ministry of the Interior, Department of Elections, 2006, treatment ULB

It is highly unlikely that EU-voters and non-EU-voters behave as monolithic groups. Unfortunately, for the time being, we still have no reliable large scale electoral data – due to financial and technical constraints - on party political preferences of the foreign (and foreign origin) electorate in Belgium. From electoral research in the Netherlands (Tillie, 2000) we know that foreign voters will show dispersed voting behaviour. Furthermore, ethnic voting is of secondary importance compared to ideological voting. Nevertheless, ethnic voting does exist and parties sometimes try to capitalize on ethnic voting patterns by privileging candidates from certain ethnic groups as a potential electoral niche (Jacobs et alii, 2006). For this reason it is worth while to compare potential and actual electoral impact of specific national groups.

Let us in table 7 first focus on the impact of different EU-nationalities in the entire Brussels Capital Region. It is clear that most national origins have a very limited potential impact (second column from the right) and an even smaller actual electoral impact (last column). The only national groups which somewhat stand out are the Spanish, French, Italians and Portuguese.

	Number of potential voters	Number of registered voters	Registration rate	Potential electoral impact	Actual electoral impact
MAROC	17159	1843	10,7%	2,30%	0,31%
TURQUIE	5337	798	15%	0,72%	0,13%
CONGO	2525	730	28,9%	0,34%	0,12%
ETATS-UNIS	1028	82	8%	0,14%	0,01%
ALGERIE	737	155	21%	0,10%	0,03%
PHILIPPINES	595	111	18,7%	0,08%	0,02%
JAPON	526	43	8,2%	0,07%	0,01%
SERBIE-MONTENEGRO	504	95	18,8%	0,07%	0,02%
CHINE	461	33	7,2%	0,06%	0,01%
ROUMANIE	450	59	13,1%	0,06%	0,01%
CAMEROUN	440	153	34,8%	0,06%	0,03%
TUNISIE	432	47	10,9%	0,06%	0,01%
YUGOSLAVIE (EX-)	379	37	9,8%	0,05%	0,01%
ARMENIE	377	70	18,6%	0,05%	0,01%
SUISSE	373	53	14,2%	0,05%	0,01%
IRAN	372	54	14,5%	0,05%	0,01%
d'origine RWANDAISE	370	146	39,5%	0,05%	0,02%
ALBANIE	352	113	32,1%	0,05%	0,02%
TOTAL NON-UE	42.298	6.622	15,7 %	5,67%	1,12%

Table 8

Impact of different non-EU-nationalities in the entire Brussels Capital Region

Source: Ministry of the Interior, Department of Elections, 2006, treatment ULB

Table 8 repeats the same exercise for different non-EU-nationalities in the Brussels Capital Region. The overall majority has a small potential impact and a negligible actual impact. In this case, only the Moroccans, Turks and Congolese somewhat pop out.

Given the fact that all these groups are unevenly distributed throughout the different municipalities of the Region, it is useful to further differentiate according to specific municipalities. We do this for the four most important EU-groups (French, Italians, Spanish and Portuguese) in table 9 and for the three most important non-EU-groups (Moroccans, Turks and Congolese) in table 10.

	Potential impact FRANCE	Potential impact SPAIN	Potential impact ITALY	Potential impact PORTU	Actual impact FRANCE	Actual impact SPAIN	Actual impact ITALY	Actual impact PORTU
ANDERLECHT	2,27%	2,98%	4,58%	1,75%	0,31%	0,43%	1,13%	0,10%
AUDERGHEM	4,35%	1,50%	1,99%	1,13%	0,97%	0,30%	0,56%	0,14%
BERCHEM-STE-AGATHE	2,00%	1,99%	2,38%	0,67%	0,43%	0,31%	0,39%	0,06%
BRUXELLES	4,54%	2,60%	3,05%	1,04%	0,80%	0,32%	0,80%	0,10%
ETTERBEEK	7,19%	2,72%	3,74%	2,21%	1,07%	0,31%	0,74%	0,23%
EVERE	2,28%	1,35%	2,69%	0,97%	0,34%	0,21%	0,48%	0,07%
FOREST	4,22%	3,39%	4,90%	2,87%	0,77%	0,48%	1,08%	0,20%
GANSHOREN	2,12%	1,66%	2,08%	0,63%	0,48%	0,29%	0,71%	0,13%
IXELLES	10,34%	2,50%	3,88%	2,61%	1,45%	0,29%	0,77%	0,34%
JETTE	2,32%	1,57%	2,10%	0,62%	0,54%	0,21%	0,42%	0,09%
KOEKELBERG	3,11%	2,10%	2,70%	1,03%	0,77%	0,34%	0,61%	0,11%
MOLENBEEK-SAINT-JEAN	2,91%	1,98%	3,22%	0,78%	0,48%	0,21%	0,49%	0,06%
SAINT-GILLES	6,80%	5,59%	4,78%	6,22%	1,94%	1,77%	1,47%	0,85%
SAINT-JOSSE	3,68%	1,86%	2,86%	0,93%	0,72%	0,19%	0,53%	0,13%
SCHAERBEEK	3,56%	1,85%	2,84%	1,32%	0,66%	0,21%	0,59%	0,14%
UCCLE	8,32%	1,74%	2,46%	1,61%	1,61%	0,24%	0,52%	0,13%
WATERMAEL-BOITSFORT	3,57%	,85%	1,54%	0,65%	0,97%	0,17%	0,54%	0,11%
WOLUWE-ST-LAMBERT	5,50%	1,93%	2,96%	1,79%	0,95%	0,30%	0,71%	0,15%
WOLUWE-ST-PIERRE	4,97%	2,13%	2,83%	1,40%	1,29%	0,38%	0,93%	0,22%

Table 9

Impact of specific EU-nationalities in the municipalities of the Brussels Capital Region

Source: Ministry of the Interior, Department of Elections, 2006, treatment ULB

When examining the potential impact of the four most populous EU-groups in the Brussels Capital Region, we can note that the French group has the most impressive potential impact in several municipalities: we can signal Ixelles (10,34% of the electorate), Uccle (8,32% of the electorate), Etterbeek (7,19% of the electorate) and Saint-Gilles (6,80%). The Spanish have an important potential electoral weight in Saint Gilles (5,59% of the electorate), while the Italians have the biggest potential impact in Forest (4,9% of the electorate) and Saint-Gilles (4,78% of the electorate). The Portuguese stand out in Saint-Gilles (6,22% of the electorate). Taking into account registration rates, the actual electoral impact is, however, each time much lower. The French have the largest impact in Saint-Gilles (1,94%), Uccle (1,61%) and Ixelles (1,45%). The Spanish are most influential in Saint-Gilles (1,77% in the actual electorate), where the actual impact of Italians and Portuguese is equally the most elevated (respectively constituting 1,47% and 0,85% of the electorate). We can readily assume that the French in Ixelles and Uccle are on average richer (and will tend to have a higher probability to support the right-liberal party MR). On the other hand, the Spanish, Italian and Portuguese in Saint-Gilles will most probably include more working class segments – being remnants of the post-war southern European labour migration wave.

	Potential impact MAROC	Actual impact MAROC	Potential impact TURKEY	Actual impact TURKEY	Potential impact CONGO	Actual impact CONGO
ANDERLECHT	3,36%	0,31%	0,56%	0,07%	0,33%	0,11%
AUDERGHEM	0,18%	0,03%	0,02%	0,00%	0,21%	0,09%
BERCHEM-STE-AGATHE	0,97%	0,19%	0,17%	0,04%	0,33%	0,05%
BRUXELLES	3,66%	0,51%	0,69%	0,13%	0,39%	0,19%
ETTERBEEK	0,74%	0,15%	0,07%	0,01%	0,30%	0,12%
EVERE	1,19%	0,21%	0,43%	0,06%	0,43%	0,18%
FOREST	2,74%	0,32%	0,09%	0,01%	0,27%	0,12%
GANSHOREN	0,70%	0,17%	0,10%	0,01%	0,25%	0,07%
IXELLES	0,98%	0,22%	0,12%	0,03%	0,37%	0,14%
JETTE	1,23%	0,16%	0,16%	0,01%	0,48%	0,21%
KOEKELBERG	2,90%	0,50%	0,50%	0,05%	0,39%	0,20%
MOLENBEEK-SAINT-JEAN	5,81%	0,71%	0,69%	0,07%	0,49%	0,13%
SAINT-GILLES	3,52%	0,78%	0,28%	0,09%	0,31%	0,18%
SAINT-JOSSE	4,35%	0,38%	5,11%	0,48%	0,59%	0,09%
SCHAERBEEK	3,57%	0,45%	3,28%	0,81%	0,38%	0,11%
UCCLE	0,27%	0,04%	0,07%	0,01%	0,21%	0,06%
WATERMAEL-BOITSFORT	0,17%	0,05%	0,04%	0,03%	0,18%	0,07%
WOLUWE-ST-LAMBERT	0,17%	0,06%	0,06%	0,01%	0,28%	0,09%
WOLUWE-ST-PIERRE	0,11%	0,01%	0,04%	0,01%	0,08%	0,00%

Table 10

Impact of specific non-EU-nationalities in the municipalities of the Brussels Capital Region

Source: Ministry of the Interior, Department of Elections, 2006, treatment ULB

Contrary to popular belief non-Belgians holding a non-EU-nationality have a far smaller potential electoral impact than the aforementioned EU groups. Only in some municipalities the non-Belgian Moroccan community could have a non-negligible potential electoral impact: 3,36% in Anderlecht, 3,66% in Brussels and especially 5,81% in Molenbeek. The (non-Belgian) Turks have the largest potential impact in Saint-Josse (5,11%) and Schaarbeek (3,28%). The Congolese never have a potential impact that surpasses the 0,60% mark. As a result, their actual impact remains very small in all municipalities. Given the relatively low registration rates, non-Belgian Moroccans and Turks can, however, not materialize their potential electoral impact in the municipalities where they are the most populous. The highest actual impact of Moroccans is not in Molenbeek (0,71%) but in Saint-Gilles (0,78%). Turks, not holding Belgian citizenship, only have an actual electoral impact of 0,48% in Saint-Josse and of 0,81% in Schaarbeek due to the granting of local voting rights to non-Belgians from outside the European Union.

So once again we must conclude that the overall actual electoral impact of these particular national groups on local politics is rather limited. This does, however, not mean that these groups of non-Belgian votes are of no importance. Let us remind the reader once more that every vote counts and that even relatively small amounts of votes can make the difference between being in opposition or in majority for political parties. It is, however, clear that the introduction of voting rights for non-EU non-Belgians has not had a dramatic impact

on end results. Clearly, the introduction of voting rights for non-nationals has had a much smaller impact on the election results than the effect of the liberalisation (throughout the last two decades) of the laws on nationality acquisition (i.e. the increase of the number of Belgian voters with a foreign background). It is due to this last factor that we have assisted to a consistent increase of the number (and the influence) of local and regional politicians with an immigrant background (Jacobs et alii, 2006).

5. The profile of EU-candidates in the 2006 local elections

As we have seen, the EU electorate has refrained from large scale registration to take part in the local franchise. In a number of municipalities, registration rates of non-EU residents (who, as we have seen, only could make use of their local right to vote for the first time in 2006) were even more important than those of EU-residents (who could now vote for a second time). As we have signalled before, non-Belgians from outside the European Union do not have the right to stand as a candidate, while EU-citizens do enjoy this right. In the remainder of this contribution we want to investigate the profiles of the non-Belgian EU-citizens who decided to take a shot in trying to get elected in their local council.

Let us first of all mention that it was not very easy to identify the non-Belgian EU-candidates among the total of 3529 persons who stood as a candidate for one of the nineteen local councils in the Brussels Capital Region. Astonishingly enough, not a single official body was able to provide us with a verified list of non-Belgian EU-candidates for local council. This is odd, especially given the fact that non-Belgian candidates had to fill in special forms – in which they had to indicated their nationality and had to declare on their honour that they had not lost their voting rights in their country of origin - when confirming that they stood for local election.

Trying to obtain a list of names of the foreign candidates at times took the form of a Kafkaesque and surrealist endeavour. When we asked the *Tribunal de Première Instance*, the court which is responsible for safeguarding the procedures of the elections, they referred us to the Governor of the Brussels Capital Region. The services of the Governor sent us to the services of the Brussels Capital Region. The Brussels Capital Region referred us to the 19 municipalities, of which the majority in turn suggested that we should ask the Regional Government. In the end no one seemed to be able to provide us with a validated list of all foreign candidates in the Brussels Capital Region. One would start to wonder what has in fact happened with the special forms which the EU-candidates have had to fill in.

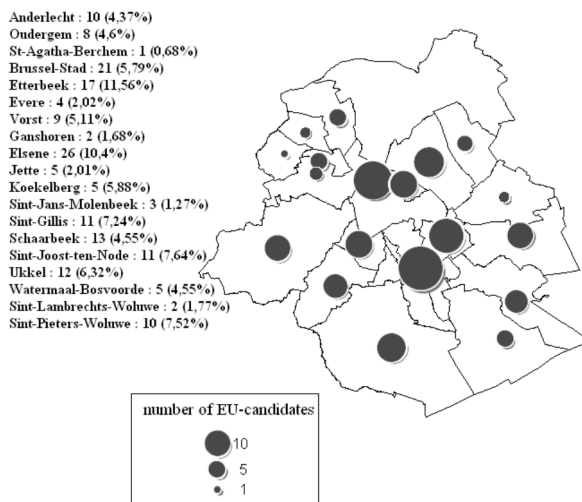


Figure 3

Number and percentage of non-Belgian EU-candidates per municipality (October 2006)

To our surprise we did, however, find on the special electoral website of the Brussels Capital Region¹² a word-file¹³ under the section ‘documentation’ which stipulated there were 175 non-Belgian EU-candidates. Strangely enough though, despite several insisting attempts, no one of the administration (nor the webmaster of the website) could give us the name of the person who had put that information on line¹⁴. We had hoped to be able to contact that person, learn about his or her sources and be able to use this information to contact the EU-candidates. *Quod non*. It is still a mystery to us how it is possible that there is information available on a government website of which no one can explain precisely how it ended up there.

12 <http://www.bruxelleselections2006.irisnet.be> [LAST ACCESSED : 4 APRIL 2007].

13 http://www.bruxelleselections2006.irisnet.be/download/250_doc.doc [LAST ACCESSED: 4 APRIL 2007]

14 One of the replies we received was that « it was probably someone from IBM ».

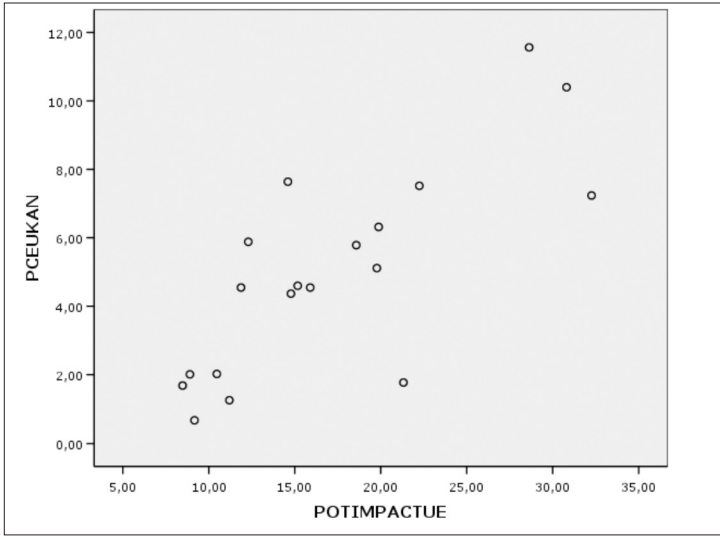


Figure 4

Scatterplot of the number of EU-candidates and the potential impact of the EU-electorate in the municipalities of the Brussels Capital Region

We assume, nevertheless, that the information provided in the aforementioned document is correct and is based on verification of the special forms which non-Belgian EU-candidates had to fill in. Figure 3 reproduces the number of EU-candidates per municipality in the Brussels Capital Region. It is striking that two of the municipalities which host the European Institutions have the largest proportion of EU-candidates (11,56% of the candidates in Etterbeek and 10,40% of the candidates in Ixelles are EU-citizens). The EU-inhabitants of these municipalities might have some of the lowest registration rates of Brussels, paradoxically they equally produce the highest proportion of non-Belgian EU-candidates. As we can see in the scatterplot of figure 4 and as one would logically expect, there is a fairly strong relation between the percentage of EU-candidates and the potential impact of the EU-electorate (correlation: 0.778, $p < 0.001$).¹⁵

We tried to track down as many of these 175 non-Belgian EU-candidates as possible through informants in the municipal administrations and in political parties. We were able to identify and locate 164 of the 175 candidates (i.e. 94%). All political families have European candidates and they are equally present on both the right hand side as on the left hand side of the ideological spectrum. Even the anti-immigrant party *Vlaams Belang*, which had always been an ardent critic of local voting rights for any category of non-Belgians (Jacobs, 1998; Bousetta & Swyngedouw, 1999), had EU-candidates on some of its lists (in Saint-Gilles and Evere). Almost all candidates came from the 15 'old' member states, hardly any originated from the 10 'new' member states which joined the Union in 2004. Most candidates are French or Italian nationals. As far as we could verify, only three

15 There is equally a link with the actual impact of the EU-electorate (correlation: 0.612, $p < 0.10$).

non-Belgian EU-candidates were able to get elected in the Brussels Capital Region: a Dutch person in Etterbeek (for the ecologist party *Groen!*), a French person in Ixelles (for the liberal party *MR*) and an Italian person in Watermael-Boitsfort (for the ecologist party *ECOLO*).

We contacted the 164 candidates who we could identify and sent them a small questionnaire (available in French, English and Dutch) regarding their socio-demographic profile and their mobilisation strategies. They could send it back to us by snail mail or could fill in the questionnaire on a protected website. In the process we used a variant of the *Total Design Method* (Billiet & Waage, 2001) and of the *Tailored Design Method* as proposed by Dillman (2000) in order to obtain a sufficient response rate. We obtained 94 valid responses¹⁶, which constitutes a participation rate of 53,7% of the candidates (and a response rate of 57,3% of all those who we could actually contact).

Overall, EU-candidates turn out to be higher educated (74,4% has a higher education or a university degree) and well off (62,7% considers him or herself to be part of the upper middle class or of the upper class). On average, they are in their forties. As such, their basic socio-demographic profile corresponds to the general patterns to be found among Belgian candidates in other elections (see Delwit et alii, 2005; Jacobs et alii, 2006). A large segment (38,3%) works or has worked for one of the European Institutions. As can be seen in table eleven, 46,8% of the EU-candidates has no religious affiliation or adheres to free thinking. Most of the other candidates are Catholics (31,9%). Of all our respondents 57,4% reports being member of a Belgian association and 28,7% participates in an association of foreigners in Belgium.

	Absolute number	Percentage
none at all	22	23,4%
Catholicism	30	31,9%
Islam	3	3,2%
Judaism	1	1,1%
Free thinking	22	23,4%
Orthodox Christianity	5	5,3%
Protestantism	6	6,4%
Anglican church	1	1,1%
Other	4	4,3%
Total	94	100,0

Table 11
Religious affiliation of the EU-candidates

16 We equally had some non-valid responses, since 6 people who we had contacted (on advice of informants from political parties) turned out to have Belgian citizenship after all. Of the 94 valid responses, 79 were in French, 8 in Dutch and 7 in English.

Most EU-candidates (85,1%) have no intention whatsoever to obtain Belgian citizenship. Only 11,7% had already stood as a candidate in elections in their country of origin (or in another country). On the other hand, 42,6% has been member of a political party in their country of origin.

	Percentage
Completely agree	25,5%
Rather agree	25,5%
Agree nor disagree	26,6%
Rather disagree	13,8%
Completely disagree	4,3%

Table 12

« I consider myself more to be a European citizen than a person from Brussels».

Most of the EU-candidates report, as can be seen in table 12, that they consider themselves rather to be European citizens than someone from Brussels. At the same time, an overwhelming 86,8% of the EU-candidates agrees with the statement that « European citizens living in Brussels have the moral obligation to participate in political life of the municipalities in Brussels».

All candidates (i.e. 100%) declare they can hold a conversation in French, while 30,9% of the respondents declares they can hold a conversation in Dutch, the other official language of the Brussels Capital Region. A clear majority (77,7%) states to be able to hold a conversation in English. Other languages are equally fairly well mastered: German (37,2%), Spanish (48,9%) and Italian (41,5%).

Language use is, of course, a sensitive topic in multilingual Belgium. Furthermore, a substantial group (53,2%) is convinced there are big differences in mentality and life style of the Flemish and of the Francophone communities, while 46,8% sees little difference between the two communities. As figures 5, 6 and 7 will show, most EU-candidates in fact agree that inhabitants of the Brussels Capital Region should in principle be able to speak French and Dutch. Indeed, 74,2% completely agrees or rather agrees with the statement “Everyone in Brussels should be able to speak French”.

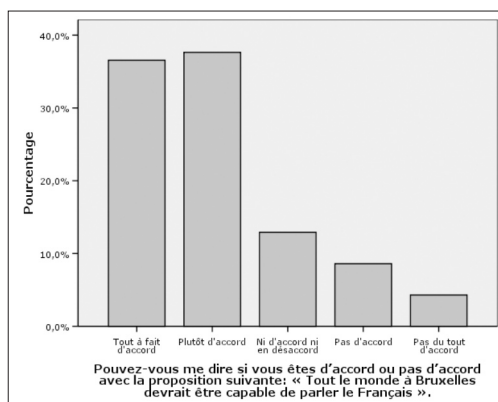


Figure 5
Opinion of EU-candidates on the use of French in Brussels

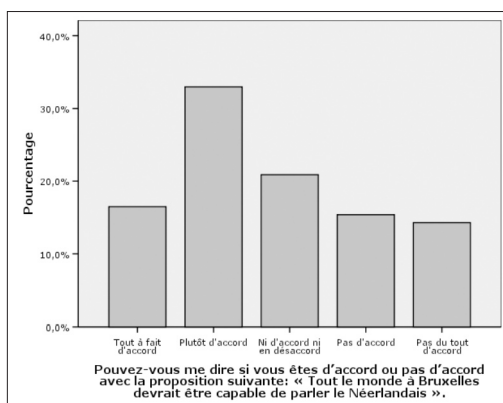


Figure 6
Opinion of EU-candidates on the use of Dutch in Brussels

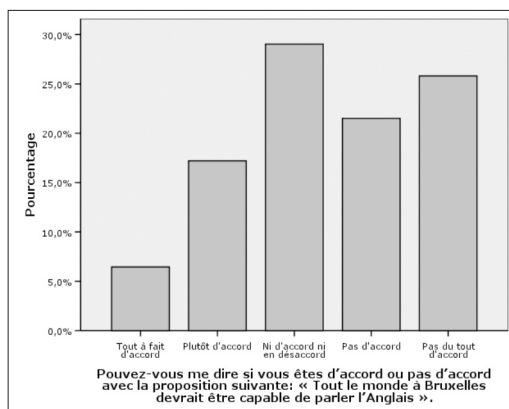


Figure 7
Opinion of EU-candidates on the use of English in Brussels

Slightly short of a majority, most EU-candidates (49,5%) agree with the statement that “Everyone in Brussels should be able to speak Dutch”, while one person in five is undecided on that issue. In contrast, only 23,5% agree with the statement that “Everyone in Brussels should be able to speak English”, while 29% remains divided on that issue. In a nutshell, it seems the EU-candidates endorse the importance of the current official bilingual French-Dutch status of the Region.

Figure 8 shows that opinions are clearly split among the EU-candidates on the question whether the local authorities in the Brussels Capital Region neglect the interests of EU-citizens: almost as many people agree as disagree with this statement.

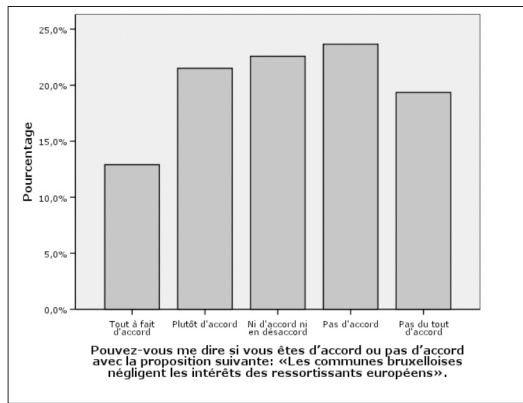


Figure 8

Opinion of EU-candidates about the statement “The municipalities in Brussels neglect the interests of European citizens”.

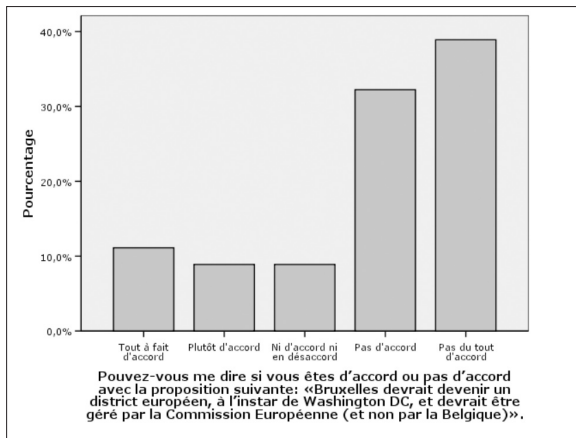


Figure 9

Opinion of EU-candidates about the statement “Brussels should become a European District, like Washington DC in the US, and should be run by the European Commission (and not by Belgium).”

On the issue whether “Brussels should become a European District, like Washington DC in the US, and should be run by the European Commission (and not by Belgium)” there is a lot more agreement among the EU-candidates. Figure 9 indicates that a large majority of 71% is opposed to the idea, while 9% is undecided on the issue. About 20% is in favour of the creation of a European federal district. Clearly, the believers in the future of a sort of *Brussels DC* still have a lot of persuasion work ahead. They will not have an easy task, since for all stakeholders there are more disadvantages than benefits to the idea (Jacobs, 2007).

6. Mobilisation strategies of EU-candidates

An overall majority (91,5%) is content with the place they were attributed on the electoral list. Those who were discontent, report that they wanted to have a position more at the top of the list. In an open question on the issue, a number of respondents admitted they were disappointed:

“Certain elected politicians of my list had no desire or interest at all to help and see foreigners getting elected. If you are not actively endorsed by the head of the list you will have little chance in getting elected. To reflect upon.”¹⁷

“(The list) did not consider the representativity of EU-citizens in Brussels”¹⁸

“Position filling in one of the blanks”¹⁹

Almost half of the candidates (46,8%) thinks they have enjoyed preferential voting from fellow countrymen because of their national origin. About half of the respondents (47,9%) is convinced they have enjoyed preferential voting from other (non-Belgian) Europeans (EU-citizens) because of the fact they are a foreigner in Belgium. This equally means that half of the EU-candidates is not sure whether they have profited from targeted preferential voting.

Sixteen percent of the respondents reports to have been recruited by a political party as a result of membership of a Belgian organisation. Almost twelve percent was recruited as a result of membership of an organisation of foreigners living in Belgium. Six in ten candidates were already registered as voters when they were approached by the party to stand as a candidate, but 37,2% only registered as a voter afterwards.

17 Translation of the following excerpt: « Certains élus de la même liste n'ont aucun envie et intérêts de voir ou d'aider des étrangers à être élus! Si vous n'êtes pas soutenu activement par une tête de liste vous aurez peu de chance de passer. A méditer »

18 Translation of the following excerpt: « Elle ne tenait pas compte de la représentativité des ressortissants de l'UE à Bruxelles »

19 Translation of the following excerpt : « Place bouche-trou ».

Most candidates (73,4%) actively incited fellow countrymen to register as a voter in their municipality. While 74,5% reports to have incited other European foreigners (EU citizens) to register as a voter, only 48,9% did the same thing among non-EU foreigners. Almost half (46,8%) of the candidates organised (or profited from) a personalised electoral campaign. The overall majority (79,8%) has incited Belgians to vote for them. 76,6% has incited fellow countrymen to vote for them and 74,5% did the same with EU-citizens from other origins. The figure, however, somewhat drops when we look at active incitement of non-EU foreigners (59,6%).

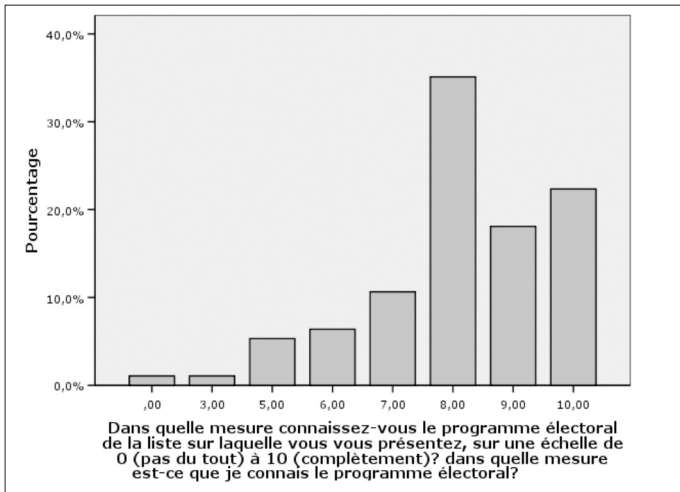


Figure 10
Knowledge of party program

All these data seem to suggest that EU-candidates are by no means focused entirely on a limited electoral niche of EU-voters or compatriots only. Non-Belgian EU-citizens want to participate in local politics to the benefit of all. They do not really (want to) constitute a special group of political actors. They are not just there to try and defend the political interests of EU-citizens alone in the local political arena. They feel the urge to be politically active and make use of their right to do so. Moreover, a large majority of these candidates agrees with the statement that European citizenship creates a moral obligation to make use of the associated right to politically participate on the local level. Local citizenship and local political integration is taken seriously by them. Indeed, as can be seen in figure 10, the overall majority of candidates report that they are well aware of the contents of the electoral program of the party list they are supporting.

7. Conclusion and debate

Registration rates of EU-foreigners to participate in local elections have remained very low in 2006, despite of considerable effort which has been undertaken to inform the EU-citizens about their right to vote and stimulate them to participate. It seems rather unlikely that registration rates can be boosted in a spectacular way in the future through even more massive investment in sensibilisation campaigns. Although we cannot prove this directly with valid survey data, it seems quite plausible to claim that the main hurdle is the registration procedure. EU-citizens do not want to go through the administrative hassle of registering to vote and dislike the idea of being obliged to vote once they have registered. There thus only seems to be one easy solution to boost political integration of EU-citizens (and non-EU-citizens alike): dismantle the registration procedure and make the vote truly voluntary²⁰. Dismantling the registration procedure and obliging all enfranchised to make use of their right to vote is impossible for EU-citizens. The European directive on local franchise for EU-residents explicitly forbids this. It is hence not an option to make the vote obligatory for all non-Belgian residents as it is for Belgian residents. A debate about the merits and flaws of obligatory voting surpasses the scope of this article. Let us simply note that it is not an option for EU-citizens due to European legislation and that the Belgian legislator has good arguments – for instance: avoiding lower participation rates among disfavoured groups who would tend to no longer participate to the formal electoral process – to want to insist on mandatory voters for its Belgian constituents. As a result, a consistent policy for all types of residents is impossible. The easiest solution for boosting political integration of non-Belgians is simply to send all potential foreign voters a voter's card and leave it up to them whether they want to make use of this vote. The more difficult solution – necessitating agreement of all 27 EU member states – would be to have the European directive on local voting rights modified in allowing Belgium to impose obligatory voting to all its inhabitants.

That is the part the Belgian government can do, but what about the responsibility of EU citizens themselves? Some non-Belgian EU-citizens see it as their moral obligation to be politically active on the local level. That is, in any case, the predominant attitude among EU-citizens who stood as a candidate in the local elections. Furthermore, although they consider themselves “more to be a European citizen than someone from Brussels”, they clearly do not just want to defend the interests of non-Belgian EU-citizens. These people are, however, the odd ones out. The overall majority of EU foreign residents have not even bothered to register themselves as voters. Apparently the bulk of them do not see it as a strong moral obligation to participate in local political life. Most probably a substantial group also does not perceive any benefits in being politically integrated in the Brussels Capital Region. Is it not telling that in a number of Brussels' municipalities, and notably in those where the European institutions are to be found, registration rates of non-EU-nationals are higher than of EU-nationals?

20 One of the authors has been arguing for this in the public debate. See the following debate contributions: Jacobs, D. & Van Parijs, P. (2006) ‘Stemrecht voor vreemdelingen: een mirakel!’, *De Morgen*, 17 augustus. Jacobs, D. & Van Parijs, P. (2006) ‘Droit de vote des étrangers: un miracle!’, *Le Soir*, 17 aout.

Perhaps EU-citizens, and especially *Eurocrats*, should not simply take for granted that they live in Brussels without having to show any interest in its local political life. Not only should they, as an expression of their European identity, foster the possibility to make use of their local voting right as a consequence of their European citizenship – especially if they have a well paid job at one of the European institutions. These EU-citizens, who are on average in a stronger socio-economic position, should equally show some respect for the living environment of their new host country. Politically integrating in the local democratic process – which in a minimal version entails registering as a voter and casting an informed vote – could, indeed, in their case also be seen as a form of basic courtesy. If they don't know anything about Brussels' and Belgian politics and use that as an excuse to not register as a voter, it is maybe time for them to start taking an interest in the place where they work and live.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the *Faculté des Sciences sociales, politiques et économiques/Solvay Business School* of the *Université Libre de Bruxelles* for financial assistance (*crédit extraordinaire pour la recherche*) in organizing our little survey among EU-candidates. We would equally like to thank all our informants, with a particular word of gratitude to Karin Impens, Rik Jellema, Dirk Lagast, Ans Persoons and Henk van Hellem. Last but not least we would like to thank professor Els Witte, dr. Roel De Groof and the other team members of BRIO-VUB for organizing the conference *Brussels–Europe*, held on 18 and 19 December 2006.

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