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Local Staff Committee Elections in Luxembourg: Two Practical Improvements

Introduction

A majority of the Luxembourg Local Staff Committee has pledged to reform its election system. Most of the articles of the current statute are non-controversial because they deal with pure mechanics of organizing a proper election or with widely accepted principles of democratic elections (secrecy of the ballots, for an example).

What we are looking for is a system that will be "fairer" than the current one. Intuitively "fair" elections are those that give voters, rather than politicians and their clients, a maximum of control over their representatives. Scientifically, the word "fair" has been given a precise interpretation on the basis of game theoretic results of John Nash and Kenneth Arrow.¹ For the present purpose, the intuitive and the scientific usage are in good agreement.

¹A rigorous treatment can be found in

Brams&Fishburn, "Approval Voting", Birkäuser, 1982,, ISBN 3-7643-3108-9. An enjoyable introduction to the metamathematics of democracy is Part IV of Hoffman, Paul, "Archemde's Revenge", Fawcett Crest, 1988, ISBN 0-449-21750-7

Three Systems that are in Use Currently

LSC Luxembourg

Statutes of the Local Staff Committee Luxembourg

Article 10 (Counting)

The count is carried out bz the scrutineers (assisted by one or several assessors, After verification of the quorum and the validity of the ballot, papers

12 candidates with most votes are in

8 candidates from lists with more than 5.0% according to d'Hondt

Electoral Rules for the Election of the LSC ISPRA

Article 15

A vote may be cast for a list or for individuals.

a. Vote for a list

A cross shall be placed in the appropriate box for the list selected; it should be remembered that the list of independent candidates is not regarded as a "list" for this purpose.

b. Vote for individuals

A cross shall be placed in the appropriate box next to the names of the candidates. A vote may be cast for one or more pairs to be elected (see Article 5) chosen from one or more lists or from all the candidates, up to a maximum of 21 votes. Article 20

Ballot papers bearing a signature, crossings-out or other marks shall be declared void.

Ballot papers bearing a number individual votes greater than the number of pairs to be elected in accordance with Article 5 shall be void.

A ballot paper which contains a clear vote for a list and, within that list alone, a number of individual votes may not be considered void.

In that case, however, only the list vote and the individual votes shall be valid.

Article 21

The "total vote" per pair shall be established; this is the sum of the individual votes for each individual pair and of the list votes. The number of pairs of candidates provided for in Article 5 who have the highest number of "total" votes" are declared elected. If the last pairs have the same number of total votes, the one elected shall be selected by lot.

LSC BRX

Article 10

Voting: votes shall be cast as follows; failure to comply shall result in the vote being declared void:

vote for a list: a cross shall be placed in the box beneath the number and the abbreviation of the list chosen (block-list vote);

Vote for a maximum of 27 candidates for full membership and alternate membership, chosen from one or more lists: a cross shall be placed in the box opposite the name of each candidate chosen, up to a maximum of 27 candidates (preference vote).

Ballot papers bearing both a cross against a list and further crosses against the names of candidates on the same list shall be treated as preference votes.

Ballot papers bearing any other writing, signature, erasure or mark whatsoever shall be declared void.

Article 11

Distribution of seats between block-list votes and preference votes shall be made in proportion to the number of ballot papers returning

a block-list vote,

a preference vote.

Distribution of block-list seats between the lists shall be made in proportion to the number of block-list votes cast for each list.

In each list, the block-list seats shall be allotted to the candidates in the order in which the list has been submitted and in the same numbers as the number of block-list seats allotted to the list.

Distribution of preference seats shall be carried out in proportion to the total number of votes cast for the candidates on each list.

In each list, the preference seats shall be allotted to those candidates who failed to be elected by the block-list votes who obtained the greatest number of votes.

Two Alternatives for a New Luxembourg System

Plan A (The Bruxelles System)

Description

The text of the appropriate articles of the "Statute of the Brussels Local Staff Committee" could be cut and pasted into our Luxembourg Statute with minimal editorial changes.

Weak Points

While it is fairer than our current system, it does fall short of maximum democracy. In malpractice, small numbers of union officials and activists can exert an undemocratic influence on the election result by determining the order of candidates on the ballot. This leaves the voters to choose which of the lists has the most favorable ratio of wanted to unwanted candidates. The preference votes can only offset part of this problem.

Strong Points

Three advantages stand out: this system is reasonably simple to understand and operate, it has been tested in practice, is already being used to (indirectly) choose the majority of the Central Staff Committee members so that we would be moving in the direction of harmonization by adopting it.

Plan B (Maximum Democracy)

Description

The candidates are placed on a single long list in random order.

Their union-affiliation is indicated in a separate column for information.

Their is a line for protest votes at the bottom where voters can use a cross to say "None of the above candidates are acceptable for me." If more than 25% of the votes are cast against all candidates by marking this line, the Local Staff Committee election is repeated once. (However, there is no longer a quorum requirement.)

Each voter has the right to cast up to twenty votes in any way s/he sees fit (giving all twenty votes to one candidate, or one vote to each of twenty candidates, or any combinatorially valid choice between the two extremes.

Here are three examples of how votes can be cast under the system of maximum democracy that has become known as <u>approval voting</u> because here each elector may distribute the votes so as to get the Local Staff Committee of which s/he approves most.

Example 1) All votes for one candidate

Candidate	Union	1	2	3	•••	18	19	20
Zenon	ABC	X	X	X		Х	X	X
Yddrigsel	XYZ							
Xerxes	•••••							
Werwolf	LMN							
Vulcan	XYZ							
Ulysses	ABC							
Titan	XYZ							
Shiva	•••••							
Robo	LMN							
Quequew	XYZ							
Paracletus	ABC							
Odin	XYZ							
Northstar								
Magnus	LMN							
Kalipso	ABC							
Jeronimo	XYZ							
Isis								
Hologram	LMN							
	ABC							
Frederick	XYZ							

Candidate	Union	1	2	3	•••	18	19	20
Edwards	•••••							

The elector has concentrated all his votes one a single preferred candidate. It is likely that most candidates will vote for themselves in this way. Another motive for this voting pattern would be the desire of a numerically small, but strongly motivated, minority to try to get (at least) one of "its" candidates elected. In this sense, approval voting gives minorities a maximum of representation while adhering to the principle of equality between voters.

Candidate	Union	1	2	3	•••	18	19	20
Zenon	ABC	x						
Yddrigsel	XYZ	X						
Xerxes		X						
Werwolf	LMN	X						
Vulcan	XYZ	X						
Ulysses	ABC	X						
Titan	XYZ	X						
Shiva		X						
Robo	LMN	X						
Quequew	XYZ	X						
Paracletus	ABC	X						
Odin	XYZ	X						
Northstar	•••••	X						
Magnus	LMN	x						
Leonard	XYZ	X						
Kalipso	ABC	x						
Jeronimo	XYZ	x						
Isis	•••••	X						
Hologram	LMN	X						
Frederick	XYZ							

Example 2) One vote for each of 20 candidates

Candidate	Union	1	2	3	•••	18	19	20
Edwards	•••••							

This is the counter-example to the preceding one. Here a somewhat less motivated voter chooses twenty representatives from among the candidates on offer. This would usually be the behavior of those voters who are not too well informed and who simply choose those representatives whom they trust, or at least know in passing. Apathetic, uninformed voters are the biggest challenge that democracy faces. They are a strong challenge to approval voting as to all the other systems of democracy. The best that can be achieved is that in this system an apathetic voter can use all of the little information s/he holds to pick and choose among candidates on the ballot. In this way, the threat to democracy that ignorance poses is, at least, spread out over up to twenty candidates, rather than being concentrated one list lead by a charismatic sociopath.

Candidate	Union	1	2	3	•••	18	19	20
Zenon	ABC							
Yddrigsel	XYZ							
Xerxes	•••••	X	X	X				
Werwolf	LMN							
Vulcan	XYZ							
Ulysses	ABC							
Titan	XYZ	X						
Shiva	••••							
Robo	LMN							
Quequew	XYZ	X						
Paracletus	ABC							
Odin	XYZ	X	X	X				
Northstar	•••••	X						
Isis	•••••	X	X	X				
•••••	ABC							
Frederick	XYZ	X	X					
Edwards								
Darwin	LMN	X						
Charles	XYZ	X						
Bonpo	ABC							

Example 3) A couple of votes for one candidate, some more for another one

Candidate	Union	1	2	3	•••	18	19	20
AhuraMaz	XYZ				X			
da		Х	X	X		X		

This is the pattern of the sophisticated, savvy voter. Someone like this might, for an example, deliberately give some support to moderate representatives of a union that s/he opposes with a view to keeping the "even worse ones" out of the Local Staff Committee. This particular strategy has the desirable side-effect of increasing the influence of "centrists" at the expense of "extremists" without imposing democratically unjustifiable artificial thresholds, below which votes are discarded.

Weak Points

Strictly, approval voting is simpler to explain, understand and practice than the current Luxembourg system. Still, the fact that this system is an innovation in Local Staff Committee elections within the EU Institutions means that we will have to pay the price of innovation in order to benefit from it.

Strong Points

Based on the game theoretic results of Von Neumann, Nash and Arrow, Steven Brams has demonstrated scientifically that approval voting is in a certain sense the "most democratic" of all possible election systems. It is far beyond the scope of this paper to give summary of a quarter of a century of research on an A4 page.

An informal argument may help to convince the non-specialist reader that Dr Brams is a lot smarter than Voltaire's Dr. Panglos. Obviously, the maximum number of votes per elector must be equal to the number of mandates available because it would make no sense to elect people to non-existent mandates. Just as clearly, approval voting gives electors the maximum freedom of choice because it imposes the minimum number of restrictions: zero. It takes advanced game theory to show that no other possible system can be "more democratic" than approval voting, but the two common-sense arguments just presented show that, at least, it is a "very very democratic" system.

Conclusion

It would be quite audacious to install a system of maximum democracy under the present circumstances, and that is one more reason to go ahead with this ambitious project. The democratic rights we now enjoy were won by massacring aristocrats, monarchs and counter-revolutionaries in the past. By installing approval voting, we can leave a somewhat more democratic society to our successors.

If serious political difficulties block the most democratic system, for now, we should use the adoption of the Brussels system to advance towards better democracy.

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