

BELGIUM – A BRIEF INTRODUCTION
ON THE OCCASION OF
THE BELGIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EU

CESAER Board / CESAER Task Force Sustainable Funding

BELGIUM

- Independent from the Netherlands since 1830
- Constitutional Monarchy
- In origin a unitary state
- Currently a federal state
- Gradual development towards regionalisation through a series of constitutional reforms
- First: 1970 → Sixth: 2012
- Reforms in origin closely related to the language issue



LANGUAGES

- Current official languages
 - Flanders: Dutch (formally the same language as in the Netherlands)
 - Wallonia: French (and in the Ost-Belgien part (Eupen-Malmedy) German)
 - Brussels: officially bilingual
- Dutch as an official language in Belgium: some milestones
 - 1898: Equality Law – Dutch became an official language
 - 1930: Ghent University to become first Dutch-language University
 - 1962: Agreement on the language borders



CURRENT STATE STRUCTURE (SIMPLIFIED!)

Federal State

→ Policy areas such as foreign affairs, defence, finances, social security, interior (maj.), justice (maj.), public health (maj.)

Three Communities

→ For matters relating to persons (language and culture): Eg. education, media, culture

- Flemish Community (Vlaamse Gemeenschap)
- French Community (Communauté française)
- German-speaking Community (Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft)

Three Regions

→ For matters relating to the territory: eg. economy, agriculture, public works

- Flanders (Vlaams Gewest)
- Wallonia (Région Wallonne)
- Brussels (Brussels hoofdstedelijk gewest - Région de Bruxelles-Capitale)

CURRENT STATE STRUCTURE (2)

- No hierarchy between the federal state and its components
- A government for each structure, but
 - Unified institutions for the Flemish Community and Region of Flanders
 - A cooperation (not constitutionally formalized) between the French Community and the French Community Committee of the Brussels region under the name 'Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles'



REPRESENTATION AT EU LEVEL

- There is little formal 'Belgium' at federal level when it comes to educational and research policy matters
 - Intra-Belgian university cooperation is de facto almost equal to an international cooperation
 - Some exceptions: Federal Research Institutes, Royal Military Academy
- However, in the Council context, only the member state is to be represented
 - Representations from the Regions/Communities to the Belgian Permanent Representation to the EU
 - Communities/regions take turns to represent the country at Council level for the relevant competency
 - This turn-based approach also goes for Presidencies
 - Settled through a cooperation agreement dating from 1994
- 2024 BE presidency
 - French Community / Walloon Region in the lead for resp. education and research topics, in coordination with their peers across the language border

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