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’
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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