THE BELGIAN MONARCHY
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State reforms are a constant in Belgian history.

The country is in a state of constant flux; institutional changes succeed one another. But Belgium is still a constitutional and parliamentary monarchy, just as it was at the founding of the nation in 1830.

The monarchy is an important trump card for Belgium. The King is neutral and inviolable. The advisory role of the King is conducted with great discretion, but his influence remains significant. The role of the King as ‘Father of the nation’ cannot be fulfilled in the same way by a political leader. The King gives expression to the pride and the happiness of the entire people and even more to its communal sadness. There is a power emanating from the person that rises above the everyday events and voices the right words, makes the appropriate gestures.

The personal involvement of the members of the Royal Family opens many doors for our foreign trade. The image, the prestige and the goodwill that a small country such as Belgium enjoys abroad is largely thanks to the engagement of the Royal Family. In this succinct book you can follow the development of the Belgian Monarchy into what it is today, a modern, popular Royal Family with a heartfelt interest and attention for all compatriots.

Enjoy your reading

April 2010
2. BELGIUM: A CONSTITUTIONAL AND HEREDITARY MONARCHY

2.1 A constitutional monarchy

Belgium is a constitutional monarchy, where the role of the monarchy is described and founded in the Constitution. The Constitution establishes the King’s legal position as the country’s Head of State and he is officially referred to as “King of the Belgians”. It also establishes the hereditary succession, thereby making Belgium a hereditary monarchy.

2.2 A hereditary monarchy

In Belgium the constitutional position of the King passes on to his natural and legitimate descendants in a direct line. A new King accedes to the throne only after he has solemnly sworn the constitutional oath in a joint session of the Lower and Upper Houses of Parliament. This must be within ten days of the death of his predecessor.

Following an amendment to Articles 85 and 86 of the Constitution in 1991, there is no distinction between the sexes in deciding succession to the throne. Previously, the “Salic law” - a historical term referring to the succession to the throne among the Salic Franks in the 6th century - had excluded women from succession to the throne.

Direct descendants of King Leopold I receive the title of Prince or Princess of Belgium at birth, keeping that title throughout their lives. The title of Prince or Princess may also be granted by royal decree to spouses of members of the Royal Family.

The title of “Prince or Princess of Belgium” is a dynastic title strictly reserved for the monarchy. As such it differs from a conventional title of nobility.

Members of the royal family bear the family name “of Belgium”.

2.3 Titles and family names of the royal family

In Belgium the Head of State assumes the title of “King of the Belgians”. It is customary for the King’s consort to take the title of “Queen”, and she may retain this if she becomes widowed.

Some Princes also have specific titles that were granted during Leopold I’s reign to the heir apparent to the throne and to certain other princes. The heir apparent is given the title “Duke of Brabant”, whilst the King’s second son receives the title “Count of Flanders” and the title “Count of Hainaut” is given to the heir apparent’s eldest son. These titles precede the title of Prince or Princess of Belgium. Originally these titles were conferred by royal decree, but over time the title of “Duke of Brabant” came to be granted automatically.

The family name

In 1920 the Belgian King changed his family name from Saxe-Coburg to “of Belgium”. In addition to this change of name, the armorial bearings of Saxony were removed from the Belgian royal coat of arms. Other Coburgers from the many-branched Saxe-Coburg family have also changed their name. For example, Britain’s King George V adopted the family name of Windsor, after the Royal Family’s place of residence.

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3. THE ROLE OF THE KING

3.1 Head of State

The King of the Belgians is a constitutional Head of State, meaning that he performs the duties conferred on him by the Constitution. Upon accession, the successor to the throne must swear the constitutional oath before a joint session of the Chambers of Parliament.

“I swear that I shall abide by the Constitution and the laws of the Belgian people, maintain the country’s independence and preserve its territory.”

The oath to maintain the country’s independence and preserve its territory should be viewed in the context of Belgium’s struggle for independence in 1830. This also explains why the King is commander-in-chief of the armed forces and can sign treaties.

The Terms of the Constitution provide Belgium with the “Trias Politica” system, the separation of the legislative, executive and judiciary. As Head of State, the King has a role to play in all three branches. His participation in the legislative branch (Article 36 of the Constitution) implies that the King co-signs government bills tabled in the legislative branch (Article 36 of the Constitution) co-signed by at least one minister in accordance with branch, occurs by means of royal decrees. These are enforcement of laws, which is the task of the executive in Parliament and ratifies laws approved in Parliament.

There are other constitutional prerogatives exercised by the King:

• The King confers ranks in the armed forces.
• The King appoints the civil servants in the government departments and the foreign office, with some exceptions.
• The King appoints judges. To guarantee their independence they are appointed for life.
• The King has the right to remit or reduce sentences handed down by judges.
• The King has the right to confer titles, but not to attach any privileges to them.
• The King confers national honours.

Although the Constitution provides that the King is inviolable, his ministers are accountable. They therefore bear political responsibility for actions of the Head of State that have a political or constitutional significance. Another consequence is that any instruments drafted or signed by the King only come into effect upon co-signature by a minister, who then becomes responsible for the instrument in question.

This does not, however, prevent the King from playing the role of mediator in his contacts and, through advice, warnings and encouragement, exerting influence.

His action can be seen as providing a continuity that benefits the nation.

At certain times, such as when a new federal government is formed, the Monarch’s role is more prominent.

On the basis of his talks with politicians and social and economic figures, the Head of State appoints a “formateur” (a person charged with forming a new government) who is entrusted with the formation of the government. If required by the political situation, the King may first appoint an “informateur” (who explores what political alliances are possible to create a government), a negotiator, a mediator or a scout. Once the federal government is formed, the Prime Minister and new ministers, as well as the state secretaries, take an oath before the King, as do the ministers-president of the Communities and the Regions.

Since 1970 Belgium has gradually turned into a federal state. Whenever there is a reform of the state structure, the King has to bring together a number of different approaches. On the basis of his constitutional role he has to ensure unity between the Belgians, but at the same time, as Sovereign, he has to take account of our multicultural society and the diversity of our Communities and Regions. For this reason, the Sovereign also has regular contacts with all of these entities.

3.2 Other activities performed by the Monarch

As part of his royal function, the Head of State is also involved in various activities:

Visits

The King and the other members of the royal family regularly pay visits to municipalities, companies, organisations and institutions across the country. For the King, this is primarily an opportunity to gain a better insight into the country and how people in Belgium live. It also enables him to encourage initiatives.

Details of visits by members of the Royal Family are announced on the website www.monarchie.be

Audiences

At the Castle of Laken or the Royal Palace of Brussels the Head of State receives a great many visitors who are important for the country because of the role they play in Belgium or in the world. Every week, the Monarch has an audience with the Prime Minister (usually on Monday) to discuss the latest political developments. Other politicians are also granted audiences on a regular basis. The Sovereign also keeps himself informed by frequently meeting representatives from a wide range of sectors.
When a foreign head of state or the head of an international organisation is in the country, he or she is usually invited for a royal audience. Ambassadors taking up their post present their credentials to the Sovereign, and when they leave the country they are granted an audience to take their leave of the King. When they present their credentials, newly-appointed ambassadors are escorted by a guard of honour: the royal mounted guard.

Royal favours
The King, the Queen and the other members of the Royal Family may grant favours to groups and events.

- The title “royal” may be conferred upon non-profit-making associations that have existed continuously for at least 50 years, demonstrate good management, regularly organise activities, pursue a commendable cause and operate a non-discriminatory membership policy, etc.

- Patronage lends the support of a member of the Royal Family to major sporting, humanitarian, cultural or scientific events or organisations.

- Honorary chairmanship may exceptionally be granted for prominent associations that are highly-influential and are chiefly active in areas of special interest to the member of the Royal Family concerned.

- The “honorary governorship of the King” can be granted for Service clubs.

- A prize from the King or Queen or a member of the Royal Family can be requested for a major event for the winner of a competition or an exhibition.

- The King or Queen may become godparent to the lastborn of an uninterrupted line of seven boys or seven girls.

- The use of the royal name can be granted for streets, avenues, squares and parks in Belgium and abroad. Exceptionally, use of a royal name is granted for flowers, clocks, buildings, associations, institutions, projects, boats, planes and air balloons.

- Members of the Royal Family may accept the role of “special representative” upon request from an international organisation that has a humanitarian aim and is chiefly active in an area that is of interest to that member of the Royal Family.

The royal mounted guard
The royal guard was formed in August 1938 and first appeared during the state visit by Queen Wilhelmina in May 1939. The escort accompanies the Monarch during major official trips in the country. The 132 horsemen ride only Belgian horses. There is also the royal motorised escort, which is formed if the journey is too long for horses. The royal escort is part of the federal police.

The constitutional rule is that audiences with the King fall under the seal of the “colloque singulier”. This means that the content of audiences with the King is not made public afterwards. The Crown may not be exposed, thus allowing the King and his guest to express their opinions freely in private. After an audience the palace’s press department distributes a communiqué naming the visitor.

The warrant of Purveyor to the Royal Household
Royal favours are not only granted to non-profit-making associations. The warrant of Purveyor to the Royal Household is highly sought-after among companies and confirms the quality of a service provided to the Royal Household. The list of Warranted Purveyors to the Royal Household is updated every year on the King’s Day. Belgium’s Warranted Purveyors to the Royal Household are members of a non-profit-making association that protects the title against misuse.

Requests for help
Every day countless numbers of people contact the King, the Queen or the other members of the Royal Family to petition for help. The Royal Family shares the population’s joys and sorrows. The Petitions Department handles over 10,000 requests for help every year, including requests for financial assistance, advice, or intervention in administrative formalities. In matters such as these, the monarch acts as a mediator between the authorities and the citizen. Through the non-profit association “Werken van de Koningin/Oeuvres de la Reine” (the Queen’s Charities), financial gifts can be granted on the basis of a supporting social report.

Ennoblement and high honours
Every year the King bestows titles of nobility and high-level decorations in one of Belgium’s national orders. He is assisted in this by the Consultative Committee for the granting of honorary awards and of decorations in the national orders.
3.3 Symbolic aspects of the royal duties

The royal office also has symbolic aspects. As "King of the Belgians", the Sovereign embodies the country. In this capacity he makes visits and encourages social, economic, cultural and scientific development. As Head of State he personifies the country abroad and in international organisations, making a considerable contribution to promoting the image of our country.

In times of disaster or adversity the Sovereign’s role of inspirational leadership aims to offer support and comfort and to restore confidence. The extent to which King Baudouin was admired by the public became especially clear when hundreds of thousands of people came to pay their last respects when he died. It was said that all Belgians were in a state of collective grief.

On the eve of the Belgian National Day the King addresses the nation in a speech that is broadcast on radio and television, as he does on Christmas Day. These speeches emphasise the Monarch’s importance as an embodiment of the nation. In January the King also addresses the country’s authorities. In his speeches the King can consider social and political issues that are close to his heart or, through his leadership, encourage citizenship and solidarity in his compatriots.

However, the Sovereign has to observe neutrality in the stance he adopts. As mentioned earlier, the Constitution states that all the King’s official actions must be sanctioned by a minister, who assumes responsibility for them. Therefore, the King’s speeches are submitted to the Prime Minister for approval.

On 21 July, Belgium’s National Day, the King takes part in the ceremonies together with the Queen, their children and their spouses, and Queen Fabiola. In the morning they attend the Te Deum which is celebrated at various places throughout the country.

King Albert and Queen Paola attend the ceremony in the Cathedral of St Michael and St Gudula in Brussels, accompanied by Prince Philippe and Princess Mathilde, and Queen Fabiola, the widow of King Baudouin. When they emerge from the cathedral there is invariably a crowd of admirers of the royal family, waiting to present them with flowers and gifts. Princess Astrid and Prince Lorenz, and Prince Laurent and Princess Claire attend the Te Deum in a different city each time. After midday the King attends the march-past of the armed forces and auxiliary services.

The Royal Family then visits the festivities that are organised in the capital.

Belgium celebrates three events related to the monarchy

21 July: the National Day, which marks the anniversary of the taking of the oath by King Leopold I on 21 July 1831.

15 November: King’s Day, the King’s name day. This day was only established under Leopold II and was not celebrated on 15 November under King Albert I. The King does not usually attend on the King’s Day, as he cannot take part in a celebration for himself. Traditionally a Te Deum is sung in the Cathedral of St Michael and St Gudula, organised by the Archbishop of Mechelen-Brussels. Since 2001 there has also been a ceremony in the Palace of the Nation, organised by the government and parliament.

17 February: the commemoration of the deceased members of the Royal Family recalls the date of the death of King Albert I (17 February 1934). The memorial ceremony is attended by the members of the Royal Family, and since this is a purely family occasion, no representatives of the authorities are invited.

Unlike the British or Dutch sovereigns, the King of the Belgians does not wear or carry any external symbols of monarchy. There is therefore no royal robe, crown or sceptre. In fact, the King does not even have a throne. The only time the King sits on a "throne" is when he takes the oath in Parliament, although this is not a “royal throne” as such, but a stately chair used only for the taking of the oath by the Head of State.
4. THE KING’S HOUSEHOLD

4.1 Staff and organisation

The Sovereign is assisted by staff enabling him to perform his duties to the best of his ability. Some of these staff belong to the “King’s Household”, while others work for the other members of the Royal Family.

The “King’s Household” is made up of seven autonomous departments, the heads of which form the Royal Household’s Management Committee:

• the Department for Economic, Social and Cultural Affairs
• the King’s Cabinet
• the King’s Military Household
• the King’s Civil List
• the Department for Foreign Relations
• the Department of the Protocol of the Court
• the Department of Petitions

Besides these departments, the King may also request assistance from aides-de-camp and equerries:

• Aides-de-camp are general officers or older senior officers who are appointed by the King. In addition to their position in the armed forces, they are entrusted with specific tasks by the Sovereign. For example, they may represent the King at events or ceremonies where he is unable to attend in person.

• The King’s equerries who, in addition to their position in the armed forces, are at the Sovereign’s disposal for a week at a time in turns. Equerries are figures of trust who prepare the King’s activities and brief him on all important aspects of the upcoming programme. When the King is away, the equerry remains permanently on call so that the King can be reached through him at all times.

Since the death of King Baudouin in 1993 three other households and one more department have been created:

• the Household of Queen Fabiola
• the Household of the Dukes of Brabant
• the Household of Princess Astrid
• the Department serving Prince Laurent

4.2 Civil List and endowments

The King’s Civil List contains funds that the nation provides for the Head of State. These enable him or her to perform the royal office with complete moral and material independence. The List includes an endowment that is fixed at the beginning of a new reign for the duration of that reign. In addition, it gives the King the right to use the royal buildings in order to represent the country with the necessary dignity and splendour.

The King’s Civil List is provided for by the Constitution and organised by law. As it takes the form of an an endowment, the Civil List is designed to enable the King to incur the expenditure inherent in the performance of his duties with complete independence. These expenses relate to staff expenses and operating costs of all kinds as well as personal expenditure and representation costs. The Civil List is therefore not a grant or allowance, and certainly not a salary.

The Royal Palace of Brussels and the Castle of Laken are State property, and are placed at the disposal of the Head of State. As part of the Royal Donation and in accordance with the wishes of the donor, King Leopold II, a number of other properties are also made available to the King. At the moment these are:

• Belvedère Castle, residence of the current royal couple
• the domain of Stuyvenberg, residence of Queen Fabiola and of Princess Astrid and her family
• the Clementine villa in Tervuren, residence of Prince Laurent and his family
• the castles of Ciergnon and Fenffe in the Ardennes

As well as the Civil List for the King, the State also grants an endowment to a number of other members of the Royal Family. The heir apparent, Philippe, and Princess Astrid and Prince Laurent receive an endowment for themselves and their families. After the death of King Baudouin an endowment was also granted to his widow, Queen Fabiola.

The Royal Donation

In 1900, a few years before he died, King Leopold II donated a large part of his personal property - buildings, land and domains - to the Belgian State. He attached some conditions to this gift: certain properties could never be sold and some had to keep their original function and appearance. Moreover, they were for the usufruct (use) of the heirs to the throne. The Park of Laken and the castles of Ciergnon and Fenffe in the Ardennes are examples of properties that are part of the Royal Donation. Some properties are rented out in order to provide the Royal Donation with income. The Royal Donation is an autonomous public institution, with its own legal personality and financial independence: it cannot receive any financial support from the State and its income therefore has to cover its expenses. The Royal Donation is under the supervision of the Minister of Finance.
4.3 Opening of the palace, the Royal
Greenhouses of Laken and the royal
crypt, correspondence, photos,
documentation and
interactive exhibition

Opening of the Royal Palace of Brussels
Since 1965, the Royal Palace of Brussels has opened its
doors to the public every year between the end of July
and mid-September. An exhibition on scientific subjects
is regularly organised during this period. Permanent
partners for the scientific aspect are the Federal Public
Service for Research Policy and Technopolis.

The exact dates and times of opening are available
from June each year from the Royal Palace of Brussels
on +32 (0)2 551 20 20.

Opening of the Royal Greenhouses of Laken and
the royal crypt
The Royal Greenhouses of Laken are open to the public
every year from mid-April to mid-May. During this
period, the public may also visit the royal crypt.

The exact dates and opening times are available from
1st March each year from the Royal Palace of Brussels
on +32 (0)2 551 20 20.

This information can also be found at
www.monarchie.be

Correspondence, photos and documentation
Any citizen can write a letter to the King or to a
member of the Royal Family in order to make a
request or communicate a message. The letter should
be addressed to “His Majesty the King”, whilst in the
case of correspondence to other members of the Royal
Family, “His or Her Royal Highness” is the correct
title.

The address is: Royal Palace – 1000 Brussels. A stamp
is not required. Sending an e-mail to a member of the
Royal Family is not common practice.

The King should be addressed as “Sire”.

The Queens and Princesses are addressed as “Ma’am”.

The correct form of address for the Prince is
“Monseigneur”.

Information on the monarchy is available on the
website for the dynasty, www.monarchie.be.

The website also contains many photos and gives
details of the activities of the members of the Royal
Family.

Photos can be purchased from the Directorate General
for External Communication at the Federal Public
Service.

Address: Infoshop.be
Boulevard du Régent, 54 (Place Madou)
1000 Brussels – Belgium
Tel.: +32 (0) 2 514 08 00
Fax: +32 (0) 2 512 51 25
E-mail: info@belgium.fgov.be
Opening times:
Monday to Friday
9.00 a.m. - 11.30 a.m., 12.00 a.m. - 4.00 p.m
Closed on Saturday, Sunday
and public holidays

Interactive exhibition
The BELvue museum houses a permanent interactive
exhibition on the history of Belgium, with considerable
attention paid to the Royal Dynasty. Guided tours of
the BELvue Museum are available.

Address: Place des Palais, 7 - 1000 Brussels
Tel.: +32 (0)70 22 04 92
Fax: +32 (0)2 502 46 23
E-mail: info@belvue.be
Site web: http://www.belvue.be/
Opening times:
Tuesday to Sunday
10.00 a.m. - 6.00 p.m. (June to September)
10.00 a.m. - 5.00 p.m. (October to May)
Closed on Monday
5. ORIGINS OF THE BELGIAN DYNASTY

5.1 The creation of Belgium

What came before

The earliest record of Belgium can be traced back to Roman times. The Roman province of "Gallia Belgica" was an area stretching between the Rhine, the North Sea, the Seine and the Saône, with Reims as its stronghold. The province was inhabited by tribes known collectively as the "Belgae" who were, according to Julius Caesar, "the bravest of the Gauls".

An the 15th to 16th centuries the Latin name of Belgium came to be used for the entire area of the then "Netherlands" (the area roughly corresponding to the present-day Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg). Belgium is the Latin translation of "Netherlands" (the "Low Countries"). Consequently, Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy (1419-1467), was called "conditor Belgii" ("founder of the Netherlands") because he began the territorial unification of the Netherlands that was completed under Charles V (1515-1555).

In French the adjective "belgique" was added in the 18th century to denote the Southern or Austrian Netherlands, "les Pays-Bas belgiques" (in Dutch "de Oostenrijkse Nederlanden").

After the Brabant Revolution in 1789 against Austria, a "United States of Belgium" was proclaimed (or "United Nederlandish States" or, sometimes, the "United Belgian States" or the "Belgian Republic"). This independence was short lived, however, and Austrian rule was soon restored (1790).

After occupation by the French (1794) and annexation to the French Republic (1795), the area previously known as "the Austrian Netherlands" came to be known as the "départements belgiques réunis" (United Belgian Departments).

After the defeat of Napoleon (battle of Waterloo in 1815), the Southern Netherlands were united with the Northern Netherlands by the Vienna Congress to form the United Kingdom of the Netherlands.

In the revolt of September 1830 against the rule of King William I of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, the "southern provinces" broke away from the northern ones. At the declaration of independence, the "Provisional Administration" of these provinces adopted the name of Belgium ("Belgie" / "Belgique") for the new state.

The revolt of 1830

There are still differences of opinion as to how Belgium came into being. The romantic version is that the seeds of the new state of Belgium were sown during a performance of the opera "La Muette de Portici" (the Mute Girl of Portici) in Brussels' Théâtre de la Monnaie. The libretto tells of the popular uprising against Spanish rule in seventeenth-century Naples. During the aria "Amour sacré de la patrie" ("Sacred love of Fatherland") the predominantly liberal audience felt they could see their own situation reflected, and began to cheer and shout. The same thing happened during the next performance, whereupon the opera was banned.

"La Muette de Portici" came to symbolise the growing discontent with the rule of the Dutch King William I. When the opera was allowed to be staged again on 25 August 1830, the audience took to the streets after the performance to give voice to their discontent. The demonstrators did not have a political uprising in mind, but wanted to give the King a warning. However, the unrest gradually led to a genuine revolt, with the citizens encouraged by the success of the French Revolution that had occurred a few months earlier in July and which had forced the French king to make way for a more liberal King.

Initially, the revolutionaries were chiefly from the middle classes. The group enjoyed a degree of prosperity and influence, but did not belong to the upper level of land-owning nobility or the industrial upper middle class. Their cause was "popular sovereignty, individual freedoms and parliamentary democracy". The clergy joined the revolt because the king’s policy explicitly placed different faiths on an equal footing, and the Catholics also campaigned against freedom of education. Under the influence of a growing "Liberal Catholicism", which rejected the demand that the Church be accorded a privileged position in the state, the rapprochement between Catholics and Liberals grew. In 1827 this gave rise to a marriage of convenience: the Unionism movement.

The burgthers’ protest quickly spread to the lower classes, who were dissatisfied with their socio-economic situation and blamed "Dutch" rule for this. The government tried to calm the protest with food distributions, but this was to no avail. At the end of September, military action increased the dissent.

King William hesitated to send relief troops, partly because he did not receive any support for a major military counter-offensive. The Dutch army abandoned their position in Brussels Park during the night of 26/27 September 1830.
Independence
After the turbulent days of September the revolutionaries set up a Gouvernement provisoire (Temporary Administration), which pronounced Belgium’s independence on 4 October 1830. Around 30,000 voters (out of 46,099 eligible voters), i.e. 0.075 % of the population of Belgium at the time, elected the 200 members of the National Congress on 3 November with a majority of conservative-minded Catholics and a minority of Liberals from the middle classes. On 7 February 1831 the National Congress approved a Constitution, which was very progressive for its time.

A Constitution ahead of its time
The Belgian Constitution of 1831 was a compromise between the Catholic forces and the Liberal middle class which, via the electoral system, together made up the National Congress. However, the international context also played a major role in the choice of form of government and the drafting of the text. In order not to offend the superpowers, the constitutional meeting rejected a democratic-republican structure and chose a hereditary constitutional monarchy. The new nation was to have a national anthem, and of course, a flag, a national coat of arms and a motto.

International recognition
A country can only exist if it is internationally recognised. On 4 November 1830 a diplomatic conference on the subject began in London. The new Belgium was supported from the outset. Great Britain regarded the United Kingdom of the Netherlands as too strong an economic power, and was therefore favourably disposed towards Belgium’s independence. France merely wished to annex the Belgian regions again. Meanwhile, industrialists and financiers all over Western Europe supported the establishment of a liberal state. The major powers recognised Belgium’s independence at the beginning of 1831, although the Netherlands only recognised the Belgian State in 1839.

The text for the first national anthem was written during the 1830 revolt by a French-speaking actor from the Théâtre de la Monnaie. His pseudonym was Jenneval and his anthem was given the name “La Brabançonne”. As the revolution progressed, Jenneval changed the text three times. He enlisted in the revolutionaries’ army and was killed in combat at Lier in October 1830.

In 1860 Prime Minister Charles Rogier had the anthem changed again in order to tone down a number of barbed attacks on the House of Orange.

**Text of the Belgian national anthem in the country’s three official languages**

**O België, ô mère chérie,**
A toi nos cœurs, à toi nos bras,
A toi notre sang, ô Patrie !
Nous leurons tous, tu vivras !
Tu vivras toujours grande et belle
Et ton invincible unité
Auss pour devise immortelle :
Le Roi, la Loi, la Liberté !

*O liebes Land, o Belgiens Erde,*
O liebes Land, o liebens Erde,
O liebes Land, o liebens Erde,
Dir unser Herz, Dir unsere Hand,
Dir unser Blut, dem Heimatherde,
Dir unser Blut, dem Heimatherde,
Weh schwören’s Dir, o Vaterland!
So blehe freh in voller Schöne,
Zu der die Freiheit Dich erzog,
Und fortan singen Deine Söhne;
Gesetz und König und die Freiheit hoch!
Gesetz und König und die Freiheit hoch!
Voor Vorst, voor Vrijheid en voor Recht,
Voor Vorst, voor Vrijheid en voor Recht,
Voor Vorst, voor Vrijheid en voor Recht.

**“The Belgian nation chooses red, yellow and black as its colours and the Belgian Lion as its national coat of arms, with the motto “Union is Strength.”**

This union especially refers to the cooperation between Liberals and Catholics, which led to the founding of Belgium.

**Article 193 of the Constitution**

"The Belgian nation chooses red, yellow and black as its colours and the Belgian Lion as its national coat of arms, with the motto "Union is Strength." This union especially refers to the cooperation between Liberals and Catholics, which led to the founding of Belgium."
The score for the Belgian national anthem.

The music was written by François Van Campenhout and is given here for completeness.

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### 5.2 The choice of Head of State

Like the form of government and the Constitution, the choice of Sovereign was a compromise from both a national and international point of view. On 3 February 1831 the National Congress elected the Duke of Nemours, the sixteen-year-old son of the new French King Louis-Philippe, as King. However, Great Britain did not approve of the candidate. Pending a definitive choice, the National Congress appointed its speaker, Surlet de Chokier, as regent.

The second-choice candidate was the Duke of Leuchtenberg, grandson of Joséphine de Beauharnais, the first wife of Emperor Napoleon, but France vetoed this possibility. Leopold of Saxe-Coburg won the approval of all the powers. This German prince, resident in England, had the favour of the landed gentry and the clergy. Furthermore, he had solid relations with European financial circles and took a great interest in industrial modernisation and development.

So it was that the Belgian dynasty came into being. It was the first monarchy in this part of Europe that had been directly elected by a parliament and the first in which the Sovereign’s power was limited. For example, the King’s signature always had to be backed politically by the signature of a minister. The Constitution also contained a number of important principles, such as the separation of powers, with the legislature being the most important of these. Other notable articles concerned freedom of speech, religion, education, association and the press.
6. HISTORY OF THE BELGIAN MONARCHY

6.1 Family tree
6.2 Belgium’s Kings and Queens up to 1993

King Leopold I (1831-1865) and Queen Louise-Marie

“Since I have been accepted by you as a Belgian, I also consider it as a law to always be a Belgian in my policy.”

King Leopold I during his inaugural speech on 21 July 1831.

A difficult beginning

In early 1830 Leopold of Saxe-Coburg had already been offered the Greek throne. He was initially interested in this but ultimately refused. When a Belgian delegation offered him the Belgian throne in London in April 1831, Leopold was again sceptical, since in his view the Belgian Constitution did not allow the King much room for manoeuvre. However, he eventually accepted the throne.

On 21 July 1831 Leopold took the oath as the first King of the Belgians. The ceremony took place on Place Royale, in front of the church of Saint-Jaques-sur-Coudenberg.

The new King was immediately put to the test. Dutch troops invaded the country just two weeks after he had taken the oath. With the help of French troops William I’s army was driven back, although the young country had to pay a high price. Following the Treaty of the XXIV Articles, which ratified its independence, Belgium had to give up a sizeable part of its territory.

Political balance in the young Belgium

Danger threatened not only from the Netherlands, but from internal opponents too. The “Orangists” wanted a restoration of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands and criticised the Belgian Sovereign. Furthermore, there were the “rattachistes”, who wanted to be part of France again. Unionism, the alliance of Catholics and Liberals that had made the success of the 1830 revolution possible, stood firm despite the many tensions. The two groups wished to defend the new achievements, whatever the cost.

The period from 1831 to 1847 saw seven successive Unionist governments, which were able to count on the support of both the Catholics and the Liberals in Parliament. This period also saw a number of important innovations, such as the establishment of two private universities: a liberal one in Brussels and a Catholic one in Mechelen. In 1835, a year after it was founded, the University in Mechelen was transferred to Leuven. The existence of the state universities of Ghent and Liège was also made official.

Economic policy mainly focused on the development of financing, industry and transport. There was cooperation with the Rothschild international bank, with which Leopold had already had contacts before his accession to the throne; and the King backed the Anglo-Belgian industrialist, John Cockerill, who was to play a major role in the economic development of the fledgling Belgium.

The King was a great advocate of Unionism, which formed a solid political basis both at home and with the outside world. Even so, the King himself largely determined the policy of the Unionist governments’ during the first few years. Shortly after independence, it was the Conservatives who reaped the greatest benefit from the revolution. However, former Orangists and freemasons strengthened the Liberal movement, giving them an electoral boost. The Liberal Party (founded in 1846) enjoyed improved relations with Leopold I and won the 1847 elections convincingly, in particular as a result of the widening of suffrage when the property qualification was lowered. This marked the end of Unionism.
The Liberal bourgeoisie continued to set the tone until 1870. Sharing a strong anti-clerical feeling, despite internal differences, the Liberals pushed for secularisation, a move that heightened the contrasts between the views of the Liberals and Catholics.

**Belgium and the world**

The domestic policy pursued by the Liberal governments was ideologically charged, but less so when it came to foreign policy. Belgium’s international status was settled at last, after it was compelled to give up most of Limburg and the German-speaking part of Luxembourg. In exchange for this, the young nation had to remain neutral in any conflicts.

In the first years of his reign, Leopold I used his international prestige to improve the country’s recognition. This was very much necessary, since Belgium’s democratic form of government was viewed with some mistrust by the still largely absolutist Europe of the time. The Monarch’s personal diplomacy often proved successful and his marriage to Louise-Marie, daughter of the French king, was a diplomatic coup. However, the tensions in relations with France grew from 1848 onwards, especially after 1851 when the Second French Empire was established.

**From the countryside to the city**

The textile industry flourished in Ghent while in Hainaut and Liège a modern coal-mining and metallurgical industry had developed. The port of Antwerp also took advantage of the positive economic situation. Nevertheless, much of Flanders remained an agricultural region for a long time and was heavily dependent on the success or failure of the harvest. Poverty was so acute that it led vast numbers of people to migrate to the industrial areas of Wallonia and Northern France. However, workers’ living conditions in the cities were also wretched – a situation that gave rise to the beginnings of the militant labour movements of the late 19th century.

In 1835 the first railway line on the European continent was opened between Brussels and Mechelen.
A happy diplomatic marriage

King Leopold I was already forty when he took up his Belgian royal duties. He had been born on 16 December 1790 in the small German state of Saxe-Coburg, the seventh and youngest child of Duke Franz and Duchess Augusta, née von Reuss-Ebersdorff. He was brought up as a devout Lutheran and would stay true to his Protestant convictions throughout his life. Leopold received a military upbringing from a very young age. He was barely five when the then Tsar Alexander, the brother-in-law of his sister Julia, appointed him colonel of the Russian imperial guard. He was already a general by his twelfth birthday, and he took part in various campaigns with the Russian army.

Leopold met his first wife Charlotte in London. She was the only daughter of the British prince-regent, who would later become King George IV. Consequently, she was regarded as the future queen. Charlotte immediately fell in love with the dashing Leopold and broke off her engagement with Prince William of Orange – something unheard of in those days.

Leopold and Charlotte married on 2 May 1816 and took up residence in Claremont House. It was a happy marriage, which unfortunately only lasted a year and a half. After a labour lasting three days, their first child was stillborn and a few hours later Charlotte died. It was the first severe blow in the life of the 27-year-old prince. He lost not only his beloved wife and child, but also his chances of playing an influential role as prince consort of the crown princess and future queen.

After Charlotte’s death, Leopold travelled for a while. He stayed with many royal families, and consequently paid several visits to the family of the future French King Louis-Philippe d’Orléans, his wife Marie-Amélie and their six-year-old daughter Louise-Marie.

Fourteen years later, as King of the Belgians, Leopold contacted them again. A marriage to the daughter of the French King would be a good diplomatic move, especially as France still harboured plans for the annexation of Belgium. Louis-Philippe and his wife Marie-Amélie were reluctant to give away their 20-year-old daughter to the King of a country that had only just been created. Louise-Marie herself was also initially unwilling to marry Leopold, who was 22 years her senior. However, when the Protestant Leopold promised to bring up his children as Catholics, the French royal couple finally consented.

The wedding was celebrated on 9 August 1832 in Compiègne, according to both the Catholic and Lutheran rites. In Belgium, Louise-Marie wrote thousands of letters describing her life in detail. Most of these letters were written to her mother, and they show an intelligent woman with a trenchant, surprising outlook on life. Like her mother, Louise-Marie loathed protocol. Gradually she got used to her new situation and to her husband, who she found to her liking. After a few years, she would endearingly refer to him in her letters as “Leopich”.

One year after the marriage, Louise-Marie gave the King a son. The apple of Leopold’s eye was named after his grandfather, Louis. “Babochon”, as he was called in the family circle, died within a year from a liver disorder.

The role of the Queen

In Belgium a Queen has a title but no constitutional role because the succession is determined by the descendants of Leopold and until 1991 only male descendants were eligible as heirs to the throne.

The title of Queen is thus an honorary title that does not appear in the Constitution. However, behind the scenes Belgian Queens have played and continue to play a role. In the case of Queen Louise-Marie, she was heavily involved in good causes and regularly supported needy families.
In 1835 another son was born: Leopold, who would succeed his father as King. Philippe and Charlotte followed.

Despite her lively family life, Queen Louise-Marie continued to feel lonely. She had lost a brother and a sister at an early age, and also feared that her father, who was King in turbulent France, would fall victim to an attack. She suffered terribly when her father was deposed in 1848.

The four pregnancies and distress over her family had worn Louise-Marie out, and would lead to her early death. The first Belgian Queen died in 1850 in Ostend, at the age of 38. In her will she declared that she had never loved anyone other than Leopold, and hoped that he would remarry and find happiness with a third wife.

King Leopold I died fifteen years later, on 10 December 1865. After the solemn funeral service Leopold I was laid to rest in the old church of Laken. In 1876 the bodies of the King and Queen were transferred to the crypt in the new church.

Family and marriage ties with other European dynasties

Before Leopold became King of the Belgians, his sister Victoire had married the Duke of Kent. Their only daughter was to become the legendary Queen Victoria, who for many years kept up an extensive correspondence with her "Dear Uncle Leopold". Victoria married Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg, a first cousin of Leopold. Prince Ferdinand, another of Leopold’s cousins, married the Queen of Portugal. Later Leopold’s daughter Charlotte married the brother of the Austrian Emperor, Franz-Josef.

At a social level, the country had been obliged to deal with the effects of an international economic crisis since 1875. Industrialists increased working time and cut wages, yet there was still very high unemployment. The social abuses caused unrest among workers, leading to the creation of the Belgian Workers’ Party in 1885 (subsequently the Belgian Socialist Party). In the wake of the papal encyclical Rerum Novarum (1891), the Christian labour movement was also formed. The Christian People’s Party led by the priest, Daens, denounced the abuses. During the following years a number of social laws were approved, such as the law on female and child labour, the law on old age pensions and the law on Sunday rest.

In 1893, after a long struggle, amendments to the Constitution were approved that included the introduction of the universal right of plural voting for men. Every man aged over 25 had one vote, whilst men who paid more taxes were given two or three votes. This reform of the electoral system led to a group of socialists winning seats in the Lower House, joining the Catholics and Liberals. The two-party system appeared to be a thing of the past.
In the final decades of the 19th century Leopold II had to deal with the growing language battle in Belgium. When Belgium had been created, its leaders had resolutely opted for French as the language of administration, education and culture, even though more than half the population were Dutch speakers. Driven by the Flemish Movement, some of whose advocates held seats in Parliament, the Flemings made progress. In 1873 a law was published that allowed Dutch to be used in Flemish criminal courts. Leopold II encouraged Flemish cultural life: with financial backing from the King, Hendrik Conscience was able to write his romantic book "De Leeuw van Vlaanderen" (The Lion of Flanders). Conscience was also appointed Dutch teacher to the Princess. In 1887 Leopold II opened the Flemish Theatre in Brussels and on this occasion gave his speech in Dutch.

In the international arena the situation remained turbulent. Belgium was able to avoid the Franco-German war in 1870, although both France and Germany repeatedly threatened a military invasion to strengthen their position.

King Leopold II remained alert. He defended Belgium’s neutrality and argued for the army to be strengthened so that Belgium could hold up against the ever-threatening superpowers. The King wanted to abolish the system of military service by lots and have this replaced by general conscription. This issue regularly pitched him against the government as well as the people, who were also against it. The King only achieved his goal after thirty years in 1909. On his deathbed he signed the law on compulsory military service for one son per family.

Belgium’s expansion

"Belgium must have a colony."

Unlike that of most countries, Belgian colonialism was a private initiative on the part of the King.

Leopold I felt that Belgium needed a colony for economic reasons, mainly so that it could import raw materials and secure outlets for its own products. A colony also enhanced a country’s status.

His son Leopold II was of the same opinion. After several lengthy trips and a great many international talks, his idea was firmly established. He brought a piece of marble back from Greece, in which he had engraved the phrase: "Belgium must have a colony". He revealed his plans during addresses to the Upper House but was unable to persuade the senators and so took the initiative himself.

From 1870 onwards, explorers travelled all over Africa; Leopold II was not alone in his interest in the continent. To avoid offending the superpowers, he organised an International Geographical Conference in Laken in 1876, which he chaired himself. In 1878 he hired the Anglo-American journalist and explorer, Henry Morton Stanley, who, on an assignment for the newspaper he was working for, had gone to Africa to try to locate the missing missionary and explorer, David Livingstone. Stanley returned from his first expedition captivated and wanted to go straight back. Leopold and Stanley together set up the Comité d’Études du Haut-Congo (Committee for Studies of the Upper-Congo), which later became the "Association Internationale du Congo" (International Congo Association).

With his mandate from the Belgian King, Stanley concluded treaties with native tribal chiefs in Congo and succeeded in renting or buying land. However, the expeditions cost the King virtually his entire family fortune. Furthermore, at that time the potential nature of the resources in the Congo was unclear. In the first few years the trade was largely in ivory. This was later followed by rubber, for which there was increasing demand due to the success of the motorcar and the bicycle.

Thanks to Leopold II’s sophisticated diplomacy, the Congo Free State was recognised as an independent country with Leopold II as Head of State at the West Africa Conference in Berlin in 1885. Part of the territory, the Crown Domain, was his private property. The King was able to convince the politicians that the colony would not cost them any money and would remain a private matter. That same year Leopold II was also given permission by the Belgian parliament to become Head of State of Congo and to bear the title, "Sovereign".

In 1890, at Leopold II’s initiative, Brussels hosted an international conference on slavery. The conference severely condemned any form of slavery, and in its wake the King started a campaign against slavery in Africa. When serious abuses by local administrators came to light, they led to criticism of Belgian administration in Congo, both at home and abroad.

International pressure led to the Congo Free State being transferred to Belgium in 1908, resulting in the country becoming a Belgian colony. Congo gained its independence in 1960 and is now the Democratic Republic of Congo.

A young state with international influence

Leopold II, who was a visionary, harboured ambitions of improving the country’s economic infrastructure. This led to the widening of the Ghent-Terneuzen canal and the expansion of the port of Antwerp. Construction of the seaport in Zeebrugge began, and coal was discovered in the Limburg Kempen.
The King carried out large-scale urbanisation projects, which he financed mainly with the proceeds from the industries in Congo. Leopold wanted to turn the capital, Brussels, into a metropolis with international influence, on the model of Paris. Wide boulevards were laid and impressive buildings built, such as the triumphal arch and palaces of the Parc du Cinquantenaire. To spread knowledge about the Congo, the king built a museum in Tervuren near Brussels, which today remains one of the world’s leading centres of knowledge on Central African culture, fauna and flora.

Leopold II also had the Royal Palace of Brussels substantially extended. The Royal Greenhouses near the Castle of Laken, a particularly revolutionary feature at the time, also underwent major extensions.

The greenhouse complex was designed in 1873 by Alphonse Balat, in close consultation with the King. The complex consists of various glass and iron structures interconnected by glazed galleries. Every year, these greenhouses are open to the public in the spring for three weeks. They have an exceptional architectural value and house a very valuable collection of plants, some of which come from Leopold II’s original collection. The current planting pattern is true to the spirit of the original.

Leopold loved Ostend, as his father had. During his reign the city grew into a fashionable seaside resort. Together with the King, Belgium’s “beau monde” flocked to Ostend, and the city’s reputation spread far and wide. Today, sadly, only a handful of its architectural treasures are still standing.

**Personal history**

Leopold II was born on 9 April 1835. He was only fifteen when his mother died and he suffered greatly from this loss. On his eighteenth birthday he married Archduchess Marie-Henriette, granddaughter of the Emperor of Austria. The marriage was celebrated in Austria on 10 August 1853. It was a marriage ‘by proxy’, and two weeks later the couple married again in Brussels.

The royal couple had four children: three girls and a boy, Leopold. He was the apple of his father’s eye, as it was he who would continue the dynastic line. But after falling into a pond at Laken the young prince developed pneumonia and died at the age of ten, leaving King Leopold II inconsolable.

Queen Marie-Henriette was more popular among the people than her husband. Her enthusiastic participation in army exercises on horseback won her the admiration of many. At the end of her life she retreated to Spa, occupying the Villa Henriette, where she died in 1902. Leopold II died in 1909, as a result of a brain haemorrhage. The 74-year-old king was given a state funeral, despite his wish to be buried quietly.

In 1902 King Leopold II almost fell victim to an assassination attempt. When he was travelling to the cathedral in Brussels to attend a commemorative mass in memory of his late consort Queen Marie-Henriette, the anarchist Rubino fired two bullets at the royal cortege. The King was not hit and remained perfectly calm. There were no victims and only the Chief Field Marshal’s carriage was hit.
King Albert I (1909-1934) and Queen Elisabeth

"A country that defends itself compels admiration. This country cannot go down."

King Albert I, during his speech in Parliament on 4 August 1914.

A turbulent start to the 20th century

As Leopold II did not have any sons, he was succeeded on 23 December 1909 by his nephew Albert, son of Prince Philippe, the Count of Flanders. The new King took the oath in Dutch as well as in French, and in his speech from the throne, championed cultural regeneration and social justice.

The new King Albert I and Queen Elisabeth had been popular among the Belgians for some time already, but that popularity did not prevent the third King of the Belgians from being promptly confronted with the issue of growing Flemish consciousness. After the Equality of Languages Act (1898) was approved, the Flemish Movement focused its demands on education. It was working hard to make the State University of Ghent a Dutch-speaking establishment, and from 1910 it waged campaigns to enforce this reform. As a counterpart to the Flemish Movement, regional awareness also grew in Wallonia. Even so, domestic issues were soon supplanted by an international conflict that would have Europe in its grip.

La Première Guerre mondiale (1914-1918)

After unification of Germany in 1871 the country had become a European superpower, a development that increased the antagonisms between France and Germany. After visits to both countries in 1913 King Albert was well aware of these tensions. Belgium was a neutral country and the King wished to maintain that position. However, he remained vigilant. On his return he urged that compulsory military service be introduced for men, and a law to this end was approved that same year (1913).

Meanwhile tensions were also growing in the Balkans. Austria-Hungary and Russia wanted to increase their influence, whilst nationalist sentiment was also on the rise in the Balkan states themselves. On 28 June 1914, the heir to the Austrian throne Franz-Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo by a Serbian student. This attack was the fuse that lit the powder keg. The ensuing war between Austria and Serbia grew into "the Great War", which would later come to be known as the First World War.

On 31 July 1914, after Germany’s ultimatum to France and Russia, the general mobilisation of the Belgian army was announced, although it was expressly reiterated that Belgium’s stance was one of neutrality. On 2 August King Albert I assumed his responsibilities as commander-in-chief of the armed forces, and hours later Germany invaded Belgium with an ultimatum. This was immediately rejected by the Council of Ministers and the Crown Council, and on the morning of 4 August German troops invaded Belgium. Events then followed in very quick succession. After the heroic resistance of the Liège forts and the fortress in Antwerp, the King and the army took up positions along the Yser on 15 October. Here bloody fighting broke out on 18 October, recorded in history as the Battle of the river Yser. With the help of a lockkeeper, the Belgian army flooded the Yser plain and thereby brought the German advance to a halt.

The Belgian army held out for four years. The front line ran from Lombardsijde up to the French border near Armentières. In the summer of 1918 there was a change of fortune and the autumn of that year saw a major Allied offensive, in which the King actively took command of the "Flanders" battalion. On 11 November 1918 the combatants laid down their arms.

From a political point of view, the situation was unique in Belgian history. The government had withdrawn to Sainte-Adresse near Le Havre, in the unoccupied part of France. The King, on the other hand, had remained with his family in De Panne, near his troops behind the Yser Line, for four years. For this reason, the King came to be known, even in the war, as the "Knight King" and the "Soldier King".

During the war the government and the King exercised power through statutory orders. To avoid domestic problems after the war, Liberal and Socialist MPs were included in the wartime government.
The Flemish Movement during the war
On the Yser Front a movement of Flemish intellectuals came into being (the “Front Movement”) which opposed the predominant use of French in the Belgian army. Communication between the chiefly French-speaking army command and the Flemish soldiers was poor. At the same time a radical wing of the Flemish Movement made overtures to the occupying forces with a view to achieving these reforms in this way. These ‘Activists’, as they were known, tried to exact a number of Flemish demands. After the war, both the Front Movement and Activism led to the founding of the Flemish National Front Party.

Shortly after the armistice in 1918 the King held an audience with a group of representatives of the country’s various political viewpoints at the castle of Loppem. Here “the Loppem government” was formed – a coalition government bringing together Catholics, Liberals and Socialists.

Reconstruction
When King Albert I returned to Brussels with his family after the war, tens of thousands of his compatriots turned out to greet him and cheer him as a hero. The King realised that his people had suffered dreadfully during the war, and on 22 November 1918, during the King’s address in Parliament, he made a number of ‘royal pledges’:

- the introduction of universal suffrage for men, in the form of one man one vote
- equal status for the country’s two national languages
- trade union freedoms
- the extension of social legislation
- university education in Dutch in Flanders

In the ensuing years these pledges were acted upon. Working time was limited to eight hours a day in 1921, and the University of Ghent became partly Dutch-speaking in 1930.

After the ‘Great War’ nothing seemed to be the same. Economically, these were difficult years and there were important developments in the political arena, too. Two new political parties were created: the Front Party and the Communist Party. In addition, the introduction of the system of one man one vote for men substantially increased the size of the electorate, resulting in the Belgian Workers Party becoming the second largest party in Belgium. Even so, due to his conduct during the war, the King was held in very high regard both in Belgium and abroad.

A major concern of the King after the war was the country’s reconstruction. In order to make sure that people had homes, the Cheap Housing Company was set up. The economy was given a boost with the creation of the Société Nationale de Crédit à l’Industrie (NMKN in Dutch, National Credit Company for Industry), and the battered transport network was also repaired.

Spurred on by King Albert I, science was also given a boost.

In 1927 the King made a remarkable speech in the Cockerill factories in Seraing.

“Belgium’s scientific and learned institutions and laboratories are in real crisis.

The initiatives taken by our industrialists and financiers coupled with our engineers’ skill and our workers’ ability will ensure that all obstacles are removed.”

A year later the National Fund for Scientific Research was set up under the chairmanship of Emile Francqui, with the support of the wealthy Solvay family and Belgium’s major banks.

The prestigious Francqui Prize of €150,000 is still awarded every year to an outstanding young Belgian scientist.
A strong queen at the side of a strong king

Fate played a major role in the life of King Albert I. He was born on 8 April 1875, the fifth child of Prince Philippe, the Count of Flanders, and Princess Maria von Hohenzollern. No one at the time could have guessed that Albert would one day be King. After the death of his only son Leopold, Leopold II had no direct heir to the throne. The next in line were Leopold’s brother Philippe and the latter’s eldest son Baudouin, but both died during Leopold II’s lifetime. So Albert, Prince Philippe’s youngest son, became the heir apparent. In 1890 Leopold II himself presented his nephew when the latter entered the Royal Military Academy.

In October 1900 Albert married Princess Elisabeth, duchess of Bavaria. It was the first time a Belgian King had married for love rather than out of diplomatic considerations. Although they had very different personalities, Albert and Elisabeth had the same interests and complemented each other perfectly. They had three children: heir apparent Prince Leopold (1901-1983), Prince Charles (1903-1983) and Princess Marie-José (1906-2001).

In 1906, while still Prince, Albert I set up the Ibis Institute which was both a school and a home for the children of fishermen (fishermen being the most impoverished social class at the time). The school also had a vessel of the same name. The Ibis Royal Work still exists and has given a home and an education to almost two thousand children since it was created.

King Albert was a keen traveller. He was the first Belgian King to visit the Belgian Congo. In 1898 he spent a month travelling around the United States, and in 1920 the royal couple travelled to Brazil. In Belgium, Albert liked to travel incognito. On such occasions, he would sometimes stop in at a local inn and chat to the often unsuspecting locals.

The King was also a mountaineer, a passion that would ultimately cost him his life. On 17 February 1934, after his daily duties, the King went for a quick climb in the Ardennes, but fell to his death from the rocks at Marche-les-Dames. The Monarch’s funeral ceremony was the first major live radio broadcast transmitted by the recently established public broadcasting company, INR/NIR. Thousands of people heard the sound of the horses’ hooves on the cobblestones as the hearse was pulled along. King Albert had been one of the earliest advocates on mainland Europe of what at that time was still regarded as an amazing medium. It was no coincidence that the very first radio broadcast in Belgium had been transmitted from the royal domain in Laken.

Albert’s widow, Queen Elisabeth, was to outlive her husband by 31 years. A year after the King’s death, a fatal accident claimed the life of her daughter-in-law, Queen Astrid. This course of events left Elisabeth in a state of depression, but it was not too long before she recovered her strong personality of old. Indeed, she was a great support to her son Leopold and his three children who had lost their mother at such an early age.

Queen Elisabeth would go down in history as the artistically minded and strong-willed Queen who had contact with all sections of the population. Despite her German origins, she resolutely sided with her new Belgian countrymen and women during the First World War. Behind the Yser she supported initiatives to help wounded soldiers, one of which was the creation of L’Océan, an extremely modern hospital for the time. Here she paid numerous visits to soldiers and continued to devote herself to the disabled veterans’ cause even after the war. Never before had a royal couple enjoyed such great popularity in Belgium.

Elisabeth was an intellectual and extremely enthusiastic Queen. In the context of her interest in Egyptology and her contacts with the Egyptologist Jean Capart, she travelled to Egypt, where she was present at the opening of the tomb of Tutankhamen. In 1925 she travelled to India, after which she became engrossed in yoga. Legendary scientists Albert Einstein and Albert Schweitzer and the Catalan cellist Pablo Casals were among her close circle of friends. Later she would be labelled the “Red Queen” because she refused to be lectured to by the political establishment. During the Cold War she travelled to countries such as the Soviet Union and China. Conventions and protocol were anathema to her. Queen Elisabeth was an excellent painter and sculptor and a gifted violinist. Indeed, she was not afraid to play alongside the very greatest musicians of her time.
King Leopold III (1934-1950) and Queen Astrid

"Preservation of national independence and inviolability of the territory are intrinsic to maintaining national unity. An indivisible and autonomous Belgium is the historical factor that is decisive for the balance of power in Europe."

King Leopold III during his taking of the oath on 23 February 1934.

Crisis on all fronts

On 23 February 1934, King Leopold III took the oath as the fourth king of the Belgians. His reign was to be short and marked by testing times. The hardest blow of all, however, came less than two years into his reign. In 1935 Queen Astrid was killed in a car crash, leaving the King on his own with three young children. The period also witnessed a far-reaching economic and political crisis.

On 25 March 1935 a government of national unity (Catholic-Socialist-Liberal) was formed under Paul Van Zeeland. An economic crisis was causing havoc worldwide, and the government was forced to carry through a drastic financial and economic programme. On the political scene, too, the parliamentary system was rocked by a severe crisis between 1936 and 1940. Four successive governments announced major reforms, but were unable to turn the tide. The major influence that the financial sector exerted over political life also played a role in this.

The advance of the Right

The economic crisis led to right-wing ideologies gaining supporters all over the world. Mussolini and Hitler came to power in Italy and Germany, respectively, and extreme right-wing parties also surfaced in Belgium. Two political groups that had strengthened their representation in parliament in the 1936 elections were able to capitalise on the economic malaise: Rex

Songbirds in Laken:

Queen Elisabeth also heard music in birdsong. In 1952 she had a recording made of the singing of the birds at Laken. In the preface of the book accompanying the record, she wrote the following words:

"Of all that is beautiful and lovely in our world, there is probably nothing more moving than the singing of birds."

In 2006 the records were re-published in digitally remastered format.

The Queen Elizabeth Competition

Music was the keyword in the life of Queen Elisabeth. The Queen Consort was the driving force behind the music competition that was named in honour of the Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe.

This competition, which has borne her name since 1951, is still the most prestigious music competition for classically trained young musicians.
was a movement that had its origins in Wallonia and aimed to reform the state on a corporatist basis, whilst the Flemish Nationalist Alliance (VNV) continued to emphasise the contrasts between Flanders and Wallonia in its manifesto. Both movements extolled the advent for of a totalitarian state, and would subsequently collaborate with the Nazi regime during the Second World War.

The world at war
Like his father, King Leopold III also became involved in a world war reluctantly. The situation was clear as early as 1936: the Locarno Pact ended in failure and the League of Nations was unable to prevent German rearmament. The King gave a speech in which he defended an “independent Belgian foreign policy”. By loosening the ties with France and Great Britain, the King and the government hoped that the country could evade the threat posed by Germany. In 1938 and 1939 King Leopold, together with Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, took a number of initiatives to maintain peace in Europe, but were unsuccessful.

On 1 September 1939 Germany invaded Poland. This marked the beginning of a series of invasions that would later become known as the “Blitzkrieg”. World War II broke out and the German advance was unstoppable.

On 10 May 1940 Nazi Germany invaded Belgium. Leopold evacuated his children to France and Spain while taking supreme command himself of the armed forces. The armed forces fought an unequal fight, and there was a high toll of victims, including civilians. The population fled in droves. On 27 May General Michiels told the king that “the army has reached the extreme limit of its possibilities”. In an area of barely 2,000 square kilometres, more than two million civilians and soldiers were hopelessly surrounded.

King Leopold III realised that to go on fighting would mean even more casualties, and saw no choice other than unconditional surrender.

The Pierlot government, which had withdrawn to France, did not agree. They had wanted the King to leave the country after the surprise German attack and continue the struggle from abroad, as Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands had done. But King Leopold wanted to stay with his soldiers. This difference of opinion between the King and the government was partly at the root of the “Royal Question” that led to the King’s abdication in 1951.

King of an occupied country
After the surrender, King Leopold regarded himself as a prisoner of war. He withdrew to the Castle of Laken with his family, where he would live in isolation for four years under German guard. From 1940 until July 1944, Belgium was under German military rule. A resistance movement was organised in various places in the country with its principal aim to sabotage the German occupation. In contrast, a small minority, in particular from pre-war parties such as the VNV and Rex, collaborated with the occupying power.

After initially fleeing to France, the government moved to Great Britain, where a number of ministers formed a government in exile.

Because the King found himself unable to reign, the government took on full executive and legislative powers, entirely in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

In Belgium the King supported the foundation of various social works. In November 1940 Leopold held talks with Hitler in the latter’s residence in Berchtesgaden. He tried in vain to secure some concessions from Hitler, such as a declaration guaranteeing Belgium’s independence, the freeing of prisoners of war and better food supplies. However, these entreaties fell on deaf ears. Only a few people were aware of this meeting, but it was subsequently to count heavily against the King.

A private matter attracted more criticism in some circles: in 1941 the King discreetly remarried. His new bride was Lilian Baels, daughter of the provincial governor of West Flanders. It was a morganatic marriage, meaning that Lilian would not be given the title of Queen, taking instead the title “Princess of Réthy”, and that children from the marriage could claim no right to the throne.

The Royal Question
On the day of the Allied Landings in Normandy, which took place on 6 June 1944, the King had to leave the Castle of Laken and, with his family, was deported by the German army. The Royal Family were first taken to Hirschstein in Germany, where they were watched over day and night by the SS. They were then taken to Strobl in Austria.

There they were liberated by the US army on 7 May 1945. Belgium had already been liberated in September 1944. However, once liberated, the King could not return to Belgium due to opposition from the government and part of the population. Unwillingly,
he took up residence at the Chateau le Reposoir in Pregny, Switzerland. Severe criticism of the King was voiced, mainly in Wallonia and among the Flemish Socialists, indeed, the Socialists called for the King to step down. The King wanted the people to decide, so on 12 March 1950 a referendum was held on whether the King should return or not: 57.68% voted in favour of his return. In Flanders, this figure was 72%, as against 48% in Brussels and 42% in Wallonia.

On 20 July 1950, the joint session of the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament ruled that the Leopold III’s incapacity to rule had come to an end. On 22 July 1950 the King returned to Belgium with his family. However, severe disturbances broke out and in Grâce-Berleur (Liège) a demonstration ended in four deaths. The country was on the verge of civil war. On 11 August 1950, the King therefore decided to step aside for his son Baudouin. On 16 July 1951 Leopold III abdicated.

**Family happiness and sorrow in war time**

It was anything but an easy task for King Leopold III to follow in the footsteps of his father, the Knight-King. The eldest son of King Albert I and Queen Elisabeth was born on 3 November 1901. When his father Albert succeeded King Leopold II in 1909, Leopold received the title of Duke of Brabant. When war broke out in 1914, the thirteen-year-old crown Prince was sent to Great Britain with his brother Charles, sister Marie-José and their mother. The Queen soon returned to Belgium to support the King in that difficult period while the Princes remained in Great Britain to study, with Leopold going to Eton College. After the war he continued his education in Brussels, where he studied at the Royal Military Academy and received private tuition from prominent figures such as Henri and Jacques Pirenne, Cardinal Mercier and the Flemish writer, Herman Teirlinck.

His bride was the Swedish Princess Astrid, the third daughter of Prince Carl and Princess Ingeborg of Sweden. In 1925 Queen Elisabeth travelled incognito to Sweden with her son Leopold to visit Astrid’s parents. Thereafter Leopold travelled to Sweden several times under the name “Mr Philip”. He was infatuated with the charming Princess and her spontaneous character. She hesitated slightly before saying “yes”, for her future duties as Queen Consort frightened her. Nevertheless a marriage ensued – and one based on love. When King Albert I announced the engagement of his eldest son Leopold to the Swedish Princess, Queen Elisabeth proudly added that the couple were getting married “because they are very fond of each other”.

Upon her arrival, the young Princess Astrid promptly stole the nation’s hearts when she fondly flew into her future husband’s arms as such an expression of human feelings had never before been seen in royal circles. After a civil ceremony in Stockholm on 4 November, the couple were married in church in Brussels on 10 November 1926. A year later their first daughter, Joséphine-Charlotte, was born. She would subsequently become Grand Duchess of Luxembourg, after marrying Grand Duke Jean.

In 1930 there was great joy when, after Joséphine-Charlotte, an heir to the throne was born: the future King Baudouin. In the same year, Astrid converted to Catholicism. Princess Astrid was five months pregnant with her third child when her husband unexpectedly succeeded his father. On 6 June 1934 the current King Albert II was born.

During the early years of their marriage, Prince Leopold and Princess Astrid went on long trips to the Dutch East Indies, Southeast Asia and Congo. The harsh abuses in the Belgian colony distressed the Prince to the point that on his return he delivered a remarkable speech on the subject in Parliament when he insisted that the moral and material situation of the indigenous population was not improving quickly enough.

Queen Astrid also took her duties very seriously and devoted herself to social work during the crisis prevailing at the time. In 1935 she launched the ‘Queen’s Appeal’ whereby she opened the former residence of Bellevue to collect clothes and food parcels.

In August 1935 Queen Astrid lost her life in a car crash in Küssnacht, Switzerland. Her death sent a great shock through the country and caused a major outpouring of grief, with two million people coming to pay their final respects.

She had been dearly loved. Her motto had always been: “The King speaks to the people; the Queen listens to the people.” Astrid left three young children. Joséphine-Charlotte was just nine, Baudouin not yet five and Albert fourteen months old when they lost their mother. In 1941 the King took a second wife, Lilian Baels, and they had three children: Prince Alexander (1942) and after the war, Princess
Marie-Christine (1951) and Princess Marie-Esmeralda (1956). After his abdication, King Leopold led a life away from the limelight. In 1960, after King Baudouin’s marriage to Doña Fabiola, he and his family moved from the Castle of Laken to the domain of Argenteuil in Waterloo. He continued to travel widely and became known as an amateur film maker and photographer. King Leopold III died on 25 September 1983. Princess Lilian died on 7 June 2002.

Prince Charles, regent of Belgium (1944-1950)

“As a member of the Royal Family I, together with this family, am at the service of the Nation. It is with this in mind that I have answered the appeal that has been made to me and have received the temporary custody of the constitutional power that the Country has bestowed upon me through you”.

Prince Charles on accepting the regency on 21 September 1944.

In the service of the Nation

When the government returned from Great Britain on 8 September 1944, after Belgium’s liberation, the King was not in the country. In June of that year he and his family had been deported by the retreating German troops. In order to ensure the continuity of the Belgian monarchy, Parliament decided to appoint Charles, the King’s only brother, to the post of regent. Charles took the constitutional oath in Parliament on 21 September 1944. In his speech he indicated that he regarded his task as very temporary and was only ruling pending the return of his brother, in whom constitutional power lay. Nevertheless, his regency was to last six years, until 20 July 1950, during which time his duty consisted of exercising the royal prerogatives as long as the King was unable to rule.

Charles, Count of Flanders, thus became the second regent in Belgian history. Although Charles and Leopold did not always see eye to eye, Charles performed his constitutional duty very loyally.

Belgium in the world

Internationally this was a time of milestones. In 1944 Benelux was founded by Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. This was the initial seed of the current European Union. There was also a break with Belgium’s traditional neutrality: in 1945 Belgium joined the United Nations and in 1948 the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, NATO.

In 1947 the Prince Regent paid a visit to Congo. In his speech he emphasised the ties between Belgium and Congo, and thanked the colony for the war efforts on the side of France and Great Britain and for the Congolese faithfulness to the Allied cause.

Reconstruction

The postwar period in Belgium was largely dominated by the Royal Question. During the six-year regency period, Belgium had no fewer than nine governments, but the economy revived nonetheless. This was thanks in part to a far-reaching monetary operation carried through by minister Gutt in October 1944. Coal mining boomed. On the international front, Belgium received support from the United States under the Marshall Plan and Belgians who had suffered materially were given grants to build cheap houses. It was also at this time that the present-day social-security system came into being. One particularly important new development was the introduction of voting rights for women in 1948. The problems between the communities took a back seat during this period, although they were never far away.
The Prince of Raversijde

Prince Charles was born on 10 October 1903, the second son of King Albert I and Queen Elisabeth. He was given the title of Count of Flanders. From early childhood, Prince Charles was in the shadow of his elder brother Leopold. During the Second World War the Prince showed great concern for the lot of prisoners of war and their families, giving financial support to the relief organisation for prisoners of war and maintaining contacts with people from resistance organisations.

When King Leopold and his family were deported in June 1944, Prince Charles was able to go into hiding. After Leopold’s return in 1950 he disappeared from public view and his relationship with his brother soon worsened. He retired to the domain of Raversijde, near Ostend. There he spent most of his time painting, a talent he had inherited from his mother, Queen Elisabeth. Prince Charles never married. He died on 1 June 1983, a few months before his brother Leopold.

King Baudouin (1950-1993) and Queen Fabiola

“The union of all forces in the country and the mutual understanding of our two national cultures will enable the continuous development of Belgium’s material and moral heritage.”

King Baudouin at his taking of the oath on 17 July 1951.

His youth, taking of the oath and the first years of his reign

Baudouin, the elder son of the then Crown Prince Leopold and Princess Astrid, was born on 7 September 1930. He had an elder sister, Joséphine-Charlotte, who was three years his senior. His brother Albert was born four years later. Baudouin’s mother, Queen Astrid, died in 1935 and his governess later revealed how traumatised the young prince was at his mother’s sudden death.

Baudouin was only ten when the Second World War broke out, an event that was to completely disrupt his education and that of his sister and brother. Although they did not suffer any deprivation, they did endure some difficult moments during their deportation to Germany and then to Austria in 1944. The attitude that many Belgians adopted towards his father during the Royal Question was also a traumatising experience for Baudouin. After his father’s abdication, having to take over as King at the age of just twenty was not easy for him for many reasons.

On 17 July 1951, the 20-year-old Baudouin officially became the fifth King of the Belgians. King Leopold III had already stepped aside on 11 August 1950 and in that intervening period Baudouin had been ‘Prince Royal’.

Whilst he was taking the oath someone shouted ‘Long Live the Republic.’
During the first few years of Baudouin’s reign, Leopold III was his closest advisor. But as time went by, and in particular after his marriage, the King’s self-confidence grew. During Baudouin’s reign Europe did not suffer any wars, but these were turbulent and difficult times both at home and abroad, and a period that saw great changes.

End of the colonial era
Congo gained independence on 30 June 1960, and since then Belgium’s relations with its former colony have not always been easy. During the independence ceremony King Baudouin said:

“My country and I recognise with pleasure and poignancy that Congo today gains its independence and international sovereignty, with Belgium’s full agreement and friendship. May God protect Congo”.

Next to speak was the Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, who criticised Belgium’s colonial policy.

Not long after that severe disturbances broke out in Congo, with a number of our fellow countrymen being killed or assaulted. Many Belgians were forced to leave the country. Belgium entertained reasonably good relations with President Joseph-Désiré Mobutu for several years, but in time they became strained and the Belgian government was forced to distance itself from the policy being pursued in Congo. When King Baudouin died in 1993, President Mobutu was not invited to the funeral. Nevertheless, in a context of cooperation and development, the Belgian government has always worked, with many private organisations, to improve the lot of the Congolese people.

School Pact
Between 1950 and 1954 the country was governed by homogeneous Christian-Democratic governments.

In 1952 a law was approved that provided for substantial financing of private education, which was chiefly in Catholic hands. This sparked strong protests from the opposition parties, which championed state education.

After the 1954 elections a coalition of Socialists and Liberals was formed. This Van Acker government radically changed the previous Education Act and financed the building of state schools, leading in turn to protests in Catholic circles. The second schools war raged until 1958, when agreement was reached in the form of the “School Pact”.

The consequences of the general strikes
The King was on his honeymoon in Spain at the end of 1960 when he abruptly had to return as a result of the general strike announced by the Socialist trade unions in protest at the Eyskens government’s Unity Act.

This Act made provision for an ambitious economic programme, but also involved draconian austerity measures. There were riots and disturbances, mainly in Wallonia, as the conflict between the language communities flared up for real for the first time.

This would remain a constant feature of King Baudouin’s reign.

The emergence of a federal Belgium
Regional parties entered the Belgian Parliament: the Volksunie in Flanders, the Rassemblement Wallon in Wallonia and the Front Démocratique des Francophones in Brussels. In an attempt to adopt an overall approach to the problems, the government abolished the linguistic census in 1961, meaning the authorities could no longer register the language people spoke. Later the linguistic boundary between Flanders and Wallonia was demarcated, and laws were passed on the language system in schools and the use of language in administrative matters.

In 1966 these directives gave rise to a dispute over the French-speaking department of the Catholic University of Leuven. In Flemish circles, people were pressing for this department to be transferred to Wallonia. This decision was finally taken in 1968, when Leuven University was split and two new universities came into being, each with their own legal personality. The “Katholieke Universiteit Leuven” remained in Leuven, whilst the “Université Catholique de Louvain” moved to Ottignies - Louvain-la-Neuve.

The conflicting views and interests of Flemings and Walloons also had repercussions on the structure of the traditional parties. Gradually they split into autonomous Flemish and French-speaking parties, which adopted divergent standpoints, in particular when it came to the language issue.
Four State reforms

Four State reforms took place during the reign of King Baudouin.

Article 1 of the Constitution states that Belgium is a federal state, made up of Communities and Regions. This happened in various steps and means that the Federation consists of two kinds of institutions with their own powers, the territories of which overlap, to a large degree, although not entirely.

The federal government consists of the federal legislative branch, the federal executive branch and the judiciary. Federal legislative power is the joint authority of the King, the House of Representatives and the Senate (Article 36 of the Constitution). The power of the federal executive is exercised by the King: here “the King” means “the Sovereign acting under the responsibility of his ministers”. The power of the judiciary is exercised by the courts and tribunals.

The powers of the former unitary state of Belgium have been divided between the Federal Authority and the Regions and Communities. Alongside the Federal Authority, the three Regions and the three Communities have their own exclusive areas of competence, the Communities within allocated matters (competence ratione materiae), and the Regions within an allocated territory (competence ratione loci).

The redistributions of the powers were along two main lines. The first relates to language and, more broadly, everything relating to culture. This led to the creation of the Communities. The concept of “Community” refers to the people making up such a community and the ties uniting these people, i.e. their language and culture. This explains why the country has three official languages, Dutch, French and German, and three Communities, the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-speaking Community. These Communities correspond to the population groups.

The second line of the State reform was historically prompted by economic interests. The Regions made it known that they were striving for greater economic autonomy. This gave rise to three Regions: the Flemish Region, the Brussels Capital Region and the Walloon Region. Up to a point, these can be compared to the States in the USA or the German “Länder”.

The Flemish Community and Flemish Region together have one parliament and one government. The French Community, the German-speaking Community, the Brussels Capital Region and the Walloon Region each have their own separate parliament and government.
The first State reform of 1970
In 1970 there was, as yet, no intention to turn Belgium into a federal state. The aim at this time was mainly to find solutions to the language problems. Therefore a new balance in the national institutions was sought. Cultural communities were established – the predecessors of the Communities – whose powers were mainly in respect of culture-related matters such as education and linguistic legislation. The Regions were included in the Constitution at this point, although for the time being they were not granted any powers.

The second State reform of 1980
The Egmont Pact and the Stuyvenberg Agreements (1977-1978) constituted attempts to come to an overall settlement for the “Community Question”, i.e. relations between the linguistic communities. But no arrangement proved to be acceptable to both Flanders and Wallonia. The King expressed his concern over the matter in various speeches. But the trend towards more wide-ranging regional powers was irreversible.

In 1980 the Martens government oversaw the second State reform, which involved the establishment of the Regions and Communities. To solve any conflicts, the Court of Arbitration was created in 1984. This became the Constitutional Court in 2007.

The third State reform of 1988-1989
The worldwide economic crisis led to the Community problems being put to one side but at the end of the 1980s they rose to prominence again. Under the third State reform, during the Christian Democratic–Socialist government of Wilfried Martens, the powers of the regional entities were widened. The Communities’ areas of competence were extended to include education. The Court of Arbitration (later to become the Constitutional Court) was given greater powers. An agreement was also reached on the establishment and organisation of the Brussels Capital Region.

The fourth State reform of 1993
The signing of the Saint Michael Agreement in September 1992 saw the State reform worked out in greater detail – Belgium officially became a federal state. Changes were made at national level, such as the composition of the Senate. Thereafter, the Communities and Regions were given still wider powers. The province of Brabant was split into two provinces: Walloon Brabant and Flemish Brabant. The Saint Michael Agreement was implemented in 1993.

“A new and important change to our political structures has just been added to those which have been started and pursued since 1970”.

King Baudewijn died a few days later. During the reign of his successor King Albert II, there has, meanwhile, been a fifth State reform.

Belgium in Europe
Shortly after Baudouin’s accession to the throne, Belgium was one of the driving forces behind European integration, which led to the current European Union. On 18 April 1951 the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was set up by Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands under the Treaty of Paris. On 1 January 1958 the European Economic Community (EEC) came into being, pursuant to the Treaty of Rome in 1957. On each occasion Belgium was one of the pioneers in European integration, due in part to the efforts of the politician Paul-Henri Spaak. European integration was gradually expanded in the following years and decades. The Merger Treaty of 1965 installed a joint European Commission and European Council for the EEC, ECSC and Euratom. The powers were systematically extended with, among other things, a common agricultural policy. New Member States joined.

In 1992 the Treaty of Maastricht was signed, under the terms of which major decisions were taken for the unification of Europe. National frontiers disappeared and it was agreed that a start should be made on European Monetary Union. On 1 January 2002 the euro was simultaneously introduced in 12 countries of the European Union, resulting in the largest currency conversion ever.

In 2007 the heads of state and government approved the Treaty of Lisbon, which contained radical reforms and a draft European constitution. Belgian politicians played an important role in all the steps taken towards integration. King Baudouin and King Albert II also repeatedly argued in favour of European cooperation in their speeches.

Ruling with moral authority
Baudouin was King for 43 years and was the longest reigning Sovereign in Europe when he died. As his reign progressed, he revealed himself to be a Head of State with great moral authority. During his reign he saw countless governments come and go, and thus acquired considerable political experience. His many speeches also clearly illustrated his social conscience and his sense of justice and peace. He was called “the nation’s conscience”, and was held in high regard on the international stage.
A loving King and Queen
The Belgians were jubilant when Prime Minister Eyskens announced on the radio that the King was to marry Spain’s Doña Fabiola de Mora y Aragón. On 15 December 1960, the entire ceremony was broadcast live on television.

After the marriage of his son Baudouin, King Leopold and his family moved to the castle of Argenteuil. Queen Fabiola quickly became popular, since it was clear she made the King happy. To their great sorrow, King Baudouin and Queen Fabiola did not have any children, and so always invited large numbers of nephews and nieces to the Castle of Laken. The royal couple travelled extensively; they were both inquisitive and wanted to learn about many cultures. Baudouin was also a great lover of nature.

King Baudouin and Queen Fabiola were an especially harmonious couple, complementing each other perfectly. Baudouin, who was particularly marked by the dramatic events in his youth, blossomed in the presence of the spontaneous and cheerful Fabiola.

King Baudouin’s sudden demise
On 31 July 1993 the King unexpectedly suffered a heart attack that proved fatal. There was mass dismay among the people and tens of thousands turned out to bid the King farewell. The funeral ceremony on 7 August 1993 was historic. Queen Fabiola wanted hope to be the dominant theme at her husband’s funeral and therefore dressed in white. Since Baudouin was at that time one of the longest reigning monarchs, a considerable number of Heads of State came to pay their respects. The funeral included the reading of the moving testimony of a Filipino prostitute, to the amazement of some; one of the King’s many social commitments was his concern over the trade in human beings. The Walloon professor, Clumeck, spoke on behalf of AIDS patients, and singer, Will Tura, sang “Hoop doet leven” (Hope brings Life).

Godfathers and godmothers
The King and the Queen are traditionally godfather or godmother to any child born as the seventh son or daughter in a row. This royal favour is not granted automatically. Children from a non-Belgian family that has been resident in Belgium for a long time are also eligible. Baudouin had 679 godchildren, and Fabiola 260. The godchildren often bore the name of their godparent. About 70 godchildren still meet regularly and so there have been cases of a Baudouin marrying a Fabiola.

The "King Baudouin Foundation"
On the occasion of his silver jubilee in 1976, King Baudouin decided to use the funds the population had given him to set up a foundation that would bear his name. This bears the motto “Working together for a better society”. The “King Baudouin Foundation” is independent and pluralist, and is active in wide-ranging areas of society. It focuses on the long term and aims to be a catalyst for new ideas. The main themes are solidarity, sense of citizenship, environment, cultural heritage and concern for the future. It also develops the international – and in particular European – dimension of the projects. Various foundations of other members of the royal family are also housed under the umbrella of the King Baudouin Foundation.

Website: www.kbs-frb.be

The day King Baudouin did not reign
In April 1990 Parliament had approved a law allowing abortion in certain circumstances. The King told Prime Minister Martens that he was unable to ratify the law as a matter of conscience. On the basis of Article 82 (now Article 93) of the Constitution, the council of ministers decided that the King was unable to rule, a situation in which the Council of Ministers exercises the King’s constitutional powers. This occurred on 3 April 1990. Two days later Parliament decided that the King’s incapacity to rule was over, meaning the King could resume his constitutional duties.
Queen Fabiola today

Queen Fabiola has been extremely popular with the Belgians ever since she arrived in Belgium in December 1960. Although a Queen does not have any constitutional duty in Belgium, Fabiola indisputably left her mark on the reign of her husband, King Baudouin. It was clear that Queen Fabiola supported the King and brought him happiness. In addition, the Queen has also provided tangible support to a great many ordinary Belgians. Through the agency of her social secretariat, she has given financial or material assistance to thousands of people, and many cultural initiatives have also been able to count on the Queen’s support. Nevertheless, she was, above all, a pillar of strength for the King, and the Belgian people are still deeply grateful to her for that.

The memory of King Baudouin

“Having been able to see and hear him, in sickness and in health, in sorrow and in great joy, every day of the thirty-three years we spent together – this is something that has made me grow. For me he remains a unique gift, today, tomorrow and forever”.

Queen Fabiola in a letter to the people, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the death of King Baudouin in 2003.

Social commitment

Queen Fabiola went through a difficult period after her husband’s death, but her social commitments helped her cope with her grief. She picked up the threads of her life and continued to devote herself to social and cultural causes.

She assumed the honorary chairmanship of the King Baudouin Foundation, for example, enabling the foundation to expand further. In October 2004 the Queen Fabiola Mental Health Fund was created as part of the King Baudouin Foundation. This fund continues the work performed by the former Queen Fabiola Foundation, in which the Queen has been actively involved for over forty years.

The Queen Fabiola Assistance Fund, a non-profit-making organisation, backs various social projects that serve as an example to others. This gives her the chance to give help to people in need, as she had always done before. In recent years the Queen has also been actively involved in research programmes for the prevention and treatment of dyslexia among young children.

Website: www.kbs-frb.be

Queen Fabiola is also still active internationally. From 1992 to the beginning of 2000 she played an active role in the International Steering Group for Economic Progress for Rural Women (ISG). In support of this project, Queen Fabiola undertook trips and gave several speeches. In 1997 the ISG acquired an advisory role at the UN.

A passion for the arts

The Queen has always encouraged cultural life in Belgium and is passionate about art and culture. In her youth, Fabiola herself wrote “Twelve marvellous fairy tales”. Dance and music also enthral her. In 1965 she took over the role of patroness of the Queen Elisabeth Competition from Queen Elisabeth, and still performs her duties as honorary chairwoman with great enthusiasm.

Queen Fabiola is also patroness of the European Museum Forum. Every year she follows the conferences and presents the European Museum of the Year award. Her energy, sharp-wittedness and sense of humour are legendary.
7. KING ALBERT II AND QUEEN PAOLA

“I ask you to make good the new institutions and ensure that they work as well as possible in a spirit of togetherness and good will, of tolerance and federal public-mindedness. As collective selfishness takes disturbing forms throughout the world, let us show that men and women of different cultures can live together in harmony in the same country. There could be no greater homage to King Baudouin”.

King Albert II during his speech from the throne on 9 August 1993.

7.1 Albert II - a style of his own

Albert II is the first Belgian King to have taken the oath, in the Palace of the Nation, in the country’s three official languages: Dutch, French and German. His wife Paola and sister-in-law Queen Fabiola attended the ceremony, which was on 9 August 1993. His speech was greeted by the politicians with a standing ovation. There then followed a triumphal procession through the streets. In the ensuing months the new royal couple paid a series of celebratory royal visits to all the Belgian provinces.

King Albert’s style is very much his own. Whereas to a large degree he followed his brother’s policy in the early years of his reign, the current King has since gradually developed his own approach. The King is a jovial figure who likes to communicate, and is also very pleasant in his contacts with politicians.

The current King Albert was a fourteen-month-old baby when his mother died, a loss that marked his childhood. Together with his brother and sister, Albert was often allowed to accompany his father Leopold III on official occasions. Nonetheless, the young Prince was always in the shadow of his elder brother and heir apparent, Baudouin. The three princely children were very close to each other due to the challenges of their childhood, in particular the two brothers, Albert and Baudouin, who got on extremely well. Their shared enthusiasm for technology, cars and motorbikes is well known.

Although Prince Albert’s professional life was not in the spotlight, he was nonetheless very active in various areas. In 1959 he became chairman of the Belgian Red Cross. However, it was his work on behalf of the Belgian economy that was of primary importance. In his role as Honorary Chairman of the Belgian Office for Foreign Trade, he led more than a hundred trade missions from 1962. His status and social understanding have helped innumerable Belgian companies gain a foothold in foreign markets.

The “Prince Albert Fund”

In 1984 the “Prince Albert Fund” was created to mark Prince Albert’s 50th birthday and in recognition of the 25 years he had already spent working to promote Belgian exports. The Fund is an integral part of the “King Baudouin Foundation” and operates in cooperation with the Federation of Belgian Businesses. Every year the Fund awards fifteen grants to young Belgian graduates to enable them to go on a work placement in a Belgian company outside Western Europe. Since it was created, the Fund has supported more than 250 young managers and helped more than 100 Belgian companies promote their products and services abroad. Since 2001, part of the Fund’s activities has focused on the Chinese and Indian markets.

Website: www.prinsalbertfonds.be
7.2 Unforeseen crises

Albert II had only been head of state for a few months when ten Belgian paratroopers were killed at the beginning of the genocide in Rwanda. The Belgian UN peacekeepers were murdered on 7 April 1994, just hours after the presidential aeroplane of the then Rwandan President Habyarimana was shot down.

In the summer of 1996 a wave of indignation swept the country when details of the terrible deeds perpetrated by Marc Dutroux were revealed. The population mobilised en masse to express its dissatisfaction at the failings of the police and judicial authorities, and this movement culminated in the historic White March that saw more than 300,000 Belgians take to the streets of Brussels in a peaceful demonstration.

At the beginning of September 1996, King Albert and Queen Paola received the parents of the murdered and missing children. In mid-October a conference was held at the Royal Palace in Brussels in the presence of the victims’ parents, experts and policymakers. The King encouraged the judicial authorities to show greater empathy and prioritise a human approach in these cases.

Simultaneously a need was felt for an organisation that could take swift and well-coordinated action when cases of missing children were reported. This led to the creation of Child Focus in 1998.

7.3 King of a complex country

The formation of a new federal government is one of the Monarch’s most important political activities. The first governments during King Albert II’s reign were formed relatively quickly and easily. In 1995 the Christian-Democrats and Socialists formed their government under the leadership of Jean-Luc Dehaene. In 1999 a new government was in place just a few weeks after the elections: the rainbow government led by the Liberal, Guy Verhofstadt, with “rainbow” meaning a coalition of Liberals, Socialists and Greens. After the 2003 elections, a purple government (Liberal and Socialist) quickly emerged, again headed by Guy Verhofstadt. However, the results from the ballot boxes in 2007 led to deadlock in the political world, and the tensions between the country’s communities flared up again. After five months a government was formed under Guy Verhofstadt, who was succeeded after three months by the Christian-Democrat, Yves Leterme, as agreed.

For King Albert, keeping dialogue going in a period such as this is a delicate balancing act. The experienced Monarch has revealed himself to be a skilful mediator, who is held in esteem and high regard by the vast majority of politicians.

After the selection of Herman van Rompuy as permanent President of the Council of Europe, the King named Yves Leterme as Prime Minister again in November 2009.

7.4 The fifth State reform 2001-2003

The fifth State reform took place under the “purple-green” government. The Lambermont agreement transferred certain powers to the Communities and the Regions. In addition, the agreement provided for financing of the Communities and further tax-raising powers for the Regions. The “Lombard agreement” amended the functions of the Brussels institutions.
7.5 Queen Paola

On 12 April 1959 it was announced on the radio that Prince Albert was engaged to be married to the Italian Princess Paola Ruffo di Calabria. They had met during the enthronement of Pope John XXIII, in November 1958.

Paola was the youngest of the seven children of Prince Fulco Ruffo, who died when still young, and Princess Luisa Gazelli. The family descended from a very eminent South Italian family while her grandmother on her father’s side, Laura Mosselman du Chenoy, was a Belgian.

Baudouin called his future sister-in-law ‘the loveliest gift Italy could give Belgium’.

The marriage on 2 July 1959 was the media event of the year. Barely ten months later a first Prince, Philippe, was born, followed in 1962 by his sister Astrid and in 1963 by his brother Laurent.

Social engagement, art and nature

When her husband acceded to the throne, Queen Paola gradually devoted herself to matters that were especially close to her heart: social engagement, art and nature. With the Queen's Assistance Fund, support is given to citizens who are unable to meet their daily needs because of financial problems and who petition the Queen as a last resort. Through the "Queen Paola Foundation", the Queen promotes the integration and training of disadvantaged young people.

In 2002 the Queen also became honorary chairwoman of Child Focus, the organisation dedicated to the fight against child abuse and to finding missing children. As honorary chairwoman of Child Focus, the Queen has on numerous occasions used her influence together with other queens and presidents’ wives to build up an international network that aims to find missing children. The Queen is also a member of the Honorary Committee of the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC).

Queen Paola loves modern art and has given a number of contemporary artists the chance to leave their mark on the historic Royal Palace of Brussels. The most stunning work of art is Heaven of Delight, in which artist Jan Fabre covered the ceiling and central chandelier of the Hall of Mirrors with the wing cases of 1.4 million Thai jewel beetles. The spectacle that this affords and the magnificent display of colour are fascinating. At other places in the palace there are monochrome paintings by Marthe Wéry, minimalist portraits by photographer Dirk Braeckman and golden pots with glass flowers by Patrick Corillon.

The Queen also loves nature and is a keen gardener. She keeps a close eye on the replanting of various royal gardens and was also closely involved in the renovation of the royal greenhouses.

In addition, since 2008, the Queen has been honorary president of the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel.

The "Queen Paola Foundation"

The "Queen Paola Foundation" was set up in 1992 to promote the integration and training of disadvantaged young people. The foundation's best-known pillar is the Queen Paola Award for Education. Since 1997, a prize has been awarded every year to a teacher with an innovative project, with the laureates chosen by an independent jury. The award is presented alternately in primary and secondary education. The "School of Hope" supports projects in schools with pupils from underprivileged areas. The Foundation also gives financial support to organisations working for the integration of young people.

The income of the "Queen Paola Foundation" chiefly comes from gifts from private individuals, associations or companies, as well as financial support from the "King Baudouin Foundation".

Website: www.sk-fr-paola.be
8. The Children of King Albert and Queen Paola

The children of King Albert and Queen Paola, the heir apparent, Prince Philippe, Princess Astrid and Prince Laurent, each have their own activities and priorities. They are senators by right. Prince Philippe took the oath on 21 June 1994, Princess Astrid on 20 November 1996 and Prince Laurent on 31 May 2000.

8.1 The Duke and Duchess of Brabant

The Duke and Duchess of Brabant and their family

Prince Philippe was born in Brussels on 15 April 1960 and is the first child of King Albert and Queen Paola, the then Prince and Princess of Liège. As the first born, he is first in line to the throne. On 4 December 1999 the prince married Jonkvrouw Mathilde d’Udekem d’Acoz (Jonkvrouw being an honorific title roughly equivalent to “Lady”), who was granted the title “Princess of Belgium” (Royal Decree of 8 November 1999). She was born in Uccle on 20 January 1973 and is the daughter of Count Patrick d’Udekem d’Acoz and Countess Anna Maria Komorowska. The couple have four children: Princess Elisabeth, born on 25 October 2001, Prince Gabriel, born on 20 August 2003, Prince Emmanuel, born on 4 October 2005 and Princess Eléonore, born on 16 April 2008. Since King Albert II came to the throne, Prince Philippe and Princess Mathilde have borne the title “Duke and Duchess of Brabant”, as heirs to the throne. The Duke and Duchess of Brabant live with their children at the Royal Castle of Laken.

Education

Education of Prince Philippe

After primary school and the first three years of secondary school at the Brussels French-speaking Collège Saint-Michel, Prince Philippe attended the Dutch-speaking Zevenkerken abbey school, near Bruges, as a boarder, where he completed his secondary schooling in Latin-Greek studies. The Prince completed his education at the Royal Military Academy, from which he graduated in 1981. He also qualified as a fighter pilot (1982), parachutist and commando (1983), whereupon he spent several months in command of a platoon with the 3rd Parachute Battalion in Tielen as an instructor. The Prince holds the military ranks of lieutenant general in the Army and Air Force and vice-admiral in the Navy.

Prince Philippe then continued his university education at Trinity College, University of Oxford (Great Britain) and at the Stanford University Graduate School in California (USA) where he obtained a Master of Arts in Political Science in 1985. In 2002 the Catholic University of Leuven granted him the title of Doctor Honoris Causa, an honorary title that was also awarded to his father, King Albert II, and his uncle, King Baudouin.

In May 2004 Prince Philippe obtained his licence as a helicopter pilot. The Prince likes to spend the little free time that he has at home with his family. He loves reading, and is patiently working on extending his personal library. The Prince is also a very keen sportsman.
Education of Princess Mathilde

Princess Mathilde attended primary school at Bastogne and read humanities at the Institut de la Vierge fidèle in Brussels. The Princess then started studies in speech therapy at the Institut Libre Marie Haps in Brussels, where she graduated magna cum laude in 1994.

Between 1995 and 1999 she worked as a speech therapist in her own practice in Brussels. In parallel, she enrolled in a psychology course at the Catholic University of Louvain, which she successfully completed cum laude in 2002.

The Princess loves modern and classical music, and plays the piano. She is also a great fan of modern literature. She plays tennis and goes swimming, and enjoys nature and outdoor activities. Princess Mathilde has also made many visits in a private capacity to countries such as India, Nepal, China, Peru, Bolivia, Mexico and Guatemala.

Activities and priorities

Devoting themselves to their country and their countrymen and women is a priority for Prince Philippe and Princess Mathilde, as shown by the countless activities on their agenda, including 300 official engagements every year in Belgium or abroad. Contact with their fellow Belgians, their work, and their areas of concern are central to their activities. At the same time the prince and princess are at the service of their fellow citizens at home and abroad. The heir apparent and his wife each have their own areas of interest, although they also like to carry out some activities together.

Prince Philippe leads four major economic missions every year, worldwide. On more than fifty occasions the Prince has worked in this capacity to promote the interests of Belgian entrepreneurs and their companies all over the world. Important trade contracts are signed during these missions, and in the process the prince develops relations with dozens of heads of state and government. Princess Mathilde regularly accompanies the Prince on these economic missions, thereby helping promote the country’s image and also devoting attention to local social projects.

In May 1997 the Prince also assumed the honorary chairmanship of the Federal Advisory Board for Sustainable Development, which was set up further to the Rio Conference.

In 1998, at the Prince’s own initiative, the Prince Philippe Fund was set up as part of the King Baudouin Foundation. The Fund operates as a platform and catalyst for bringing people from the country’s three Communities closer together, by fostering social contacts and dialogue, by supporting cross-Community projects and by publicising original initiatives on both sides of the linguistic divide. To this end, the Fund works in partnership with schools, colleges and universities, institutions and associations.

Prince Philippe is also Honorary Chairman of the Belgian Investment Company for Developing Countries, the European division of the Club of Rome and the International Polar Foundation.

The Prince is particularly interested in the social environment of young people and their integration in the society of tomorrow, but also keeps very close track of difficulties linked to social problems such as unemployment. As heir apparent, Prince Philippe keeps abreast every day of a broad range of issues affecting Belgium, Europe and the world.

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The Princess is very sympathetic towards the lot of vulnerable people, and vulnerable children in particular. In December 2000 the gifts from her wedding were used to set up the “Princess Mathilde Fund”, which focuses on the problems facing the weakest people in society. Every year the project most deserving of praise in this field receives a prize. In addition to financial support, the award also provides recognition of the work done by the participating associations and organisations.

The Princess grants her Royal Patronage to various associations working on behalf of the most vulnerable. Problems relating to upbringing are often aspects to which most attention is paid. Therefore, as a member of the Belgian delegation, the Princess took part in the United Nations Special Session on Children in 2002. She presided over humanitarian missions to Niger, at the invitation of UNICEF and Belgium’s development cooperation agency, and to Mali, in which emphasis was placed on children’s rights, health, empowerment of women, the eradication of poverty, and good governance.

In 2005 Princess Mathilde became United Nations Special Envoy for Microcredit. Microcredit is a modern form of combating poverty, involving modest loans being granted, chiefly to women who want to set up a small business. The Princess has visited several projects in various countries.

Princess Mathilde has also agreed to be special representative for the worldwide campaign in support of orphans and other vulnerable children affected directly or indirectly by HIV/AIDS.

Since 2007 the Princess has been Young Global Leader of the World Economic Forum.

www.monarchie.be
www.prins-filipfonds.org

Princess Mathilde Fund:
via the website of the King Baudouin Foundation:
www.kbs-frb.be
8.2 Princess Astrid and Prince Lorenz

Princess Astrid, Prince Lorenz and their family

Princess Astrid was born on 5 June 1962, the second child of King Albert and Queen Paola, the then Prince and Princess of Liège.

She was named after her grandmother, Queen Astrid.

On 22 September 1984 Princess Astrid married Lorenz, Archduke of Austria-Este. He was born on 16 December 1955, the second child of Archduke Robert of Austria-Este and Princess Margherite of Savoie-Aoste. A graduate in Economic and Social Sciences from the University of Innsbruck, Archduke Lorenz was given the title Prince of Belgium in 1995.

Astrid and Lorenz have five children, all of whom were born in Belgium: Amedeo (21 February 1986), Maria Laura (26 August 1988), Joachim (9 December 1991), Luisa Maria (11 October 1995) and Laetitia Maria (23 April 2003).

Prince Lorenz regularly takes part in official activities attended by the members of the Royal Family.

Education

After attending secondary school at the Institut de la Vierge fidèle in Brussels, the Princess spent a year studying the history of art in Leiden (the Netherlands). She then took a course at the European Institute of the University of Geneva, completing her higher education in Michigan (USA).

Princess Astrid underwent military training in the form of informative and working visits to the armed forces. She currently holds the rank of colonel in the Army’s Medical Component.

Activities and priorities

In 1993 Princess Astrid took over from her father as honorary President of the Red Cross, a post she held until the end of 2007. In this role she visited the victims of the tsunami in Thailand and Sri Lanka. As honorary President of the Queen Elisabeth Medical Foundation (GSKE), the European Organisation on Research and Treatment of Cancer (EORTC) and the Scientific and Medical Funds of the King Baudouin Foundation, the Princess is keen to support basic medical research.

The Princess devotes herself in particular to the fight against poverty, and to people with disabilities, human rights, burns patients, cancer research and neurology.

She is also committed to the fight against epidemics and pandemics, in part through her role as special envoy of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership (RBM) for the fight against malaria, in the context of which she has taken part in missions to Zambia and Tanzania. The Princess is also greatly concerned for victims of violence, notably in the fight against cluster munitions and anti-personnel mines, an area in which Belgium has been a pioneer within the international community.

Princess Astrid represents Belgium at the four-yearly Paralympics or Olympic Games for Disabled Persons, and, through her attendance, supports the Special Olympics for Disabled Sportsmen and women that are held every year in Belgium.
8.3 Prince Laurent and Princess Claire

Prince Laurent, Princess Claire and their family

Prince Laurent was born on 19 October 1963 and is the third child of the then Prince and Princess of Liège.

On 12 April 2003 Prince Laurent married Miss Claire Coombs (daughter of a British father and a Belgian mother), who assumed the title of Princess of Belgium on the day of her marriage. Claire Coombs was born on 18 January 1974 in Bath, Great Britain. Prior to her marriage she had worked as an expert land surveyor. The couple have three children: Princess Louise (6 February 2004) and twins Prince Nicolas and Prince Aymeric (13 December 2005). Princess Claire regularly takes part in the official activities at which the members of the Royal Family are present.

Education and training

After primary schooling at the French-speaking Collège Saint-Michel, Prince Laurent went to the Dutch-speaking Saint Andries Abbey School of Zevenkerken near Bruges as a boarder with his elder brother Philippe. He then attended classes at the Pius X College in Antwerp. After training at the Royal Cadets’ College in Laken, the Prince followed an academic training at the Royal Military College.

Like his father before him, Prince Laurent decided to serve in the Navy. He received his training on board various frigates and minesweepers, and in September 1985 was appointed reserve officer candidate, 2nd class. A few weeks later he took the oath as officer. He then obtained his certificate as a diver and his licence as a helicopter pilot. Prince Laurent was appointed to the ranks of Frigate Captain in November 1994 and Naval Captain in 2004.

After his military training, the Prince left for the United States where he underwent several months’ practical training in private companies in the pharmaceuticals, aviation, leisure and banking sectors as well as at the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Prince Laurent then acquainted himself with development and environment programmes at the UN. Back in Belgium, the prince followed a traineeship at the European Commission, where he took part in meetings on the quality of life on our planet, which brought him the Emile Noel Award for his original contribution to European unification.

Activities and priorities

From 1994 to 2009 Prince Laurent has been chairman of the Royal Institute for the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and the Promotion of Clean Technology (KINT).

The prince is also chairman of the Prince Laurent Foundation, which is dedicated to the welfare of domestic and wild animals and especially aims to improve the relationship between people and the animal kingdom. The Foundation’s Pet Dispensaries also fulfil a social function by offering the underprivileged the opportunity to have their pet looked after free of charge.

The Prince is also chairman of the European Research Group for Alternative Toxicity Testing (ERGATT), and honorary chairman of the National Orchestra of Belgium.
The King and Queen surrounded by their 12 grandchildren.

Front row, from left to right: Princes Emmanuel and Gabriel, Princess Elisabeth, on the Queen's lap, Princess Éléonore, on the King's lap, Prince Aymeric, Princess Laetitia Maria and Princess Louise.

Second row, from left to right, Prince Nicolas, on the arm of his mother Princess Claire, Prince Amedeo, Princess Luisa Maria, Prince Joachim and Princess Maria Laura.
PHOTO LEGEND

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