



Belgium at a glance

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Belgium – a bird's eye view

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Belgian – a bird's eye view

Belgium – a country of regions

Belgium lies in northwest Europe and is bordered by the Netherlands, France, Germany and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. Distance is, of course a relative term, as Paris, London and Amsterdam are a two-hour train ride from Brussels, the capital of Belgium and the European Union.

Belgium is located at the interface of the major European hubs of economic and urban activity and the world's primary seaboard, the North Sea. As such, it lies not only within one of the most populous and trade-intensive regions on the planet but also along a key economic and urban axis.

Belgium is a federal state made up of three Communities (the French Community, the Flemish Community and the German-speaking Community) and three Regions (the Brussels-Capital Region in the centre, which is officially bilingual, the Flemish Region to the north, which is Dutch-speaking and the Walloon Region to the south, which is French and German-speaking).

The main federal institutions are the federal government and the federal parliament (with a Chamber of Representatives and a Senate). The Communities and Regions also have their own legislative and executive authority.

The three Communities in Belgium (The Flemish, French and German ones) are defined on the basis of their language.

The Communities enjoy powers over various policy areas, such as education, culture and what are referred to as 'social matters', such as family/child support and certain aspects of healthcare.

The three Regions (Flemish, Walloon and Brussels-Capital Regions) focus more on locally-based issues and their powers extend primarily to considerations of an economic nature such as public works, agriculture, employment, land-use planning and the environment.

(See maps on page 11)



Zoniënwood / Forêt de Soignes -
Bois de la Cambre / Ter Kamerenbos



The North Sea coast



The Ardennes

A constitutional and hereditary monarchy

As Belgium is a constitutional monarchy, the latter's role is defined and enshrined in the Constitution. The head of state is the King, who is the King of the Belgians. The Constitution lays down the King's legal status and the hereditary succession. In the event of a succession, the King's constitutional

authority is passed on to the natural and legal direct descendant. The King takes power only after he has solemnly taken a constitutional oath during a joint meeting of the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate. This has to be taken 10 days after the death or retirement of his predecessor.



From right to left: Albert II, King of the Belgians, his granddaughter Princess Elisabeth, who is destined to become the first Queen of Belgium, and the Crown Prince Philippe of Belgium.

A country full of creative talent

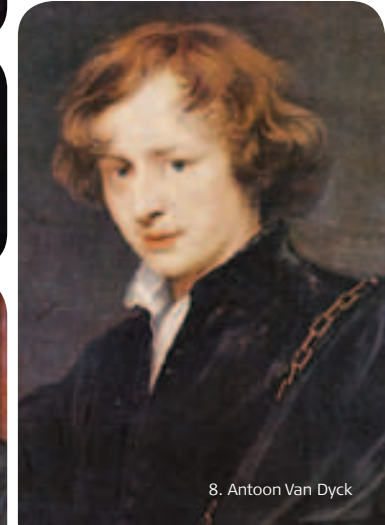
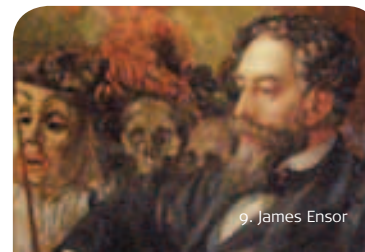
Belgium boasts a great deal of creative talent. John Cockerill supplied customers all over the world with steam locomotives, steamboats, trams, blast furnaces and other heavy industrial equipment. The dynamo (1), soda (2) and Bakelite (3), and many other practical applications were all invented by Belgians or people of Belgian origin, and today's rapidly evolving industry is continuing this tradition.

Such well-known artists as Peter Paul Rubens (4), Pieter Bruegel (5), Jan Van Eyck (6), Rogier Van der Weyden (7) and Antoon Van Dyck – to mention just a few of the Flemish masters – rose to prominence in the land that would one day become Belgium. Their paintings are to be found all over the world but some of their finest works are on display in a number of Belgium's museums. James Ensor (9), Félicien Rops, Théo Van Rysselberghe, Paul Delvaux and René Magritte are also internationally famous Belgian artists.

Cartoon strips are considered an art in their own right in Belgium and the latter boasts the greatest number of cartoonists of any country in the world, talented artists following in the footsteps of revered predecessors such as Hergé (Tintin), Peyo (the Smurfs), Edgar P. Jacobs and Bob De Moor (Blake and Mortimer), Morris (Lucky Luke) and many others.

During the Middle Ages, cathedrals and belfries sprang up all over Belgium and can still be admired today in many art cities across the country. Countless castles are to be found dotted all over the Belgian countryside and come the 20th century, the city of Brussels became synonymous with the Art Nouveau movement. All of these buildings have helped to define the country's incredible wealth of architectural triumphs.

Fine arts, folklore, fashion, design...Reflections of the past or future trends, these are all areas where Belgian talent holds sway. And of course Belgians really appreciate top cuisine, relishing the country's mouth-watering and long-standing culinary traditions.



A dynamic economy

With its good climate, natural resources, rapidly expanding sectors and central location, Belgium enjoys a key position on the European and international stage.

The country boasts considerable expertise in a wide range of fields – expertise which has largely been the driving force behind its success. Industrial activity in Belgium originally centred around heavy industry associated with the mining and processing of its underground resources. However, the country succeeded in making a smooth entry into other key industrial sectors, paving the way for and promoting economic growth in Europe.

New sectors continued to spring up throughout the 20th century following the arrival in Belgium of leading groups in a variety of sectors including petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, nanoelectronics, automobile manufacturing and household goods among others. ... Activity in these new sectors has long ensured considerable socio-economic diversity in Belgium and in so doing has promoted the growth of subcontracting and an efficient service sector offering substantial added value.

Following in its own footsteps as the first country in Continental Europe to embrace the industrial revolution, Belgium has made the most of its geographical location as a gateway to its key neighbours and at the very heart of all Europe's markets.

Treasure trove of contrasts

The main features of Flanders with its flat landscape are its cities and ports. Wallonia, meanwhile, is a region of hills and valleys, the most famous area being the Ardennes to the south with its outstanding natural beauty and considerable appeal as a tourist destination. Most towns in Belgium are extremely old, with some such as Tongeren and Arlon dating back over 2,000 years to Roman times. Cities such as Bruges and Ypres were some of Europe's largest settlements during the Middle Ages and Ghent, Brussels, Antwerp and Liege are also renowned artistic centres.



Diversity and multiculturalism

Belgium has always welcomed migrants from abroad and many have made the country their home over the centuries, including writers, artists and other intellectuals such as Karl Marx, Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, Charles Baudelaire and Auguste Rodin.

Its central location in Europe at the crossroads between the Latin and Germanic worlds, its multilingualism and its forward-looking social, political and religious freedom have all contributed to Belgium's cosmopolitan character and fostered a tolerant and multicultural society.

Amazing history!

The distant past

During the first centuries of the present era, Romans succeeded in conquering what would later become Belgium, as far as the Rhine, while during the 5th century Germanic tribes staked their claim – and culture – in the more sparsely populated north. Indeed, it is this historical pattern of settlement which has shaped the country's multi-lingual character, with French – a Romance language – still spoken in its southern areas and the Germanic Dutch in the north. Over the centuries, Belgians have found themselves under the rule of a number of foreign despots including the Burgundians, the Spanish, the Austrians and the French. At that time, the terms "Belgica" and "Belgium" were Roman names for "the Netherlands", which, until the 16th century, comprised modern-day Belgium and the Netherlands. Belgium's geographical location within Europe, therefore, has shaped its entire history.

Independence

On 25 August 1830, the opera *La muette de Portici* (The Mute Girl of Portici) was performed at the Brussels opera house, the *Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie*, and succeeded in stirring up a sense of extreme patriotism among the audience. Riots broke out against the Netherlands, with which Belgium had once again been united to form the United Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1815 following Napoleon's defeat at the Battle of Waterloo.

Dutch troops retreated and Belgium proclaimed independence on 4 October 1830. In 1831, Europe's major powers at that time (the United Kingdom, Prussia, Austria and France, the former three wishing to avoid the region being unified with the latter) recognised the new state of Belgium at the London Conference. So began Belgium's history as an independent nation.

Sovereignty of the new state of Belgium was offered to Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (Leopold I), the uncle of the United Kingdom's Queen Victoria. He was sworn in on 21 July 1831 and was duly crowned King of the Belgians. The date 21 July has been celebrated as Belgian National Day ever since. In 1831, the newly formed state of Belgium adopted what was at the time one of the most liberal constitutions in existence.


A prosperous country

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Belgium put in place a comprehensive social security system entitling all citizens to family allowance, sickness insurance, a pension, unemployment benefit and paid leave. This impressive system has enabled everyone to advance while at the same time enjoying the reassurance of a safety net. It has also ensured that Belgium's poverty rate is one of the lowest in the world and per capita GDP is currently in excess of €32,000 a year.

Industrialisation and Congo

Thanks to the success of its industry, the recently created Belgium soon held a prominent position on the world map. Belgian figures would soon play a key role as the forerunners in the development of railways. The legendary Orient Express, for example, carrying tourists and businessmen between Ostend, Paris and Istanbul was designed and built by a Belgian.

Leopold I's successor, King Leopold II, firmly believed that Belgium would only prosper on the world stage if it acquired a colony, along the lines of its European neighbours. He therefore set about finding one – and his search took him to Africa. In 1877, the Congo Free State was formed and became the personal property of Leopold II. However, in 1908 against the backdrop of a more turbulent international climate, Leopold transferred ownership of the colony to the state of Belgium. The former Congo Free State became known as the Belgian Congo until it finally gained independence in 1960.



The Longa is a 1 kilometre long well-preserved Gallo-Roman road. This historical hollow road, with its unique fauna and flora, forms the linguistic border between Walloon Brabant (Hélécine) and Flemish Brabant (Landen).

The advent of the state reform and two World Wars

Belgium's institutional framework at the time of its independence in 1831 was fairly straightforward. The country had a king, a government with a bicameral parliament, nine provinces and multiple municipalities. The official language was French although this did lead to a certain degree of frustration among some of the population. The Flemish wanted Dutch to be recognised as an official language of instruction in schools, the courts and for administrative business, a wish which in time came to be granted.

World War One and World War Two hindered the country's development into a "new Belgium". Once again, Belgium became the battleground where the major powers sought to settle their differences. Millions of soldiers were killed in trench warfare across the Yser plain and entire regions were annihilated. Today, the image of Flanders Fields endures as a reminder of the atrocities that occurred there.

Post-1945, Belgium was a pioneer in establishing the United Nations (UN) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and was also one of the six founder Member States of what has today become the European Union. The latter, in addition to its central location within Europe, has earned Brussels the title of Capital of Europe.

Belgium's history as a diplomatic 'buffer' between the major powers and, on occasions, as the victim of the latter's ambitions, has naturally made the country, entirely on an empirical basis, a world expert on promoting peace – so much so, in fact, that Belgians have carved out an established reputation and recognised skill in devising solutions for complex and multi-cultural societies, as reflected in the four Nobel Prizes awarded to Belgium: to the Institute for International Law in Ghent (1904), August Beernaert (1909), Henri La Fontaine (1913) and Georges Pire (1958).

Belgium: once the Battlefield of Europe, respecting the past

Across a total area of barely 30,000 km², Belgium has over 3,000 battlefields, the scene of battles which decimated the population and completely obliterated entire regions. This is why Belgians have long believed that a peaceful and concerted approach is the best way to resolve conflict.

The country's war cemeteries bear witness to past horrors and are dotted all over both the Yser plain, which saw ferocious fighting during World War One, and the Ardennes, the scene of the Ardennes Offensive, the final German offensive on the Western Front during World War Two. The cemeteries still draw visitors and descendants of those who were killed in battle, all coming to pay their respects and remember their – and our – heroes.

Indeed, every day for decades at the Menin Gate in Ypres, the Last Post is sounded – a resounding bugle call in honour of those soldiers who fell in battle during the Great War. Many veterans and ordinary citizens from the United States, Belgium and other countries come to pay their respects at the War Memorial in the town of Bastogne to show that those who fell in battle are not forgotten.

Waterloo to the south of Brussels, the site of the Emperor Napoleon's defeat, is another of Belgium's world-renowned battlefields.

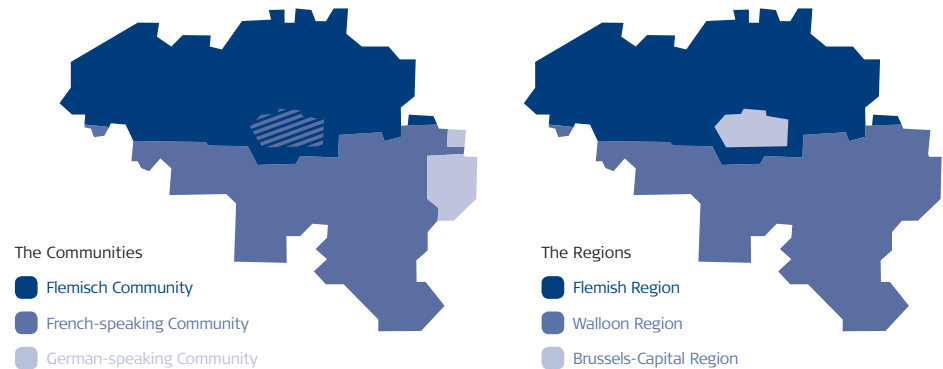


Located between Liege and Aachen the Henri-Chapelle American cemetery and memorial contains the graves of 7,989 members of the military and 450 missing soldiers are commemorated there.

Six state reforms

Today, the newly formed state of 1830 is dramatically changed. Six state reforms have resulted in Belgium being thoroughly restructured. The King, the federal government and the federal parliament have been joined by the institutions of the regions and communities whose powers have increased with each successive wave of state reform.

State reform in Belgium is a dynamic process designed to make the way the institutions operate clearer and less hermetic. A sixth major state reform is now on the agenda.



The essential features of the six state reforms

- *1970: The first state reform*
Language and cultural autonomy: the cultural communities come into being. The regions are included in the constitution.
- *1980: The second state reform*
The communities and regions acquire legislative powers and now have their own governments and parliaments.
- *1988-1989: The third state reform*
The communities' jurisdiction is extended to education policy. An agreement is reached on the organisation of the Brussels-Capital Region.
- *1993: The fourth state reform (Saint-Michel agreement)*
Pursuant to the Saint-Michel agreement Belgium's status as federal state is provided with an official setting. The councils (parliaments) of the federated states will now be directly elected and enjoy limited constitutional autonomy.
- *2001-2003: The fifth state reform (Lambermont and Lombard agreements)*
The regions are granted additional powers (foreign trade, agriculture and administrative oversight over lower-level authorities). Steps are also taken to refinance the communities and the regions are granted further taxation powers.
- *2011: The sixth state reform*
The structure of Belgium has undergone a major transformation. Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels and the Germany-speaking Community are more autonomous. The federal state will now have less funds to operate, while focusing more on its core activities: social security, the functions of authority and regulation. The Regions and Communities are assigned more decision-making powers as a result of a major transfer of resources and policies, such as labour market policy, family benefits, tenancy laws and traffic legislation. In areas such as partial tax jurisdiction, they will also be made financially accountable and become personally responsible for their policy achievements. A broadly balanced solution has been hammered out for Brussels and the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde district, including the division of the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde constituency, the much-discussed BHV issue.



Working in Belgium

An open economy

Belgium has always been an open economy. Since the Middle Ages, Bruges, and later Antwerp have been important centres for merchants and businessmen trading products from all over the world. This openness has grown greater still in recent decades. According to a recent Swiss study (KOF Index of Globalisation – Swis ETHZ) Belgium is the most globalised country in the world based on economic, social and political criteria.

Although home to less than 0.2% of the world's population, Belgium ranks as one of its top ten countries in terms of volume of international trade in goods (WTO – World Trade Organisation). Exports accounted for over 80% of the country's GDP in 2011 (*) – by far the greatest percentage of any of the EU's 27 Member States. Belgium is also the top-ranked EU Member State in terms of foreign direct investment (FDI).

Remarkably, too, Belgium is also the leading country world-wide in a number of sectors. For example, it is the world's largest exporter of pharmaceuticals, polyethylene and carpets, while being the leading hub for the diamond trade. Its position within the European Union and its economic openness enable it to exploit its assets to the full while enjoying a leading position in international trade.

Flexibility, quality and innovation

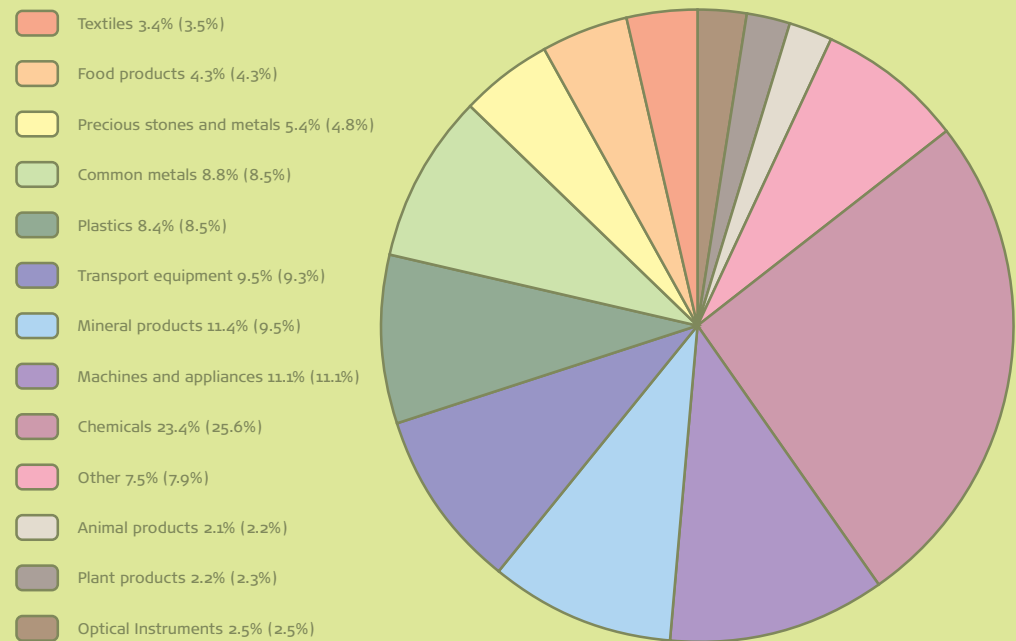
Belgium has managed to rise successfully to the major economic and technological challenges it has faced over the years. Some 75% of its population are employed in the service sector, 23% in industry, and the remaining 2% in agriculture. (*)

By raising standards among its manufacturing companies and enhancing the competitiveness of its workforce, Belgium has also managed to adapt to the demands of globalisation while at the same time remaining competitive. Belgian entrepreneurs have seized the opportunity afforded by globalisation and have focused on providing substantial added value and cutting-edge technology. So what are Belgium's specialities? Processing, assembly, development, upgrading and refining to

name but a few. Equipment and mechanical engineering, car manufacturing, civil engineering, chemicals, textiles, glass and oil: nearly all the sectors are represented in Belgium.

Belgium's economic make-up comprises primarily small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are active in all areas of the economy, from the chemicals and pharmaceuticals industry to the food sector. They share a common thread in terms both of creativity and a desire to overcome challenges and spearhead innovation, and of their unique attributes of skill and providing tailor-made services in niche markets. In fact, so great is their expertise, they have become market leaders in several high-tech sectors.

Breakdown by export sector in 2011 (2010)*



(*) Source: quarterly accounts of the Institute of National Accounts (March 2012)

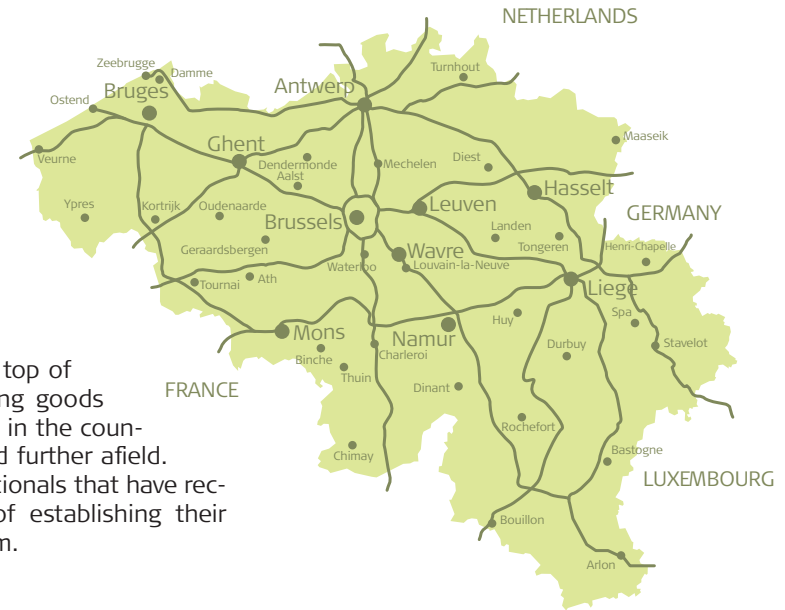
A key logistics country and a major hub for the distribution of goods and services

Belgium's trump card is certainly its enviable geographical location, lying as it does at the very heart of a dynamic region. It is a crucial link in the transport chain whether by air, sea or land and the country has used this inherent asset to its advantage, becoming a pivotal logistics hub in terms of transport, assembly, refining, processing and distribution.

Antwerp is the second largest port in Europe, and the 13th worldwide. The harbour has the world's largest petrochemical complex, after Houston in Texas, and has succeeded in attracting leading companies such as Bayer, BASF, Solvay and Degussa.

Liege is one of Europe's key ports. Belgium has airports in Brussels, Liege, Ostend, Charleroi and Antwerp, some of which specialise in freight as well as passenger transport.

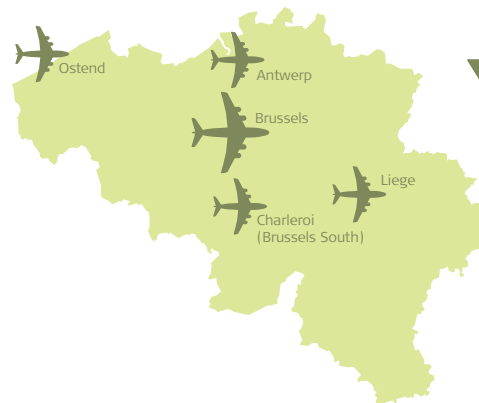
Be it seaports, inland ports, canals, airports, or rail, road and motorway networks, Belgium's transport systems are constantly being adapted to meet the needs of its economy. Infrastructure projects are on the go all the time building locks, boat lifts, high-speed trains, multimodal transport systems and more to enable Belgium to remain at the top of its game as a hub for distributing goods and services to companies based in the country, in neighbouring countries and further afield. It also attracts numerous multinationals that have recognised the benefits to them of establishing their European headquarters in Belgium.



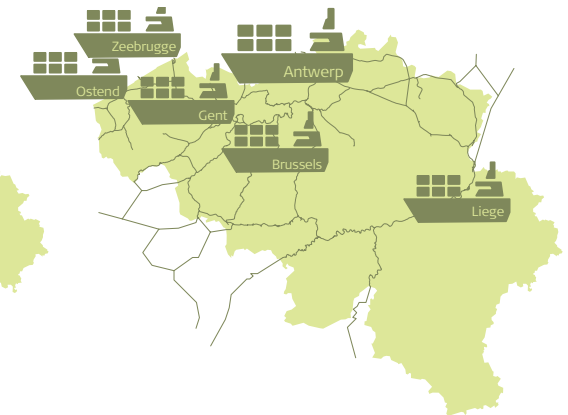
A dense road network

Belgium's workforce is its driving force and key asset

The Belgian workforce's high level of productivity has been – and continues to be – a determining factor in the country's excellent achievements in an economic context. Belgium has one of the highest productivity rates of any country in the world (*IMD World Competitiveness Report 2011*). Productivity is particularly impressive in industry, construction and finance and is certainly due in no small part to the fact that Belgians hold key management positions in a number of major groups. Multilingualism, a creative flair, flexibility and a determination to achieve the best possible compromise for all parties make Belgian CEOs a highly sought-after commodity among multinationals.



Airports



Seaports, inland ports and network of waterways

Scientific research and education



Above: Jean-Pascal van Ypersele, Climatologist and professor at the Belgian Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL). A world authority on 'ecolonomics'.

Above right: Prof. Christine Van Broeckhoven, head of the molecular biology and genetics department, Antwerp University, a world authority on research into Alzheimer's disease.

Right: Frank De Winne, a Belgian astronaut. His space flight in 2002 made him the second Belgian astronaut, after Dirk Frimout. They have both had the title of viscount bestowed upon them.



Today, at the dawn of the 21st century, Belgium is involved in a wide range of international scientific programmes, for example in nuclear research at the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN), research into space exploration, and study of environmental issues at its newly established Princess Elisabeth Station in Antarctica. These are just some of the more widely reported of the country's scientific research activities: Belgian scientists are also involved in research in the fields of nanotechnology, biotechnology, vaccinations and more.

The main hotbed for Belgium's scientific expertise is its universities, which, by creating spin-offs, have succeeded in tapping into the added value to be gained from their invaluable body of knowledge and know-how. For example, the development of proton therapy in treating cancer is perhaps one of the world's greatest economic and scientific achievements.

Complementary relationships and systems for promoting efficiency are vital components in the drive to prepare for the future.

Various clusters – groups of companies both small and large – are springing up in Belgium in connection with particular businesses, products, skills, sectors and markets. The key benefit of such clusters is the opportunity they present for players to share knowledge and join forces, and thereby achieve the critical mass required to become preferred partners.

Belgian Nobel Prize-winners: Recognising ingenuity and skill

The most prestigious acknowledgement, the Nobel Prize, has often been awarded to Belgian scientists owing to their outstanding work: Jules Bordet, Corneille J.F. Heymans, Albert Claude, Christian De Duve and Ilya Prigogine. Belgians have also received Fields Medals, Guggenheim Prizes and other international awards acknowledging great successes – and, by extension, the high quality of Belgium's education system and universities.



Belgium – a way of life

A gourmet experience

Belgium, the country of gourmet experiences. The country where fine food does not have to mean visiting expensive restaurants. In less pricey eateries – and even at home – Belgians eat well and fine food is often the subject of conversations between friends over a tasty meal.

Belgian cuisine has developed its own identity thanks to the country's inventive chefs and their use of typically Belgian produce. Creative, memorable food available to all is the hallmark of gastronomy in Belgium, tradition and quality its watchwords.

To many, Belgian specialities and Belgian cuisine mean endives, beer and chocolate. With its myriad breweries, ranging from family-owned businesses, via middle-sized firms to large brewery groups with international ambitions. Belgium offers a wide spectrum of beers, with a huge variety of tastes and flavours. Nowhere else in the world can you find so many place-related, authentic and colourful styles of beers as in Belgium. Belgium's world-famous Trappist beer is even protected by law. Beer in Belgium is closely linked with culture and tradition.

Chocolate is also one of the country's best-known products and here, too, the key criterion is quality.

Belgium is also playing a pioneering role in cheese-making. With over 300 different cheeses, the country is rightly proud of its reputation as a cheese-producing nation. Belgium has also given its name to the Belgian Blue breed of cattle, developed over years of selection and reared to provide exceptionally high-quality beef. Belgium also boasts a wide range of typically regional food, including North Sea fish and sea- food dishes, waterzooi (a stew of chicken and vegetables) from Ghent, stoemp (a mix of pureed potatoes and root vegetables) and Brussels' sprouts as well as game, poultry, partridge and pheasant dishes in the Ardennes. Cooked and cured meat is also a delicacy in Belgium, as are bread, fine pastries and delicious biscuits among others. All in all, Belgium offers a true taste sensation and the country is renowned worldwide for its cuisine!



Fashion, too, is a Belgian tradition

Belgian fashion is à la mode! Belgians are trend-setters and the country has a long-standing tradition of expertise and skill in the world of fashion, a tried-and-tested mix of creative and tempered audacity. Today, Belgian designers are to be found on all the top catwalks and at all the most prestigious fashion shows. The country's fashion schools are renowned worldwide and Belgian fashion has become an established trademark in its own right!

Antwerp is the undisputed birthplace of contemporary fashion in Belgium. Since the late 1980s, the city's designs have bowled over the world of fashion in Belgium and Ann Demeulemeester, Marina Yee, Dries Van Noten, Dirk Bikkembergs, Dirk Van Saene and Walter Van Beirendonck – known as the Antwerp Six – have enjoyed international success. Martin Margiela, too, is generally considered the unofficial seventh member of this illustrious group.

In addition to the Antwerp Six, Belgium has produced a long list of successful designers, as well as designers of accessories, to have enjoyed international acclaim, including: Edouard Vermeulen, Stijn Helsen, Kaat Tilley, Olivier Strelli, Raf Simons, Olivier Theyske, Elvis Pompilio, Jean-Paul Knott, Christophe Coppens and Tim Van Steenberghe.

Antwerp, diamond centre of the world

Antwerp is unchallenged as the leading diamond capital. 80% of rough diamonds and half of all polished diamonds pass through Antwerp. In figures, the industry is a national and international heavyweight. An average €150 million worth of stones arrive in Antwerp every day: 8% of GDP. The diamond trade with all its exchanges and offices is conducted in a specific area of the city covering approximately 2 square kilometres, an area filled with different nationalities, cultures and styles of dress. All languages and dialects are spoken in Antwerp, an incredible symbiosis of people and activities all linked by a single precious stone!



Creation of Walter Van Beirendonck





Left: Centre for Fine Arts (BOZAR), built in 1928 by the famous Belgian Art Nouveau Architect Victor Horta.

Below: Maarten Van Severen was a leading figure as an architect and designer for 20 years but he died prematurely in 2005.



Below: The Ferrari California, which the well-known Belgian car designer Lowie Vermeersch helped to design. He has since created his own design agency.



Leading-edge design

Belgium's modern-day creative talents are the latest in a long line of home-grown designers with a rich and illustrious tradition. Henry Van de Velde, the pioneer of Art Nouveau, Gustave Serrurier-Bovy, Victor Horta, Huib Hoste, Willy Van der Meeren and a whole host of other leading designers inspired the likes of Maarten Van Severen. Their creations symbolise the transformation of creative projects into industrial products and reject the myth of pre-industrial authenticity. Belgian designers have always sought to mix genres. Be it

furniture or decorative accessories, they love to blur accepted distinctions and push back boundaries, and classicism, antiquity, avant-gardism and countless other styles can often be found combined in a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts! Belgian designers have also carved out a reputation in the world car industry.

Folklore and traditions

All manner of popular celebrations take place in Belgium throughout the year, including carnivals, marching bands, processions, historical re-enactments, country fairs and commemorative events. Many such events are inspired by the collective memory in different areas and regions.

Each town, village and sometimes even individual districts or tiny hamlets organise their own festivals. Belgium's folklore is centuries old and respected and revered traditions have been passed down through the generations. Some traditions and folklore such as the Procession of the Holy Blood in Bruges, the famous Gille character at the Binche Carnival, the Ascension Day procession in Bruges, the Aalst Carnival and the Processional Giants and Dragons in Ath, Brussels, Dendermonde, Mechelen and Mons have even been classified by UNESCO as being part of the world's heritage. Other festivities include the Ommegang Pageant in Brussels and the spectacular procession during the Assumption events in Liege... In fact, Belgium has almost as many festivals as it does towns and villages!



Ommegang pageant in Brussels



Procession of the Holy Blood in Bruges

Leisure in Belgium

In addition to its countless popular festivals, packed cultural calendar, rich and impressive artistic heritage and tasty cuisine, Belgium also offers a great deal in the way of leisure pursuits, including walking trails through the forests of the Ardennes and across the fenland Plateau des Fagnes, the North Sea coast, cycling, horse-riding and boating, golf, theme parks, castles and estates, international fairs and exhibitions, antiques fairs and flea markets.

Belgium offers an incredibly diverse range of tourist attractions, particularly for such a small country: there is something for everyone – and it's never very far away!



The Ferme Libert bike park is located near Malmedy, in the middle of the High Fenland nature park, and it is the largest one in the Benelux countries.

A country of sporting legends

Belgium has produced many sporting legends and has also been the inspiration behind a number of sporting disciplines and international competitions. The Van Damme Memorial event (1) is currently considered one of the highlights of the world athletics calendar.

International cycling has many key competitions with Belgium providing the settings and venues: Tour of Flanders (2), Liege-Bastogne-Liege, the Flèche Wallonne (3) among others are evidence of just how much Belgians love their bicycles, and cycling is the country's most practised sport, whose key ambassadors include the cycling champion Eddy Merckx (4).

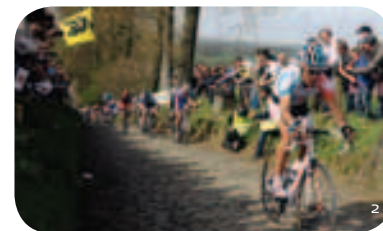
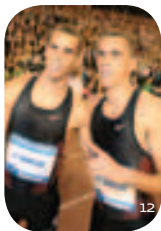
Motor sport is another long-standing tradition in Belgium and the country hosts several rallies (5). The Spa-Francorchamps circuit (6) is considered the best Formula One circuit in the world, all the more so since it lies at the heart of such a picturesque region. In the case of motocross (7) Namur's citadel and the sands of North Limburg have provided good examples of the role Belgium has played in this particular sport over the past 30 years.

Another of Belgium's favourite sports is football and the country's national team, nicknamed the Red Devils (8), have a long and illustrious history in this sport, having qualified on many occasions for the world's most prestigious footballing event, the World Cup. Belgium is also a conducive environment for major international football talents: young star players from Belgium hired by top non-Belgian foreign clubs include Eden Hazard, Vincent Kompany, Marouane Fellaini and Romelu Lukaku.

Belgian sports people also excel in judo, athletics, swimming, table tennis (9), rowing and tennis in particular. The tennis champion Justine Henin (10) was at the top of the world game until her retirement in 2011. The other tennis champion, Kim

Clijsters (10), is still one of the world's top players. In the world of athletics Belgium has continued its success with the top-level performance of the athlete Tia Hellebaut (11) at the 2008 Beijing Olympics in Beijing and the achievements of the Borlée brothers (12) which took them to the top of the table in Europe. Our leading athlete Kim Gevaert officially retired from public life during the Memorial Van Damme event in 2008.

Belgium's sporting achievements have been recognised in other ways, too, with the appointment in 2001 of the Belgian Jacques Rogge (13) as President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC).





Art in its blood

Innate talent, showcased on Belgium's streets

In Belgium, the first taste one gets for the country's artistic talent is its architecture. The countryside is dotted with villages and castles dating from all eras. Most Belgian towns have a long history and often date back to the Middle Ages or earlier. The majority – Tournai, Mons, Ghent and Bruges, for example – were built around a mediaeval centre with church steeples and belfries, the latter housing the particular town or city's royal charter. These charters set out the citizens' political freedoms as recognised by the city's noblemen and thanks to their determination, the inhabitants of Ghent, Bruges, Liege and Huy enjoyed extensive rights even in the Middle Ages. Huy's charter is the oldest, dating from 1066 while in 1068, the Count of Flanders granted the town of Geraardsbergen a charter setting out its citizens' rights and privileges.

Tongeren (Civitas Tungrorum) and Tournai (Civitas Tornacensium) were considered towns as far back as Roman times, while Arlon (Oralaunum Vicus) was an important hub and trade centre. Roman remains are still visible today in Tongeren and Arlon, the two oldest towns in Belgium.

Discovering the charm of Belgium's towns – large and small – is a real pleasure. Bruges is renowned worldwide not only for its majestic buildings but also for its peaceful beguinage and tranquil canals. The bustling city of Ghent is dominated by its three towers and tourists frequently throng to the St Bavo Cathedral to admire its impressive altarpiece, the Adoration of the Mystic Lamb by the Van Eyck brothers. Antwerp is the largest city in Flanders. Its centre-piece is the staggering Cathedral of Our Lady, the tallest in Belgium. Antwerp also embodies the essence of the Renaissance and the baroque era and is the city of Peter Paul Rubens.



Brussels is Belgium's capital city and is renowned worldwide for its magnificent Grand'Place, the futuristic Atomium and the Manneken Pis, a tiny statue of a small boy, to be appreciated with a knowing wink. Brussels was also the birthplace of Art Nouveau and boasts many fine museums.

The city of Liege, formerly the administrative centre of the Episcopal principality of the same name, is full of churches, including the ancient collegiate church of St Bartholomew. The town of Mons has the largest and tallest belfry in Belgium. Namur, the administrative and political capital of Wallonia, lies at the foot of a citadel at the confluence of the Sambre and Meuse rivers. Charleroi, by contrast, is a relatively young town, a product of the industrial boom there from the late 18th century onwards.

Countless other, smaller, Belgian towns have a delightful charm, including Dinant and Bouillon with their citadels, Diest and Lier with their *béguinages*, Thuin with its hanging gardens, as well as others such as Ypres, Mechelen, Spa, Rochefort,

Kortrijk, Stavelot, Veurne, Chimay, Damme and Durbuy to name but a few. The buildings in even the very smallest towns – and villages – bear witness to the impressive architecture of bygone eras. Louvain-la-Neuve, some 20 km from Brussels, is one of Belgium's newer towns and has been designed to develop sustainably well into the future.



Manneken Pis

The fine arts, a long-standing Belgian tradition

Fine art is the perfect showcase of Belgium at its best. Pieter Bruegel the Elder was one of the greatest artists the world has ever known and the adjective "Brueghelian" is a virtual synonym for "Burgundian", both terms being closely linked to the adjective "Belgian".

Magnificent works by the so-called Flemish Primitives, namely the Van Eyck brothers, Rogier Van der Weyden, Hugo Van der Goes, Hans Memling and Jeroen Bosch today, hang in museums all over the world, as do those by more recent Belgian painters such as the brilliant Paul Delvaux and René Magritte, the standard bearers for Belgian surrealism. The latter, as well as Pieter Bruegel, Félicien Rops, James Ensor, Marcel Broodthaers, Panamarenko, Luc Tuymans, Octave Landuyt, Jan Fabre, Francis Alÿs, David Claerbout, Hans Op de Beeck, Wim Delvoye and Michaël Borremans, manage to place the world around us in an inspiring context providing food for thought.



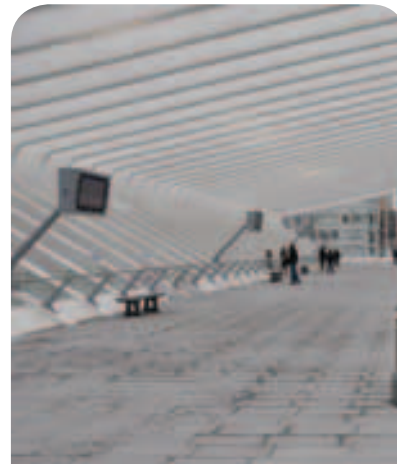
MAS - Museum aan de Stroom
in Antwerp

Victor Horta, Henry Van de Velde and others transformed Brussels into the capital of Art Nouveau by building magnificent yet completely habitable houses in the art deco style. "Belgians 'are born with a brick in their stomach' as the saying goes. Art Deco, too, is a striking feature of Brussels' architecture, as is industrial art.

Mention should also be made of the present-day Belgian post-modernist architects, Bob Van Reeth, Jo Crepain and Stéphane Beel, presenting the New Simplicity. The prestigious architectural works include the MAS (Museum aan de Stroom) in Antwerp, Antwerp Central Station and the Liege-Guillemins Station.



Above: Magritte Museum in Brussels
Below: in the wake of an international competition for the new high-speed train station in Liege, the choice fell on the project put forward by the well-known architect Santiago Calatrava.



Left: under the supervision of the architect Jacques Vonckx the Antwerp station building has been transformed in recent years into a magnificent 'railway cathedral', proclaimed as one of the world's finest stations.
Below: Luc Tuymans - Maypole, 2000
234 x 116 cm, oil on Canvas
Private collection, Courtesy David Zwirner, NY



A country of performing arts

While the story of the state of Belgium coming into being as a result of the opera *La muette de Portici* (The Mute Girl of Portici) is a romantic notion and open to interpretation, there is no doubt that the performing arts enjoy a high profile in Belgium. The choreographer Maurice Béjart turned ballet of the 20th Century into a true 'arts concept' owing to his trend-setting contribution to the world of classical ballet. Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker built upon this momentum with her dance company Rosas and her international school of contemporary dance PARTS. Belgian ballet also currently boasts a number of other talents including Wim Vandekeybus, Alain Platel and Frédéric Flamand. Much appreciated throughout the world, the work of a younger generation of choreographers, such as Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, is regularly performed during festivals such as Avignon in France and ImPulsTanz in Vienna.

Gerard Mortier is without a shadow of a doubt a name to be reckoned with in the world of opera. As an administrator during the 1980s he breathed new life into the Brussels opera house, the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie. His career then took him to the Salzburger Festspiele, the Opéra national de Paris, the New York City Opera and the Teatro Real in Madrid. In the case of the lyric arts, mention should also be made of Bernard Foccroulle, whose achievements include heading the International Lyric Arts Festival in Aix-en-Provence, Serge Dorny, general manager of the Opéra national de Lyon, and Jan Raes, managing director of the Koninklijk Concertgebouworkest in Amsterdam. Ivo Van Hove, currently heading the Toneelgroep Amsterdam, is an authority on directing for the theatre and opera.

The Flemish polyphonists Orlandus Lassus, Josquin des Prez and Adriaan Willaert distinguished themselves in the 15th and 16th centuries. Major Belgian classical composers during the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries include André Grétry, César Franck and Eugène Ysaÿe respectively. Belgium's Queen Elisabeth International Music Competition is one of the highlights of the classical music calendar. It alternately showcases the competing talents of violin, piano and vocal soloists from all over the world. The Belgians Thomas Blondelle (vocal 2011), Lorenzo Gatto (violin 2009) and Liebrecht Vanbeckevoort (piano 2007) were amongst the recent winners.

Belgium is also the birthplace of Adolphe Sax, inventor of the saxophone, and of musicians such as Toots Thielemans (guitar and harmonica), Philip Catherine (guitar) and Jef Neve (piano). Other musical styles are also doing well: dEUS and Milow (rock), 2 Many DJs (dance), Adamo, Frédéric François and Jacques Brel (vocal), The Cousins, Francis Goya & André Brasseur (instrumental) Rocco Granata, Helmut Lotti and Clouseau (pop), Eddy Wally (mood) and many others.

Belgium has no shortage of cultural events of all types, be it major rock and pop festivals such as Rock Werchter, at various times named the Best Festival in the World, Spa's festival of French music and song known as the Francolies or the country's many artistic festivals – both national and international – taking place throughout the country all year round.

Thomas Blondelle as Melchior in *Frühlings Erwachen*, performed in the Brussels opera house.



Belgian films

Belgian cinema also reflects the country's heritage and history – and the Belgian way of life, too. What is special about Belgian film-making is the way it portrays a panorama of society and images of humanity, all with striking realism: stories of real lives and real people. A new generation of film-makers, actors and actresses have taken up the baton and are frequently recognised for their achievements, some having received Palmes d'Or in Cannes and Oscars in Hollywood – two of the most prestigious awards in the world of cinema. To reminisce briefly, Brussels was the birthplace, too, of the celebrated American actress Audrey Hepburn, immortalised because of her performance in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Chantal Akerman, Alain Berliner, Jan Bucquoy, Stijn Coninx, Gérard Corbiau, André Delvaux, Marion Hänsel, Raoul Servais, Henry Storck, Jaco Van Dormael, Dominique

Deruddere, Jan Verheyen, Robbe De Hert and Harry Kümel are just some of the many famous film-makers to have hailed from Belgium.

Le Gamin au Vélo (1) by Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne, won the Grand Jury Award at Cannes in 2011 and the short film "Badpakje 46" by Wannes Destoop scooped the jury prize. The film *Les Géants* by Bouli Lanners was also one of the winners. Hollywood has embarked upon a remake of *Loft* by Erik Van Looy, the most successful Flemish film ever. Finally, *Bullhead* (2), the first feature film by Michaël R. Roskam, won several awards during international festivals and then went on to be selected to represent Belgium at the Academy Awards 2012 for the Best Foreign Language Film.



(1) The Kid with a Bike



(2) Bullhead



A pen is for writing ... and drawing

Belgian literature is shaped by the country's linguistic heritage, both French-speaking and Dutch-speaking. Belgium boasts an impressive list of authors from the 19th century right through to the present day, including: Georges Rodenbach, Maurice Maeterlinck (Nobel Prize for Literature in 1911), Guido Gezelle, Emile Verhaeren, Michel de Ghelderode, Ernest Claes, Gerard Walschap, Louis-Paul Boon, Johan Daisne, Jean Ray, Paul Van Ostaijen, Hugo Claus, Françoise Mallet-Joris, Julos Beaucarne, Amélie Nothomb, Jef Geeraerts, Bob Mendes, Stefaan Van Laere, Dimitri Verhulst and Tom Lanoye. There is always Georges Simenon, too, the creator of Inspector Maigret, and the cosmopolitan Marguerite Yourcenar, who was born in Brussels yet did not hold Belgian nationality. The Belgian spirit or 'belgitude' as it is known, may be interpreted in different ways and was and remains a recurrent theme in the country's home-grown literary works.

Belgium is also the unrivalled home of the cartoon strip: having both produced and been home to a whole host of cartoonists, whose characters have often become more famous than their creators: Tintin and Milou or Quick and Flupke (Hergé), Nero (Marc Sleen), Lucky Luke (Morris), Blake and Mortimer (Edgar P. Jacobs), Suske en Wiske (Willy Vandersteen), Kiekeboe (Merho), Jommeke (Jef Nys), Spirou et Fantasio (André Franquin), Boule and Bill (Jean Roba), Le Chat (Philippe Geluck) and countless other comic heroes who continue to delight young and old alike. And the Smurfs (Peyo), the world famous little blue men, appeared for the first time in 3D in a film brought out in 2011, which proved to be a huge success. Albert & Co (Charel Cambré) is a comic strip about the Belgian Royal family.



Extract from Tintin - The Secret of the Unicorn, one of Hergé's comic strips that served as a basis for Spielberg's recent film.



The Smurfs, a comic strip by Peyo, was recently turned into a successful live action film by Raja Gosnell, with a second one now in the works.



Some cities have facades that are completely covered with the work of cartoonists. With the highest concentration of designers in the world Belgium is continuing the comic strip tradition, an art form in its own right.



Belgium and Brussels in a world

Belgium, an active member of the international community

With its traditional partners, Belgium is actively pursuing an international cooperation policy. Its capital city, Brussels, is home to the main institutions of the European Union (EU) and to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and has thus become a centre for international relations.

Belgium is also a well respected member of the UN and was one of the latter's founding Member Countries, as it was of both the EU and NATO. On many occasions, Belgium has demonstrated its commitment to the UN, not least by sending Belgian Blue Helmets on a number of peace-keeping missions. Since the end of the Cold War recent examples in the Balkans and Lebanon demonstrate how



sustainable this approach is. However, the purpose of such UN cooperation goes far beyond peace and security alone.

Belgium also distinguishes itself as a result of its work to safeguard and promote human rights and, more generally, social and environmentally sustainable development. Further evidence of Belgium's proactive presence on the international scene was its election to a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for 2007-2008 period. Belgium was also involved in the UN Human Rights Council during the 2009-2012 period.

Belgium is also at the forefront of cooperation development activity, not only via the EU but also at a bilateral level: it is a key international aid donor and is out in front in terms of per capita development cooperation. Also worth mentioning is the active role it plays in implementing the Mine Ban Treaty (Ottawa Convention).



A long-standing European tradition

The European Union is reflected in the daily lives of Belgian citizens in many ways.

Belgium is one of the founding Member States of the European Union. Belgian politicians have played a key role in determining the strategy for European construction.

Several European institutions are based in Belgium, making Europe a very tangible reality and very much in touch with citizens. Without wishing to detract from the important role played by Strasbourg and Luxembourg, it is not for nothing that Brussels is called "the capital of Europe". The European Commission sits in Brussels, in the Berlaymont building, while European Council meetings (or "European Summits") are held several times a year in the European capital. The European Council became an institution in its own right with the introduction of the Lisbon Treaty. The Belgian Herman Van Rompuy is the first full-time President. Some plenary sessions and European Parliament committee meetings are staged in Brussels. The very many European institutions based in Brussels are populated by thousands of European civil servants.

Against the background of the six-month rotating Presidency, Belgium has several times been called upon to stand at the helm of the European Union. Helping to consolidate the European integration process, these terms of office have also served to strengthen Belgium's image abroad. In the second half of 2010, Belgium took over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the 12th time, and successfully so according to many outside observers. Belgium has delivered measurable results in several areas, such as the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, tackling global warming and protecting the environment, energy policy, European social policy, law and order, right of asylum and immigration.

Accordingly, Belgium has always sought to widen and deepen the European integration process and is continuing to do so, at a time when this is even more necessary against the background of globalisation.



Herman Van Rompuy, the first full-time President of the European Council in Brussels





Berlaymont building in Brussels, the seat of the European Commission



European Parliament in Brussels



Square-Brussels Meeting Centre



Justus Lipsius building in Brussels, the seat of the Council of the European Union, during the Belgium's EU Presidency (1 July - 31 December 2010)

Brussels, an international city

Over 1,000 public and private international organisations have established either a head office or permanent representation in Belgium's capital city. The list includes the main EU institutions.

The presence of such international organisations attracts many professionals, who are well represented in Brussels, for instance diplomats, the international press, representatives of employers and trade unions, members of think tanks, academics, experts and lecturers, multinationals and international service companies among others.

Along with Washington DC, Brussels has the highest number of diplomats and foreign journalists in the world. The Belgian capital is also a major global centre for conferences.
Invest in Belgium!

Invest in Belgium!

The figures speak volumes: inward foreign direct investment in Belgium totalled €52.8 billion in 2010 compared with €57.9 billion the following year.
(Source: National Bank of Belgium)

There are several reasons for this success, including the country's central geographical location, a business-friendly environment, a highly skilled, multilingual and flexible workforce and a long-standing tradition of welcoming foreign interests, not to mention a top-class infrastructure, affordable property prices, Brussels' central location in terms of international decision-making and the country's so-called 'poles of competence' system linking private companies with public universities and research centres.

Belgium lies at the heart of the European Union. A company located in Belgium has access to 200 million consumers within a radius of just 500 km. It is therefore certainly no coincidence that so many multinationals have chosen to set up European distribution centres in Belgium.

Both the federal and regional authorities, too, have introduced a range of financial and fiscal incentives such as a notional-interest reduction, a deduction for patent incomes, an advanced ruling practice and other tax breaks to encourage investment in innovation, research and development.

Research and development are top priorities for Belgian managers, who have created 'poles of competence', business groups and incubators to promote cooperation between academia and business, and the funding made available for this venture is designed to help apply the findings from basic research in practical contexts.

Last but not least, of course, there is also Belgium's legendary hospitality – another reason why it is a perennial favourite with investors and those seeking the ideal location for their registered offices, headquarters, treasury centres and R&D centres. Belgium attracts a great deal of the overall investment in Europe. Belgium, then, is becoming an even more favoured location among foreign investors and has every interest in recognising this.



Belgium in brief

- Area: 30,528 km²
- Population: 10.951.266 inhabitants, 6.306.638 in the Flemish Region, 3.525.540 in the Walloon Region and 1.119.088 in the Brussels Capital Region (source: Federal Public Service for the Economy, SMEs, the Self-Employed and Energy, 1.1.2012)
- Capital city: Brussels
- Official languages: Dutch, French and German
- Political system: a constitutional parliamentary monarchy
- Head of State: HRH King Albert II
- Per capita GDP: Approximately €32,000
- Currency: The Euro since 1 January 2002
- Recognised religions: Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism, Anglicanism, Greek Orthodox Church and Islam. Secularism is recognised equally alongside the aforementioned religions.
- Belgian National Day: 21 July (anniversary of King Leopold I's accession to the throne)

Did you know ?

- The word "spa" used worldwide to refer to an area for relaxation, comes from the name of the Belgian town of Spa, famous for its thermal waters
- Waterloo, the famous battlefield at which the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte was defeated, lies just south of Brussels
- The Belgian city of Antwerp is the diamond centre of the world
- Along with Washington DC, Brussels has the highest number of diplomats and foreign press correspondents in the world
- In 1899, the Belgian engineer Camille Jenatzy was the first driver to reach a speed of 100 kph in his electric vehicle *Jamais Contente* ("Never Satisfied")
- What became known as the Big Bang theory of physics was proposed by Belgian priest and scientist Georges Lemaître
- Belgium has more castles per square kilometre than any other country in the world
- The cartoon characters Tintin, the Smurfs and Lucky Luke were created by Belgians
- There are over 750 types of local beer in Belgium
- The first international football match was officially played in Brussels in 1904



Belgian Federal Parliament



Thermals springs in Spa

Credits

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