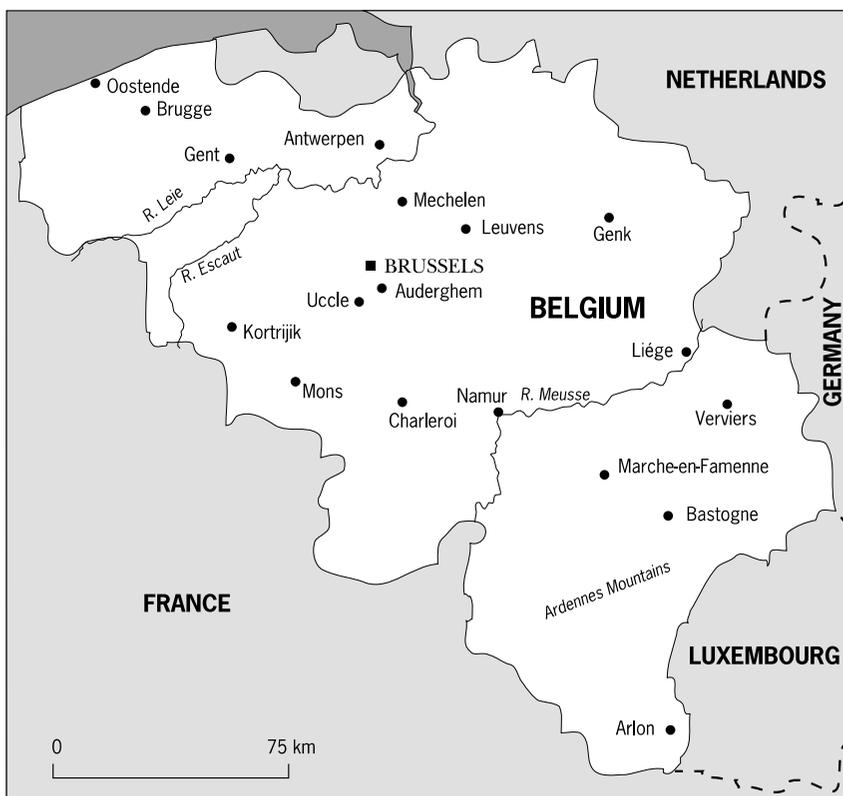


Belgium



On 4 July 2013 the Belgian King, Albert II, announced his abdication. In a national televised address, the low-profile 79-year-old monarch told his people that after 20 years on the throne, he would step aside in favour of his son, Crown Prince Philippe. He cited health reasons, saying that his son was ‘well prepared to succeed me.’ Philippe was crowned as King Philippe I on Belgium’s national day, 21 July.

King Albert’s time on the throne had not all been plain sailing. After he succeeded his brother, King Albert found himself involved in a major scandal following allegations that he had fathered an out-of-wedlock daughter, Delphine Boel. Unsurprisingly, the Delphine Boel affair did little to improve the King’s relations with his wife, Queen Paola. In early 2013 Ms Boel began court proceedings to prove she was the king’s daughter. Inevitably, there was some media speculation that the

King’s decision to abdicate was influenced, or even determined, by the court action.

Royal intervention

As with most European monarchies, Belgium has a constitutional monarchy in which the monarch plays a largely ceremonial role. However, in Belgium one of the few duties that does fall to the monarch is that of resolving – or trying to resolve – a constitutional crisis. The extent to which King Albert contributed to the resolution of the 2010–11 political deadlock was uncertain. With – or without – his mediation, on 9 December 2011 a new Belgian government was sworn in after a record-breaking 541 days of negotiations between all the parties with the objective of modifying the constitution to provide greater autonomy for the regions that make up Belgium. Under-lying the crisis were the tensions between Belgium’s two

KEY FACTS

Official name: Royaume de Belgique (French), Koninkrijk België (Dutch), Königreich Belgien (German) (Kingdom of Belgium)

Head of State: King Philippe I (crowned on 21 Jul 2013)

Head of government: Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo (PS) (from 6 Dec 2011)

Ruling party: Coalition of *Flemish parties*: Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams (CDV) (Christian Democratic and Flemish), Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten (VLD) (Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats), Socialistische Partij-Anders (SP-A) (Socialist Party-Other); *francophone parties*: Parti Socialiste (PS) (Socialist Party), Mouvement Réformateur (MR) (Reform Movement), Centre Démocrate Humaniste (CDH) (Humanist Democratic Centre) (from 6 Dec 2011)

Area: 30,518 square km

Population: 11.10 million (2012)

Capital: Brussels

Official language: Dutch (Flemish), French and German

Currency: Euro (€) = 100 cents (from 1 Jan 2002; previous currency Belgian franc, locked at Bf40.34 per euro)

Exchange rate: €0.75 per US\$ (Jul 2013)

GDP per capita: US\$43,686 (2012)*

GDP real growth: -0.20% (2012)*

GDP: US\$484.69 billion (2012)*

Labour force: 5.20 million (2012)*

Unemployment: 7.34% (2012)*

Inflation: 2.62% (2012)*

Balance of trade: -US\$8.68 billion (2012)*

* estimated figure

language and cultural communities: Flemish and French. This issue had brought down a number of governments and created a climate of political instability. Curiously, respect for the royal family appears to be one of the few factors that bridges the linguistic divide.

A public opinion poll conducted ahead of Crown Prince Philippe's coronation by two private TV stations – VTM and RTL – indicated that just under half of all Flemish respondents believed Philippe would be a good king, compared to two-thirds of respondents in French-speaking Wallonia. The extreme right-wing Vlaams Belang (VB) (Flemish Interest) party decided not to attend the coronation ceremony. The more moderate Flemish separatist party Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA) (New Flemish Alliance) was represented, but not by its leader, the high profile Bart De Wever, the mayor of Antwerp. Political attitudes to the Crown Prince's assumption of power were inevitably determined by the criticism he attracted in 2004 when he accused Vlaams Belang of trying to divide the country. In 2013 all the Flemish political parties sought to reduce the role of the monarch, in some cases to the extent of abolishing the monarchy completely. At lot hangs on the response of each language community to their new King. His ability to strike the right note with each community could well determine Belgium's future as a country.

Wallonia was long Belgium's industrial heartland; however its decline in prosperity has been marked, as rustbelt replaced dynamo. Once prosperous Wallonian

towns and cities such as Charleroi and La Louvière languished. Wallonian separatist movements demanded closer ties with France, some going as far as seeking union with their francophone neighbours. Twenty-first century Flanders, by contrast, has a much more modern economy with higher per capita income. Antagonism has inevitably resulted from the level of subsidies perceived to be flowing from the north to the south.

Given the systemic problems that have bedevilled Belgian politics for decades, this divided country has weathered the global crisis relatively well. Unemployment appears to have been kept under control, although in the view of the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) continuing-weak domestic demand, rapid fiscal consolidation and slow export market growth still look likely to hinder an economic recovery. The OECD also considered that, further structural reforms beyond the measures introduced in 2012 would boost competitiveness and growth, helping to secure fiscal sustainability in the face of large ageing-related spending pressures.

Belgium's fiscal consolidation has, according to the OECD, already been sizeable with the government committed to secure a structural budget balance by 2015. Maintaining a structural budget balance over the medium-term would ensure a rapid reduction in public debt, creating room to finance part of Belgium's age-related spending increases. The reform of early retirement programmes would raise Belgium's low (by international

standards) effective retirement age – the key to containing pension expenditure – but the system would still give insufficient work incentives to older workers. The reform of fiscal federalism arrangements is transferring more spending and tax responsibilities to the communities and regions. Reforms of the unemployment benefit system and special provisions for new graduates are expected to improve the efficiency of the labour market. However, other factors still hold back the labour market, including high sectoral minimum wages, labour market traps created by the high tax wedge and the de-coupling of wages from productivity. The OECD also expressed concern that Belgium's ageing population was boosting cost pressures in the health system. The system delivers accessible care and broadly satisfactory health outcomes. Nevertheless, its performance is reduced by practice and efficiency variations across providers, high consumption of drugs and possibly supplier induced demand. Health responsibilities are fragmented across government levels and sickness funds have too passive a role. The strict regulation of the supply of health services risks rendering the system too inflexible as ageing changes demand patterns. Long-term care has a high reliance on care in institutions.

After enduring a world-record period of 18 months to form a federal government, attention inevitably became focussed on where Belgium, as a body politic, is heading. Political minds had been concentrated by the charismatic Mayor of Antwerp, Bart de Wever who had left little doubt about his views and intentions in his first statement following his election as Mayor. The election had seen the renaissance – or at least its beginning – of the birth of what Mr de Wever described as 'a new popular Flemish party, the N-VA. The new party had not only won the mayoral election in Antwerp, but also in the smaller towns of Turnhout, Saint Nicolas, Alost and Roulers. Mr de Wever had become the *de facto* negotiator in chief who was not even prepared to wait for the 2014 elections to begin negotiations with Belgium's incumbent prime minister, the socialist and francophone Elio di Rupo (whose command of the Dutch language was described as 'minimal'), over what could well amount to the end of Belgium as a nation state.

De Wever calms down.

In many respects Belgium reflects the disparities present in the European Union,

KEY INDICATORS

Belgium

	Unit	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Population	m	10.73	*10.81	10.84	10.95	*11.10
Gross domestic product (GDP)	US\$bn	506.40	470.40	470.20	513.40	*484.69
GDP per capita	US\$	44,756	44,090	43,379	46,878	*43,686
GDP real growth	%	1.0	-2.9	2.3	1.9	*-0.2
Inflation	%	4.5	-0.2	2.3	3.5	*2.6
Unemployment	%	7.0	7.9	8.3	7.3	*7.3
Exports (fob) (goods)	US\$m	373,019	252,156	282,297	324,404	302,371
Imports (fob) (goods)	US\$m	388,867	255,089	284,628	336,121	311,054
Balance of trade	US\$m	-15,848.0	-2,933.0	-2,331.0	-11,717.0	-8,682.0
Current account	US\$m	-6,704.0	-6,690.0	9,028.0	-7,294.0	*-2,371.0
Total reserves minus gold	US\$m	9,318.0	15,907.0	16,499.0	17,880.0	18,600.0
Foreign exchange	US\$m	7,767.0	7,801.0	7,880.0	8,008.0	8,451.0
Exchange rate	per US\$	0.68	0.78	0.76	0.75	0.77

* estimated figure

where the perception exists that a richer north subsidises a profligate south. Translating this into Belgian terms, the N-VA advocated the dismantling of Belgium as a kingdom and the establishment of a Flemish-speaking republic. The N-VA had won the largest share of the vote in the stalemated June 2010 elections. Not that this amounted to a substantial endorsement; the N-VA only garnered 38 per cent of the vote in Flanders, suggesting that not too many Flemish voters supported a split. To overcome the objections to Mr De Wever the King appointed a further battery of negotiators, two ‘médiateurs’, a ‘clarificateur’, a ‘conciliateur’, an additional ‘informateur’ and, on top of them all, a ‘negotiateur’.

However, all that seemed to happen, was that the antipathy between the opposing groups worsened as prosperous Flanders sought to transfer the country’s power base from the existing federal state to the three regions of Flanders (Flemish speaking), Wallonia (French) and Brussels (largely French). The very nature of the status of Brussels, known for its ‘facilités’ was considered by many Flemish Belgians to be a step too far. The ‘facilités’ allow the municipal authorities in the half dozen mainly French-speaking towns around Brussels, but technically on Flemish soil, to communicate in French with those citizens who wish to do so. There was some logic to the ‘facilités’ since even in 2012 less than ten per cent of Brussels’ inhabitants are Flemish speakers. In Flanders, citizens are already required to demonstrate that they have a reasonable command of Dutch.

Risk assessment

Politics	Fair
Economy	Fair
Regional stability	Good

COUNTRY PROFILE

Historical profile

In the eighth and ninth centuries the area, which is now Belgium, was part of the Charlemagne Empire. It achieved independence by the tenth century. Flemish towns, with their large textile industries, enjoyed great financial and political power.

- 1322 The area fell under French control again.
- 1419 The accession of Philip of Burgundy ended a period of instability.
- 1477 The Low Countries (Belgium and the Netherlands) passed to the Habsburgs of Spain on the death of Philip’s son, Charles the Bold.

- 1500–55 Under the reign of Emperor Charles V, Antwerp was a leading commercial centre and financial centre.
- 1555–98 Reign of Philip II, King of Spain. The Belgians and the Dutch reacted against the tyranny of Philip II. There was turmoil between Protestant and Catholic communities.
- 1580s The northern Netherlands managed to secede. King Philip re-conquered the south, where Catholicism was imposed. The leading traders and intellectuals migrated to the north.
- 1598–1621 Under Archduke Albert and Archduchess Isabella (daughter of Philip II), the southern Netherlands (Belgium excluding Liège) became semi-autonomous.
- 1648 The Peace of Westphalia confirmed this position.
- 1700–13 The War of the Spanish Succession resulted in the southern Netherlands passing to the Austrian Habsburgs. Liège remained independent within the Holy Roman Empire.
- 1790 The United States of Belgium was established after a local revolution inspired by the French Revolution.
- 1792 French troops conquered the southern Netherlands and Liège.
- 1793 The Austrians reoccupied the territory.
- 1794 The southern Netherlands and Liège were invaded by the French and the newly integrated territories were annexed to France. When Napoleon came to power, Belgium became part of the French empire.
- 1814–15 During the Congress of Vienna (after the defeat of Napoleon) it was agreed to unite the northern and southern Netherlands and the principedom of Liège under the rule of King William I. The Catholic Church refused to accept a protestant King, while William tried to impose Dutch rule in Flanders.
- 1828 The Catholics and young Liberals formed an association called Unionism and drew up a programme of demands.
- 1830 Revolution erupted in Brussels and the south broke away from the north. Belgium was declared independent of the Netherlands.
- 1831–65 Leopold I of Saxe-Coburg became the first King of Belgian.
- 1865–1909 King Leopold II, invested in expeditions to Africa and privately owned the Congo Free State, in which the treatment of Congolese natives by European officials was brutal. Belgian annexed the Congo Free State in 1908, shortly before the King’s death.
- 1914 Following the outbreak of the First World War, Germany invaded Belgium and the country became a battlefield until the end of the war in 1918.
- 1918–39 Inter-war years saw rapid industrialisation, developing colonial wealth in

- Africa and the forging of regional links, leading to the Belgium-Luxembourg Economic Union (BLEU).
- 1940–45 Belgium was invaded and occupied by Nazi Germany.
- 1947 Belgium formed a customs union with Luxembourg and the Netherlands, known as Benelux.
- 1951 King Leopold III, who had been on the throne since 1934, abdicated in favour of his son, Baudouin (Boudewijn) I.
- 1958 Belgium was a founder member of the forerunner of the European Union (EU), the European Economic Community (EEC), with Brussels becoming the favoured location for the organisation.
- 1960 Belgium withdrew rapidly from the Belgian Congo.
- 1970s There was a succession of unstable coalition governments.
- 1979–92 Christian Democrat Wilfried Martens was appointed prime minister twice during this period, with Mark Eyskens serving for some months in 1981.
- 1992 Jean-Luc Dehaene was appointed prime minister.
- 1993 King Baudouin I died and was succeeded by his brother, Albert II. Belgium became a federal state.
- 1999 Belgium was one of the first 11 countries to adopt the euro.
- 2001 A government reform package approved more money for schools in the French-speaking communities of the south and more political influence for the Dutch-speaking Flemish around Brussels, even though they were in a minority.
- 2002 The Euro currency replaced the Belgian franc.
- 2003 Parliamentary elections were won by the Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten (VLD) (Flemish Liberal and Democrats), a coalition was formed which included the Socialistische Partij Anders-Spirit (SPA-Spirit) (Socialist Party-Spirit), Parti Socialiste (PS) (Socialist Party) and Mouvement Réformateur (MR) (Reform Movement).
- 2004 Following conviction for racial incitement, the Vlaams Blok (VB) (Flemish Bloc) party reconstituted itself as Vlaams Belang (VB) (Flemish Interest)
- 2007 The VLD, SPA-Spirit, PS and MR formed a coalition government Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt resigned; however he was re-appointed as a caretaker prime minister. His attempt at forming a coalition failed and to break the political impasse, the King asked Verhofstadt to form an interim government.
- 2008 After nine months of political stalemate, Yves Camille Désiré Leterme (CDV) was sworn in as prime minister leading a coalition government. The government initiated a US\$2.8 billion stimulus package needed to avert a recession. Leterme resigned as prime minister following the

collapse of the country's largest bank, Fortis, and a scandal over its rescue. Herman Van Rompuy took office as prime minister.

2009 Two predominantly Flemish-speaking towns of Halle and Affligem, were embroiled in controversy during EU elections, as Francophone political parties were denied advertising space on municipal billboards. Herman Van Rompuy resigned and Yves Leterme became prime minister again.

2010 Herman Van Rompuy became the EU's first permanent president. The Leterme government resigned after a coalition partner withdrew over the voting future of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde. The lower house of parliament passed legislation banning the wearing of the *burka* (full Islamic face veil worn by women). In parliamentary elections, the Flemish separatist party, Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA) (New Flemish Alliance) won 17.4 per cent of the vote (27 seats out of 150) and the right to form a coalition government.

2011 In February, when there was still no government, Belgium achieved the dubious record of the longest time a democratic country had been without a government (249 days), as political parties from the Flemish-speaking north were unable to achieve unity with their French-speaking southern counterparts.

On 16 May, Elio Di Rupo (PS) was asked to form a new government. However by 4 July he was still in coalition negotiations with others. On 14 September, caretaker prime minister, Yves Leterme, announced his resignation, to become deputy secretary-general of the OECD. On 21 November, Elio Di Rupo was unable to form a government and asked the King to relieve him of the responsibility. However, on 6 December a new government was sworn into office, with Elio Di Rupo as prime minister, following a record-breaking 541 days since the general election caused a political deadlock. The six-party agreement to form a government was probably spurred on by the downgrading of Belgium's credit rating from AA+ to AA by Standard and Poor's on 25 November.

2012 On 13 July, parliament enacted a law to split along linguistic lines the constituency of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde. The Halle-Vilvoorde was merged with Leuven electoral area to form a single constituency (of French speakers) and the Brussels electoral area became a single constituency (of Flemish speakers).

2013 Delphine Boel, said to be King Albert's daughter born out of wedlock, opened court proceedings to attempt to prove she is indeed his daughter. On 4 July King Albert II announced his abdication, stepping down in favour of his son, Crown Prince Philippe. King Albert, 79,

said he was healthy enough to fulfil his duties. Philippe was sworn in as King on 21 July.

Political structure

Constitution

A new constitution was introduced in 1994, re-defining the federal structure and introducing devolution on both a regional and language-speaking level. In 2001, a constitutional amendment allowed greater autonomy in taxation, spending, agricultural and trade policy. The federal state is responsible for economic, domestic, foreign, defence, legal, welfare and health policy.

There are three Régions/Gewests (Regions) of Flemish, Wallonia and Brussels. Each has its own executive and assembly, responsible for regional policies (such as transport and housing).

Overlapping the Regions are three Communautés/Gemeenschaps (Communities), representing Belgium's Flemish, French and German-speakers. They are responsible for policy on language and cultural affairs. The French and German Communities operate separate parliaments. The Flemish Region and Community (which represent the same geographical area) operate a joint assembly. Language and cultural affairs in the Brussels Region are divided between the Flemish and French Communities. In May 2003 electoral reforms allowed changes to electoral districts for the House of Representatives, which now match the borders of the provinces, a new system of distribution of seats, an electoral threshold and Belgians abroad allowed to vote.

Independence date

21 July 1831

Form of state

Federal parliamentary democratic monarchy

The executive

The monarch has a largely ceremonial role but, as Head of State, formally appoints the head of government, although this post is always the leader of the ruling coalition. The prime minister appoints a cabinet of ministers (limited to 15 and with an equal number of French and Flemish speakers); they do not sit in parliament but must present their policies and performance before parliament for review.

National legislature

The Federale Parlement – Parlement Fédérale – Föderales Parlament (federal parliament) has two chambers. The Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers – Chambre de Représentants – Abgeordnete Kammer (chamber of the people's representatives) has 150 members elected by proportional representation for four-year terms. The Senaat – Sénat – Senat (

senate) has 71 members in total, of which 40 are directly elected for four-year terms by proportional representation, 21 members are appointed by the lower community parliaments and 10 members are appointed by other senators – sons and daughters of the monarch are customarily senate members. Both chambers can propose and veto legislation.

Universal suffrage is at age 18; voting is mandatory, although ballot papers allow an invalid or blank vote. Voting is almost entirely undertaken by electronic means, through the use of a computerised swipe card system. Although federal elections are scheduled every four years, early elections are possible when called for by the prime minister. The federal government is typically a coalition, with ministerial posts assigned to members of political parties within the ruling coalition.

Legal system

The Code Napoléon, became the basis of civil law in Belgium.

The constitution guarantees the independence of the judiciary from the executive and legislative branches. Court hearings are public and trials of a serious nature are heard before a jury of civilians.

The highest court is the Cour de Cassation (Supreme Court), composed of judges appointed by the Crown. A Cour d'Arbitration rules on conflicts of authority between the many layers of federal and national government and their legal instruments.

A Consultation Committee, made up of regional and national representatives including the prime minister, is the final recourse for conflicts of interest arising from devolution. Formed with equal numbers of French and Dutch/Flemish speakers, it makes its decisions by consensus.

Last elections

13 June 2010 (parliamentary)

Results: Parliamentary: (Chamber of Representatives) Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA) (New Flemish Alliance) won 17.4 per cent of the vote (27 seats out of 150), Parti Socialiste (PS) (Socialist Party) 13.71 per cent (26), Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams (CDV) (Christian Democratic and Flemish) 10.85 per cent (17), Mouvement Réformateur (MR) (Reform Movement) 9.28 per cent (18), Socialistische Partij-Anders (SP-A) (Socialist Party-Differently) 9.24 per cent (13), Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten (VLD) (Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats) 8.64 per cent (13), Vlaams Belang (VB) (Flemish Interest) 7.76 per cent (12), Centre Démocrate Humaniste (CDH) (Humanist Democratic Centre) 5.53 per cent (nine); four other political parties won less than 5 per cent of the vote and shared the remaining 15 seats. A coalition government was eventually formed on 6 Dec 2011

between Flemish parties (Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams (CDV) (Christian Democratic and Flemish), Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten (VLD) (Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats), Socialistische Partij-Anders (SP-A) (Socialist Party-Other) and francophone parties (Parti Socialiste (PS) (Socialist Party), Mouvement Réformateur (MR) (Reform Movement), Centre Démocrate Humaniste (CDH) (Humanist Democratic Centre)). Senate: N-VA won 19.61 per cent of the vote (nine seats out of 40), PS 13.62 per cent (seven), CDV 9.99 per cent (four), SP-A 9.48 per cent (four), MR 9.27 per cent (four), VLD 8.24 per cent (four), VB 7.6 per cent (three); three other political parties shared five other seats. Turnout was 89.2 per cent.

Next elections

2014 (parliament)

Political parties

Ruling party

Coalition of *Flemish parties*: Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams (CDV) (Christian Democratic and Flemish), Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten (VLD) (Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats), Socialistische Partij-Anders (SP-A) (Socialist Party-Other); *francophone parties*: Parti Socialiste (PS) (Socialist Party), Mouvement Réformateur (MR) (Reform Movement), Centre Démocrate Humaniste (CDH) (Humanist Democratic Centre) (from 6 Dec 2011)

Population

11.10 million (2012)

Last census: October 2001: 10,296,350

Population density: Urban population 97 per cent (2010 Unicef).

Annual growth rate: 0.4 per cent, 1990–2010 (Unicef).

Ethnic make-up

Around 57 per cent of the population live in Dutch-speaking Flanders, 32 per cent in French-speaking Wallonia, 10 per cent in bilingual Brussels and 1 per cent in the German-speaking border region. There are also some 860,000 foreign expatriates and immigrants. The largest expatriate communities are Italian, French, Moroccan, Dutch, Turkish and Spanish. Foreigners comprise about 27 per cent of the population of Brussels.

Religions

Predominantly Roman Catholic (75 per cent). Also Protestant, Jewish and Muslim.

Education

Education budgets are set by the French, Dutch/Flemish and German language communities.

Most schools are state-run and free.

Catholic and international schools are fee-paying. The Belgian education system is widely recognised as being of a very

high standard. Government expenditure on education typically accounts for 3 per cent of GDP.

The teaching language is determined by the linguistic region in which a school is based: Dutch, French or German.

Brussels is a bilingual region of its own, and here separate schools use the language appropriate to their pupils, drawn from the surrounding community. International schools (concentrated in Brussels and Antwerp), may teach in foreign languages and follow foreign curricula. Belgian French and Flemish schools follow the same school cycles. However exams are particular to each language.

Primary schooling lasts from age six to 12 when students undertake exams to determine progression to one of four different schools and programmes: general, technical, artistic or vocational.

Universities and colleges offer a full range of subjects and qualifications.

Compulsory years: 6 to 18.

Enrolment rate: 103 per cent, gross primary enrolment; 146 per cent, gross secondary enrolment; of the relevant age group (including repeaters and training for the unemployed); 56 per cent tertiary enrolment (World Bank).

Pupils per teacher: 12 in primary schools.

Health

Adequate healthcare is provided for all citizens. The patient pays for treatment, but the fee is reimbursed by his or her health insurance company. The reimbursement may cover almost all of the cost or very little, depending on the patient's choice of doctor. The *mutuelles* (health insurance companies) also have their own clinics where basic healthcare, optometry and dentistry can be obtained for a token fee.

HIV/Aids

There were an estimated 14,000 people living with HIV in 2009 (Unicef 2012)

HIV prevalence: 0.2 per cent aged 15–49 in 2009 (Unicef 2012)

Life expectancy: 80 years, 2010 (Unicef 2012)

Fertility rate/Maternal mortality rate: 1.8 births per woman, 2010 (Unicef 2012); maternal deaths 8 per 100,000 (World Bank)

Child (under 5 years) mortality rate (per 1,000): 4 per 1,000 live births (WHO 2012)

Welfare

A social insurance scheme covers welfare payments. Contributions are taken from all workers at 7.5 per cent of earnings and pensioners 0.5–2 per cent of pensions or pre-pensions; employers pay 8.86 per cent of the payroll and the government provides annual subsidies.

Old age pensions, disability, sickness, maternity benefits, survivors pensions are dependent on contributions to worker's insurance funds.

Workers' contributions cover around 70 per cent of social security costs. Unemployment benefits are administered by three regional offices, the Vlaamse Dienst Arbeidsbemiddeling Beroepsopleiding (VDBA) in Flanders, the Organisme de Formation et d'Emploi de la Wallonie (FOREM) in Wallonia and the Office Régional Bruxellois d'Emploi-Brusselse Gewestelijke Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling (ORBEM-BGDA) in Brussels.

Pensions

The statutory age of retirement is 65 and 62 for men and women respectively; in 2009 it will be set at 65 for all.

Main cities

Brussels (Bruxelles, Brussel, Brüssel, Bruessel) (capital, estimated population 1.1 million in 2012), Antwerp (Anvers, Antwerpen) (493,920), Gent (Ghent) (248,285), Charleroi (202,981), Liège (Luik, Lüttich, Liege, Luettich, Luttich) (195,076), Brugge (Bruges) (116,342), Namur (109,686), Mons (91,200).

Languages spoken

The northern part of Belgium, Flanders, is Dutch-speaking and the southern part, Wallonia, is French-speaking. Brussels is officially bilingual, but over 80 per cent of its population are French-speakers. There is also a small German-speaking area in eastern Wallonia, which became part of Belgium after the First World War. English, Luxembourgish, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Arabic and Turkish are also spoken.

Official language/s

Dutch (Flemish), French and German

Media

The linguistic division of Belgium society circumscribes its media.

Press

Dailies: National newspapers include, in Dutch, *The Nieuwsblad* (www.nieuwsblad.be), *Het Laatste Nieuws* (www.hln.be) is a tabloid and *De Morgen* (www.demorgen.be), *Belgisch Staatsblad* (www.ejustice.just.fgov.be) is a government gazette; in French, *La Libre Belgique* (www.lalibre.be) and *Le Soir* (www.lesoir.be); in German, *Grenz-Echo* (www.grenzecho.be).

Several regional newspapers are published by SudPress (www.lacapitale.be) including *La Capitale*, *La Meuse*, *La Gazette* and *Nord Eclair*; others include *Le Courrier Mouscron* (www.actu24.be), *Metro* (www.metrotime.be), and *Gazet van Antwerpen* (www.gva.be).

Weeklies: *Les Nouvelles du Dimanche Matin* is a Sunday newspaper. *Le 7e Soir* is a national weekly. Other weekly publications include *Knack* and *Le Vif/L'Express*.

Business: The principal daily financial newspaper is owned and published by Mediafin and in French called *L'Echo* (www.lecho.be) and in Dutch *De Tijd* (www.tijd.be). In French and Dutch, other weeklies include *Imediair* (www.imediair.be) and *Trends* (www.trends.be). *Forward* (www.vbo-feb.be) is the monthly publication of the Chamber of Commerce. In Dutch, *Impuls*

(<http://intersight.org/impuls>) is an annual business directory.

Periodicals: Some daily newspapers publish weekend editions. In French and Dutch, *Flair* (www.flair.be), *Jet Magazine* (www.jetmagazine.be), and *Loving You* (www.lovingyou.be) are women's magazines. In English *New Europe* (www.neurope.eu), gives analysis of EU issues. In French and Dutch, monthly magazines include *Test Aankoop* (www.test-aankoop.be), a consumer magazine and *Meervoud* (www.meervoud.org) advocates Flemish sovereignty and *MM* (www.mm.be) is a magazine on marketing,

Broadcasting

National, public broadcasting is provided by Radio-Télévision Belge de la Communauté Française (RTBF) for the French-speaking community and Vlaamse Radio en Televisie (VRT) for the Dutch-speaking community.

Radio: There are two public and one commercial national networks, RTBF (www.rtf.be/radio) has five stations and an international programme, VRT (www.vrt.be) has five stations and Belgischer Rundfunk (www.brf.be) transmitting programmes in German, has two stations. All broadcasters offer full internet access.

There are many independent, private, regional radio stations including C Dance Network (www.c-dance.be) and Topradio (www.topradio.be/); local stations include Crooze FM (www.crooze.fm) and Geel FM (www.geelfm.be) from Antwerp, Ciel Radio (www.cielradio.be) and Q Music (www.q-music.be) from Brussels and Zone 80 (www.zone80.be) from Liège.

Television: All terrestrial TV will be broadcast via digital technology by 2011. VRT is Belgium's leading broadcaster, which uses external production houses to provide domestic programmes. It has two TV channels, één (one) (www.een.be), which has a full range of programmes, Ketnet (www.ketnet.be) is for children and Canvas (www.canvas.be) is an in-depth news, alternative arts and entertainment

channel. Ketnet shares its channel (0700–2000) with Canvas (2000–0100). RTBF (www.rtf.be) operates two terrestrial, TV channels (La Une and La Deux) and a satellite network (www.rtfbsat.be).

Vlaamse Televisie Maatschappij (VTM) (www.vtm.be) is the leading commercial TV network in the Dutch-speaking area, with three channels, VTM, Kanaal Twee (for children) and JIMtv.

There are many pay-to-view services provided via satellite or cable. TV Vlaanderen Digitaal (www.tvvlaanderen.be) and Liberty TV (www.libertytv.com) are satellite stations. Plug TV (www.plugtv.be) and AB3 (www.ab3.be) are cable TV services.

Belgian TV viewers can also tune into a great number of channels from Germany, France, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Spain, Italy and the UK.

Other news agencies: Belga News

Agency: www.belga.be

Flandersnews (VRT news):

www.deredactie.be

Economy

Belgium has used its geographic situation to develop a sophisticated transport system of roads, rail, canals and ports that is important to trade in the European Union (EU). With this network in place, and although it has few natural resources and has to import almost all its raw materials, Belgium nevertheless has a diversified industrial sector, generally in the north (Flanders), based on a highly skilled, productive and multi-lingual work force.

The service sector dominates at around 75 per cent of GDP, with industry constituting almost 25 per cent and agriculture, including fishing, 1 per cent. Antwerp is Europe's second largest port (after Rotterdam, The Netherlands); it processed 157.8 million tonnes of cargo in 2009, of which the single largest component was petroleum derivatives. Antwerp is also a world centre for diamond trading and processing, with imports of rough cut diamonds, cut and polished diamonds; most of the resulting production is exported. International trade in diamonds fell in 2009 as demand dropped in line with the global economic crisis.

In 2008, when the banking crisis struck and the country had to bail-out three of its largest banks that had over-extended their assets on non-performing loans (Fortis, Dexia and KBC Groep), GDP growth fell to 1.0 per cent in 2008, (down from 2.9 per cent in 2007). The crisis caused the downfall of the government as its attempts at selling Fortis left bank shareholders litigious and many bank-workers redundant. Belgium officially entered recession in the first quarter of 2009 with annual GDP growth of -2.9 per cent. However, the economy recovered in 2010, with growth

of 2.3 per cent and an estimated 1.9 per cent in 2011.

The effect of the global recession on Belgium was a drop in exports, a fall in domestic spending and a rise in unemployment. Per capita income that had been US\$35,929 in 2005 jumped to US\$47,756 in 2008 when the economy was buoyant, but within a year per capita income had fallen to US\$44,090 in 2009 and further still to US\$43,379 in 2010. However in the second year of positive growth per capita income grew to an estimated US\$46,878 in 2011.

When the economy is back to pre-crisis levels of growth, the government will have to tackle the imbalance of non-productive citizens and an aging population and the resultant public expenditure in their maintenance through social welfare and pensions.

External trade

As a member of the European Union, Belgium operates within a community-wide free trade area, with tariffs set as a whole. Internationally, the EU has free trade agreements with a number of nations and trading blocs worldwide.

It has a complex and open market economy; national and multinational companies have operations that import raw materials and semi-finished items that are readied and re-exported. While 75 per cent of all exports go to other EU states, international trade has been hampered by the high value of the euro.

Belgium's hand-made, quality chocolate confectioneries are some of the world's most sought after products. The raw chocolate is typically sourced from Africa, with the finished product consumed locally and exported.

Imports

Imports consist of petroleum and derivatives, rough diamonds, machinery and equipment, metal products, pharmaceuticals, foodstuffs, vehicles and products, chemicals and consumer goods.

Main sources: The Netherlands (20.8 per cent of total in 2012), Germany (14.1 per cent), France (10.5 per cent).

Exports

Many companies export more than 80 per cent of their production. Principal exports include machinery and equipment, diamonds, steel, glass, pharmaceuticals and organic chemicals, motor vehicles, foodstuffs and carpets. A new biotechnology sector has developed.

Main destinations: Germany (17.4 per cent of total in 2012), France (15.6 per cent), The Netherlands (12.5 per cent).

Agriculture

The agriculture sector accounts for around 1.4 per cent of GDP and employs 2.5 per cent of the workforce. Although

small-scale, cultivation is intensive, especially in Flanders, which has better soils for arable farming. Here one quarter of the organically managed land is used for arable crops. Belgium is self-sufficient in sugar, eggs, butter and meat, and is an exporter of vegetables and horticultural produce. The amount of land under cultivation (approximately 25 per cent of total land area) is falling.

Reform to the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was introduced in 2005 in Belgium, whereby subsidies paid on farm output, which tended to benefit large farms and encourage overproduction, were replaced by single farm payments not conditional on production. This is expected to reward farms that provide and maintain a healthy environment, food safety and animal welfare standards. The changes are also intended to encourage market conscious production and cut the cost of CAP to the EU taxpayer.

Fishing is a smaller and less important industry in Belgium than in neighbouring countries, largely because of its short coastline. The mussel- and oyster-bearing waters of the Scheldt estuary are bordered on both sides by the Netherlands. Belgium has a flotilla of small offshore trawlers, but no major deep sea fleet.

Forest and other wooded land cover around 22 per cent of the land area – one of the lowest ratios in Europe. The majority of timber materials imported come from Germany and France.

Industry and manufacturing

The large-scale, export-based industrial sector accounts for 22 per cent of GDP and employs approximately 28 per cent of the labour force.

Belgium's industrial sector is strongly regional. Flanders, which accounts for some 60 per cent of GDP, has a modern industrial base. It is also more integrated into international markets than other regions, with around 85 per cent of its output going abroad and accounting for some 70 per cent of total Belgian exports. The region of Wallonia, on the other hand, accounts for 25 per cent of GDP and is burdened with declining heavy industry. The government has made considerable efforts to restructure the industrial base in Wallonia, with substantial investment incentives available.

The government's policy is aimed at facilitating the renewal and restructuring of industry so that it can adapt to new technologies and maintain its competitive position internationally. This includes encouraging domestic and foreign investment in industry with tax incentives, particularly in advanced technology fields.

Tourism

Belgium has 10 sites registered on the Unesco World Heritage list, including pre-historic, ancient, mediaeval and other historical places of interest. The country has modern, well developed connections and communications with all surrounding countries, with an extensive tourism infrastructure and has a reputation for world-class chocolate and beer.

Tourism is an important component of the economy. Travel and tourism constitutes around 5 per cent of GDP and provides employment to over 5 per cent of the workforce. Before the global economic crisis cut visitor numbers in 2009, the annual foreign exchange earnings from tourism was US\$13 billion in 2008; this figure dropped to US\$10.5 billion in 2010 and remained relatively static in 2011, despite a year-on-year increase of 3.9 per cent in international arrivals in the first half of 2011. Capital investment in travel and tourism increased from US\$1.9 billion in 2008 to US\$2.3 billion in 2011 as government measures were applied to improve the prospects of the industry.

Mining

The mining sector accounts for approximately 0.3 per cent of GDP and employs 0.4 per cent of the workforce. There is no longer a mining industry. Only clay and sand are mined on any scale.

There are no known oil or natural gas reserves. However it is a hub for the import and re-export of crude oil which it refines and liquefied natural gas (LNG) for which it is both a conduit and importer and blender of gas coming from The Netherlands, the UK, Norway, Germany and Russia. It imports 18 billion cubic metres of gas annually and 619,800 barrels per day (bpd) of oil. Belgian refineries had a total capacity of 791,000bpd.

Belgium's coal-mining industry has production of 122 million tonnes per annum largely produced by tip-washing; 214 million tonnes are imported to meet domestic demand.

Energy

Installed electricity capacity was 13.5GW. Nuclear power is the primary source of energy, accounting for around 60 per cent of electricity output; most of the rest comes from thermal sources, fired by gas, coal and oil. There are seven nuclear stations. Legislation provides for nuclear energy to be phased out by 2025, but Belgium's environmental obligations to the EU European Climate Change Programme are leading to revised considerations.

Financial markets

Stock exchange
NYSE Euronext NV

Commodity exchange

Liffe Connect

Banking and insurance

The banking sector is divided into three main groups – commercial banks, public credit institutions and private savings banks.

Belgium's efforts to meet the conditions for European Economic and Monetary Union (Emu) involved major restructuring of the financial sector.

Central bank

Banque Nationale de Belgique; European Central Bank (ECB)

Time

GMT plus one hour (daylight saving, late March to late October, GMT plus two hours)

Geography

Belgium is a small European state bordered to the north by the North Sea and The Netherlands, to the east by The Netherlands, Germany and Luxembourg, and to the south and west by France. It is flat near the coast, but hilly in the Ardennes region in the south-east.

Hemisphere

Northern

Climate

The country has a temperate climate; the proximity of the sea reduces the harshness of winter, but makes summers relatively cool.

Temperatures overall do not show great variations. The average for the hottest month, July, is 17 degrees Celsius (C) and for the coldest, January, 3 degrees C. Temperatures tend to be slightly higher along the coast and cooler in the Ardennes.

There is regular but moderate rainfall with average annual precipitation of 800mm.

Dress codes

Belgian dress codes are in general the same as those in other industrialised nations. Suit and tie for men are usual for business and formal occasions, but often a jacket and trousers are sufficient. For women, a suit, dress or skirt and blouse are suitable for most business and social occasions.

Entry requirements

Passports

Passport are required by all visitors, except EU citizens of Schengen Accord states, who require ID cards.

Visa

Required by all, except nationals of EU and Schengen area signatory countries, North America, Australasia and Japan. For further exceptions contact the nearest embassy. A Schengen visa application (offered in several languages) can be

downloaded from <http://europa.eu/abc/travel/> see 'documents you will need'.

Currency advice/regulations

No restrictions on foreign or local currency movements.

Customs

Personal items are duty-free. There are no duties levied on alcohol and tobacco between EU member states, providing amounts imported are for personal consumption.

Health (for visitors)

Nationals of the European Economic Area (EEA) countries and Switzerland can access reduced cost and sometimes free medical treatment using a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) while visiting the EEA. Exceptions include nationals of the 10 countries which joined the EU in 2004 whose EHIC is not valid in Switzerland. Applications for the EHIC should be made before travelling.

Mandatory precautions

There are no mandatory health precautions.

Advisable precautions

No exceptional precautions are necessary; any necessary medication should be kept with its original packaging.

Hotels

It is advisable to book hotel or pension in advance either directly or through Belgium Tourist Reservations. By law, all tariffs must be displayed. Service charges are usually included. Tipping is roughly 10 per cent. Major credit cards are accepted.

Public holidays (national)

Fixed dates

1 Jan (New Year's Day), 1 May (Labour Day), 21 Jul (Independence Day), 15 Aug (Assumption Day), 1 Nov (All Saints' Day), 2 Nov (All Souls' Day), 11 Nov (Armistice Day), 15 Nov (Dynasty Day), 25 Dec (Christmas Day), 26 Dec (St Stephen's Day). Also community public holidays: 11 Jul (Flemish community); 27 Sep (French-speaking community).

Fixed-date holidays that fall on a Sunday are observed on the following day.

Variable dates

Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Whit Monday.

Working hours

Banking

Mon–Fri: 0900–1600. Banks are open most days, although a few small banks close at lunch-time.

Business

Mon–Fri: 0830–1730; Sat: 0900–1200.

Government

Mon–Fri: 0900–1700.

Shops

Mon–Sat: 0900/1000–1800/1900. In large cities, convenience stores (*magasins*

de nuit/avondwinkels) stay open either all night or until around 2200 every day, including Sundays.

Telecommunications

Mobile/cell phones

There are G3 and 900/1800 GSM services available throughout the country.

Electricity supply

220V AC

Social customs/useful tips

It can be considered impolite to use French in Dutch-speaking Flanders or Dutch in Wallonia due to historical friction between the two language groups. English is quite widely understood and has made headway as a *lingua franca*, in Brussels in particular.

In Flanders, the names of Walloon cities are generally in Flemish and vice versa in Wallonia. There are also different names for German place names in both Belgium and Germany.

Business relations require some degree of formality and the use of the formal pronoun in French and Dutch (*vous/U*). It is customary to shake hands at the beginning and end of a meeting. Punctuality is valued.

Belgium has one of the highest ratios of police to population of any western European country and officers are permitted to undertake random identity checks. It is compulsory to have a passport or identity card with you at all times.

Alcohol is sold freely at any time of day or night. Smoking is banned in public places (including stations and airports).

Traffic coming from the right has priority in most situations (if the driver who has priority slows down or hesitates, he/she still has priority; a driver who has priority only loses this after having stopped and started moving again). Therefore, foreign drivers should be aware that vehicles could suddenly emerge from side-streets to their right.

Security

There is very little street crime or violence in Belgium, though the inner cities have isolated problem areas.

Getting there

Air

National airline: SN Brussels Airlines is an independent, Belgium airline.

International airport/s: Brussels Zaventem (BRU), 13km north-east of the city centre; amenities include, banks, restaurant, duty-free shops (arriving and departing), medical facilities and business centre. Antwerp International (ANR), 3km east of Antwerp; Brussels-South Charleroi (CRL), 55km south-east of Brussels; Ostend International (OST), 6km from city; Liège (LGG) 5km from the city centre.

Airport tax: Departure tax: Brussels Zaventem eur20.93; Brussels-South Charleroi: eur13.49; Antwerp and Ostend eur10; Liège eur7.

Surface

Rail: Express trains (TEE) ensure rapid connection with all French, Dutch and German cities.

Water: There are daily crossings by ferry or jetfoil to Ostend or Zeebrugge from the UK and Norway.

Main port/s: Antwerp, Ghent, Zeebrugge, Ostend, Brussels, Liège.

Getting about

National transport

Road: There is an extensive road network. Toll-free motorways serve all main towns with the exception of those in the Ardennes.

Buses: Extensive coach services operate throughout the country, particularly to rural areas, run by Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Belges (SNCFB) and Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Vicinaux (SNCFV).

Rail: First- and second-class services run between all main towns. Combined tickets allowing stop-overs in main towns offer best value. Over half the railway network is electrified.

Water: There are over 1,500km of inland waterways. Services are operated by Administration des Voies Hydrauliques. Inland canals connect with major French, Dutch and German ports.

City transport

Taxis: Readily available throughout the country. The standardised, metered fare system includes a tip in the final price. Taxis booked to call for a pick-up include a surcharge in their fare. Chauffeur-driven cars are cheaper on long journeys.

Buses, trams & metro: Flat fares are charged on tram and bus service. There are metro services in Brussels and Antwerp.

Trains: Special airport shuttle service operates from Brussels Central Station and North Station, departing every hour.

Car hire

Available at airports and in most main towns. The minimum age of a hire car driver is 23 years. A full driving licence, valid for at least one year remaining is required. All vehicles must carry a fire extinguisher and first aid kit. Speed limit: urban roads 60kph, main roads 90kph. Maximum speed on dual carriageways and motorways 120kph, minimum speed 70kph. Drive on the right. The wearing of seat belts throughout the vehicle is compulsory. Trams have right of way on any road.

BUSINESS DIRECTORY

The addresses listed below are a selection only. While World of Information makes every endeavour to check these addresses, we cannot guarantee that changes have not been made, especially to telephone numbers and area codes. We would welcome any corrections.

Telephone area codes

The international direct dialling code (IDD) for Belgium is +32, followed by area code and subscriber's number:

Antwerp3Ypres57
Arlon63Liège41
Bastogne61La Louvière64
Brugge50Libramont61
Brussels2Mechelen15
Charleroi71Mons65
Chimay60Ostende59
Dendermonde52Verviers87
Ghent9Zeebrugge50

Chambers of Commerce

American Chamber of Commerce, 50 Avenue des Arts, 1000 Brussels (tel: 513-6770; fax: 513-3590; e-mail: gch@postil.amcham.be).

Antwerp Chamber of Commerce, 12 Markgravestraat, 2000 Antwerp (tel: 232-2219; fax: 233-6442; e-mail: eic@kkna.be).

British Chamber of Commerce, Egmont House, 15 Rue d'Egmont, 1000 Brussels (tel: 540-9030; fax: 512-8363; e-mail: brit.cham@britcham.be).

Bruges Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 25 Ezelstraat, 8000 Bruges (tel: 333-696; fax: 342-297; e-mail: brugge@ccibkw.be).

Brussels Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 500 Avenue Louise, 1050 Brussels (tel: 648-5002; fax: 640-9328; e-mail: inscription@ccib.irisnet.be).

Charleroi Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 1a Avenue Général Michel, 6000 Charleroi (tel: 321-160; fax: 334-218; e-mail: info@ccic.be).

Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Belgium, 1-2 Avenue des Arts, 1210 Brussels (tel: 209-1550; fax: 209-0568; e-mail: fedcci@cci.be).

Ghent Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 41 Martelaarslaan, 9000 Ghent (tel: 266-1440; fax: 266-1441; e-mail: kkgent@cci.be).

Liège Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Palais des Congrès de Liège, 2 Esplanade de l'Europe, 4020 Liège (tel: 343-9292; fax: 343-9267; e-mail: info@ccilg.be).

Banking

AXA Bank Belgium, 214 Grotesteeweg, 2600 Antwerp (tel: 286-2211; fax: 286-2407; e-mail: contact@axa.be).

Dexia, Boulevard Pachéco 44, 1000 Brussels (tel: 222-1111; fax: 222-1122; e-mail: info@dexia.be).

Fortis Banque, 20 Rue Royale, 1000 Brussels (tel: 510-5211; fax: 510-5626 e-mail: info@fortis.com).

ING Belgium, 24 Avenue Marnix, 1000 Brussels (tel: 547-2111; fax: 547-3844; e-mail: info@ing.be).

KBC Bank and Insurance, Havenlaan 2, 1080 Brussels (tel: 429-1111; fax: 429-8123; e-mail: kbc.bank@kbc.be).

Central bank

Banque Nationale de Belgique, Boulevard de Berlaimont 14, BE-1000 Brussels (tel: 221-2111; fax: 221-3100; email: info@nbb.be).

European Central Bank (ECB), Kaiserstrasse 29, D-60311, Postfach 16 03 19, Frankfurt am Main, Germany (tel: (+49-69) 13-440; fax: (+49-69) 1344-6000; email: info@ecb.int; internet: www.ecb.int).

Stock exchange

NYSE Euronext NV, Palais de la Bourse, Place de la Bourse, 1000 Brussels (tel: 509.1211; fax: 509-1212; e-mail: info@euronext.be; www.euronext.com).

Chi-X, www.chi-x.com

Commodity exchange

Liffe Connect, www.nyse.com/nyseuronext

Travel information

Brussels International Airport Company (BIAC), Brussels Airport, B-1930 Zaventem, (tel: 2753-4200; email: info@biac.be).

Brussels International Tourism and Congress, Hôtel de Ville, Grand Place, 1000 Brussels (tel: 513-8940; fax: 513-8320; e-mail: info@brusselstourism.be).

SN Brussels Airlines, The Corporate Village, Da Vincilaan 9, 1935 Zaventem (customer service tel: 070 351-111; internet: www.flysn.be).

National tourist organisation offices

Belgian Tourist Office (Brussels and Ardennes), 61 Rue du Marché aux Herbes, 1000 Brussels (tel: 504-0390; fax: 504-0270; e-mail: info@opt.be).

Belgian Tourist Office (Tourism Flanders), 63 Rue du Marché aux Herbes, 1000 Brussels (tel: 504-0390; fax: 504-0270; e-mail: info@toerismevlaanderen.be).

Ministries

Ministry of Agriculture and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, 1 Rue Marie-Thérèse, 1000 Brussels (tel: 211-0611; fax: 219-6130).

Ministry of the Budget, 180 Rue Royale, 1000 Brussels (tel: 219-1911; fax: 217-3328).

Ministry for the Civil Service, Résidence Palace, 51 Rue de la Loi, 1040 Brussels (tel: 790-5800; fax: 790-5790).

Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Public Health and Environment, 7 Avenue des Arts, 1210 Brussels (tel: 220-2011; fax: 220-2067; e-mail: environment@health.fgov.be).

Ministry of Defence, 8 Rue Lambermont, 1000 Brussels (tel: 550-2811; fax: 550-2919).

Ministry of Economic Affairs and Scientific Research, 23 Square de Meeûs, 1000 Brussels (tel: 506-5111; fax: 514-4683).

Ministry of Employment, 51 Rue Belliard, 1040 Brussels (tel: 233-5111; fax: 230-1067; e-mail: info@cabmeta.fgov.be).

Ministry of Finance, 12 Rue de la Loi, 1000 Brussels (tel: 238-8111; fax: 233-8003; e-mail: contact@ckfin.minfin.be).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 15 Rue des Petits Carmes, 1000 Brussels (tel: 501-8211; fax: 511-6385; internet site: http://www.diplobel.fgov.be/default_em.htm).

Ministry of Interior Affairs, 60 Rue Royale, 1000 Brussels (tel: 504-8511; fax: 504-8500; e-mail: info@mibz.fgov.be).

Ministry of Justice, 115 Boulevard de Waterloo, 1000 Brussels (tel: 542-7911; fax: 538-0767; info@just.fgov.be).

Ministry of Mobility and Transport, 65 Rue de la Loi, 1040 Brussels (tel: 237-6711; fax: 230-1824).

Ministry of Social Affairs and Pensions, 62 Rue de la Loi, 1040 Brussels (tel: 238-2811; fax: 230-3895).

Ministry of Telecommunications, Public Enterprises and Participations, 7 Queteletplein, 1030 Brussels (tel: 250-0303; fax: 219-0914; e-mail: info@telcobel.be).

Prime Minister's Office, 16 Rue de la Loi, 1000 Brussels (tel: 501-0211; fax: 512-6953).

Other useful addresses

Belgian Association of International Trading Houses (ABNEI), 7 Israëlietenstraat, 2000 Antwerp (tel: 226-0712; fax: 231-9969; e-mail: tradechem@cmc.be).

Belgian Embassy (USA), 3330 Garfield Street, NW, Washington DC 20008 (tel: 202-333-6900; fax: 202-333-3079).

Belgian Foreign Trade Board, World Trade Centre, Tower 1, 30/36 Boulevard du Roi Albert II, 1000 Brussels (tel: 206-3511; fax: 203-1812; e-mail: info@obcebdhb.be).

Belgian Institute of Standardisation, 29 Avenue de la Brabançonne, 1000

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Brussels (tel: 738-0111; fax: 733-4264; e-mail: info@ibn.be).

British Embassy, 85 Rue d'Arlon, 1040 Brussels (tel: 287-6211; fax: 287-6360; e-mail: info@britain.be).

Brussels Regional Development Agency, 6 Rue Gabrielle Petit, 1080 Brussels (tel: 422-5111; fax: 422-5112; info@sdrb.irisnet.be).

Ducroire/Delcredere (export credit agency), 40 Square de Meûs, 1000 Brussels (tel: 509-4211; fax: 513-5059; e-mail: ducroire@ondd.be).

Euler-Cobac (credit insurance), 15 Rue Montoyer, 1000 Brussels (tel: 289-311; fax: 289-329).

Federation of Belgian Companies (VBO-FEB), 4 Rue Ravenstein, 1000 Brussels (tel: 515-0811; fax: 515-0999; e-mail: info@vbo-feb.be).

Flemish Economic Alliance (VEV), 5 Brouwersvliet, 2000 Antwerp (tel: 202-4400; fax: 233-7660; e-mail: vev@vev.be).

Flemish Foreign Trade Board, 40 Boulevard du Régent, 1000 Brussels (tel:

504-8711; fax: 504-8899; e-mail: info@export.vlaanderen.be).

Investment Company for Flanders (GIMV), 37 Karel Oomsstraat, 2018 Antwerp (tel: 290-2100; fax: 290-2105; e-mail: receptie@gimv.be).

National Institute of Statistics, 44/46 Rue de Louvain, 1000 Brussels (tel: 548-6365; fax: 548-6367; e-mail: info@statbel.mineco.fgov.be).

US Embassy, 27 Boulevard du Régent, 1000 Brussels (tel: 508-2111; fax: 511-2725; e-mail: ic@usinfo.be).

Walloon Business Union (UWE), 1-3 Chemin du Stockoy, 1300 Wavre (tel: 471-940; fax: 453-343; e-mail: info@uwe.be).

Walloon Export Agency (AWEX), 2 Place Saintelette, 1080 Brussels (tel: 421-8211; fax: 421-8787; e-mail: mail@awex.wallonie.be).

Other news agencies: Belga News Agency: www.belga.be

Flandersnews (VRT news): www.deredactie.be

Internet sites

Belgium companies: www.belgium.com/business/tradecontact.php

Belgium Federal Information Service: www.belgium.fgov.be/

Belgium Foreign Trade Board: www.obcebdbh.be

Belgium White Pages: www.infobel.be

Europa (Gateway site): <http://europa.eu.int>

Export services: <http://exportservices.be>

Travel information: www.visitbelgium.com

Railway information: www.b-rail.be

Statistics: www.statbel.fgov.be

Le Soir (newspaper): www.lesoir.be

La Poste (newspaper) www.brusselspost.com

Government of Flanders: www.flanders.be

Government of Wallonia: www.wallonie.com

Hotels and restaurants: www.brussels-online.com