

COUNTRY PROFILES

Belgium

The research into literature on the approaches of the three Belgian communities regarding international cultural policy suggests that generally a positive attitude towards cooperation with other European countries vis-à-vis the rest of the world prevails – although levels of cooperation and policies vary from community to community.

Belgium is a federal country. Many policy areas, including culture and international cooperation, have been devolved to regions and communities. The three linguistic (Flemish, French and German-speaking) communities have the competence for self-governance in the field of international cultural cooperation. They have the authority to conclude international agreements and treaties with foreign governments at local, regional and national levels. As a result there are three distinct policies on international cultural cooperation instead of just one.¹ In the context of multilateral organisations or bodies where only one seat is available, such as the EU, the communities' ministers attend on a rotating basis.

Cultural institutes of national importance are under the supervision of the federal government. The government also oversees the adherence of the communities to national basic principles with regard to cultural policies, e.g. the protection of ideological and philosophical minorities and the setting up of councils. The federal government and the bodies of the communities coordinate their activities regularly.

Common to all three communities is that they seek international recognition of their competences as infra-state actors. In practice this means that often cooperation is sought with other infra-state actors.

M i n i s t r y o f C u l t u r e , Y o u t h , S p o r t
a n d B r u s s e l s – F l e m i s h c o m m u n i t y
Cultural policy is mainly dealt with by the Department for Culture of the Ministry of Culture, Youth, Sport and Brussels. In 2004, the Parliament of the Flemish Community adopted a new act for cultural policy, the Arts Flemish Parliament Act. It advances an integrated approach for all professional artistic expressions and includes an international dimension. Generally, funding is based on cultural criteria. However, the Minister has argued that considerations such as employment, the image of Flanders and foreign policy cannot be ruled out within the context of international cultural policy.

T h e c u r r e n t M i n i s t e r f o r C u l t u r e
s t r e s s e s t h e i m p o r t a n c e o f
d e v e l o p i n g a n i n t e r n a t i o n a l
c u l t u r a l p o l i c y . T h e C o u n c i l f o r
C u l t u r e h a s a d v i s e d t h e
g o v e r n m e n t o n t h e d e v e l o p m e n t o f
s u c h a p o l i c y . T h e C o u n c i l
a r g u e s t h a t i n t e r n a t i o n a l
c u l t u r a l p o l i c y s h o u l d b e
e m b e d d e d i n g e n e r a l c u l t u r a l
p o l i c y a s i t c a n c o n t r i b u t e t o
o n e o f t h e m a i n t h e m e s i n
c u l t u r a l p o l i c y , i . e . i n c r e a s i n g
i n t e r c u l t u r a l c o m p e t e n c e . W i t h
r e g a r d t o c o o r d i n a t i o n w i t h

Flemish foreign policy, the Council warns that foreign policy considerations should not guide the selection of Flemish art to be promoted.

Ministry for Foreign Affairs –
Flemish community

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs seeks to promote Flanders and regards cultural activities as a potential resource. Priority countries in which to expand its activities in developing cooperation are South-Africa, Morocco and Mozambique.

Policy focus – Flemish community

In the Flemish community policy statement on culture for 2004-2009, the development of a two-way international cultural policy is foreseen. Its main objectives are to:

- promote the visibility of Flemish art and culture abroad;
- increase the presence of foreign artists in Flanders and to stimulate cultural cooperation.

The policy statement foresees the necessity to increase participation in multilateral forums and European programmes. It also mentions efforts to streamline international communication in order to promote Flemish arts and culture abroad. Furthermore, it aims to develop a strategy for including culture in development cooperation as an agent of development.

Themes in foreign policy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are the protection of cultural diversity and the protection of minorities.

Geographical focus – Flemish
community

Flemish international cooperation tends to focus on other EU member countries (old and new), with the Netherlands as a top priority. The ten bilateral cultural cooperation agreements follow the same trend and include Norway. An increased interest in EU neighbouring countries such as Algeria (cultural agreement), Turkey and Morocco can be observed.

Outside “wider Europe” Flanders is active in cultural cooperation with South Africa, Chile, Mozambique and Canada (principally Québec). And, according to policy statements, hopes to build relations with China and Japan.

French community

The international relations of the Walloon Region and the French-speaking Community of Brussels are administered by the CGRI-DRI (Commissariat Général aux Relations Internationales - Division des Relations Internationales) in cooperation with COCOF (Commission Communautaire Française de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale). The responsibilities of this (now) single administrative body include the management of bilateral relations, including cultural relations. Currently it has cooperation agreements with fifty-five countries, regions and provinces on five continents.

As is the case with all other EU Member States, the French Community of Flanders cooperates with UNESCO and the Council of Europe as well as the EU and its bodies. The most important multilateral cooperation forum for Wallonia-Brussels is the Organisation Internationale de Francophonie. It is viewed as an alternative to unilateral and homogenising tendencies in the global context.

Policy focus – French community

As a body concerned with foreign policy, the activities of CGRI-DRI in the field of culture tend to be intimately related to foreign policy. The CGRI-DRI has published a series of cahiers detailing its strategic cultural cooperation policies. The main fields of activity include:

- the promotion of cultural diversity (which is generally understood as the promotion of the French language);
- intercultural dialogue;
- equal opportunities for men and women; social integration.

The government of the French Community announces its “militant” support for cultural diversity as the expression of democracy and respect. It seeks to establish a strong international legal instrument that allows European states and governments (including the French Community) to express their cultural identities. Cultural goods should be protected from market forces because they express identities and values. Diversity can be achieved by support of the free movement of artists and art, and by community support for foreign artists.

The strengthening of the visibility of Wallonia-Brussels remains the top-most priority. In this context, the French Community government aims to develop a strategy for reinforcing the emancipation of Wallonia-Brussels as a strong international actor. It also aims to advance the “European idea” and the European construction as an integral part of a global federal system, and wishes to reinforce the European consciousness of its citizens.

G e o g r a p h i c a l f o c u s – F r e n c h c o m m u n i t y

The Walloon-Brussels’ international policy focuses on two geographical poles: the European Union and the Francophonie. The current policy statement (2004-2009) by the French-speaking community seems to indicate that the importance of the former is to be increased.

Among the former, cooperation with France and Poland are pronounced in policy statements. Delegations of COCOF are also present in France (Paris), Germany (Berlin), Poland (Warsaw) and the Czech Republic (Prague). Furthermore, a cultural centre is housed in France (Paris).

Some limited emphasis is also placed on neighbouring non-EU countries for example Romania is cited prominently in policy papers and the CGRI-DRI claims to organise activities in Algeria, Israel, Tunisia, Palestine, Romania, Switzerland, Lebanon and Morocco.

The French Community have a delegation from COCOF in USA (Baton Rouge) and Québec (Canada). The CGRI-DRI claims to also be active in Québec and Louisiana (USA).

The CGRI-DRI is also active in Sub-Saharan Africa (Congo, Burundi, Rwanda) Benin, Burkina Faso and Senegal; in South Africa (Kwazulu Natal); and in Asia.

The CGRI-DRI also claims to be active in Vietnam, China and Japan. Mention is also made in policy statements of Bolivia, Chile, Cuba and Haiti.

G e r m a n c o m m u n i t y

The German-speaking community is the smallest of the three Belgian communities (pop. 71.000). Its international cultural relations are limited and focus on neighbouring EU Member States and regions. The Department for General Affairs is responsible for international relations, however the responsibility for individual policy areas (culture, education etc.) lies with the relevant departments. The department is currently working on a strategy paper for the international relations of the German-speaking community.

T h e D e p a r t m e n t o f G e n e r a l A f f a i r s – G e r m a n c o m m u n i t y

The Department for Cultural Affairs is responsible for cultural policy. It is currently working on a new decree on culture, and furthermore aims to promote cultural exchange within Belgium and

beyond. The department funds cultural actors who request support for their international activities.

G e o g r a p h i c a l f o c u s - G e r m a n c o m m u n i t y

The international cultural relations of the German Community are limited to and focussed on neighbouring EU Member States and regions. The German Community in Belgium has only concluded cultural agreements with other EU countries namely: Germany, France, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Austria, and Hungary.

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Ce site portail offre un accès immédiat aux sites culturels de la Communauté française, toute l'information culturelle est désormais concentrée sous une seule adresse : le navigateur de la Culture en Communauté française

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Depuis 1996, quatre accords de coopération conclus par la Communauté française, la Région wallonne et la Commission communautaire française de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale (COCOF) ont réorganisé les Relations internationales afin d'assurer une visibilité et une présence optimales de Wallonie-Bruxelles dans le domaine international. L'Espace international Wallonie-Bruxelles (EIBB) regroupe les administrations des Relations internationales (CGRI-DRI), l'Association pour la Promotion de la Formation et l'Education à l'Etranger (APEFE), l'Agence wallonne à l'Exportation et aux Investissements étrangers (AWEX) et constitue également un réseau à l'étranger (Délégués, Attachés économiques et commerciaux, Coordonnateurs APEFE). Les filiales spécialisées : Wallonie-Bruxelles Images, Wallonie-Bruxelles Musiques, Wallonie-Bruxelles Théâtre et le Bureau International de la Jeunesse, sont gérées par le CGRI et le Ministère de la Communauté française

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Das Königreich Belgien ist ein Bundesstaat, der drei autonome Gemeinschaften, drei Regionen und vier Sprachgebiete umfasst. Die drei Gemeinschaften sind: die Flämische Gemeinschaft, die Französische Gemeinschaft und als kleinster Bestandteil des Staates die Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft. Diese verfügt wie die beiden großen Gemeinschaften über politische Eigenständigkeit....

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The "Grande region" is set in the heart of Europe and covers the regions of Sarre, Lorraine, Grand Duché de Luxembourg, Rhénanie Palatinat, Région Wallonne, and the French and German communities of Belgium. The cooperation between these regions extends to include economic, cultural, tourism and social development.

