



Belgium

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Leaving The Door Open



Western Balkan countries which genuinely want to belong to the EU, and share and defend its basic values and political objectives, are being offered ample opportunities for implementing such a policy. The statement by the German Foreign Minister, Sigmar Gabriel on a “Berlin process reloaded” is only the latest example of the willingness of the EU and member states to continue extending a helping hand to those committed to the EU project – Leo D’Aes

The Belgian Ambassador to Serbia, H.E. Leo D’Aes, insists that the challenges confronting the European Union, at the internal and the global levels, have not brought an end to the idea of expansion to the countries of the Western Balkans. Testifying to this, he says in this interview for CorD Magazine, are not only the recent announcements of the highest European officials, but also the concrete financial support of €100 million that Serbia received in early June from the EU pre-accession funds. Ambassador D’Aes advises that Serbia continue with

reforms, particularly in the area of the rule of law and establishing a business climate that would guarantee predictability and stability of investments for potential investor companies.

• **Your Excellency, you recently told students of the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade that Serbia can become an EU member when it fulfils all conditions in the process. However, one gets the impression that EU enlargement is becoming ever less important on the European agenda due to the internal situation within the Union.**

On what basis do you claim that the Balkans is an EU priority?

- I will answer this question by recalling a clear statement made by the European Council on 9th March: “In light of the internal and external challenges that the region is facing, the European Council discussed the fragile situation in the Western Balkans, which it will keep under review. It stresses the importance of continuing on the reform path, good neighbourly relations and inclusive regional cooperation initiatives. It reaffirmed its unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western

RELATIONS

Our bilateral relations are coloured by the accession process, in which we are committed to progress. It's a partnership with shared responsibilities geared towards the future, so I cherish it and try to contribute to it

DIVORCE

The EU and Britain are faced with the unpleasant task of divorcing. Let us deal with this in a way that respects both sides' interests

CERTAINTY

Any businessperson rightly demands legal certainty at all levels (state, local) and in all fields (technical, taxes, permits etc.)

Balkans. Welcoming the progress made by the countries of the region, the European Council stresses that the EU remains committed and engaged at all levels to support them in conducting EU-orientated reforms and projects".

This statement followed a visit, the week before, of HR Mogherini to the region, and was followed by the participation, one week later, of Commissioner Hahn in the WB6 meeting in Sarajevo. And, as you know, another high-level meeting of the WB6 was called by HR Mogherini on 24th May. Commissioner Hahn was here again on 8th June to participate in the EU-Western Balkans Investment Climate Forum. These are just the most recent examples of the continued, sustained and active interest of the EU in the Balkans.

• **At the recent celebration of the 60th anniversary of the founding of the EU there was almost no mention of enlargement, while the "white paper" of Jean-Claude Juncker on the future of the Union until 2025 does not mention expansion at all, but rather only five EU consolidation scenarios. What kind of message does that send to candidate countries?**

- Western Balkan countries that genuinely want to belong in the EU, and which share and defend its basic values and political objectives, are being offered ample opportunities to implement such a policy. The statement by German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel on 31st May, on a "Berlin process reloaded", is only the latest (and strongest) example of the willingness of the EU and/or member states to continue extending a helping hand to those committed to the EU project. Making an attractive economic area of the WB6 is a concrete project and, in my opinion, sends a very

positive message to the region. It implies, of course, mutual responsibilities. Other opportunities for substantial and



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lasting reforms in all sectors related to the EU acquis abound, with substantial EU help available. For instance: as recently as 7th June, Serbian European

Affairs Minister Joksimović signed an agreement in Brussels, together with Commissioner Hahn, on a package worth nearly €100 million to boost Serbia's economic competitiveness, infrastructure and judicial system.

• **Belgian Finance Minister Johan Van Overtveldt said that the EU as we know was destroyed by Brexit. He considered it would now be best to reorganise the Union in such a way that member countries form a strong alliance around key issues – security, migration and trade – rather than dealing with "trivia policies" that increase discontent among citizens across the continent. Is that "Europe in multiple circles", and how would decisions on enlargement be made in such an alliance?**

- The position of the Benelux countries is clear: the EU needs to focus increasingly on its core priorities, doing what member states alone cannot deliver to their citizens. Moreover, different paths of integration and enhanced cooperation could provide for effective responses to challenges that affect member states in different ways. That means, simply, that in our view the EU must continue moving forward, effectively responding to global challenges (i.e. the broad field of security), preferably in unison, or else in a core group, on specific issues, if need be. Evaluating and deciding the readiness of candidates to join such a dynamic EU will, of course, require broad consensus.

• **Speaking about Brexit, Belgium seems to favour reaching an agreement with the UK as soon as possible and not prolonging negotiations. Given that some are of the opinion that the EU should not make concessions in negotiations, because that would send**



a bad signal to other states, which option do you think will prevail?

- The EU and Britain are faced with the unpleasant task of divorcing. Let us deal with this in a way that respects both sides' interests: those of Britain wishing to cancel its obligations of membership, those of the EU wishing to keep intact the rights and obligations of the EU member states which signed up to the Treaties. In other words, it is quite clear that abandoning obligations of membership implies losing the advantages of that membership.

• Belgian media are reporting increases in the number of Brits seeking Belgian citizenship, especially among those who live in Belgium for work reasons. How will the government deal with such requests?

- Any British citizen applying for Belgian citizenship will need to comply with the current legislation on Belgian nationality.

• When it comes to Serbia, you recently advised Serbian government not to wait for the EU to become ready for enlargement, but rather to continue with reforms. Do you believe this process can be just as effective without clear prospects of joining the EU?

- Yes and no. Yes, because a number of reforms are necessary as such, with or without joining the EU. No, because joining the EU is a privilege to which one can rightly and proudly look forward, as a healthy motivation. So, it's a combination of what needs to be done anyway, with an inspiring commitment to become the member of a political project that has successfully entered its 61st year.

• In which areas do you consider reforms as being the most needed?

- The areas are quite well known: macro-economic stability and fiscal consolidation, attainable and attractive incen-



forts to gradually approach the grand EU acquis. As a founding member, we are not only in favour of the principle of strict and fair conditionality, we are always open to discuss with the accession team the best ways to make progress, in any field, in any chapter. There are many informal consultations like that in Brussels, at all levels, with Serbian representatives to the EU, and in which we (like all member states) aim to increase understanding and facilitate progress for those working hard to join us. And, of course, as a contributing member state, we help "in practical terms", i.e. financially, through everything the EU does here in terms of pre-accession assistance.

• How would you evaluate bilateral relations between Belgium and Serbia?

- Our bilateral relations are coloured by the accession process, in which we are committed to progress. It's a partnership with shared responsibilities geared towards the future, so I cherish it and try to contribute to it. In the meantime, we cooperate actively and substantially, for instance in the wide area of justice and police investigations and in the ever-ongoing fight against organised crime. As you know, our economic relations are modest, but with Serbia's efforts aimed at improving the business climate come an enhanced interest from Belgian companies.

• The interior ministers of Belgium and Serbia signed an agreement on police cooperation a few months ago, aimed at ensuring more efficient cooperation in the fight against terrorism and organised crime. How is that agreement implemented?

- The recently signed police cooperation agreement is especially important in the rapid exchange of information on all matters related to organised crime. It

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tives for SMEs to invest, the rule of law in the broad sense, the many practical steps to take to open up the WB6-area and making it a true regional market at the micro-level.

• Belgium has repeated several times that Serbia can count on its help and support in the process of membership negotiations. What does that help look like in practical terms?

- We very closely monitor Serbia's ef-

contributes to making daily operational relations, which, as you know, are quite intense, even smoother.

• On the same occasion, Belgian Interior Minister Jan Jambon stated that around 200 Belgian nationals are active on the battlefields of Iraq and Syria. At the same time, other data suggest that several hundred Belgian citizens have contacts with radical groups, some of which are responsible for terrorist attacks in Belgium and throughout Europe. How is the government dealing with this problem?

- The CT (counter terrorism) activities are of course very much part of the wide network of cooperation within the EU, and between the EU and its Balkan partners. Key fora like the EU-Western Balkans Ministerial meetings on Justice and Home Affairs, or the Western Balkan Counter-Terrorism Initiative (WBCTI) help us and other EU Member

states to manage, to the extent possible, the threat. No state can do it alone. With every day passing the practical cooperation

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with our many partners in this very demanding task of CT is increasing.

• To what extent is Serbia interesting for Belgian investors today and where do you see possible obstacles to their greater engagement in Serbia?

- With fiscal consolidation taking root, and with initiatives for promoting SMEs increasing and being sustained, there is gradually increasing interest in establishing partnerships here in Serbia, either as a production unit for export or for grasping opportunities of the local market. Hesitations spring from the real or perceived lack of a level playing field, making the investment riskier than it could be elsewhere. Any businessperson rightly demands legal certainty at all levels (state, local) and in all fields (technical, taxes, permits etc.). To the extent that this kind of certainty and confidence increase, Serbia's vast economic potential will equally attract more Belgian interest. ■



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About company

Blockx doo is a company from Serbia, who in 2002 founded the Belgian company Louis Blockx NV from Arendonk. We continue 95 year-old tradition of our Founder in the production of containers, polypropylene fabrics and PP-Big bags.

We belong to the largest European manufacturers of these products.

The whole production process is complete and takes place in one location so you can easily

track the movement of material in order to respect the principle of traceability.

We started manufacturing with used machines. Starting 2006 we completely replaced extruders and weaving machines with the latest generation of the same, so now we have electronically controlled production process with a laboratory that monitors the entire production process.

Our imperatives are quality, reliability, respected deadlines, satisfied customers, but

do not forget our employees from which we require continuous improvement and dedication to the job and in return provide a steady and interesting work with the possibility of constant improvement, taking care of their health and safety.

-processing PP granules and production of PP tapes, fabrics and loops of different dimensions,
-Production Big bags of FIBC (Flexible Intermediate Bulk Containers) and Container liner bags of all types and for all purposes.



A Satisfied Investor Is The Best Ambassador

Serbia has taken courageous steps to tackle different economic challenges, like reducing the deficit and boosting investment. Progress on EU accession also undoubtedly offers foreign companies reassurances that the business environment will be even more predictable, and increases interest among foreign partners. This is even more important for businesspeople than statistics and figures

Bilateral relations between Belgium and Serbia are good and friendly, especially when it comes to cooperation between armies, police and prosecution services. Businesspeople from the two countries have met several times in recent years, including twice this year, with two more meetings planned by the end of the year. However, the total trade exchange could be much better. Economic cooperation between Belgium and Serbia is very good and is gradually expanding every year, says Marijana Milošević Tufegdžić, Economic Counsellor at the Belgian Embassy.

• **Where do you see room for the improvement of this cooperation?**

- There are around 50 Belgian companies currently active in Serbia, represented in various sectors. Overall foreign trade between the two countries is increasing steadily every year, making Serbia more attractive as a partner for Belgian entrepreneurs. Of course, there is always room for improvement. Belgium is at the leading edge of a whole series of sectors.

Some of the most important sectors of the Belgian economy include biotechnology, the environment, the automotive sector,

Belgian companies operating in Serbia are generally satisfied with their activities and investments. Some of them are even very active in promoting Serbia as an interesting business development destination

pharmaceuticals, the agri-food sector, ICT, transport and logistics etc. With its relatively small domestic market, Belgium has developed an open, internationally-orientated economy heavily dependent on foreign trade. Our office in Serbia represents the three Belgian regional agencies specialised in foreign trade - Brussels Invest & Export (<http://invest-export.brussels>), Wallonia

Foreign Trade and Investment Agency (www.awex.be) and Flanders Investment and Trade (www.flandersinvestmentnadtrade.com). We are supporting Belgian companies on a daily basis by providing them with a variety of information regarding the Serbian market - general information (statistics, information on sectors and industries etc.), information on the potential of local markets. Our goal is to raise the attention of Belgian businesspeople regarding the Serbian market's advantages.

• **The bilateral trade exchange in 2016 totalled €564 million, with the balance favouring the Belgian side. Apart from raspberries and cars, what else can Serbia offer the demanding Belgian market?**

- It is true that the raspberries, or Serbia's "red gold", are one of the most exported products from Serbia to Belgium. Nevertheless, Serbia has great potential in various other areas - sectors like metal processing, industrial machinery, agri-food, energy, the environment and ICT offer numerous opportunities for various types

of cooperation between the two countries, as well as possibilities for transfers of knowhow and technology.

• More than 50 companies with Belgian capital currently operate in various sectors in Serbia. How satisfied are they with conditions for doing business; and to what extent do their objections differ from those of the majority of foreign investors?

- In general, the difficulties and challenges faced by the Belgian business community present in Serbia don't differ from the problems of the majority of foreign investors. Belgian companies are generally satisfied with their activities and investments in Serbia; some are even very active in promoting Serbia as an interesting business development destination among other Belgian companies. During recent years the legislative framework has noticeably improved with regard to the general economic environment. Serbia has taken courageous steps to tackle different economic challenges, like reducing the deficit and boosting investment. Also, progress on EU accession undoubtedly offers foreign companies reassurances that the business environment will be even more predictable, and increases interest among foreign partners. This is even more important for businesspeople than statistics and figures. However, there are Belgian companies that have experienced some problems and unpleasant surprises with the regulatory framework when dealing with bureaucratic administration and red tape.

• Are there any Belgian investors current interested in investing in Serbia (and in which areas) or are they still most interested in selling finished products (such as machinery and industrial equipment, chemicals and textile products)?

- So far Belgian companies expressed their interest in the Serbian market in terms of investments in various industrial sectors - agriculture, the food industry,

ICT, metal processing, renewable energy, real-estate. Of course, positive experiences gained by investors who are already active in the country help to attract others, as a satisfied investor is a country's best ambassador. It is important to work constantly on the Serbian marketplace's positive image. At the moment, the real estate sector and various outsourcing possibilities in different industries remain in the main focus of potential Belgian investors.



Food and motor vehicles are currently the most exported products from Serbia to Belgium. In 2016, Serbia was Belgium's 70th supplier, so there is certainly potential for growth

• Belgium is a highly developed industrial country that imports raw materials and semi-finished products, and then exports finished products. With this in mind, are there any finished products from Serbia that have a chance of appearing on the Belgian market?

- The Belgian market is indeed very demanding. As already mentioned, food and motor vehicles are currently the most exported products from Serbia to Belgium. In 2016, Serbia was Belgium's 70th supplier, so there

is certainly potential for growth. The fact that the Serbian Chamber of Commerce has an office in Belgium is of great importance for reinforcing economic cooperation and supporting Serbian companies in their appearance on the Belgian market.

• In cooperation with Belgian producers, and with the use of their technologies, Serbian companies could emerge on markets with which Serbia has a privileged status. Do you see an opportunity to improve trade exchange figures in this segment?

- Serbia's Free Trade Agreements are one of the advantages of the Serbian marketplace. They cover various markets and could also offer interesting business opportunities.

• Businesspeople from the two countries have met several times in recent years, including twice this year; with two more meetings expected by the end of the year. Do you have any feedback on how many of these meetings result in contracts signed or cooperation expanded?

- Every year there are various events organised in order to bring the business communities of the two countries closer together. The three regional agencies that we represent annually organise contact days and seminars in order to promote Serbia as an attractive business destination. This allows us to directly meet with Belgian entrepreneurs interested in doing business in Serbia and provide them with regular and timely information on opportunities, potential local partners, local legislation, tenders and fairs. Furthermore, our office regularly organises visits of Belgian business delegations to Serbia, with one delegation expected to visit Serbia in the first half of 2018. During these visits, through B2B meetings, we bring together potential business partners from the two countries. We are pleased that these business encounters often result in signed contracts. ■



Creating New Prospects For Cooperation

The Belgian-Serbian Business Association (BSBA) continues to support prospective investors and promote the country for business cooperation. Regular events organised by the BSBA provide our members with a platform for interacting and offer a variety of opportunities for networking, establishing new business contacts and new business opportunities

Our mission is to connect and point out opportunities for all who do business in Serbia and in/with Belgium. Members also help to promote each other's business. Networking happens at our friendly, meetings and events, both formal and informal. We see growing interest in the country's business environment every year.

• The Belgian-Serbian Business Association (BSBA) was established precisely seven years ago. How much has the business climate in Serbia changed during that time?

- People in the street are certainly not as excited as I am, but I would simply say close your eyes and imagine the picture of that environment seven years ago and when you have it open your eyes again. Look around and you have to admit that a lot has changed for the better. We see more international brands operating in the country, between Belgrade and Novi Sad you can see along the highway new construction preparing for improved logistics. I see in that a good indicator for the results of change so far and confidence in further improvements in the future.

• One of the biggest investments in Serbia actually came from Belgium when Delhaize bought Maxi for €932 million. How much did this acquisition impact on Belgian investors; did it increase their interest in Serbia?

Supporting SMEs is a cornerstone of the EU's drive for growth and jobs. Since 99% of all EU companies are SMEs, accounting for 67% of jobs, it's clear that what is good for small businesses is good for Europe's economy

- Companies like Delhaize, now Ahold Delhaize, act like ambassadors for business explorers. We hear that indeed when prospective Belgian investors visit Serbia. The Belgian direct impact in their staffing is now minimised, with its management now mainly composed of domestic staff. But there is

not only Delhaize. Our METECH company in Smederevo has strong leadership under Mr Rutten, who doesn't hesitate to invite business relations to visit Serbia, and BLOCKX in Backi Petrovac is not shy about promoting their investment in the country. During a visit of 17 Belgian real estate professionals last month, the presence of BESIX was seen as an important indicator for positive change.

• Do Serbian companies sufficiently take advantage of the retail chain provided by Delhaize, and what is lacking in order for Serbian products to be more present on the shelves of this international retail chain?

- Local companies were struggling, mainly with financial capacity, to reach agreement with retailers like Delhaize. It is up to the producers themselves to seek and use the right financial support instruments. It is noticeable that banks which employ more friendly SME practises take into account a larger number of qualitative factors and their final lending decisions rely more heavily on the assessments of the owner's potential, vision, approach to business, experience, reputation etc. We are

convinced that banks will in general adapt to a more SME-friendly stance. You can see from marketing campaigns that Delhaize (Maxi) is strongly promoting domestic products. I am sure that it was not easy for domestic producers, certainly at the beginning, to comply with the standards imposed by the retailer. I remember specifically that former Delta suppliers needed time to build up a new relationship of trust with Delhaize.

• You said on one occasion that supporting the development of SMEs was one of the BSBA's goals. How developed is this sector in Serbia; can you compare it with the SME scene in Belgium?

- Supporting SMEs is a cornerstone of the EU's drive for growth and jobs. Since 99% of all EU companies are SMEs, accounting for 67% of jobs, it's clear that what is good for small businesses is good for Europe's economy. In Belgium the forecast is that in 2017 SMEs will experience 4.2% growth in employment and 8.4% value added. For some time there has also been a trend to shift to micro enterprises (less employment per unit).

Serbian Economy Minister Goran Knežević said at a COSME event last May that Serbia and Europe draw their biggest potential and strength from small and medium-sized enterprises, which make up 98% of companies in Serbia and contribute with more than 50% of GDP. Compared to official figures from 2013, it means a slight fall back in the SME component, hence in its contribution to GDP. This trend should be stabilised and all efforts to promote SMEs as business entities, as well as support to enhance their efficiency. Fighting the grey economy should be a primary concern.

• When it comes to the comparative advantages of Serbia over other countries where investors can place their money, the "high-quality workforce" comes to the fore. Is this reason enough to attract new investors?

- In the conclusion of the last EU Western Balkans Investment Climate Forum it is stated



The competition abroad is also very hard and unless you are seeking to work far below normal wages it will not be easy to get work

"Young people face particular difficulties in labour market access, fuelling their exodus and thus leading to the brain drain." I believe that this is not completely correct. Access is difficult for too many, but mainly because they do not have the skills required by investors. The government is aware of that and started with support from Austria, Germany and Switzerland to introduce dual education

in order to integrate the needs of economic actors into the skills development of young people. Also smaller initiatives like the ADA financed SEED framework is developing LPE (Local Partnership for Employment), in cooperation with a Belgian consulting house in Serbia, which seeks cooperation between the public, private and civil sectors in improving the employment climate at the local level. Related to the exodus, I can say that more students in higher education see and use the opportunities for studying and gaining experience abroad. The best thing is that more of these students are realising that the best place to promote their knowledge and new skills is Serbia. Believe me, the competition abroad is also very hard, and unless you are seeking to work far below normal wages it will not be easy to get work. Most important

to your question, however, is that investors see in the available workforce willingness to work, and that is certainly present and noticed in Serbia.

• What are your plans for the period ahead; what will the BSBA deal with?

- Apart from our regular activities at the BSBA and the promotion of the SME sector, we will continue to be actively involved in the Mixed Chambers Council of the Serbian Chamber of Commerce & Industry. In the current year we will have another series of working lunches for our members on current topics by relevant authorities on the chosen subject. One of these topics being planned is the reform in administrations, more specifically the issues of inspections and the mitigation of effects of the grey component of the economy. ■



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Crossroad Of Different Cultures

Located in the heart of Western Europe, Belgium enjoys a key position in the European and international economy. As one of the six founding states of the European Union and home to many international organisations, Belgium has always been a prosperous marketplace, in business with countries from all over the world. Even though Belgium has a fairly recent history (founded in 1830), its colourful past and location at the crossroads of different cultures has shaped the cosmopolitan character it has today



Brussels The Capital Of Europe

Brussels hosts the headquarters of the main EU institutions, and that has more to do with a lack of agreement than any political statement. When French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman made his declaration on 9 May 1950, he called for Europe to jointly control their coal and steel industries. Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Italy and the Netherlands agreed and signed the Treaty of Paris in 1951 that created the European Coal and Steel Community. A few years later, in March 1957, the Treaty of Rome created the European Economic Community and the European Community for Atomic Energy.

It was time for the new institutions to start operating; however, no consensus could be reached about which country should host the offices. An emergency meeting in 1958 in Paris concluded that the institutions would be chaired in turn by the ministers of each of the six Member States. Based on alphabetical order, Belgium went first. It is due to the continuing inability of the Member States to decide which city should host the EU institutions that Belgium has become the permanent capital of the EU.

Education

There are 3 different kinds of schools in Belgium, namely community schools, subsidized public schools, and subsidized free schools which are normally affiliated to the Catholic Church. Private home education is permissible too, and these numbers are rising slowly. Education is compulsory between age 6 and age 18. Following an almost universal period of voluntary pre-school, children enter primary school for a period of 6 years. There a curriculum based on reading, writing and basic mathematics encourages interest in a broader range of subjects too.

Secondary schooling unfolds through 3 phases. The 1st one creates a solid general basis, while the 2nd and 3rd ones increase in specificity. Overlaid across these are 4 different genres of schools, namely general secondary schools, technical secondary schools,



vocational secondary education schools, and art secondary education institutions. Over and above these, students with disabilities can follow special syllabi.

Vocational Education

In Flemish-speaking Belgium, ongoing vocational education and training provides a good spread of opportunities for further and second-chance adult education. Policy is dynamic, and the system is accordingly under continuous reform.

Tertiary Education

Belgium Education Anybody with a qualifying secondary school diploma may enroll at any one of several universities, although additional entrance examinations are generally required by faculties of civil engineering, architecture, medical and dental sciences, nautical sciences and fine arts.



Languages in Belgium

As one of the smaller countries in Europe, many visitors to Belgium are surprised to learn it has not one but three official languages: Dutch, French and German.

This is not just because variety is the spice of life - the country's linguistic diversity stems from a series of related political and cultural conflicts that started many hundreds of years ago. It's important to be aware of the sensitivities that surround language and how it changes depending on which part of the country you're in.

Belgium is divided into two distinct regions - Flanders to the north (where Brussels is located) and Wallonia in the south. The Flemish speak Dutch, but do not consider themselves Dutch, and the Walloons speak French, but do not consider themselves French. There is also a small region of German-speaking Belgians on the German border.

The primary language in Belgium is Dutch, spoken by nearly 60% of the population. It's almost identical to that spoken across the border in the Netherlands but some differences in dialect have seen it colloquially called "Flemish".

French is the second most popular language in Belgium, spoken by just over 30% of the population. Many Flemish people can also speak French as a second language. Like the Dutch spoken in Flanders, Belgian French is mostly similar to that spoken in France but there are some small differences in vocabulary and pronunciation.

As a result of this split, many road signs and other notices around Belgium are written in both French and Dutch. German, while one of the three official languages, is much less prevalent and only spoken by less than 1% of the population.

In Brussels, the main language spoken is French but like many capital cities these days is multilingual, perhaps even more so given it is the home of the EU and the high number of foreign officials and diplomats who live there. All public services and information are in both French and Dutch.

Côte d'Or

Chocolate is one of the biggest industries in the world, and as it happens, some of the most famous chocolatiers are located in Belgium.

On 24 April 1883 Belgian Charles Neuhaus registered the Côte d'Or brand. A Belgian icon was born! The first Côte d'Or chocolate was made from cocoa beans from the Gold Coast, now Ghana, and given the familiar elephant logo. The first bar was created in 1911. The famous Côte d'Or packaging was also launched. From their beginnings, these chocolate bars have grown into an assortment comprising dozens of new products and flavours. Including the Mignonnette, Bouchée, Chokotoff, biscuit bars or the launch in 1990 of the Sensations range, the intensely

flavoured chocolate for connoisseurs including Noir de Noir, Noir Intense and Noir Brut. All of these chocolate delights stem from Côte d'Or's expertise and passion for the chocolate product. The reasons for its success are obvious: cutting-edge craftsmanship, faithfulness to a unique intense flavour and the original recipe (high cocoa content and impeccable, consistent quality of the beans) and a constant search for new ideas, with the accompanying successful product innovations. And last but not least: Mondelez International group's respect for Belgian know-how has ensured that the quality of Côte d'Or chocolate is maintained and internationally renowned.



Belgian Beer Heritage

In November 2016 the Belgian beer culture has been inscribed by UNESCO on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Making and appreciating beer is part of the living heritage of a range of communities throughout Belgium. It plays a role in daily life, as well as festive occasions. Almost 1,500 types of beer are produced in the country using different fermentation methods. Since the 80s, craft beer has become especially popular. There are certain regions, which are known for their particular varieties while some Trappist communities have also been involved in beer production giving profits to charity. In addition, beer is used for cooking including in the creation of products like beer-washed cheese and, as in the case of wine, can be paired with foods to compliment flavors. Several organizations of brewers exist who work with communities on a broad level to advocate responsible beer consumption. Sustainable practice has also become part of the culture with recyclable packaging encouraged and new technologies to reduce water usage in production processes. Besides being transmitted in the home and social circles, knowledge and skills are also passed down by master brewers who run classes in breweries, specialized university courses that target those involved in the field and hospitality in general, public training programs for entrepreneurs and small test breweries for amateur brewers.



35th Art Brussels: Contemporary Since 1968

Though it retains its youthful profile as a discovery fair, Art Brussels is one of Europe's oldest and most established fairs, celebrating this year its 35th edition. Since its inception, Art Brussels has evolved into a must-see international contemporary art fair, and one of the top European art fairs.

For the second time, Art Brussels will take place in the beautiful Tour & Taxis landmark building, a turn of the 20th century customs house, situated in Brussels' vibrant inner-city area and a location offering ideal viewing conditions for art. Collector attendance is strong with visitors notably from Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Scandinavia, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom as well as from countries further afield such as Australia, Turkey and the USA.

As Belgium's leading fair, Art Brussels continues to build on its profile and track record as one of "Europe's foremost discovery fairs", as stated in the New York Times. In this respect, 145 galleries are encouraged to play with the element of surprise by presenting either new work or undervalued historical work in the following sections:

On top of the gallery proposals, Art Brussels brings an exclusive artistic project, a discursive programme of debates, talks, etc.



The Kingdom of Belgium

The monarchy of Belgium is a constitutional, popular and hereditary monarchy whose incumbent is titled the King or Queen of the Belgians and serves as the country's head of state. There have been seven Belgian monarchs since independence in 1830. The incumbent, Philippe, ascended the throne on 21 July 2013, following the abdication of his father King Albert II.

In the political domain, the King's action does not consist in exercising personal power without the cooperation of ministers. The King interacts with players in the political arena by asking questions, expressing opinions, making suggestions, warning and giving encouragement.

His perspective is that of continuity, long-term objectives, and major projects in which the country and the State must engage. The King exerts his influence through dialogue with all those involved in the political decision-making.

This enables the King to meet regularly political leaders and representatives of a wide variety of sectors. These contacts, the content of which remains confidential, are a precious source of information for him and a means of allowing him to exert his influence.

The importance and impact of this political action by the King varies, depending on the circumstances and the pace of public life. It is and must remain constant. However there are times when the role of the King, while remaining covered by ministerial responsibility, is perceived much more clearly, such as when a government is being formed.

The Presidents of governments of the Regions and Communities take the oath before the King. He also grants audiences to members of government and parliament of the Regions and Communities.



QUEEN MATHILDE AND KING PHILIPPE OF BELGIUM



Ghent: Flying Under The Radar

Ghent is a city that was made to be experienced. At almost every turn, there is something fantastic to see, explore, do or eat. It's cultural, with its share of great museums, theatres, and art/design spaces. It's historical, with castles, a fortress, centuries-old churches and beguinages to while away our day. And, it's a foodie's destination, known as much for its award winning restaurants as it is for its laid back approach to all things food and beer. And, it's all built around canals and waterways.

Ghent is a city that is best experienced off the beaten path, allowing your mind (as much as your body) to wander in amongst the ancient build-

ings that merge and mingle with the new. To be jolted out of your gaze by the toot of a tram, because you realise you are actually standing in the middle of the street on a tram track. To breathe in the smells of the fresh seafood and sample the cheese at the Vrijdagmarkt, as you weave in and out amongst the locals picking up their produce, or eating frites for lunch.

Wherever you go, however you do it, Ghent is definitely one city you should not miss in favour of the bigger, well known ones. It makes you feel as though you've uncovered a gigantic secret, that's been hidden forever. It makes you feel special, as though you are the first one discovering it.



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dinner with friends



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Develops Regional Mining



Focus of the Belgian company Carmeuse on our region is reflected in large investments in the economy and in introduction of new technologies

Carmeuse is the world's leading manufacturer of lime and lime-based products. With long-term plans, investments and new technologies it encourages development of the key industries in the region. In addition, as a responsible employer, Carmeuse applies European standards and sets work safety and environmental protection as a priority for its operation.

"We are very satisfied with our current business and the strategic plan of the whole group is to invest in this region. First of all, we are talking about Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where we have our production units. Lime production is very important for economic stability because it provides a key raw material, without which it is impossible to do business in other strategic industries, such as metallurgy, energy and construction industry," said Darko Križan, Director of Carmeuse Serbia, adding: "Thanks to constant investments, Carmeuse has been recognized as a long-term partner in improving the economy and economic development in the region."

Since arriving in Serbia in 2013, Carmeuse has invested €9.6 mill. in the Jelen Do quarry, and continues to invest in streamlining this

plant, modeled on the world's state-of-the-art plants. New investment in the alternative fuels plant in the amount of €2.5 mill. is underway. A significant part of the funds is earmarked for introduction of new production technologies, which besides ensuring competitiveness and

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improving work efficiency and the quality of the end product, are the most environmentally advanced solutions.

Investments in the production capacities of mines and factories since the arrival of

Carmeuse in BiH in Doboj 2007 have amounted to over €30 mill, and the company continues to invest. Last year in April, a new plant for fillers production at the Doboj factory was officially opened, which was the result of an investment between €2-3 mill.

A stable and reliable delivery system, products that comply with the highest European standards (ISO 9001 and ISO 14001), availability of large quantities of reserves and warranty, are the main reasons why Carmeuse is a successful and reliable partner of the economy. As the responsible employer, who employs more than 4,000 people globally, the company is continuously improving work safety through implementation of the safety procedures and education.

Carmeuse is the world leader in the production and processing of high quality limestone and dolomite into lime, as well as limestone and lime products for industrial and commercial customers, with more than 150 years of experience. One of the basic principles of Carmeuse business is cooperation with the local community - when starting a production at new locations, the company's first concern is to adapt to the local environment. ■

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