

ifa ECP Monitor Country Report

# Belgium

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## 1. External cultural policy objectives in geopolitical context

With seat of the European Commission in its capital city of Brussels, Belgium is at the heart of the European Union. Home to a multilingual and diverse mid-sized population, Belgium is internationally renowned for its culinary exports as well as its artistic impact, including the Flemish Old Masters and the popularization of the comic. As a former imperial power, Belgium further has ongoing ties to several Central African countries. The Western European country is governed by a centuries-old constitutional monarchy. Politically, the country is organized as one of the most strongly federated countries in the world, with three distinct regions: Flanders, Wallonia and the Brussels-Capital Region. The existence of three linguistic communities and administrative regions with distinct competences creates a complex apparatus of domestic and foreign policies. This feature dominates Belgium's ECP to an extent where speaking of one "Belgian" foreign policy no longer seems fit (Tavares, 2016).

**Table 1: Economy of Belgium**

	2019	% change since 2015
Population (millions) / ranking	11.45 / 80 <sup>th</sup>	11.23 / 2%
GDP ranking	24 <sup>th</sup>	25 <sup>th</sup>
GDP per capita	€41,460	12
Cultural economy (%GDP)	0.5 <sup>(2018)</sup>	0
Education economy (%GDP)	6.2 <sup>(2018)</sup>	-0.1
R&D economy (%GDP)	2.68 <sup>(2018)</sup>	0.3
Media economy (%GDP)	0.2 <sup>(2018)</sup>	0

Sources: Eurostat, World Bank

**Table 2: Belgium's geopolitical and geo-economic position**

	2019	2015
Hard power rank	70 <sup>th</sup>	> 25
World trade indicators / ranking (\$ million)	19 <sup>th</sup> / 795,982	17 <sup>th</sup> / 712,867
Soft power rank	18 <sup>th</sup> / 67.17	17 <sup>th</sup> / 58.85
Diplomacy rank	26 <sup>th</sup>	25 <sup>th</sup>

Sources: World Bank, 2020; Global Firepower, 2021; Soft Power 30, 2020; Lowy Institute, 2020

Belgium's relevance to the global economy is highlighted by its world trade ranking, where the country is placed at 19<sup>th</sup> worldwide, higher yet than its GDP per capita. Similarly, as the seat of the European Commission and home to a variety of international organizations and think tanks, Belgium's soft power earns it a ranking of 19<sup>th</sup>. However, internal political divisions and uncertainty have contributed to a drop in the score since 2015 (Portland, 2019). While Belgium's diplomatic network ranks at place 26 globally, Belgium's hard power is ranked much lower, taking the 70<sup>th</sup> spot.

**Table 3: Government spending on ECP fields as a % of total outlays**

	2019	% change since 2015
Culture	1 <sup>(2018)</sup>	0.1
Education	11.9 <sup>(2018)</sup>	0.2
R & D <sup>5</sup>	1.32	0.2
Media	0.4 <sup>(2018)</sup>	0

Source: Eurostat

Belgium's government spending reflects certain priorities that also shape Belgium's reputation abroad. One percent of government spending on culture places the country just ahead of Germany (0.9%) and just below France (1.1%) – two countries renowned for their engagement on behalf of their cultural sector. Additionally, measured by the share of total outlays, Belgian spending on education exceeds even the UK. The country is home to a number of prominent research universities and a complex network of primary and secondary education institutions, which are organized by the linguistic communities.

## 2. External cultural policy: an overview

Belgian external cultural policy is defined by the multiplicity of perspectives and the spectrum of administrative structures with a mandate for foreign affairs. As a country with a strongly entrenched federal structure, Belgium places the capacity for culture, language, education and international affairs in the hands of the Communities and Regions. Three communities exist: the Flemish<sup>1</sup>-speaking community, which primarily resides in Flanders, the French-speaking community, primarily home to Wallonia, and the smaller German-speaking community, which also lives mostly in Wallonia. Belgium's capital Brussels is home to both French-speaking and Flemish-speaking communities (Leenknecht, 2020).

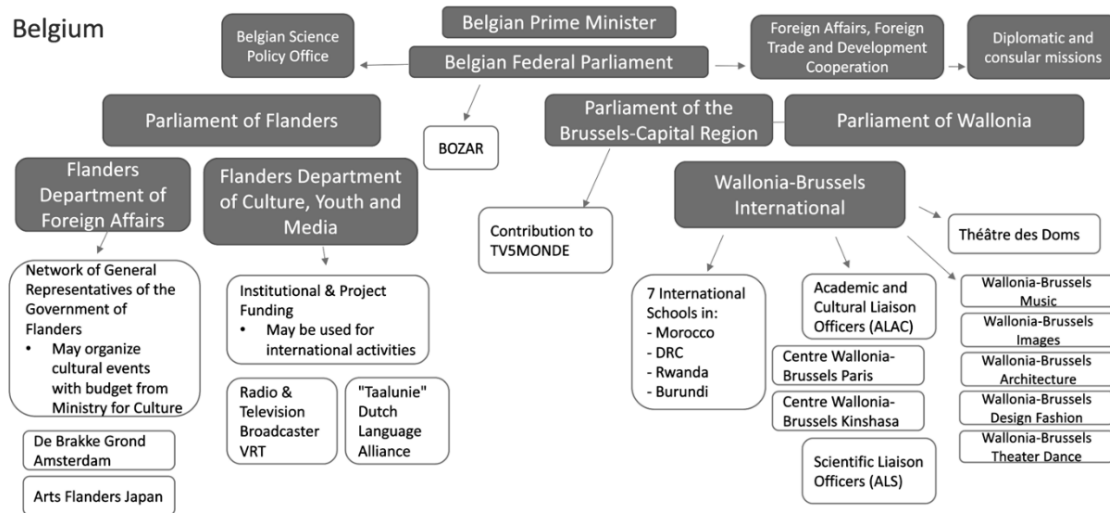
Belgian ECP must be seen in the context of this plural domestic political and cultural context. In external cultural policy, three governmental bodies stand out: (1) the national Belgian government as a signatory of multiple bilateral and multilateral treaties (before the competence was allocated at the level of federated entities in 1993), funder of national cultural institutions and diplomatic representative in embassies abroad; (2) the Flemish government, primarily represented through the interplay of the Flanders Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) with the functional departments such as the Flanders Department of Culture, Youth and Media

<sup>1</sup> The Flemish language is a dialect of the Dutch language.

(FDCYM); (3) Wallonia-Brussels International (WBI), a francophone body representing the foreign affairs of a Federation of Wallonia and Brussels. While the German-speaking community possesses its own parliament that is authorized to pass decrees in relation to culture, its relative ECP impact is minor. This report therefore foregrounds the three aforementioned governmental bodies and their spending.

In response to this structure, senior diplomatic positions for the Belgian government are rotated (Crickemans, 2010). This also applies to the participation in international bodies, although UNESCO actually has two separate desks for the two communities for matters of education and culture (Leenknecht, 2020). In matters where the federated regions do not have competence, such as admitting new members, an official Belgian representative steps in (Tavares, 2016).

**Figure 1: Institutional map of Belgium ECP**



With an external cultural policy presence in 24 countries, in addition to bilateral cultural agreements with a total of 52 countries and more than 110 diplomatic posts abroad (Lowy Institute, n.d.), Belgium is a mid-tier player in external cultural policy. In this field, it is notable that international engagement of the communities is organized according to different regional emphases. Most importantly, both communities have strong cultural ties to their linguistic counterparts in the Netherlands and France. Flanders formalized this partnership with the “Cultural Treaty Flanders-Netherlands” in 1995 and the Dutch Language Treaty in 1980 (Flanders Department of Foreign Affairs, 2018). Due to these partnerships, cultural representation in Belgium’s immediate neighborhood as well as wider Europe is strong.

Due to the country’s colonial history in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Wallonia-Brussels institutional representation is comparatively strong here (Wallonie-Bruxelles International, 2020b). Further, in acknowledgment of the large Moroccan diaspora in Belgium and the two countries’ historical ties, Morocco is a close partner for cultural cooperation for both regions and communities. Specifically, Wallonia is represented in Morocco with two Belgian curriculum schools (AEBE, n.d.). A cooperation between Flanders and Morocco has further resulted in the establishment of Darna, a Flemish-Moroccan culture house in 2017 (*Darna: Een Open Huis*, n.d.).

**Table 4: Key ECP Statistics for Belgium**

	<b>2019</b>
Number of countries with ECP activities	24
Total number of institutions abroad	31 (including education institutions)
Total number of FTE staff engaged in ECP activities	> 6,000 (including Dutch language teachers)
Cultural Treaties	Belgium: 45 countries Flanders: 2 countries W-B: 20 countries <u>Total: 52 countries</u>
Government financial support (€ million)	> € 12.5 million
Total expenditure of all ECP operators (€ million)	> € 25 million
Comparative ECP ranking	medium

Due to their different approaches, the respective external cultural policy fields will be covered separately unless indicated otherwise.

Flemish cultural policy aims to strengthen Flanders' international visibility. For example, it seeks to utilize the momentum of the upcoming Belgian EU presidency (in 2024) to draw attention to Flemish culture (Flanders Department of Culture, Youth and Media, 2020). Beyond this goal, the Flemish government considers culture a transporter of values highlighted in Flanders. In this capacity, the FDFA has expressed the goal to utilize external cultural policy in order to enhance trust between nations (Flanders Department of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). Flemish support in the international sphere is based on a strong legacy of a bottom-up "follow the actor"-approach: Although the policy objectives above are touched upon in multi-annual strategies, actors receiving long-term funding from the FDCYM are ordinarily granted a high degree of freedom in the implementation of their programming, including their international activities (Janssens, 2018). Individual strategies govern specific goals in bilateral relations (Flanders Department of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). This approach is also visible in the comparatively small number of Flemish institutions abroad. While the Delegations of the Government of Flanders abroad engage in individual cultural affairs as part of their mandate, there are no designated cultural attachés or full-time employees for culture<sup>2</sup>.

Wallonia-Brussels is similarly interested in enhancing the community's exposure internationally. In order to achieve this goal, WBI is supported by six targeted cultural agencies, which offer support for cultural exports and create international relationships. These include: Wallonia-Brussels (WB) Music, WB Architecture, WB Design Fashion, WB Theatre Dance. Moreover, the French-speaking community also promotes the French language and the study of "La Francophonie" (Wallonie-Bruxelles International, 2020b). As the foreign service of a fusion

<sup>2</sup> Representative from FDFA, personal communication, February 8, 2021. E-Mail.

of the French community and the Walloon and Brussels regions, WBI also possesses departments organizing international science, education and development cooperation as well as coordinating the regions' membership in multilateral organizations.

### 3. Fields of ECP

#### 3.1. Culture and the arts

The Belgian government's direct engagement with culture and bilateral international relations is limited, as both are fields in which the regions and territories possess competences as well. However, two federal-level programmes are worth highlighting. First, the "Belgian Art & Diplomacy" initiative arranges for Belgian artworks to be represented in Belgian embassies worldwide (Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, 2016).

Secondly, the Brussels-based Centre for Fine Arts "BOZAR" ("Le Palais des Beaux-Arts") plays a role in federal Belgian ECP, despite not being an official actor of foreign diplomacy (Leenknecht, 2020). The institution is under the oversight of the federal government, although it also receives subsidies from both the French- and Flemish-speaking communities. With a special department for "Institutional Relations", BOZAR creates programmes that are "in line with Belgium's regional and national cooperation priorities" and aim to "support Belgium's image abroad" (BOZAR, 2020, p. 58). Twelve percent (amounting to €4.2 million) of the institution's annual budget was spent on international partnerships and programming with more than 100 countries in 2019. However, much of this programming often consists of multilateral efforts in the context of the EU, though it is not separately reported (*ibid.*, p. 59).

Flemish external cultural policy is funded and implemented by several actors. Funds for international cultural activities exist both in the FDFA, as well as the FDCYM. The Flemish network of diplomatic missions abroad, including cultural attachés, is organized and funded through the FDFA. Flemish participation in the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) network is similarly represented by the FDFA. Additionally, the Flemish government allocates funding for the two Flemish cultural institutes abroad: "De Brakke Grond" in the Netherlands and "Arts Flanders Japan" in Japan. Unlike larger networks of national cultural institutes (such as the UK's British Council), the Flemish institutes operate independently from one another (Flanders Department of Foreign Affairs, 2018).

Consolidated data on Flemish expenditure for international cultural engagement is difficult to obtain, as "domestic" project funding or institutional subsidies may also be used for cultural actors and organizations to perform international activities individually. In line with the aforementioned "follow the actor"-model, beneficiaries of public awards or subsidies in the field of culture may often decide to what extent their craft shall be taken abroad, thereby becoming actors of cultural diplomacy in their own right (Leenknecht, 2020). Nevertheless, the FDFA's annual allocation to international projects in the field of culture may give an idea. In 2020, funding decisions for approx. €748,000 were made. Nearly all of these projects span multiple years<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Representative from FDFA, personal communication, February 8, 2021. E-Mail.

Wallonia-Brussels has expanded its formalized ECP activities carried out through WBI in recent years. With the creation of a network of the Academic and Cultural Liaison Officers (ALAC) in 2018, present in eleven countries, the region highlights priority regions for cultural cooperation. These officers are in charge of representing the cultural richness of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation internationally, as well as connecting Wallonian artists and groups with the relevant points of contact in the host country (Wallonie-Bruxelles International, 2020c). In addition, WBI supports three distinct cultural institutes abroad: Firstly, two more traditional francophone “cultural centers” are located in Paris and Kinshasa, the largest officially francophone city in the world. Additionally, WBI supports the Théâtre de Doms, a Belgian theatre in the south of France, which is dedicated to performing and promoting Belgian content in France. Wallonia-Brussels’ increased emphasis on external arts and culture policy in recent years has made a notable difference in budgets. With an expenditure of 7.4 million euros in 2019 (Wallonie-Bruxelles International, 2020b) the agency’s spending was up by almost 30% from 2015 (Wallonie-Bruxelles International, 2016).

**Table 5: Key statistics on culture and the arts**

	2019	2015
Number of countries present	Total: 14 <u>Wallonia-Brussels</u> Cultural Centres: 2 Network of “Academic and Cultural Liaison Officers: 11 <u>Flanders</u> Cultural Centres: 2	Total : 14 <u>Wallonia-Brussels</u> Cultural Centres : 2 <u>Flanders</u> Cultural Centres: 2
Number of institutes	Total: 5 <u>Wallonia Brussels</u> : Two cultural centers and one Belgian Theater <u>Flanders</u> : Two cultural centres	Total: 5 <u>Wallonia-Brussels</u> : 3 <u>Flanders</u> : 2
Number of FTE staff	-	-
Number of artists in exchange programmes	Wallonia-Brussels: > 612 <sup>4</sup>	Wallonia-Brussels: > 566 <sup>2</sup>
Number of cultural agreements	Total: 52 countries Belgium: Bilateral cultural agreements with 45 countries Flanders: 2 countries W-B: 20 countries	

<sup>4</sup> Number of artists or groups supported through exchange programmes or mobility schemes in Wallonia-Brussels International’s sector-specific sub-agencies.

	2019	2015
Budget (€ million)	WBI: € 7.4 million BOZAR: € 4.2 million	WBI: € 5,678 million
Government financial support (€ million)	WBI: € 7.4 million <sup>5</sup> FDFA: > €748,000 (2020)	WBI: € 5,7 million (up by 29.93%)

Sources: Wallonie-Bruxelles International, 2020; Flanders Department for Foreign Affairs, 2018; BOZAR, 2020, Wallonie-Bruxelles International, 2016; FDFA, personal communication, February 8, 2021, E-Mail

### 3.2. Language

Recognizing that Dutch is not among the widely used languages in Europe, Flanders has created the “Taalunie” (literally: “Language Union”) in cooperation with the Netherlands as part of their joint Dutch Language Treaty signed in 1980. Suriname joined this union as a third partner in 2004 (Flanders Department of Foreign Affairs, 2018). In recent years, the Taalunie has strived to position Dutch as a valuable language for business and cross-border cooperation. Indeed, the union has found that in 2019 there were 400,000 students of the Dutch language and 6,000 teachers in the Flemish-Dutch neighbourhood alone (Taalunie, 2020). Flanders possesses none of its own language institutions abroad, instead betting on the facilitation of regional networks and teacher platforms organized in the context of the Taalunie (de Jonghe, 2019). The association is continuously expanding and professionalizing this offer, for instance by aiming to offer an online Dutch language course starting in 2021 and seeking to expand its reach in China, India, Japan and South Korea (Taalunie, 2020).

Wallonia-Brussels International’s international engagement in language is limited to its contributions in the fields of education and media. For more information, please see the sections below.

**Table 6: Key figures on language promotion**

	2019	2015
Number of countries where courses are offered	Dutch: 40, incl. 14 teacher platforms	-
Number of students enrolled		
In-class	400,000 (in neighbouring countries alone) <u>Taalunie Summer Courses</u> : 120/year <u>Dutch Overall</u> : approx.	<u>Taalunie Summer Course</u> : 100/year
Online reach	n/a	n/a

<sup>5</sup> Consolidated numbers for the Belgian national government and Flanders currently unavailable.



	2019	2015
Number of candidates for Dutch language qualifications	CNaVT (Certificaat Nederlands als Vreemde Taal): 1979 from 42 countries, 1238 passed	CNaVT: 735
Number of language teachers	Approx. 6,000 (in neighbouring countries alone)	-
Budget	Taalunie: € 10,231,163	Taalunie: € 11,923,519
Government financial support	Flanders: € 3,743,084 in the Taalunie	Flanders: € 3,338,000 in the Taalunie

Sources: Flanders Department for Foreign Affairs, 2018; Taalunie, 2020; Taalunie, 2016; Taalunie, 2015; Taalunie, n.d.

### 3.3. Primary and secondary education

In the face of competition from countries with more significant own-language educational systems abroad, such as France and Germany, Belgium has a relatively limited presence. Its offerings are regionally limited to six schools in four countries: Burundi, Morocco, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. They form the Association of Belgian Programme Schools Abroad (“AEBE”). This system of international primary and secondary education is organized only by Wallonia. Correspondingly, these Belgian international schools are informed by the curriculum and requirements devised by the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. The creation of a seventh school, also in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is currently underway (AEBE, n.d.). With more than 3,000 students and 240 teachers, Belgian schools still provide a substantial presence abroad (*Statut des enseignants*, 2018).

**Table 7: Key figures on primary and secondary education**

	2019	2015
Number of countries	Wallonia-Brussels: 4 (Africa)	4 (Africa)
Number of schools	Wallonia-Brussels: 6	5
Number of students	3.362 (2017)	-
Number of staff / teachers	240 (2017)	-

Sources: AEBE, n.d., *Statut des enseignants*, 2018

### 3.4. Tertiary education and science

Home to several highly-ranked institutions of higher education, Belgium enjoys an excellent academic reputation. Moreover, the country’s universities can offer their well-connected European location in close proximity to other top destinations. The number of tertiary-level international students in Belgium (53,896) is three times the number of outbound Belgian students (15,868). Here, too, Belgium’s close partnerships with its neighbourhood are apparent:

in 2018, the most common countries of origin were France, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, followed by Cameroon and Italy (UNESCO, n.d.).

The University of Ghent, one of Flanders' most distinguished universities, possesses an English-language offshore campus in Incheon, South Korea, which concentrates on technological degree programmes and offers exchanges with the university's other branches in Flanders (Ghent University Global Campus, n.d.). Moreover, in a partnership between Flanders and the Netherlands, the transnational University Limburg (tUL) was created. tUL is not a newly founded university but rather a cooperation between the Flemish Universiteit Hasselt and the Dutch Maastricht University (only half an hour apart, although in different countries) without its own campus (Transnationale Universiteit Limburg, n.d.). Nevertheless, tUL's presence is minimal and enrolment numbers are fairly small (Knight, 2015).

**Table 8: Key figures on tertiary education**

	2019	2015
Number of countries	2	2
Number of universities / colleges abroad	One international branch campus (South Korea) One transnational university (Netherlands)	One international branch campus (South Korea) One transnational university (Netherlands)
Number of domestic universities / colleges	Wallonia-Brussels: 25 Flanders: 22	-
Number of foreign students	53,896 (2018)	56,453
Number of staff / teachers	> 14 (Staff in South Korea)	-
Budget (€ million)	-	-
Government financial support (€ million)	WBI: € 277.372,34	WBI: € 4.03 million (Research & Higher Education)

Sources: UNESCO, n.d., Ghent Global University Campus, n.d.-a, Ghent Global University Campus, n.d.-b, Transnationale Universiteit Limburg, n.d., Wallonie-Bruxelles Campus, n.d., Flanders Education, n.d., Wallonie-Bruxelles International, 2020; Wallonie-Bruxelles International, 2016

Domestically, science and research are less strongly defined by the regions and communities. The federal Belgian science policy contains the participation in several international science projects, for example in the realm of aerospace (*Federaal Wetenschapsbeleid*, n.d.). Moreover, the federal government supports the Academia Belgica, a "Centre for History, Arts and Sciences" in Rome. The academy, supported with approx. €500,000 in federal funding (Hel Guedj, 2020), offers residencies to Belgian researchers and artists, publishes Belgian research and aims to enhance Belgian-Italian relations (Academia Belgica, n.d.).

Both the Flemish and the Walloon governments have also devised programmes for international scientific cooperation and the mobility of researchers. In Flanders, the public, independent agency FWO is in charge of providing project-based funding, fellowships and travel costs along a number of specific programme trajectories (FWO, n.d.). Although there are also

several renowned Flemish research institutions in “STEM” fields that have established international branch locations, these operate independently from the Flemish government (Flanders Department of Foreign Affairs, 2018).

The network of Scientific Liaison Officers (ALS) complements the WBI’s international ALAC-network in the field of science and research. The network is comprised of six officers strategically deployed to certain countries (Brazil, Switzerland, Germany, Canada, Sweden, USA) with the aim of fostering partnerships and facilitating new research connections for Walloon scientists and institutions (Wallonie-Bruxelles International, 2020a). Their work is supported by 179 experts on scientific cooperation, distributed across the network of Walloon diplomatic representations abroad. WBI supported the field with approx. € 320,000 in 2019. The public agency further supports individual researchers and scientists through exchange and mobility schemes, benefiting approximately 76 researchers and 66 projects in 2019 (Wallonie-Bruxelles International, 2020b).

**Table 9: Key figures on science and research**

	2019	2015
Number of countries	Wallonia-Brussels: 20 Belgium: 1	Belgium: 1
Number of institutes	Academia Belgica: 1	Academia Belgica: 1
Number of researchers / staff	Academia Belgica: 23	-
Number of projects	Wallonia-Brussels Mobility Funds: 66 projects	-
Number scientists in exchange programmes	Wallonia-Brussels 76 (Scholarships for exchange) FWO: 87 projects (2020)	Wallonia-Brussels: 60 (Scholarships for exchange)
Budget	Academia Belgica: approx. 500,000€	-
Government financial support	Wallonia-Brussels: €319,541 (Scientific Liaison Officers) Belgium : > €500,000	WBI: 4.03€ million (Research & Higher Education)

Sources: Wallonie-Bruxelles, 2020; Academia Belgica, n.d.; Hel Guedj, 2020; Wallonie-Bruxelles, 2016; FWO, personal communication, February 8, 2021, E-Mail

### 3.5. Foreign Media

As a country with a relatively small population, Belgium’s regions and communities benefit from pooling resources with linguistic partner countries in order to deliver an international television presence. Flanders and the Netherlands have jointly conceived BVN (“Het Beste van Vlaanderen en Nederland”), a public television channel that is available anywhere in the world. In addition to an online live stream and the BVN app, the channel is also available via satellite or cable in certain regions (BVN, n.d.). Additionally, the Flemish VRT NU is an on-demand online platform serving Dutch speakers abroad. Although the platform is only widely

available within Europe, it may be accessed by interested learners of the Dutch language worldwide upon application (VRT, 2020).

French-speaking Walloons have a similar arrangement in the form of TV5Monde. The expansive network is jointly offered by five regions and countries (France, Canada, Québec, Switzerland and Wallonia-Brussels). Its ten channels, broadcasting only in French but offering subtitles in thirteen languages, are available in 198 countries worldwide. According to its own records, the channels attract a weekly audience of nearly 60 million viewers, with a particularly strong African viewership (TV5MONDE, n.d.).

While Flanders does not have a dedicated international radio channel, the public channel VRT, supported by the FDCYM, is available online worldwide (VRT, 2020). In Wallonia, on the other hand, the francophone public radio and television network RTBF has a designated channel called RTBF International, which is available online, on FM in Kinshasa and via satellite in the rest of Africa (RTBF Entreprises, n.d.). Once again, the Wallonia-Brussels Federation's international emphasis on the francophone African continent is notable, with both television and radio presences specifically targeting these countries.

**Table 10: Key figures on foreign broadcasting, including social media statistics**

	2019	2015
<b>TV</b>		
Number of countries broadcasted to	BVN: worldwide TV5Monde: 198	-
Number of languages	BVN – Dutch TV5Monde: French (13 languages subtitled)	-
Number of channels	11(BVN: 1, TV5Monde: 10)	TV5Monde: 11
Audience / weekly (million)	TV5Monde: 59	TV5Monde: 50
Digital audience / monthly average	<u>Flanders:</u> BVN YouTube: 3,820 VRT NU: 7,250 <u>Wallonia-Brussels:</u> TV5MONDE: 45.6 million (2018) YouTube: 569,000 (2020)	-
Social networks (million, combined Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)	<u>BVN:</u> Facebook: 70,259 (2020) Twitter: 1,718 (2020) Instagram: 2,980(2020) <u>TV5MONDE:</u> Facebook: 3.043.000 (2020) Twitter: 1.015.000 (2020) Instagram: 334,000 (2020)	-

Number of countries broadcasted to	BVN: worldwide TV5Monde: 198	-
Budget	Flanders support for VRT/BVN: € 266,324,000 <sup>6</sup>	-
<b>Radio</b>		
Number of countries broadcasted to	RTBF Online: Worldwide, FM/Satellite: DRC/ Africa VRT: Worldwide	-
Number of languages	2 (French, Dutch)	
Number of channels	RTBF International: 1 VRT Radio: 2 (one worldwide, one Europe)	RTBF International, VRT Radio

Source: VRT, 2020; BVN, n.d., Flanders Department of Culture, Youth and Media, 2020; TV5MONDE, n.d., TV5MONDE, 2020; RTBF Entreprises, n.d.; Facebook; Twitter; Instagram; LinkedIn

## 4. Challenges and future outlook

ECP efforts originating in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation have become more professionalized in recent years. The work of traditional cultural institutes is not as widespread as its counterparts the Goethe Institut or the Instituto Cervantes – perhaps due to the strong international presence of the Alliance française. Yet the WBI’s formation of the ALAC and the ALS network add further specialization to the federation’s diplomatic network, all the while enhancing its presence in strategically important areas – a trend likely to take even more shape in the next years.

Flanders is undergoing a different development. Since the most recent elections, Flanders’ Minister-President Jan Jambon (2019-2024, a representative from a nationalist party) holds the mandate for Foreign Affairs, as well as Culture, Youth and Education. This combination indicates great potential for the future of Flanders’ ECP. Indeed, the internationalization of cultural policy was listed as a strategic objective by Jambon. In line with his party’s ideology, especially the cooperation with the Netherlands will likely take priority during his term (Leenknecht, 2020). This trajectory is in line with the expansion plans targeted by the Dutch-language Taalunie over the next years (Taalunie, 2020).

Meanwhile, the implications of international cultural engagement have brought about initial concerns among Belgian cultural organizations in 2016. The steadily increasing growth of international cooperation and travel have spurred discussions about the respective ecological footprint and ethical consequences and started a quest for alternative solutions (Janssens, 2018).

The distinct regional approaches make it difficult to find a single “Belgian” strategy for ECP. Moreover, the individual regions’ governance of the ECP subfields decidedly targets different regions and seeks out different cooperation partners. As a result, the federated regions surpass

<sup>6</sup> The expenditure for international programming and transmission is not reported separately. This number indicates the total support by the Flanders Department for Culture, Youth and Education to the VRT network.

the dominance of the national Belgian government in foreign policy (Tavares, 2016). The individual characters of the regions are further entrenched with every new bilateral treaty signed by the regions. Yet the Belgian election results in 2019 demonstrate the complications associated with this drifting apart. While Flanders' far-right and nationalist parties saw strong outcomes, far-left parties were strongly represented in Wallonia. It consequently took almost 16 months to form a coalition government and assume governmental work – thereby breaking its own world record for the longest period without a government during peacetime (previously set in 2011). Even after the coalition was formed, many Flemish citizens felt disenfranchised by the disproportionately small share of Flemish parties represented in the coalition (Walsh, 2020).

In a country with such severe political cleavages, the importance of well-strategized ECP approaches is underlined even more. The downturns in Belgium's diplomacy and soft power rankings is only modest, so far. Nevertheless, they function as a reminder that Belgium's ideologically heated internal debate may have real consequences for its geopolitical status, as well. The next years will reveal whether Flanders and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation will utilize their resources to signal a unified front or if their institutions and self-images will continue to drift apart.

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