

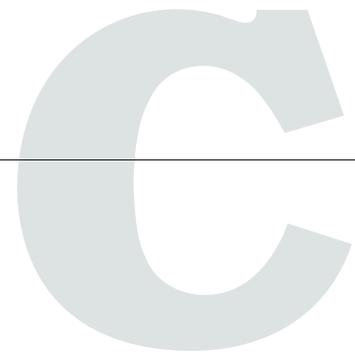
Activity Report

2006



Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs,
Foreign Trade and Development
Cooperation





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Forewords



Foreword by Karel DE GUCHT, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Was there ever a year that wasn't busy? If there was, I haven't experienced one at FPS Foreign Affairs. And 2006 was particularly hectic by any standards.

The Belgian Chairmanship of the OSCE was a textbook example of how our staff fairly and astutely go about performing the role of 'honest broker' in the international arena. It cost us much time and energy, both in public and behind the scenes, from Washington to Moscow, taking in Vienna and Warsaw along the way, but we managed to achieve tangible results in difficult circumstances. It was no easy task, but we kept the organisation on track without it losing its special identity.

That gives us high hopes for the next two years when we'll be a member of the UN Security Council. There too our diplomats will be faced with awkward issues - delicate balancing acts where we will try, despite the problems, to put forward a clear vision. The effective multilateralism traditionally advocated by Belgium involves more than defining the greatest common denominator among the superpowers. Our basic values, such as peace, democracy and human rights, must be developed within this context.

The best safeguard is a strong European presence. The most serious crisis over the last year - in the constant powder keg that is the Middle East - drew the attention and involvement of the EU member states that it deserved. And Belgium was

no exception, taking the difficult but in my opinion only appropriate decision of sending troops there under a UN mandate. The Middle East will also continue to form the central focus in the years to come, and will see Belgium consistently playing the EU card.

The past year saw Congo clear a crucial hurdle on the road to peace and stability. No one would have dared hope for open and democratic elections - much less two rounds - but, thanks not least to our political and financial support, that is exactly what we saw. Congo now has an elected president and parliament, and they will have to realise that legitimacy also entails responsibility. The people chose them, and now it is up to them to really serve the people.

Meanwhile the FPS, the policy unit and our missions worked tirelessly on economic diplomacy, for Belgians abroad, on bilateral relations from Latin America to China, and on numerous other activities and responsibilities - too many indeed to mention here.

What is absolutely clear is that they produced excellent results, and I want to warmly thank all those involved. And I can assure you that the coming year will be just as busy and at least as productive as this year.

Karel DE GUCHT
Minister for Foreign Affairs



Foreword by Armand DE DECKER, Minister for Development Cooperation

Creating a shared world instead of a divided one

Development without peace, and peace without security: one is inconceivable without the other. And in the current international situation, security and world peace depend on the countries of the South. Their chronic underdevelopment, despite the considerable progress made over the last decade, is not only an outrage in its own right but has become the most poignant example of global inequality, and a threat to peace and stability. Recent developments in certain countries in Africa and the Middle East clearly show that the world has shifted its priorities from the relationship between East and West to the relationship between North and South. This new dynamic, as well as the South-South relationship, means that in future, development policy will be a focal point of geostrategy.

The geostrategic dimension of development cooperation is also evident in the new challenges it must address. Firstly, there is the link between migration and development, and secondly the fight against violent extremism. Clearly the North-South dialogue and the promotion of democratic values and basic freedoms have a role to play in these areas.

This is new ground for cooperation, and aims to involve the economies of the South in globalisation and enable them to play a full role in it. But combating

poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) still continue to be the top priorities in our development policy.

Development cooperation must be able to rely on the support of civil society for the MDGs to have lasting value. Indeed, civil society can make a particularly useful contribution here. In Belgium, it must maintain and strengthen its solidarity with the countries of the South. This was the idea behind us setting up the Voluntary Civil Service for Development Cooperation, which - following our commitment in 2005 - was created by the law of 27 December 2005 and became operational on 22 June 2006. After completing their training, the first volunteers set off for our partner countries in November 2006.

Our development policy continues to be based on the three traditional pillars: direct bilateral cooperation, multilateral cooperation and indirect cooperation.

In the field of direct bilateral cooperation, the government has striven for greater efficiency and a more goal-oriented approach. For example - following a commitment we made - we recently developed a new management contract between the Belgian government and its technical agency, Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC). This third management contract is intended to meet the challenges facing development cooperation in the 21st century. The first step in the project cycle is to put the partner country centre-stage; then, our cooperation efforts must be stepped up and efficiency improved; the final measures include applying financial management

practices, in accordance with the regulations in place, and giving more authority to all the Belgian cooperation partners.

The government is continuing its focus on geographical concentration. The list of 18 partner countries hasn't changed since 2003, which indicates how much we strive for stability in this area. However, nothing lasts forever and sooner or later we will have to take geopolitical trends into account.

Another even more sensitive point is whether we should stop meeting the needs of countries that are emerging from war or a crisis. Take, for example, Afghanistan or certain situations in Africa. In 2006, Lebanon was the prime example of a country requiring massive amounts of aid from the international community to regain its basic equilibrium. On top of the emergency aid that Lebanon received from Belgium and other donors, Lebanese reconstruction in the long term depends on factors where the expertise and experience of Belgian Development Cooperation can make a contribution.

Traditionally, our activities have focused on Africa. Indeed, most of our partner countries (13 out of 18) are African countries. While partly the result of historical links, this is mainly because Africa is still the continent hardest hit by extreme poverty and the disastrous effects of this poverty. The Belgian government's 2003 coalition agreement gave top priority to Central Africa, in particular Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda, in its development cooperation policy. The Belgian administration's resolve on this issue spurred our



European and international partners into action, and the resulting dialogue has not only put a stop to the conflicts in the Great Lakes Region, but stimulated and supported the resolution of the crisis and the establishment and consolidation of peace in that region.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the establishment of the Third Republic, symbolised by a president and a democratically elected parliament taking up their places, represents Belgium's most outstanding diplomatic success of the last twenty-five years. While it is first and foremost the Congolese people, with their show of courage, strong desire for change and amazing patience, who should take the credit for the successful elections, this positive outcome was only possible thanks to the determination of the two Belgian governments led by Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt to make Congo a top priority on their international agenda and their ability to convince the international community to do the same. The day after the first round of the presidential elections, the initial measures of an emergency plan, worth €25 million, took effect. Politically, the emergency plan aims to acquaint the Congolese people with the benefits of peace and democracy as quickly as possible. In 2007, Belgian aid to Congo will increase considerably, with the Belgian development cooperation for that country rising from €79 million to €109 million.

In terms of multilateral cooperation, the main thrust of our policy orientation remain the same. Belgium realises that only action agreed on a multilateral basis and more effective coordination of the

aid between countries will face down the very major challenges posed by development. The government continues to plea for increased 'Europeanisation' of development aid policy.

As far as indirect cooperation is concerned, expenditure in 2005 amounted to €184 million, with more than half of this being invested in cofinancing of recognised non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The government will continue to work on initiatives that ensure that our aid is coherent and of a high quality, as can be seen in the reform of NGO cofinancing that we undertook in close consultation with the NGO sector. This reform was one of the tasks that the government had set itself in this term of office so that - in a dialogue with the NGOs - we could find a more flexible system of cofinancing, with fewer and simpler administrative procedures, while keeping a credible control mechanism in place.

The government is keeping a watchful eye out for new challenges to development and resources and methods for coping with them. For example, migration, environmental questions, good governance and regional cooperation are set to grow in importance as time goes by.

These objectives can only be met if we set aside the necessary budgets for achieving them. The government continues to be a keen advocate of more resources for development cooperation. Belgium's official development aid in 2007 will be 0.55% of gross national income (GNI) and rise to 0.70% in 2010, in line with the commitment made in 2002 at the Monterrey Conference and reaffirmed by

the Prime Minister at the United Nations' Millennium summit+5 in 2005.

Belgium - thanks to the government's continued efforts to meet its international development aid obligations - is now the world's 6th largest development aid partner and the 10th largest donor in absolute terms. That may not be common knowledge at home, but it is much appreciated abroad.

Armand DE DECKER
Minister for Development Cooperation



**Foreword by
Marc VERWILGHEN,
Minister for Economy,
Energy, Foreign Trade and
Science Policy**

Today's world is one of globalisation and liberalisation - a world where acquiring new markets has taken on crucial importance. Globalisation encourages every country to be very open to trade and investments. Now that the new economic powers are knocking at our door and the enlargement of the European Union is a reality, every country has to adopt a strong image, and every company has to be able to face up to the international competition.

These two challenges have to be grappled with by the Belgian government and Belgian companies, and so the task of Foreign Trade is obvious: first, to make Belgium more attractive for other countries and, second, to promote the interests of Belgian companies abroad.

Two sectoral missions that concentrated on an important sector of the Belgian economy were arranged in 2006. They complemented the multisectoral missions led by Prince Philippe which aim to open up new markets for Belgian companies. These missions shed light on Belgium's economic benefits, focusing on the sectors that are of interest for foreign investors.

In January, I travelled to Qatar with a number of Belgian companies to present the energy sector. We met the Minister for Economy, Finance, Energy and Foreign Affairs and the country's emir.

A Belgian-Qatari energy institute was set up during that visit.

Institutes and companies from the scientific world accompanied me on a visit to Cuba in October at the invitation of the Cuban Minister for Foreign Trade. Various cooperation agreements were signed with Cuban partners. These markets have enormous potential for our companies, but seem to have been neglected in comparison with the Chinese, Indian and Brazilian markets.

Other initiatives were also launched to tell other countries about the economic possibilities Belgium provides. Three cocktail receptions giving the opportunity for people to network were held at my policy unit in 2006. These events mean that Belgian business leaders from a certain sector have the chance to meet ambassadors from a particular region of the world, and Belgian companies can find out information about new potential markets. After Paris, London and New York, Brussels is the city with the largest number of embassies in the world and so it has a high concentration of knowledge about foreign markets, the economic strategies of other countries and their future investments, and it is important that Belgium capitalises on this.

The first reception was organised in April 2006, with the beer sector being presented to the ambassadors of America. At the second and third receptions, held in September and October, the multimedia sector was presented to the African ambassadors, and the aerospace/space sector to the Asian ambassadors.

Finally, the arrival of a vehicle for financially supporting exports makes it easier to promote Belgian companies' interests abroad. Aimed primarily at SMEs, it means that they don't have to invest in the long term and can shorten their terms of payment. The number of SMEs is growing in Belgium. More than 99% of companies have fewer than 50 employees, and so it is important that the Belgian economy supports the development of SMEs.

**Marc VERWILGHEN
Minister for Economy, Energy,
Foreign Trade and Science Policy**

**Foreword by
Didier DONFUT,
State Secretary for European
Affairs, attached to the
Minister for Foreign Affairs**

Since I became State Secretary for European Affairs well over two years ago now, I have continually stressed the importance for Belgium of better coordination of European interests and my desire to get active bilateralism in place with the other EU member states so that we can deal with the challenges of an enlarged European Union more effectively.

European integration is growing in complexity by the day. I am delighted to report that my many visits to my counterparts and the information carefully collected by our embassies have borne fruit, meaning that our country can easily sound out its partners and make a positive contribution to major European negotiations.

Continuing with the theme of coordinating European interests for Belgium, I want to point to the considerable progress that has been made in transposing European legislation into Belgian law: two years' constant monitoring has eliminated two thirds of our backlog, meaning that we are now at the threshold of 1.5%, the maximum lag for transposition agreed by the member states. This excellent result increases Belgium's credibility as an untiring campaigner for European integration.

But it must be said that 2006 was hardly a bed of roses: the campaign seeking approval for the draft Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe is in deadlock in many countries, and Europe

still does not yet seem ready to face the major socio-economic problems resulting from globalisation (unemployment, relocations, environmental degeneration, and so on), the negotiations with Turkey for the country's accession to the EU are having a rough ride, and the EU had to issue strong warnings to Bulgaria and Romania to ensure they were in a position to join on 1 January 2007.

Generally speaking, the 'Europe of projects' proposed by the European Commission has not - with a few rare exceptions (for example, the embryonic European energy policy) - brought the citizen closer to the European project. Nevertheless, although the EU was the driving force behind resolving the crisis in Lebanon, I am still convinced that 2006 must be seen in more ways than one as a year of transition before a 2007 that seems to hold a number of challenges in store.

First and foremost, politically we must seize the opportunity provided by Germany's EU Presidency (in the first half of 2007) to start finding a solution for the impasse resulting from the 'no' votes in the French and Dutch referenda on the constitutional treaty. We must ensure that the countries that did approve it are fully involved in the discussions.

Another positive move would be to breathe new life into the frozen accession negotiations with Turkey, as the current situation is unsatisfactory for both sides.

Finally, Europe must ensure sustainable growth and high-quality jobs. That is the only way to ensure the welfare of all. I remain convinced that this is pos-

sible by developing the European Single Market, the largest single market in the world, which must be able to fall back on consumers with substantial purchasing power and companies with considerable innovation potential. To make that possible, the debate about what I've called 'the European social dynamic' - the member states' commitment to continue working on a more socially oriented welfare system and a better environment - must stay on the agenda. They must also finally reject tax dumping which undermines the soul of the European project - a project that celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2007.

**Didier DONFUT
State Secretary for European Affairs,
attached to the Minister for Foreign
Affairs**

1. Resources

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1. Resources

1. Internal organisation of the FPS

Modernisation at cruising speed

In 2006, the FPS continued down the path of modernisation adopted since the Copernicus reform of 2002. The drive for change took the form of a wide range of improvement programmes. These were the product of the *Business Process Re-engineering* project (2003-2004) and new ideas from the departments that were incorporated into the new management and support plans drawn up by the managers of the FPS.

In the following, we go into the specifics of a number of important change processes within the FPS, such as knowledge management, security and performance measurement. For performance measurement we take the various management plans (directors-general) and support plans (support directors) as our basis. To give you a better idea of these, we take a closer look below at the support plan of the B&B support directorate. You can find further information about a number of specific achievements and improvements in our consular and protocol activities in the chapter entitled "Serving the public".

Knowledge management programme

We paid special attention to methodically organising our knowledge management processes in 2006. Knowledge management is a relatively new area for the federal government. It involves collecting, storing and disseminating the knowledge

needed by an organisation to meet its objectives. Knowledge management is a broad field of action. The following strategic choices were made for the years 2006 and 2007.

Firstly, the FPS **further developed and strengthened the Knowledge Management Department**, which has the task - in conjunction with the other directorates - of making structured improvements to the management of our knowledge.

In addition, we decided to **revamp our intranet**. The aim of the intranet is to serve as the portal to all the knowledge and information held by the FPS, and a way of the departments themselves developing and managing the different **information sections**. The intranet will also allow every department to build up its own **work site**, where shared documents can be stored. This will increase the uniformity of the service provided by the various departments.

The new intranet will be fully operational in 2007. 2006 already saw a number of important pilot projects, such as the establishment of sites for each country. These sites, which are administered by the appropriate geographical departments of the Directorate-General for Bilateral Affairs (DGB), have the enormous advantage that they make a number of basic documents available online for each country for all the members of staff at the FPS and at the missions. The next stage is for every embassy and consulate to be given its own work site. A test project in 2006 with an electronic workspace that facilitates the transfer of duties from a departing ambassador to the

newly appointed head of an embassy has already produced positive results.

Finally, there is the run-up to a new form of official message system between headquarters and the missions. This is scheduled to go live in the spring of 2007. This project is meant to put an end to overly full inboxes but also give structured access to the information that is sent electronically between missions abroad and headquarters.

Management and support plans

The directors-general and support directors' revised management and support plans (2006-2008) came into force in 2006. They seamlessly join up with the management plan of the Executive Committee Chairman. Each of them provides a series of key indicators intended to allow progress in the different domains to be monitored. The results of the analysis will be discussed every three months by the Executive Committee. The improvement projects that are still in progress (or that have not yet started) are an integral part of the management and support plans.

While the ICT Department has largely succeeded in performing its important support function in the change process, we are finding it difficult to attract enough people with the right profile and this remains an obstacle to putting certain plans or projects in place.

New support plan for the Budget and Management Control support directorate

In the new support plan for the Budget & Management Control (B&B) support director, the financial policy for the past three years was evaluated and the policy for the next three years was presented.

When drawing up the support plan, a number of recent developments were taken into account.

In view of changes in the legislation on management and support positions, the Executive Committee decided to adopt a new approach and start using a new format for preparing management and support plans.

The current state of affairs regarding the Copernicus reforms within B&B means that it is impossible to be sure of what changes will take place over the next three years in the legislative framework for administrative and budget control, government accounting and the budget cycle.

Objectives

The general orientation of the future developments incorporated into the B&B management plan 2003-2006 also forms the basis for the plan for the period 2006-2009. Its main thrust is also to be found in the specific projects that came out of the BPR (*Business Process Re-engineering*) operation.

Here is a list of the relevant initiatives:

- modernising the management of the missions: greater financial autonomy, better organisation of control and support at headquarters and at the missions, better IT, goal-oriented training courses, centralisation of

financial flows, active communication, and cooperation with the Missions Inspectorate;

- organising internal control at headquarters and at the missions: clear definition of responsibilities, appointment of an accounting officer;
- modernising the management of the budget in Brussels: greater autonomy, flexibility, responsibility and transparency for the departments of the Chairman and the directorates-general and support directorates;
- putting in place the scoreboards for the Executive Committee and the directorates-general and support directorates;
- supporting the strategy units, in the departments of the Chairman and the other directorates-general and support directorates, which have to work on better management - in particular better management of the missions network;
- modernising the management of business trips and relocations;
- optimising the quality of the services provided by B&B to all the internal and external customers at headquarters and at the missions.

Getting the right skills in place

Whether or not this support plan will actually be implemented depends in large part on whether B&B has the personnel to cope with the new challenges. This certainly applies to risk management and internal control, where the absence of the right skills is felt most acutely. Personnel planning will give priority to filling this gap.

It is also essential that ICT provides the necessary support for the mission moder-

nisation projects. Cooperation in this area has improved considerably over the last three years thanks to a more professional approach being adopted by both sides and also the fact that extra resources were provided. This positive trend must be continued, come what may.

Cooperation with the Missions Inspectorate is another extremely important element in strengthening and rationalising the structures for supervising the missions.

Good results

After three years of intense activity, the clear conclusion is that everyone has given their all and produced good results. Contacts with other departments of Foreign Affairs and with colleagues from the Belgian public sector and international partners have made it plain that there is only potential for a high-quality administration if there is consistent decentralisation, empowerment and transparency in our activities.

Good governance, ethical operations, results-oriented management and internal control are central in the further development of our organisations. These topics should enable us to cope with the increasing complexity of our general mission, while also meeting our obligations in terms of transparency and good management of the limited resources at the government's disposal.

Better monitoring of modernisation

S.00/BPR, set up following the *Business Process Re-engineering* project in the FPS, was renamed S.06 (Modernisation and Management Support). The old department's duties were broadened into more general monitoring of the modernisation effort. So while supervision of individual projects is left to the relevant directorates, S.06 will gradually develop into a service provider, aimed at providing the best practical assistance possible for project-based work. The end of 2006 saw the launch of a user-friendly site for all civil servants to bundle all their experiences, suggestions, good advice and 'best practices', for the benefit of everyone. S.06 will also be responsible for monitoring the Charter for a Customer-Friendly Government, implementation of which will vary from one FPS to another.

Security high on the agenda

Greater security for missions abroad

In 2006, the security of Belgian embassies and consulates abroad was the topic of special attention, with work, in conjunction with the Department for Buildings Abroad (P&O4.1), on improving security in a number of locations.

The first place where this was the case was Abuja (Nigeria), where the security situation is worsening by the day. A new armoured vehicle replaced the old one, which no longer met requirements. The chancellery has moved for the time being to the Austrian embassy

and a Gunnebo safety lock has been fitted there.

In Beirut (Lebanon), extensive work was carried out to improve the security of the residence.

In Kabul (Afghanistan), it is planned to relocate the Belgian bureau to a more appropriate building.

In the buildings used by Belgoeurop/Cops, measures were taken to improve security. With a view among other things to the next inspection visit by the competent services of the EU, the general security provisions in the new buildings, and in particular in the secure areas, were at the top of the agenda.

In New York, after the relocation of the Belgian consulate and the Belgian Representation to the UN, security was put in place at the new location (Gunnebo lock, alarm system, surveillance service, and so on).

In Bujumbura (Burundi), the security provisions were radically reorganised. Within the FPS, a short guide of the most important security instructions was created on the initiative of the Management Committee for Information Security.

ANS/NVO works on information security

Again in 2006, the secretariat of the National Security Authority (ANS/NVO) made an important contribution to improving security.

- It handled 6,200 cases and issued 5,012 security clearances.
- A new PC program aimed at simplifying the administrative processing of cases was developed in conjunction with ICT and the ICT department of GISS (the Belgian military intelligence and secu-

urity service). This should be operational in the spring of 2007 and should also lead to a reduction in the consumption of paper and ink.

- With a view to the new tasks that will be assigned to the ANS/NVO secretariat from January 2007, on 6 October 2006 the Belgian Council of Ministers gave the go-ahead to the secretariat taking on four more members of staff.
- In 2006, preparations were made for concluding treaties and Memoranda of Understanding with Bulgaria, Finland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom. These are intended to make it possible for Belgium and the country in question to exchange classified information.
- Each month from January to June 2006, the ANS/NVO secretariat organised the meeting of the INFOSEC working group, made up of the major players in information security (State Security Service, the Federal Police, Ministry of Defence, FEDICT, FPS Economy and FPS Foreign Affairs). This working group put together two bulky memoranda about homologation, certification and evaluation, which are intended to enable Belgian industry to compete for contracts on high-technology and protected markets.

1. Resources

More efficient management of diplomatic missions in Brussels

In 2006 too, the Protocol & Security (P&S) Directorate - which is responsible for the administrative management of the diplomatic missions in Brussels - made efforts to modernise its services.

On the P&S Directorate website launched in 2005, there was already a diplomatic list for the diplomatic community; since 2006, there has also been extra information about the rules of protocol.

P&S paid particular attention over the last year to the issue of respect for transport legislation by diplomats and mediation for settling disputes.

P&S relocated the General Directorate with its secretariat and the Diplomatic Missions Directorate to the renovated wing of Egmont Palace.

287 diplomatic missions in Brussels - and counting

The diplomatic community in Brussels continues to grow and now numbers 287 diplomatic missions (181 bilateral embassies, and 106 multilateral delegations and Permanent Representations) with about 18,400 people who all receive privileges. By the end of November, P&S had issued 10,361 new identity cards: 5,653 diplomatic cards, 2,331 for administrative and technical personnel and 2,377 for members of the service personnel, domestic personnel and civil servants on an official mission.

As far as consulates are concerned, in 2006 approval was granted for the opening of nine new honorary consulates and the appointment of fourteen new consular heads of missions, including four career consuls.

For international organisations too, the numbers are rising: three headquarters agreements or protocols/addenda were approved. There are 19,000 international civil servants holding a special identity card issued by Protocol. In 2006, P&S managed the cases of 58,000 people in all.

New law on the Honours List

There was also news on the Belgian Honours List in 2006. The law of 1 May 2006 on the awarding of honorary distinctions within the Honours List and the Royal Decree of 15 October establishing the rules and procedure for the awarding of honorary distinctions within the Honours List were published in the Belgian Official Gazette on 24 October 2006. These were partly the result of the preparations made by the Honours Department in close cooperation with the Prime Minister's departments. These documents form the basis for all the specific regulations and equivalences in the public sector. Incidentally, some of them, such as the regulations for federal civil servants, educational personnel and the integrated police services, are already in an advanced stage of preparation. This brings an end to the legal uncertainty that had arisen after the Council of State had annulled the basic regulations for civil servants and white-collar employees working for the public administrations and equivalent institutions. The Honours Department is now preparing a convenient guide that will be made available to the administrations involved.

Over 125 visits

The Visits Department followed up on just over 125 state, official and working visits. Protocol and security aspects were given appropriate attention. The state visit of the Dutch queen was a major success.

This department also issued 77 cards to cut down on entry formalities and 25 cards for the diplomatic corps car park at the airport in Zaventem.

The Visits Department processed 3,164 requests for security measures for VIPs, as well as applications for preferential treatment at Abellag and Melsbroek airports and Brussels South station. The department received thirty complaints of burglaries of chancelleries and residences. It forwarded 2,309 applications to use the VIP area at the airport in Zaventem.

The department responsible for Egmont Palace and the castle of Val Duchesse organised about 525 lunches, dinners and receptions. 2006 was a particularly busy year - in part because of the many activities connected with the Belgian Chairmanship of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Symposium: “Belgium on the international scene - A view from abroad”

Following the 175-25 festivities in 2005, Belgium celebrated another - less famous but nevertheless highly significant - 175th anniversary in 2006: the anniversary of the Conference of London.

The Belgian revolution of 1830 heralded secession from the Netherlands and the declaration of Belgium's independence. This led to the five great powers of that time - the United Kingdom, France, Prussia, Austria and Russia - meeting in London to work out guarantees for our newly acquired independence. This major international conference was crucial for defining our borders and developing our political system.

The Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Karel De Gucht, invited representatives of those former powers, now modern states, to come and commemo-

rate this period, and representatives of France, Russia, Austria, Germany and the United Kingdom and also the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg met in Egmont Palace on 14 November to do just that.

Multilateral diplomacy

In his opening speech, Karel De Gucht reminded his audience that the Conference of London was a first exercise in multilateral diplomacy. He also stressed how attached the Belgians are to democratic values, as they have been ever since independence.

His Dutch counterpart, Bernard Bot, immediately pointed to the historic roots and quality of cooperation between Belgium and the Netherlands. Border controls between the two countries have long been discarded, making Benelux a unique basis for close cooperation and a laboratory for developing policy at European level.

Luxembourg Minister for Foreign Affairs Jean Asselborn outlined the historical context of the independence of his country, a fifth of whose population migrated to America through Belgian ports - a memory that lingers to this day.

As for the other speakers, Vassili Likhatchev, vice-chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Russian Federation Council, commended the pragmatism that has always characterised relations between Belgium and Russia; Markus Löning, a member of the German Bundestag, praised the political virtues enshrined in the Belgian constitution; British MP Gordon Marsden emphasised the need for greater stability through the use of diplomacy and gave the Belgian constitution as an example; and Austrian Ambassador Franz Cede spoke about the Belgians' expertise in dealing with complex issues.

European equilibrium

French Ambassador Joëlle Bourgois pointed to the impact of the events of 1831 on the world of today. In 1831, thanks to Belgium, a European equilibrium was created; today, we can see the European Union's contribution to creating a global equilibrium. In an ever-changing world, pooled sovereignty is equivalent to more sovereignty.

Under the chairmanship of State Secretary for European Affairs Didier Donfut, the morning session was brought to a close. In the afternoon, the floor was taken by the representatives of the three major international institutions: the UN, NATO and the EU.

Former United Nations Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar recalled his

(From left to right) Foreign Affairs Executive Committee Chairman Jan Grauls, former NATO Secretary-General Lord Robertson, former United Nations Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar, former European Commission President Jacques Delors, and State Secretary for European Affairs Didier Donfut

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memories of Belgium, and he acknowledged the important contribution made by Belgium to UN efforts, as did former NATO Secretary-General Lord Robertson in his speech.

'Belgian moments' in the history of Europe

According to former European Commission President Jacques Delors, Belgian domestic politics had never stopped successive Belgian governments actively supporting European policy-making. Belgium had always remained true to the ideas of the founders of what became the European Union, and the Community philosophy. There had been 'Belgian moments' in the history of Europe and there would be more in the future.

In his closing speech, Minister for Development Cooperation De Decker took up from where Lord Robertson had left off and stressed the importance of the transatlantic link provided by NATO and the need for closer cooperation with the European Union in the field of development cooperation.

There were many questions, observations and personal reminiscences from the audience. The assembled company gave a good reception to the words of, among others, former Belgian Prime Ministers Mark Eyskens and Wilfried Martens and former Minister for Foreign Affairs Willy Claes, which brought this special day to a close in a spirit of dialogue.

2. Personnel

Adjustments to personnel policy

2006 saw the FPS Foreign Affairs, in partnership with FPS Personnel and Organisation, continuing to modernise its personnel policy, as part of the raft of initiatives that have been developed within the federal civil service.

The objective is to make sure that the staff are better trained and more highly skilled and that personnel structures more effectively meet the relevant requirements.

Discussions are under way in the FPS about mapping all the level A positions by producing job descriptions and evaluating positions. This exercise will come to an end in

early 2007 and will allow the personnel to maximise their skills and will help to ensure that members of staff are given the jobs that best suit them.

The 2006 personnel plan for headquarters indicated that 53 members of staff needed to be recruited - some of them to offset departures. The plan will be completed in early 2007.

For the foreign service, the FPS recruited 34 members of staff in 2006: 26 diplomats and 8 Development Cooperation Attachés.

The tables below show the composition of the FPS's staff both at headquarters and abroad as at 1 November 2006, and the number and category of missions. The map annexed at the end of the report shows the location of the different types of missions.

FPS staff at headquarters and abroad (1 November 2006)

Number of established officials and officials under contract at headquarters:

| | |
|----------------------------------|-------------|
| Established internal officials | 668 |
| Officials under contract | 503 |
| Diplomats | 167 |
| Chancellors | 60 |
| Development Cooperation Attachés | 21 |
| Total at headquarters | 1419 |

Total number of established officials and officials under contract in missions and at Permanent Representations abroad and Permanent Representations in Brussels:

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Diplomats | 245 |
| Chancellors | 114 |
| Development Cooperation Attachés | 40 |
| Expatriate officials under contract | 147 |
| Officials under contract employed on site | 1513 |
| Total in missions and Permanent Representations abroad and in Brussels | 2059 |
| Grand total (Headquarters, missions and Permanent Representations) | 3478 |

Number and category of embassies and consulates (1 November 2006)

| Missions | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| Embassies | 89 |
| Consulates General | 16 |
| Consulates | 10 |
| Permanent Representations | 10 |
| Cooperation Bureaus * | 6 |
| Total | 131 |

* This refers only to cooperation bureaus in countries where there is no Belgian embassy: Bamako, Cotonou, Maputo, Niamey, Quito and La Paz. Twenty offices have been set up in the grounds of an embassy, consulate general or Permanent Representation.

In 2006, three embassies were closed (Harare, Quito and La Paz), and two cooperation bureaus were opened (Quito and La Paz).

3. Buildings

Buildings abroad

The FPS runs approximately 350 buildings abroad, over half of which it owns. The total value of the FPS's fixed assets is almost € 375 million. Most of the properties are official residences of heads of missions.

Other buildings, mainly chancelleries, are rented and cost between € 9 million and € 10 million per annum.

In 2006, the investment budget totalled € 10.1 million, and the purchasing budget was € 2.8 million.

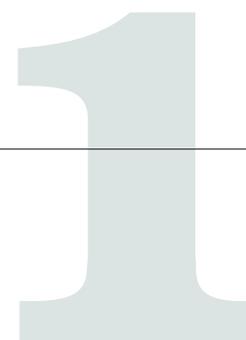
The buildings Master Plan gives an indicative rundown of revenue and expenditure of the Buildings Fund over the next four years. This pertains to major real estate transactions and priority renovation and construction projects.

Buildings in Brussels

These buildings are rented. The main building, Egmont I, is located at 15 rue des Petits Carmes. Construction of Egmont II began in June 2004 and was completed at the end of 2006.

Egmont II replaces several rented buildings at different locations in the city: 72 rue de Namur, 6 rue de Bréderode, 2-4 rue Crespel and 139 rue Haute.

The FPS also runs Egmont Palace and the castle of Val Duchesse in partnership with the Buildings Agency (Régie des Bâtiments/Regie der Gebouwen).



4. Budget and financial resources

| Division | Programme | Area | Commitment amount | Organisation amount |
|----------|-----------|---|----------------------|----------------------|
| 01 | | Strategic bodies of the Minister for Foreign Affairs | | |
| | | Policy and mission | 2,709,000 | 2,709,000 |
| 02 | | Strategic bodies of the Minister for Development Cooperation | | |
| | | Policy and mission | 2,347,000 | 2,347,000 |
| 11 | | Strategic bodies of the State Secretary for European Affairs, attached to the Minister for Foreign Affairs | | |
| | | Policy and mission | 1,282,000 | 1,282,000 |
| 21 | | Management bodies | | |
| | 0 | Management and supervision | 69,711,000 | 69,711,000 |
| 40 | | General services | | |
| | 1 | Protocol | 721,000 | 721,000 |
| | 2 | Training | 1,500,000 | 1,500,000 |
| | 3 | Conferences, seminars and other events | 1,487,000 | 1,487,000 |
| | 4 | Humanitarian aid | 1,170,000 | 1,170,000 |
| | 5 | Representation abroad | 3,547,000 | 3,547,000 |
| | 6 | Communication and information | 1,615,000 | 1,615,000 |
| | 7 | International cooperation | 3,528,000 | 3,528,000 |
| 42 | | Embassies, consulates and cooperation missions | | |
| | 0 | Subsistence programme | 166,004,000 | 166,004,000 |
| | 1 | Bilateral relations | 9,300,000 | 10,280,000 |
| 43 | | Directorate-general for Legal Affairs | | |
| | 0 | Subsistence programme | 496,000 | 496,000 |
| 51 | | Directorate-general for Bilateral Affairs | | |
| | 0 | Subsistence programme | 10,000 | 10,000 |
| | 1 | Bilateral relations | 3,938,000 | 3,938,000 |
| | 2 | Economic expansion | 2,653,000 | 2,653,000 |
| 52 | | Directorate-general for Consular Affairs | | |
| | 0 | Subsistence programme | 3,000 | 3,000 |
| | 1 | International Institutions | 117,000 | 117,000 |
| | 2 | Humanitarian aid | 197,000 | 197,000 |
| 53 | | Directorate-general for Multilateral Affairs and Globalisation | | |
| | 1 | Multilateral relations | 80,327,000 | 80,327,000 |
| | 2 | Science policy | 3,579,000 | 3,579,000 |
| | 3 | Cooperation | 483,000 | 483,000 |
| | 4 | Humanitarian aid | 48,862,000 | 50,762,000 |
| 54 | | Directorate-general for Development Cooperation | | |
| | 0 | Subsistence programme | 3,665,000 | 3,665,000 |
| | 1 | Governmental cooperation | 251,149,000 | 223,143,000 |
| | 2 | Non-governmental cooperation | 199,151,000 | 200,361,000 |
| | 3 | Multilateral cooperation | 452,536,000 | 357,499,000 |
| | 4 | Special missions | 127,698,000 | 116,332,000 |
| 55 | | Directorate-general for European Affairs and Coordination | | |
| | 1 | European relations | 3,337,000 | 3,337,000 |
| | | Total budget for 2006 (adjusted) | 1,443,122,000 | 1,312,803,000 |

5. Information and communication technology

FPS Foreign Affairs poses some particular challenges for ICT. Firstly, there is the large number of embassies and consulates, some of which are located in areas where it is scarcely possible - or even completely impossible - to communicate with the outside world; and, secondly, there is the need to be able to contact headquarters in Brussels at all times (and especially in a crisis).

Like any modern organisation, the FPS relies on ICT support for most of its processes: personnel management, financial management, management of Belgians abroad, management of the process of issuing visas, knowledge management, and so on.

2006 saw the launch or performance of a number of major projects with a role to play in modernising the ICT support infrastructure of FPS Foreign Affairs:

- expansion of the capacity of the global data network: this project means that there will be a twofold to tenfold increase in the bandwidth available to missions for their secure communication with Brussels;
- installation of new servers at all the missions, including a system for storage and backup of the data on-site;
- modernisation of the missions' PCs: upgrading to a more powerful operating system and more modern office applications;
- consolidation of the bank of servers in Brussels;
- implementation of an efficient solution for data storage and protection;
- rollout of a new application for financial management at the missions;

- rollout of a new application for the management of Belgians abroad;
- participation in the Biodev project for issuing biometric visas (see also Serving the public - Consular affairs);
- introduction in the FPS and at the missions of a knowledge management system allowing information to be shared and enabling staff to work together on documents;
- development of a new detailed policy on data protection.

2. Serving the public

2



1. Consular affairs

Biometrics as an aid to visa policy

After launching the European pilot project Biodev I (*Biometrics Data Experimented in Visas*) together with France in 2005, Belgium - in the form of the Directorate-General for Consular Affairs (DGC) - started work on Biodev II, involving a larger group of countries, in 2006.

The first phase, Biodev I, enabled a number of French and Belgian embassies and consulates to test out recording visa applicants' biometric data: taking digital prints of all their fingers and taking a digital photograph.

In 2005, France started up the tests in Colombo (Sri Lanka), Minsk (Belarus),

San Francisco (US) and Annaba (Algeria). Belgium did this in Washington (US) and Kinshasa and Lubumbashi (Democratic Republic of Congo). The two countries ran the experiment together in Bamako (Mali).

Belgium issued over 15,000 biometric visas at the four missions involved. Adding to this the biometric visas at the French missions, over 110,000 biometric visas were produced in all.

Preparation for VIS

Biodev can be viewed as a 'laboratory' for compiling the envisaged central European database for visa applications, the *Visa Information System (VIS)*.

Certain border posts check the biometric data recorded in the individual visa applications when the visa applicant arrives in

the Schengen area. Specifically, this happens at the posts at Brussels Airport, various French airports (Roissy Charles de Gaulle, Orly, Lyon Saint-Exupéry and Marseille-Provence) and the port of Marseilles.

Biodev I has not only made it possible to test out the hardware and software, forward the data and save them securely but also to check how the visa applicants react to the system and find out how viable it is for the embassies and consulates.

The French-Belgian project was such a success that in 2006 it was extended in the form of Biodev II. Six additional EU member states are taking part in this phase: Luxembourg, the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, Spain and Portugal.

European financing

The European Commission is financing the project, as was the case for Biodev I. It is using the budget of the ARGO action programme, whose goal is to improve the administrative cooperation between the EU member states in the fields of asylum, visas, immigration and controlling external borders. The Commission is taking on 80% of the costs of Biodev II, while the eight participating countries are financing the other 20%.

Each participating country ensures that there is recording of the biometric data at a number of embassies and consulates abroad and checking of the data when visa applicants arrive in the Schengen area.

Belgium chose the embassies in Kinshasa, Kigali and Bujumbura and offered to record visa applicants' biometric data for the other participants as well at these locations.

Biodev II - digital fingerprinting at a border post in Zaventem

© FPS Foreign Affairs, Anke Renard





At a technical level, this second phase of the Biodev project means that the various computer systems can be tested out to check up on interoperability.

This new project also boosts European cooperation at consular level, as one stipulation is that the partners will also deal with recording the biometric data for other participating countries.

Finally, for the Biodev projects Belgium asked the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp to carry out a study into the repercussions of digital fingerprinting on hygiene and public health. The idea was to find out whether there is a chance of passing on infections or contagious diseases.

World first: limited health risks involved in digital fingerprinting

On Belgium's initiative, as part of the Biodev project a study was carried out examining the risk of passing on infectious diseases when taking digital fingerprints. This study, carried out by Professor Jan Jacobs of the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp, is universally regarded as a 'world first'. This issue had never before been the subject of close investigation. The results indicate that there are limited health risks involved in taking digital fingerprints.

The research set out to answer the following question: "Can infections be passed on by taking and reading digital fingerprints?" More specifically, what the research had in mind was micro-organisms that can be used in bioterrorism (for instance in Washington) and tropi-

cal diseases (malaria, Ebola and other viruses). On the basis of a study of the literature, it was investigated whether micro-organisms that cause infections on hands or non-porous surfaces (such as the scanners used in Biodev installations) can survive and so be passed on to other people.

The main conclusion of the study was that there are indeed micro-organisms that can be passed on from one person to another through hand/object contact, but this does not apply to those micro-organisms that could be used for bioterrorism or those causing tropical diseases. However, very small numbers of the micro-organisms that can indeed be passed on by taking digital fingerprints may cause stomach, intestinal or bronchial infections. The specific risk level that Professor Jacobs puts on infection with *salmonella typhi* in the case of visa applicants in Kinshasa is 2 in 10,000. In Washington the risk of infection with the rotavirus was also calculated as being 2 in 10,000. Many of these micro-organisms are spread among the general public. Simple measures such as washing your hands with alcohol-based disinfectants, minor adjustments in the design of the equipment and appropriate disinfection can substantially reduce the risk of infection.

Study is a world first

Outside the strict context of healthcare and monitoring food safety, there has actually been scant attention paid to hygiene and infection

through hand/object contact. Taking fingerprints is seen in our society as something quite normal. It is amazing then that not a single academic study could be found that had investigated infections being passed on via *fingerprinting*. This meant that Professor Jacobs's study aroused the interest of the European Commission, which is closely following this issue with an eye to the Visa Information System, and the American authorities, which have always assumed that there was no risk of infections.

Belgian measures to reduce the risk of infection

Belgium will introduce measures in March 2007 to drastically reduce the risk of infection on the basis of the study's recommendations, starting with a pilot project. Thus, the visa section of the Belgian embassy in Kinshasa will receive clear instructions about the procedure to follow when taking fingerprints.

A dispenser with disinfectant soap (containing alcohol) will be provided for the visa applicants and alcohol wipes will be distributed after the fingerprints have been taken. Applicants can find a poster in the waiting room with more information about the whole procedure.

After evaluation of this pilot project, the instructions will be sent to all the missions taking part in the Biodev project trials.

Belgium is the only country in the world where this study has been carried out. It is also unique in providing civil servants and the public with clear instructions that limit the risk

2

2. Serving the public

of contracting contagious diseases when taking digital fingerprints.

2. Crisis management

FPS Foreign Affairs: Help and support in times of crisis

The Crisis Centre – Travel Warning Unit – B-FAST Department has been in operation within FPS Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation since 2003; since then, additional provisions have been made to provide the most effective response possible in emergency situations. In this context, there are three main areas of action:

- assisting Belgian citizens who find themselves in crisis situations abroad;
- travel warnings for Belgian citizens who are planning to go abroad;
- providing emergency aid for local populations, by deploying B-FAST.

Assisting Belgians abroad

The Crisis Centre was activated twice in 2006: for the bus accident in Pedrezuela (Spain) in May and for the evacuation of Belgians from Lebanon in July. In total, around 1,500 Belgians left Lebanon, of whom 1,150 were evacuated by the Belgian embassy.

Travel warning issued for 133 countries

In 2006, the FPS published travel warnings for more than 130 countries. These provided information for

Belgian citizens planning to go abroad on the situation at their destination and warned them of any problems or dangers they might encounter.

As the demand for travel warnings is increasing and increasing numbers of people now have access to the Internet, since 2001 FPS Foreign Affairs has been posting travel warnings on the website www.diplomatie.be. On average, about 600 people a day visited this section in 2006.

B-FAST activated three times

In the event of disasters and emergency situations abroad affecting primarily the local population, the local authorities sometimes ask for emergency aid from Belgium and the international community. The rapid reaction unit B-FAST that was set up for this purpose in 2000 carried out three operations in 2006.

In May, B-FAST provided aid to Bulgaria and Romania when those two countries were hit by floods. A team of firefighters went into action with large high-capacity pumps in Bulgaria, while a shipment of medicines was delivered for people in Romania.

An expert from FPS Health travelled to Ethiopia in August to advise the Ethiopian authorities on the health problems that had arisen as a result of the floods there.

Floods in Romania

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3. Policy

3



1. Belgium in a bilateral context

Western Europe

New impetus for policy on neighbouring countries

The Directorate-General for Bilateral Affairs (DGB) appointed an 'Ambassador for Neighbouring Country Policy' in 2006 to provide new impetus to Belgian policy on neighbouring countries and come up with ideas to strengthen the bonds between Belgium and these countries. The ambassador mainly plays a coordinating role, ensuring that there is adequate communication and coordination between all the players and institutions taking part in cross-border projects, so that the projects are coherent and efficient.

A number of important activities lie ahead: revision of the Benelux Treaty; organising the Belgo-Dutch Conference and Belgo-British Conference; preparing the forthcoming summits with the governments of the Netherlands and Luxembourg; and monitoring developments in the cooperation between SAR.LOR.LUX, Région Nord-Pas-de-Calais and North Rhine-Westphalia.

Benelux

New Benelux Treaty in preparation

Preparations for the official negotiations about the future of the Benelux are being made at intragovernmental level and between the three participating countries.

The first exploratory meeting between the three member states about the future of the Benelux was held on 17 January 2006. This was followed on 14 June

2006 by a Benelux seminar presided over by Luxembourg and attended by the Regions and Communities. The topic was "Benelux cooperation: current state of affairs and future prospects", and the three countries were told about the legal options for extending the treaty.

Luxembourg

The Belgian and Luxembourg governments met at Schengen Castle (Luxembourg) on 19 July 2006 for their traditional biennial meeting. This was followed on 19 December 2006 by their sixth summit, at La Hulpe Castle (Belgium). The aim of the summits is to regularly analyse progress made in strengthening bilateral cooperation with the goal of improving the wellbeing of the two countries' citizens.

The summit agenda contained a number of important issues concerning European and cross-border cooperation between the two countries. The Belgian and Luxembourg governments were pleased with cross-border cooperation within the Benelux. Particular attention was paid to cooperation within the political institutions of the European Union. The Luxembourg government, as the outgoing president of the Benelux, informed the Belgian government about the informal discussions that the three member states had conducted in the first half of the year about the treaty establishing the Benelux Economic Union after 2010, when the treaty is due to expire.

Belgium and Luxembourg expressed a desire to continue and strengthen the Benelux partnership and to renew the treaty. To ensure that the various cross-border cooperation activities continue to make good progress, the governments

confirmed the results of the discussions on crisis management, public health, mobility and transport, consular affairs, the police and justice.

At the start of October 2006, the FPS finished preparations for the ratification procedure of the SAR.LOR.LUX cross-border cooperation agreement, which had been concluded on 23 May 2005.

The Netherlands

The FPS prepared the fourth Belgo-Dutch Conference in 2006. This prestigious event, together with the inter-governmental Thalassa summit, was postponed to 2007 because of the parliamentary elections in the Netherlands on 22 November.

France

Euro-district in the making

Noting that legislative and regulatory obstacles were continuing to hinder cross-border initiatives, the French and Belgian Prime Ministers and the Minister-Presidents of the Flemish Region, the Walloon Region and the French Community decided to set up a working group of six Belgian and six French MPs. This working group took up its duties on 10 November 2005. Its task was to help in the search for how relations could be made easier, put forward proposals for legislation in various areas and discuss how the political administration of a future Euro-district would work.

The FPS helped to set up the working group by finding Belgian members of parliament and contributed a sum of €70,000 to finance it.

There were three plenary meetings of

the Belgo-French parliamentary working group in 2006: on 20 March, 12 June and 28 November.

The Belgo-French parliamentary working group signed an agreement on 12 June 2006 on the administration of the cross-border conurbation. In this agreement the twelve members of the working group made a commitment to propose establishing a Euro-district to their respective governments. The district would form a kind of consultative body for developing and carrying out projects with cross-border ramifications. It would consist of an assembly with voting rights, an executive committee and specialist committees.

The working group wanted to ensure that swift targeted action was taken following the guidelines that they had set out. Therefore it proposed to the various governments that a founding committee be set up with the task of drawing up the cooperation agreement and byelaws for the Euro-district and calculating the budget needed.

The FPS organised a meeting on 10 November 2006 to discuss the future activities of the Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai Euro-district founding committee, with the proposal on how the administration would be organised and the district's bodies would be financed as its main focus.

In late January 2007, the Franco-Belgian parliamentary working group is organising a public debate on the proposals. The idea is to submit an official report to the Prime Ministers and Minister-Presidents by the end of March 2007.

Matters concerning the rivers Scheldt and Meuse and inland navigation

Since 1 December 2005 the federal government has taken part in the International Scheldt Commission and in the plenary meeting and the meetings of Scaldit. In these meetings the countries on the banks of the Scheldt mutually and multilaterally coordinate the transposition of the EU Framework Water Directive.

The Commissioner for Rhine Navigation, who is appointed by FPS Foreign Affairs and chairs the Belgian delegation to the Central Commission for Navigation on the Rhine, represented the Federal Minister for Mobility at the Pan-European Conference on Inland Waterway Transport, held in Bucharest on 13 and 14 September 2006.

The aim of the conference was to establish unrestricted inland navigation between the North Sea and the Black Sea, giving the inland navigation sector the chance to develop into a major alternative means of transport that can help cope with the expected doubling of freight transport in Europe over the years to come.

United Kingdom

Intensive cooperation

Belgium and the United Kingdom have good relations and continue to develop these, e.g. via the annual Belgo-British Conference. The 2006 edition of this prestigious event, held in October, brought together eighty

high-level representatives from the two countries to discuss the effects of globalisation for their citizens.

The discussions covered future energy supplies, healthcare, the issue of integration and diversity in the workplace, the democratisation of access to information and the effects of this for the media.

Belgium and the United Kingdom are also working closely together in the *Great Lakes Region Contact Group*, which met in London on 19 June.

Germany

Fifty-five years of bilateral relations

Belgium enjoys excellent relations with Germany. The way that the two countries analyse and view international issues and the future of Europe generally run in parallel. In April and July, a group of about 40 German trainee diplomats visited the FPS, where they attended discussions on Belgium's bilateral and multilateral policy. In June, we marked the fifty-fifth anniversary of bilateral relations between our countries: these were established on 27 June 1951 when the first ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany presented his credentials to the Kingdom of Belgium. Belgium was one of the first countries with which the Federal Republic exchanged ambassadors after the Second World War. This represented an important step for the new state on the road to acceptance into the community of nations and a brave political gesture on the part of Belgium so soon after the war and the occupation.

Finland

Special attention during the EU Presidency

Relations with Finland are so good that rarely is there any occasion to focus on them. However, the Finnish Presidency of the European Union provided an opportunity to pay special attention to bilateral relations between Belgium and Finland. An increase in the frequency of visits between the two countries allowed us to highlight the synergies between them. Finland was able to call on Belgian expertise in African affairs during its presidency.

Italy

Celebration of 60 years of bilateral relations focuses on migration

Belgium and Italy enjoy excellent bilateral relations at all levels, including civil society.

The close links between the two countries were again evident with the seminar held on 12 September 2006 at Egmont Palace. The event was organised by the Royal Institute for International Relations together with the Italian embassy to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the bilateral agreements between Belgium and Italy. These formed an important milestone in the history of Italian immigration to Belgium.

The speakers (mainly academics) covered topics that gave a brief outline of the historical and sociological aspects of Italian immigration to Belgium. The colloquium was also an opportunity to look past the vic-

ious stereotypes about Italian immigrants and remember the tragedies in which they were involved such as the Bois du Cazier mining disaster in 1956. Out of the 262 miners who lost their lives, 136 were Italians.

The opening of the seminar was attended by Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs Karel De Gucht and Italian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Franco Danieli.

Western Balkans

Active engagement

Belgium is paying special attention to the western Balkan states, which are continuing on their path of stabilisation, with the ultimate aim of these countries joining the European Union and NATO. Belgium's engagement is clear from a series of projects covered by our preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention budgets. The projects deal with issues such as the return of war refugees (Kosovo and Croatia), boosting the participation of women in politics (Kosovo), teaching young people democratic values (Croatia), mine clearance (Croatia), and reinforcement of the legal system (Bosnia-Herzegovina).

Participation in Althea and other EU initiatives

Belgium took part in the EU (EUFOR) initiative Operation Althea in Bosnia-Herzegovina and provided forty service people and three A-109 helicopters. Four Belgians are involved in the EU Police Mission (EUPM) in that country. Belgium's contribution

in Kosovo consists of about 200 soldiers for the NATO peacekeeping force (KFOR). In the EU, Belgium continued to offer political support to the stabilisation and association process to which the western Balkan states have made a commitment. This process aims to get them ready for EU membership. Each country will be judged on its own merits when deciding on whether it can join the organisation.

Numerous meetings

There were numerous meetings in 2006 between senior civil servants from Belgium and the western Balkan states. In his capacity as Chairman of the OSCE, Minister De Gucht made two trips to the region: in February and in April. Noteworthy visits to Belgium were made in March 2006 by the President of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Suleyman Tihic and in the same month by the President of Serbia-Montenegro (at that time still one country), Svetozar Marovic, and in December 2006 by the Prime Minister of Croatia, Stipe Mesic. Following a referendum in May, Montenegro became a sovereign state on 3 June 2006.

Turkey: Belgium remains a supporter of EU membership

Belgium remains a keen supporter of Turkey joining the European Union. Minister De Gucht visited Ankara at the end of October, where he reminded his hosts of this support. At the same time, though, he pointed to the need for Turkey to step up the

pace of reform and honour its commitments to the EU and its member states. If this does not happen, there is a risk that the accession negotiations will become derailed.

Greece

Belgium enjoys intensive and cordial bilateral relations with Greece.

On many issues we share the same viewpoints and vision - certainly when it comes to European policy, as Minister De Gucht noted yet again during his visit to Athens in January 2006.

Cyprus: continued hopes of reunification

Like its European partners, Belgium would have preferred to see a unified Cyprus joining the EU, but it respects the sovereign will of the people which led to the Annan 5 Plan being rejected on 24 April 2004. As Minister De Gucht told the Cypriot government on his visit to Nicosia in January 2006, while the Cypriot question remains unresolved Belgium continues to support multilateral efforts to reunite the island, albeit in compliance with international rules, UN resolutions and the basic principles of the European Union.

Belgium makes a substantial contribution from its preventive diplomacy budget to a project (Committee on Missing Persons) that aims to contribute to reconciliation between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots at a time when discussions about an initiative

seeking a solution to the division of the island have ground to a halt.

Transatlantic relations

United States

Prime Minister's visit strengthens ties with the US

Belgium continued to work on strengthening relations with the United States of America in 2006, building on the foundation laid during President Bush's visit to Belgium in February 2005.

Prime Minister Verhofstadt, accompanied by Minister De Gucht, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Didier Reynders and State Secretary for Administrative Simplification Vincent Van Quickenborne, paid an official working visit to the United States in January 2006. The ties between the two countries were emphasised at a reception at the White House.

In addition to Washington, the Belgian government delegation visited New York and Chicago. The Prime Minister spoke there about recent developments in the European Union and presented his vision of the future of the EU.

Road shows

An important objective of the visit was to promote Belgium as a trading and investment partner for American business. Numerous private meetings were held with company managers and special seminars were organised to present Belgium as a place to invest. Attended by large

numbers of interested people, these *road shows* focused on the favourable tax regime for foreign companies, and especially the new system of a notional interest deduction and tax *rulings*. (In this system the Office for Rulings in Fiscal Matters stipulates in advance how the fiscal rules are going to be applied to any particular transaction.)

Naturally, in addition to the visit by this government delegation, there were bilateral and multilateral contacts throughout the year between the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs and the US Secretary of State and senior civil servants. The emphasis here was on cooperation in the OSCE, preparing for Belgium's membership of the UN Security Council and particular items on the Belgian foreign policy agenda, including a special focus on developments in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Great Lakes Region.

Canada

Multifaceted relations

2006 saw particular attention being paid to relations with Canada, a country that is often - completely unjustly - viewed in the same light as the US. As it turns out, though, Belgium's relations with Canada have an important specific value and significance. The legacy of the historical links that arose from Belgian emigration and the casualties suffered by Canada during the two world wars persists to this day, in the form of outstanding political relations and numerous economic, cultural and social exchanges.

Economic mission

The great diversity of bilateral relations between Belgium and Canada came very clearly to the fore during the economic mission to Toronto, Ottawa and Quebec from 5 to 10 November. It was led by HRH Prince Philippe and included Federal Minister for Economy, Energy, Foreign Trade and Science Policy Marc Verwilghen and Flemish Minister for Economy, Enterprise, Science, Innovation and Foreign Policy Fientje Moerman and her Walloon counterpart Jean-Claude Marcourt. Needless to say, the official contacts at Canadian federal level and with the provincial authorities of Ontario and Quebec showed that Belgium and Canada shared similar policies and views on the major challenges posed by international political, economic and social developments. The mission's multi-faceted economic programme too, which included investment seminars, company visits and numerous private discussions involving the more than 140 participants from Belgian business, demonstrated the scale of exchanges between Belgium and Canada and prospects for further development.

Central and Eastern Europe

Belgium's heightened interest in Central and Eastern Europe, including the former Soviet Union, can be attributed to the increasingly significant global role played by the countries of this region. Their energy

resources and the gradual opening of their markets are increasingly factors to be reckoned with. In 2006, the Belgian Chairmanship of the OSCE contributed to strengthening our contacts there and focusing attention on this region's potential in our foreign policy.

The integration of the new members of the EU is going well.

Russia**Developing a partnership through the EU**

Our relationship with Russia is based on the European Union's policy of partnership and cooperation with this giant country. This led to an agreement with the Russians at the end of 2005 covering four areas: freedom, security and justice; the economy; external security; and research and education.

Economic mission

Among the various bilateral events that took place in 2006, the most notable was certainly the economic mission that visited Moscow, Kazan and Saint Petersburg in June. About 300 people accompanied HRH Prince Philippe on this trip. The mission strengthened trading relations between the two countries and also allowed specific issues to be raised, such as energy and diamonds.

The Southern Caucasus**More contacts**

The Belgian Chairmanship of the OSCE led to more frequent contacts with Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Belgium plans to build on this further with a view to strengthening relations with each of these countries in 2007.

Prince Philippe is welcomed in Kazan by Rustam Nurgaliyevich Minnikhanov, the Prime Minister of Tatarstan, June 2006

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Bulgaria and Romania

Economic mission demonstrates confidence

HRH Prince Philippe led an economic mission to Bulgaria in December, and the mission continued with a seminar in Romania. Special attention was given to the issues of infrastructure and the environment. This mission reflected the confidence that the Belgian business community had in the potential of these two countries in the run-up to their joining the EU.

Ukraine

Elections a good sign for democracy

The elections that were held in Ukraine in 2006 confirmed that democracy has become firmly established in that country. Ukraine's efforts to seek rapprochement with the Euro-Atlantic institutions are worthy of special attention. The focus in 2006 was on preparation of the first Joint Committee meeting, scheduled for the start of 2007.

Lithuania

State visit by King Albert II

HM King Albert II and HM Queen Paola made a state visit to Lithuania from 20 to 22 March 2006, taking a one-hundred strong delegation with them. The official delegation, which included Minister for Foreign Affairs De Gucht and State Secretary Donfut, was joined by thirty businesspeople, twenty academics and



HM King Albert II, First Lady Alma Adamkiene, HM Queen Paola and President Valdas Adamkus during the state visit to Lithuania, 20-22 March

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thirty journalists. The visit provided an opportunity to showcase Belgium for the business community, academia and - through Queen Paola's specific input - cultural circles. What particularly came to the fore in the official contacts was Belgium's role as a partner in the EU and NATO. Belgium's contribution to NATO's Baltic air-policing mission played an important part in this. The public was mainly interested in the Belgian lifestyle.

The Middle East

The war in Lebanon and the return of peace

The Belgian foreign ministry supported European Union High Representative for Foreign Policy

Javier Solana and the Finnish Presidency of the EU in the peace efforts they made from the outbreak of war between Israel and the Lebanese group Hezbollah in July 2006. These involved a whole series of discussions, activities and missions to the region to ensure the safe evacuation of European citizens, an end to the hostilities, a political settlement to the conflict and access for humanitarian aid. Belgium played an active role in the European Council of Ministers meeting on 1 August. This meeting, which took as a basis the conference held a few days earlier, reached agreement on a number of objectives:

- to support France in its negotiations to secure adoption of a resolution it had submitted to the UN Security Council;

- to achieve a European consensus on the need to deploy an international force to support the political settlement and assist the Lebanese forces;
- to support the humanitarian aid efforts and the reconstruction of Lebanon.

These conclusions incorporate key points taken up by the UN Security Council Resolution 1701 of 11 August 2006.

Minister travels to Israel and Lebanon

Minister for Foreign Affairs Karel De Gucht made a trip to Israel and Lebanon on 23 and 24 August. In the bilateral discussions he had with Israel, he stressed the country's right of legitimate self-defence enshrined in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, but also the lack of proportionality in the Israeli army's reaction in Lebanon and the obligations that Israel has to meet in order to comply with the Geneva Conventions.

Belgium and various other EU member states faced up to their international responsibilities and played an important diplomatic and military role in finding a solution to the conflict with their work on Resolution 1701 and by setting out clear rules of engagement for UNIFIL (*United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon*) and supplying a good number of troops for this force. This helped end the war, consolidate the cease fire and secure the quick withdrawal of the Israeli army, allo-

wing the Lebanese army to deploy up to the Blue Line, while the armed Hezbollah militias were forced back to the north of the Litani River.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Delicate situation following election of Hamas

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has once again created a number of challenges for the diplomatic community.

The election of Hamas to head the Palestinian Authority led to a number of problems as this party does not recognise the state of Israel, has not renounced the use of violence and rejects the basic agreements of the Middle East peace process.

Belgium subscribed to the policy of the European Union and the Quartet (the UN, the EU, the US and Russia) of attempting to get Hamas to change its mind on the three issues just mentioned. The situation led to a veto on contacts with the representatives of Hamas in the Palestinian Authority and a stop being put on direct aid for the government. However, Belgium, and the EU as a whole, faced up to its responsibilities by increasing the humanitarian aid supplied through the Temporary International Mechanism (TIM) set up by the EU.

This aid is provided directly to the Palestinian people without the mediation of the institutions controlled by Hamas. Belgian aid for the Palestinians increased in 2006 by 30% on the aid for 2005 and totalled €14 million.

In parallel with these efforts, the Belgian foreign ministry supported the attempts to form a Palestinian government that recognises the state of Israel, renounces violence and respects the framework agreements of the peace process. In discussions with the Israelis, the Belgian foreign ministry stressed that priority must be given to political solutions as opposed to a solution involving only security measures. Moreover, international human rights legislation must be respected.

Diplomatic conference in Cairo

Problems looked at from an Arab/Muslim perspective

The North Africa and Near East Directorate organised a diplomatic conference in Cairo on 9 and 10 May 2006. It was chaired by the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs and brought together all the Belgian heads of missions in the region.

One of the conference's objectives was to look at themes such as democracy, the rule of law, good governance and human rights from the perspective of the Arab/Muslim world and come up with theoretical analyses and ideas for practical measures to help us determine our policy in this turbulent region.

At an operational level, the conclusion drawn from the conference was that it is important for the EU - including Belgium - to increase the assistance to civil society. However, this assistance must be well thought out. First, the position of the non-

governmental organisations (NGOs) operating there must not be undermined and their security and that of the EU's dialogue partners in civil society must not be compromised; and second, the people and organisations chosen as dialogue partners must be sufficiently independent from the local authorities in the region.

Also, the EU and its member states must do more to increase dialogue with the political and economic elites of the Arab/Muslim world. Finally, the EU and its member states should also be more aware of the fact that while it is important to support the modernisation of the countries concerned, the local inhabitants do not necessarily consider this to be a process of democratisation.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Long-awaited elections

Belgium followed developments in the transition process in DRC closely. Since the Sun City agreements in 2002 it has been our goal, together with our partners in Europe (EUSEC, EUPOL and EUFOR), on the world stage (MONUC and CIAT) and in DRC (IEC), to support the country on the road to peace and stability and allow new institutions to be established after free, fair and transparent elections.

To achieve this, DRC needed shared and balanced democratic power,

with not only the country's president but also its prime minister and parliament having a number of important prerogatives.

The elections also gave the people the chance to elect provincial representatives. After the decentralisation process provided for in the constitution, they will have extensive powers and considerable budgetary resources that were previously in the hands of central government.

During the electoral process, Belgium continually repeated the international community's calls for the authorities and institutions concerned to allow the media to do their work in reporting the elections and ensure the candidates were given adequate protection.

Furthermore, Belgium urged the candidates to follow the code of conduct put forward by the IEC (*Independent Electoral Commission*). This included refraining from incitement to hatred and concentrating on programmes and political plans.

Finally, a hundred or so observers were sent to give extra guarantees that the elections would run according to plan. These observers - Belgians, members of parliament and representatives of NGOs and civil society - travelled to DRC to monitor both rounds of voting.

Reconstruction and good governance

In its many bilateral contacts with DRC (visits by ministers and members of parliament), Belgium continually stressed to the Congolese authorities the importance of reconstruction and good economic governance of the country after the elections. DRC faces an enormous task in getting the economy moving again and improving the citizens' standard of living. It is a challenge that it cannot face without the international community's assistance in guaranteeing the security and stability needed to create a climate of growth and development.

Elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Realising this, Belgium has made extra efforts: alongside our substantial existing and continuing support for the establishment of an integrated Congolese army, police units and the DDR process (*disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration*), we advocated keeping MOMUC in DRC after the elections. In the area of good governance, Belgium is participating in the World Bank and European Union's common initiative to develop 'compact governance' and proposed setting up a mechanism for further monitoring the situation post-transition. This should make it possible to ensure adequate coordination between DRC's major partners and to engage in a dialogue with the newly elected authorities (while taking care of course to respect the country's independence).

Belgium has tried to promote the principles of good governance and transparency (e.g. in some key sectors of the Congolese economy). It is supporting a partnership in the transport sector between the ports of Matadi and Kinshasa and those of Antwerp and Brussels - support that is, however, conditional on the Congolese authorities respecting the rules of good governance.

In the mining sector Belgium has tried to get the political players in DRC and the international community to take action to support a project increasing transparency. Various proposals that have been made in this area are still being studied.

In the financial sector Belgium is supporting cooperation between

the National Bank of Belgium and its counterpart, the Central Bank of Congo.

Great Lakes Region

Pact on Stability, Security and Development

Belgium urged the countries of the Great Lakes Region to help to restore the sovereignty of DRC, combat weapons trafficking and illegal exploitation and dismantle 'negative forces'.

Rwanda also played a constructive role during the electoral process in DRC and, together with Burundi, was an advocate of restarting CEPGL (*Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries*), an initiative supported by Belgium.

Belgium continued to follow the process of political stabilisation in Burundi, so there were many ministerial visits between the two countries.

The FPS organised two Joint Committee meetings in October: one with Rwanda and the other with Burundi. The former resulted in the allocation to Rwanda of €140 million for the period 2007-2010, while the latter led to a pledge to Burundi of aid worth €60 million for the period 2007-2009.

The second summit of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region was held in December 2006 in Nairobi (Kenya), two years after the first one, with the eleven participating countries signing an ambitious document, the Pact on Stability, Security and

Development. As a member of the *Group of Friends*, Belgium actively supported this process. It is now the responsibility of the region itself to ensure that the details of the pact are implemented in practice on the ground. Belgium has lent its support and cooperation to the efforts made in this area by the UN (resolutions, monitoring adherence to the weapons embargo, and so on), the African Union, La *Francophonie* and the EU.

South Africa, Sudan, the Horn of Africa and Côte d'Ivoire

Strategic pact with South Africa continued

Belgium continued in 2006 with the strategic partnership with South Africa that had been launched on President Mbeki's 2004 visit to Brussels. HRH Prince Philippe led an economic mission to South Africa in March 2006, and the first meeting of the Belgium-Africa Joint Committee was held in November.

Support for initiatives for Sudan

Belgium closely followed the situation in Sudan. Our Special Representative for *Institution Building*, Jos Geysels, visited Khartoum and Juba in February as part of the north-south peace process. Belgium also supported a series of projects that aimed to consolidate peace in Sudan.

As far as the crisis in Darfur is concerned, Belgium provided support for AMIS (the African Union peace-

keeping mission in Sudan), and for various other initiatives aiming to secure the cooperation of parties that had not signed the Darfur peace agreement.

Support for peace process in Horn of Africa

Belgium also devoted attention to the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, focusing particularly on the Horn of Africa, where there is a peace process under way in various places, and to the situation in Côte d'Ivoire. Moreover, the FPS, in the form of our embassy in Addis Ababa and in conjunction with various Belgian institutions, organised activities to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of diplomatic relations between Belgium and Ethiopia. The anniversary is a clear mark of Belgium's long-term engagement in Africa.

Asia

2006 was the first year when there was work on implementing the conclusions of the memorandum on our future in Asia. The memorandum proposed strengthening our relations with that continent, and in particular with a number of partners whose importance is universally acknowledged, such as China, Japan, India and Thailand. Another significant event was the trip made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs through Pakistan, Nepal and Afghanistan.

China

Numerous contacts strengthen relationship

Numerous initiatives and visits turned the spotlight onto the 35th anniversary of diplomatic relations with China - a country with which our bilateral contacts have increased considerably.

On the fringe of these visits, many political, economic and cultural agreements were signed - for example on Deputy Prime Minister Zeng Peiyan's visit to Belgium, when no fewer than seven agreements were signed. 2006 also saw the launch of the first direct flight between Belgium and China. Confucius Institutes, which aim to increase knowledge about China and the Chinese people, are being established in all the Belgian universities. At the same time - with the support of a special fund - investments in both directions are increasing. The breakthrough in relations between Belgium and China will continue in 2007 with a new mission led by the Belgian crown prince. Previous missions of this type were always a success in terms of both the number of participants and the interest that they aroused in business circles as well as the results they achieved.

Preparations for the Olympic Games and World Expo

In 2007, we will be working towards the next two milestones in our relations with China, a country whose political and economic might is growing all the time, as we prepare for Belgium's participation in the 2008 Olympic Games and the Shanghai World Expo in 2010.

Japan

Increasing Japanese investments

Japan too remains a priority for Belgium. We have strong links with Japan going back many years, as evidenced by numerous discussions and official visits, including the one by the Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs in May 2006, and this process will go on with the planned official visit by Prime Minister Abe in January 2007. The economic links between the two countries are of the utmost importance as 200 Japanese companies have seats in Belgium, making Japan one of our longest-standing and most important foreign investors. Belgium and Japan are updating their bilateral agreements to strengthen investments of this kind, hence a new agreement on social security will be taking effect from 1 January 2007, and now there are also negotiations in progress to amend the existing treaty on double taxation.

India

Important area for development with interest in Belgium

In 2006, special attention was also paid to India, which, alongside China, is unquestionably a key area for development in the region. The importance of our relations with India was underlined by a visit in November by the Belgian Prime Minister, Minister for Finance and Minister for Foreign Affairs with the goal of attracting investment. India had already shown a striking inter-

rest in Belgium, with Indian investors acquiring stakes in large Belgian companies or even taking over control of them. Conversely, our country, with its distribution and logistics operations, is also an important potential partner for India.

Indian art exhibition

The visits were also an opportunity to stress the excellent political and cultural relations between the two countries. These were further emphasised by the exhibition organised in the Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels, which represented the most prestigious exhibition of Indian art organised in Europe for many years. It was opened by Sonia Gandhi.

Pakistan

Good relations with influential country

Pakistan is a clear example of a country with which Belgium has traditionally had good relations. It is a regional power with a sphere of influence that stretches far beyond its national borders. Furthermore, Pakistan is playing a central role in the fight against terrorism.

Nepal

Continuing internal conflict

Belgium is supporting the negotiations in Nepal to put an end to the internal conflict that has been going on for far too long.

Afghanistan

International aid necessary for tackling problems

Afghanistan faces challenges that cannot be denied by the international community. The unacceptable Taliban regime may have been pushed aside, but the threat of terrorism and the fight against narcotics persist to this day. With these issues in mind, Belgium is participating in the international efforts to safeguard security and to reconstruct Afghanistan. About 300 Belgian soldiers were deployed in Kabul and Kunduz in 2006 as part of ISAF, the international force to help guarantee security - a necessity in a country that still has to deal with the Taliban which refuses to give up the fight and the mafia that is living off its trade in opium, a product of which Afghanistan has inadvertently become the world's top producer. Belgium is not only providing military aid. It is also participating in development projects aimed at strengthening Afghan institutions, boosting the fight against drugs and improving the position of women. These efforts will be continued over the years to come, together with constant efforts to improve coordination between military assistance and development cooperation.

Thailand

Political situation affects relations

Unfortunately, in 2006 Thailand had to face an internal political situa-

tion that threatened the democratic foundation that had for many years formed the basis for the harmonious development of our bilateral relations. Belgium remains committed to this country and hopes for a swift return to a situation in which we can continue our policy of intensive dialogue and cooperation.

Latin America

Belgium develops new policy for region

Synergies between Belgium and Latin America have existed for a number of centuries now. Economic, commercial, cultural and personal exchanges have continued to develop all the time. In a globalisation context, the common past that Belgium and Europe share with Latin America has the potential to form a fertile breeding-ground for providing new impetus to the partnership between the two regions.

It was with this in mind that the FPS set out the orientation for Belgium's new policy regarding Latin America. Assessments were made and conclusions drawn that will form a basis for the policy's implementation in practice.

Ministerial tour

Belgium's desire to strengthen its relations with Latin America was further emphasised by Minister De Gucht's decision to go on a tour of Argentina, Brazil and Colombia.

Special attention was focused on the development of relations between the

3. Policy

European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean (EU-LAC). Belgium was actively involved in the numerous EU-LAC meetings at all levels, especially the May summit of the heads of state and government of the two regions in Vienna.

Economic diplomacy promotes Belgian interests

Minister Karel De Gucht launched the idea of 'economic diplomacy'. Supporting Belgium's economic interests abroad is one of the basic missions of FPS Foreign Affairs. In practice, this involves a very wide range of activities: supporting exporters and their export efforts, eliminating trade barriers, assisting in the settlement of disputes, and so on.

Eliminating trade barriers

Once again in 2006 the FPS participated in numerous activities aimed at eliminating barriers to free market access. The seminar that we organised on this subject at Egmont Palace on 6 July deserves a particular mention here.

Another noteworthy event was the Transport seminar held in Kinshasa in February and the meeting of the GMF (*German Marshall Fund*) on 25 and 30 April.

Strengthening Belgium's image as a provider of quality products

In all, 45 events were organised to bolster the high-quality image of

Belgian products and publicise them abroad.

Examples were the Belgian pavilion at the Ratchaphruek flower show in Thailand - where, incidentally, we walked off with a first prize - as well as the Iwakura festival in Japan, and Eurodream in New York, marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty of Rome.

Support for exporters abroad

Support for exports by Belgian business also means that our missions abroad mediate if there are financial disputes or if intellectual property rights are not respected. The same applies to blocks on Belgian imports for health reasons (bird flu, dioxins, bluetongue disease, and so on).

Belgian pavilion at the Ratchaphruek flower show in Thailand, October 2006

© BELGA



Economic missions and 'road shows'

The FPS coordinates the various players that organise the economic missions led by HRH Prince Philippe. There are several missions each year - in 2006, they visited South Africa (March), Russia (June), Canada (September) and Bulgaria and Romania (December).

The FPS also helped with the preparations for the two *road shows* of the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister in the US (Washington, New York and Chicago) in January and in India (New Delhi, Chennai and Madras, Bangalore and Mumbai/Bombay) in November. The purpose of these events is to attract foreign investors and explain what incentives there are in the Belgian tax system to reward investments, with a specific focus on the deduction of notional interest.

Investment treaties

The Belgian-Luxembourg Economic Union (BLEU) signed treaties in 2006 with five countries - Botswana, Bahrain, Mozambique, Ethiopia and South Korea - to increase mutual investments and protection of those investments. Similar treaties were signed with Panama and Rwanda. A text that had previously been signed was brought up for discussion again by Qatar. There was a fourth round of negotiations with Russia and a first round with Kyrgyzstan (which, however, was inconclusive). Belgium also concludes agreements to stop double

taxation. Such treaties were signed with Macau, Morocco, the Seychelles, Singapore and the US in 2006, and one with Azerbaijan took effect in the course of the year.

Financial mechanisms for stimulating exports

The Finexpo committee, whose administration is taken care of by the Export Support Directorate, has the task of supporting Belgian companies that export capital goods and services.

It mainly makes use of three instruments to achieve this. Firstly, there is the commercial mechanism of stabilising interest rates, and then there are two financial assistance mechanisms: state-to-state loans and interest credit. In 2006, a third kind of financial assistance mechanism was added: an outright grant.

The interest stabilisation mechanism allows exporters to offer a guaranteed fixed rate throughout the period that a credit is being paid back. However, this activity is currently very sluggish due to the low market interest rates.

State-to-state loans and interest credit allow our companies to help developing countries. The new mechanism, the grant, has exactly the same goal, but focuses on helping SMEs - although larger companies are not excluded.

These last forms of export support are used frequently and involve considerable funding.

Applications for assistance made simpler

Finexpo works in close collaboration with the departments of the National Delcredere Office; a joint form has been designed for companies and/or banks needing government assistance for so-called 'tied' aid. The form is available on the Delcredere website and the Finexpo site (www.finexpo.be).

Our website also contains all the legislation relating to Finexpo's work as well as the annual activity report. Also anyone interested in the questionnaire that has to be filled in to receive non-tied aid can find it there.

2. Belgium in the European Union

Ever more pressing need for common European energy policy

Since January 2006 and the dispute between Russia and Ukraine about the supply of gas, the energy issue has gained a new dimension. Rises in petroleum and gas prices, growing energy requirements, the increasing scarcity of resources, the ever more pressing issue of global warming, and also Europe's growing dependence on imported energy and the lack of stability in supplier countries rekindled the debate about the need for a common European energy policy. This was the background against which the European Commission published its Green Paper in March 2006. It received the support of the European Council shortly afterwards.

According to the Green Paper, Europe needs an ambitious common policy to ensure sustainability, competitiveness and security of its energy supply. Belgium is a supporter of a common European energy policy and fully endorses the objectives that were set.

Benelux document meets with approval

Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg drew up a common document on energy security and foreign policy in March. This document stresses the importance of energy security, interdependence with third countries, the need for concerted European action and, lastly, the strong link between internal and external aspects of energy policy.

The European Commission and the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy took the key elements in this Benelux document as a basis for a joint paper entitled "An external policy to serve Europe's energy interests". This document, which focuses on all the various aspects of guaranteeing energy security, was approved by the European Council of 15 and 16 June.

The paper indicates that the EU is just one player in a rapidly changing energy landscape, and that it is crucial that it concludes strategic partnership agreements with the most important producer, consumer and transit countries, and that a coordinated and coherent EU approach is necessary.



Austrian Chancellor and European Council President Wolfgang Schäussel with European Commission President José Manuel Durão Barroso, Brussels, 15 June © BELGA

Talks with Russia

The Finnish Presidency continued on the same course and concentrated on the external aspects of energy policy, in particular relations with Russia, and discussions at the informal meeting in Lahti on 20 October were almost completely devoted to energy relations between the EU and Russia. Here the participants agreed that the future talks about bilateral cooperation must be based on the principles of the European Energy Charter.

The 25 EU member states reached an agreement in late 2006 on subsequent dialogue with Russia about the supply of energy. This meant that negotiations could start between the EU and Russia about the renewal of the comprehensive partnership and cooperation agreement.

Another achievement of the Finnish Presidency was an agreement on the network of 'energy correspondents'. This network will be laun-

ched at the start of 2007. It will allow the European Union not only to monitor the security of its external energy supply, but also serve as an *early warning mechanism* if there is the threat of a crisis.

Energy efficiency

As far as the internal aspects of the European energy policy are concerned, the Commission approved an energy efficiency action plan in November. This was given a positive reception by the EU Energy Council of 23 November. The plan comprises 75 measures to be taken over the next six years to reduce energy consumption by 20% between now and 2020.

The Directorate-General for European Affairs and Coordination (DGE) ensured that Belgium's position on energy was given appropriate attention. At the coordination meetings emphasis was put on the great importance Belgium attaches to energy efficiency, the link between

energy and sustainable development, an efficient internal market and coherence between the various aspects of energy policy and the other areas of European policy.

Energy top of the agenda again in 2007

Energy was thus top of the European agenda throughout 2006 - and that is not going to change in 2007.

The European energy policy is one of the priorities of the German and Portuguese presidencies. DGE will ensure that Belgian interests are efficiently presented and promoted at European level.

“Global Europe” aims for a competitive Europe

To support its Growth and Jobs Strategy, the European Commission approved the communication “*Global Europe*” in the autumn of 2006. This will form the framework for EU trade policy over the years to come.

The Commission reiterated in the document that the EU remains committed to the Doha Development Agenda negotiations, which it sees as its top priority. It would like to see the negotiations result in ‘new generation’ bilateral free trade agreements focusing on emerging markets.

The strategy aims to open foreign markets - not only by reducing customs tariffs but also by eliminating a whole range of non-tariff obstacles. Another focus are the ‘new growth sectors’, which are still not - or virtually not - covered by the WTO rules: investment, public procurements, competition and government aid.

As far as the choice of partners is concerned, the EU is seeking to conclude ‘new generation’ bilateral trade agreements with emerging markets on the basis of economic criteria. In addition to continuing the negotiations with Mercosur and the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Commission proposes launching negotiations with South Korea, the ASEAN (*Association of Southeast Asian Nations*) countries, India and Russia.

Belgium wants level playing field

Belgium is generally positive about the Commission’s assessment and general analysis. It stresses the importance of the link between the EU’s internal policy and external policy and emphasises the role that the Lisbon Strategy must play in this regard.

Belgium believes that European exporters must be able to operate on a level *playing field*, with the same opportunities as local businesses, and so urges the Commission to ensure that the international social, environmental protection and safety standards are respected by all our trading partners.

Belgium also insists upon special attention being paid to sustainable growth and to development in the bilateral agreements that are to be concluded.

Innovation policy requires European cooperation

Increasing globalisation is changing the world economy. It presents new opportunities and challenges. The

development of a European innovation policy is of strategic importance for Europe’s ambition to make the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy in the world by 2010.

A group of four experts, including the Belgian Jozef Cornu and chaired by former Finnish Prime Minister Esko Aho, presented a report on 20 January 2006 with recommendations for boosting the European Union’s research and innovation performance. According to the Aho Report, European policy in this area needs to be based on four pillars: the creation of innovation-friendly markets, strengthening research and development resources, increasing researchers’ structural mobility and fostering a culture which encourages innovation.

The approval of the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Development (FP7) by the European Council and the European Parliament on 30 November 2006 is an important first step in this direction. The framework programme, which starts on 1 January 2007 and continues to the end of 2013, will allow important European research initiatives to be carried out. The total budget for this period is almost €55 billion, which means that each year there will be 40% more money available for expenditure than over the period 2000-2006 (FP6).

Putting knowledge into practice

This was top of the list of priorities for Finland, a model country in terms of innovation, for its presi-

dency of the European Union in the second half of 2006. The communication entitled "Putting knowledge into practice: A broad-based innovation strategy for Europe", published by the European Commission on 13 September 2006, was used as a basis for the discussions of the heads of state and government at the informal Lahti summit on 20 October 2006 about a plan covering ten priority courses of action for education, research and industrial policy. This action plan was approved at the EU Competitiveness Council of 4 and 5 December 2006 and subsequently ratified at the European Council of 14 and 15 December 2006.

Throughout this process, DGE used a whole range of instruments to coordinate Belgium's position both technically and politically, allowing Belgium to make a meaningful contribution to the debate from an early stage.

Community patent

Alongside the need to identify promising European growth markets and to tailor European research instruments accordingly, it is absolutely essential that a pan-European system of intellectual property rights be set up, preferably in the form of a single Community patent for the EU. After all, patents protect the owner of an invention and at the same time promote the dissemination of knowledge. Moving applications for and management of these intellectual property rights from national to European level will provide greater legal protection, and for the research institutions and companies involved it will mean con-

siderable cost savings and cut down on red tape.

Europe has enormous innovation potential. A European policy in this area has the capacity to lead to more innovation aimed at creating new markets for products and services based on top-class research results.

Better follow-up on transposition of European legislation

The incorporation of European legislation into Belgian law is an ongoing process. Transposition mechanisms are systematically assessed according to their performance. A working group was set up in 2004 to study proposed directives with a view to their subsequent transposition. A year later, the interactive Eurtransbel database was created, making it possible to keep track of where in the transposition process a piece of European legislation is at any given time.

In early March 2006, the State Secretary for European Affairs launched a catch-up plan based on three projects. In the first initiative, the network of 'Euro-coordinators' is promoted. This is a body made up of over 80 contact points in all the administrations within the federal and regional governments - including the Council of State and the Belgian Official Gazette - and those working in the legislative branch.

Work is also under way to optimise the use of the Eurtransbel database and on ensuring quicker follow-up on the cases where the European Commission accuses Belgium of

infringements. The existing investigations regarding interaction between the Belgian authorities in these infringement cases and regarding European Court of Justice proceedings were updated and expanded in the course of the year.

Despite the improvements resulting from frequent dialogue and better follow-up, Belgium's score for the transposition of directives relating to the implementation of the internal market fell back slightly in July. However, this has to be seen against a background of the whole EU achieving worse results for the transposition of directives into national legislation.

In July it was still too early to see the results of the catch-up plan and reinforced efforts, as the process of transposing directives consists of a number of stages. There was an improvement in the Belgian score in the second half of the year.

Frequent involvement in preliminary reference procedures

The Belgians are getting better and better at defending their interests at the European Court of Justice and are getting more involved in the establishment of European law in this area. A noteworthy development is that Belgium is increasingly intervening in preliminary questions when a judge of a member state asks the Court of Justice for interpretation of European legislation. In practice, this meant that on 13 November 2006 Belgium, as a member state, was taking part in 26 preliminary reference procedures that are pending before the Court - this is above the European average.

3. Belgium in a multilateral context

Increasing globalisation and interdependence between countries are probably the most striking features of the international scene at the start of the twenty-first century.

The problems faced by the international community, too, are often intertwined cross-border issues. Thus, it is now generally accepted that there is a strong link between security, development and human rights, nor is any doubt about the relationship between energy consumption and climate change, or between migration and development.

Such issues cannot be tackled by a single country on its own, but require international cooperation.

However, these new, complex and rapidly developing problems present new challenges for international organisations, most of which were originally created to tackle one specific problem or issue.

Belgium made efforts once more in 2006 to tackle problems in the existing international organisations or improve the consistency of the action taken by these organisations.

Below are a number of areas where Belgium tried to improve and guide the management of globalisation.



Belgium's election as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for a period of two years (2007-2008), New York, 16 October © BELGA

Belgium member of United Nations Security Council

On 16 October 2006, Belgium was elected a non-permanent member of the Security Council for a period of two years (2007-2008).

The previous time that Belgium had a seat on the Security Council was the period 1991-1992. Belgium's election with no fewer than 180 votes out of 189 is an unmistakable sign of the confidence that the international community has in this country.

Belgium wants to play an active role in issues on the Security Council's agenda and thus live up to the responsibilities of dealing with peace and security issues granted to members of the Security Council by the Charter of the United Nations.

Alongside geographical issues, the Security Council addressed a number

of specialist topics, such as women, peace and security, the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, and children in armed conflict. In these key humanitarian areas Belgium wishes to contribute added value by putting forward positions in line with the values of our society.

The FPS increased staff levels at the United Nations Directorate at the FPS and the Permanent Representation in New York with a view to Belgium's term on the Security Council.

The Diplomatic Contact Days in September 2006 allowed the other departments in the FPS and all the missions abroad to be involved in these efforts. On 27 October, the Belgian Council of Ministers approved a memorandum put forward by the Minister for Foreign Affairs in which the framework for our activities in the Security Council was given, and the

Minister for Foreign Affairs presented this to Parliament on 14 November. A total of five EU member states will have a seat on the Security Council in 2007: France, Italy, the United Kingdom, Slovakia and Belgium. Belgium has set itself the goal of boosting the European 'dynamic' in the council.

Belgium chairs the OSCE

Minister for Foreign Affairs Karel De Gucht was Chairman of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2006. He was assisted with the Chairmanship preparations and the activities of the Chairmanship itself by senator Pierre Chevalier, special envoy to the OSCE.

The OSCE Department (M1.3) in the Directorate-General for Multilateral Affairs (DGM) was enlarged into a team of 18 members of staff for this busy and politically important year. Including both diplomats and officials (established and under contract), the team liaised intensively with Belgium's Permanent Representation to the OSCE in Vienna, which also increased its staff levels.

Belgium's Federal Council of Ministers approved a background paper in December 2005 detailing the programme for the Belgian OSCE Chairmanship and it was presented to the Belgian Parliament. The programme was then communicated in the first month of the Chairmanship to the OSCE member states at the OSCE Permanent Council and to the national and international press.

The Minister also presented the programme at a meeting with the coalition of Belgian NGOs and in his speech to the UN Security Council in New York. There would be regular dialogue with Parliament, international organisations (the United Nations, the European Union and the Council of Europe) and NGOs during 2006.

Programme for the Chairmanship

The parameters and orientation of the Belgian OSCE Chairmanship in 2006 were summarised in the background paper as follows: "Regarding the priorities of the Belgian OSCE Chairmanship, the Government has four major thrusts. In the first instance, Belgium will have to play an active role in the institutional reform of the OSCE. Second, in the interests of achieving a better balance between the "baskets", our Chairmanship will have to devote its attention to strengthening the economic dimension and to endeavouring to introduce into the OSCE the co-operation mechanism of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, particularly with regard to transport. Third, combating international crime and promoting the rule of law will be of central importance during our Chairmanship. This is an issue that the average citizen feels affected by. We will co-operate in this area with other FPSs, notably those of the Interior and of Justice. Finally, our country, as holder of the Chairmanship, will make a constructive contribution to the resolution of "frozen" conflicts." (The full background paper is available on the OSCE website www.osce.org.)

This programme, which was intended to be both ambitious and realistic, was implemented through a range of activities and initiatives. Our OSCE delegation conducted discussions and negotiations in Vienna to allow decisions and declarations to be made. Minister De Gucht travelled from Brussels to the Balkans, the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia, and he held bilateral meetings with his counterparts in numerous capitals of OSCE member states (including Washington and Moscow). The Minister also attended international and regional meetings as OSCE Chairman and often held parallel bilateral meetings. One particularly notable trip took the Minister to the Georgian capital Tbilisi, where he successfully acted as a mediator in negotiations for the release of some Russian army officers.

Intervention in 'frozen conflicts'

The focus of many of the Minister's trips and meetings was mediation by the OSCE Chairmanship to contribute to resolving the so-called 'frozen conflicts' of South Ossetia (in Georgia), Transnistria (in Moldova) and Nagorno-Karabakh (the Armenian enclave in Azerbaijan). The Belgian Chairmanship organised a donor conference in Brussels for the economic reconstruction of South Ossetia. The conference met the target of €10 million and gave the go-ahead for implementing specific projects.

Events

The OSCE Chairman also released numerous statements to the press on

disturbing or promising events or developments in OSCE countries. In all these cases the Chairman spoke on behalf of the OSCE and its standards and values.

The Belgian OSCE Chairmanship also organised various special high-level events and conferences and many workshops for experts. Those activities, too, focused on one of the OSCE's three dimensions ('baskets'): the politico-military dimension; the economic and environmental dimension; and the human dimension. A comprehensive list of these conferences, events and workshops, together with all the relevant documents, is available on the OSCE website. Initiatives that stand out were a commemorative event for the victims of the holocaust, an energy conference in conjunction with the Energy Charter Secretariat and the International Energy Agency, a meeting of the police chiefs of all the OSCE countries, public seminars on election monitoring and e-democracy, and a 'twinning' visit to Belgium for fifteen journalists from the Balkans, the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia.

Election monitoring

There were also elections in Ukraine and Belarus in 2006. ODIHR, the specialist OSCE institution, organised and supervised the international monitoring of the elections in close consultation with the Belgian Chairmanship. Belgian observers took part in both of these operations and other similar ones.

The Belgian Chairmanship of the OSCE was closed with the meeting of the Ministerial Council in Brussels on 4 and 5 December.



The 14th Ministerial Council meeting of the OSCE, Brussels, 4 & 5 December

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4. Belgium and globalisation

Doha Development Agenda

The negotiations at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) cover twenty issues, of which the major ones are as follows:

- agriculture (market access, domestic support, export support);
- market access for Non-Agricultural products (otherwise known as Non Agricultural Market Access - NAMA);
- liberalisation of the trade in services.

The *Doha Development Agenda* was centre of attention at the sixth WTO Ministerial Conference, held in Hong Kong at the end of December 2005.

Some headway made

Hopes that adequate headway would be made at the Hong Kong Conference

on all elements of the DDA proved misplaced. Nevertheless, the conference did make substantial progress on a number of points, especially development aspects. A positive development was that the developed countries agreed to free market access for products from the Least Developed Countries. They will be given duty and quota free market access for 97% of the tariff lines. Headway was also made on African cotton exports. In addition, the ministerial conference also made it possible to lay the foundation for increasing resources for *Aid for Trade* (assistance for the development of trade in developing countries). In the months following the Hong Kong Ministerial Conference, the negotiations were mainly focused on the three major issues linked together by the negotiators: market access for agricultural products, market access for indu-

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strial goods (NAMA) and the reduction of domestic support for agriculture. It became clear that only equivalent and simultaneous concessions in these areas could save the negotiations. As it proved impossible to resolve these problems quickly - despite the fact that the EU showed a readiness to redouble its efforts to achieve this - it was decided at the end of July to suspend the negotiations indefinitely. The EU, together with India and Brazil, expressed regret at the lack of flexibility in the United States' positions on domestic support for agriculture.

Belgium involved in preparing positions

Belgium made an active contribution - through for example the work of the Article 133 Committee and the Belgian Council of Ministers - to preparing the positions promoted by the European Commission at the WTO on behalf of the EU. Belgium is a strong supporter of further integrating developing countries into the world trade system and creating greater legal certainty by means of increased regulation. It also took the opportunity to emphatically reiterate that the undertakings made by the EU - so including Belgium - meant that a similar gesture was needed from the other developed countries and increased efforts were required of the major emerging economies. That is the price that will have to be paid to reach a balanced general agreement that is fair to all sides.

Hopes of a new start

Following the mid-term elections in the United States, the time seems

ripe to cautiously resume negotiations in Geneva, starting with technical matters. However, there are still many questions to be answered and the *window of opportunity* for reaching an agreement is limited as the special mandate held by the US administration to conclude trade agreements without the intervention of Congress expires in July 2007.

Migration and Development

On 24 and 25 January 2006, the FPS organised the international ministerial conference on "*Reinforcing the Area of Freedom, Security, Prosperity and Justice in the EU and its Neighbours*". This conference's approach to migration paralleled the other major EU policy areas, in particular security policy, the economic future of Europe and cooperation on justice and home affairs. It was jointly organised by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and FPS Foreign Affairs'

Ambassador for Immigration and Asylum Policy.

The conference was aimed at participants from the European Union and neighbouring countries to the east and south of the EU. The topic was innovative as it placed migration in a new light by integrating it into general European policy. This represents a broader and more positive approach than the traditional one centring on security. It was also multidisciplinary: the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister for Home Affairs and the Minister for Development Cooperation as well as the State Secretary for European Affairs and the State Secretary for Social Integration were all involved, so creating a horizontal perspective.

Conference on Migration and Development

A second international conference followed on 15 and 16 March. This discussed Migration and Development. There were around 350 participants

Conference on Migration and Development, Egmont Palace, Brussels, 15 & 16 March

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from a wide range of backgrounds: ministers and senior civil servants from both developed and developing countries, NGOs, migrant organisations, journalists and international organisations. The IOM, the European Commission and the World Bank helped to organise this conference at international level; nationally, arrangements were made through cooperation between the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister for Home Affairs and the Minister for Development Cooperation.

'Roundtables' were organised covering triangular Mali-Morocco-Belgium/EU cooperation, migration-related interaction between South Asia and the EU/US zone, and getting migrant communities more effectively involved in development efforts with a view to, for example, transferring knowledge and optimising transfers of money.

This conference showed that it is possible to have an informed and constructive dialogue between countries of the North and the South about the link between migration and development without the discussion being dominated by political considerations. A seminar was organised in June 2006 in conjunction with the Royal Institute for International Relations (IRRI/KIIB) about how the problems of migration can be tackled at international level and how the coherence of policy in this area can be improved.

Proposal of a global forum well received

Pursuant to the High-Level Dialogue on migration launched by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Belgium propo-

sed holding a Global Forum in 2007 to follow up on this international dialogue. The proposal was well received. This forum will launch a new international consultation process on strengthening the link between migration and development. The preparations for this international meeting are already under way.

Africa

In 2006, the EU gave priority to dialogue with the countries of North and sub-Saharan Africa. This was also evident from the Rabat Conference, where the ministers of the EU and Africa worked on the theme of 'migration and development' and tried to determine those projects which according to the African countries should become a priority for European development aid.

5. Belgium and development cooperation

2006 key year for Central Africa

2006 was a key year for Belgian development cooperation with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Burundi. With the elections in DRC - which marked the end of the transition period in that country - the Democratic Republic of Congo reached a historic crossroads on the way to lasting peace.

Elsewhere, Belgium has a structural development relationship with Rwanda and a second Joint Committee meeting was organised on 23 October 2006.

A Joint Committee meeting was also organised with Burundi on 26 and 27 October for the first time in 12 years.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

The structural development cooperation with DRC was resumed at the end of the 1990s. A strategy paper for future Belgian development cooperation with this country was drawn up in 2001. This set out two phases: a partnership on the road to peace and then a peacetime partnership. The initial programmes were therefore aimed primarily at basic social sectors, creating jobs through EIIPs (*Employment-Intensive Investment Programmes*) and demonstrating an active Belgian presence in DRC by strengthening civil society.

With the establishment of a transitional government, made up of representatives of the different factions, and the bringing together of the country and the improved security situation there, the possibility arose of expanding the bilateral programme. The priority areas are as follows:

- good governance and the rule of law;
- security, conflict prevention and community building;
- support for the social sectors;
- support for economic reconstruction.

In this context, a multidisciplinary approach and more effective coordination of the various Belgian players were advocated.

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Action plan

In the absence of a Joint Committee with the DRC, an action plan was drawn up for the period 2004-2005, worth a total of €75 million. That action plan, together with a number of additional priorities, guided and formed the backbone of Belgian cooperation with DRC in the period 2004-2005. In view of the lack of an approved PRSP (*Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*), the period covered by the plan was extended to 2006.

Pilot exercises

Belgium also took control of the pilot exercise on *Good Humanitarian Donorship* in 2006. The GHD initiative creates a discussion forum for donors on good practices for financing humanitarian assistance, with principles and standards being agreed on there. Moreover, the initiative encourages increased responsibility on the part of the donors involved.

Belgium is taking the lead in DRC in the pilot exercise on the principles of cooperation in fragile states. Fragile or vulnerable states are states lacking the political will and/or means to develop and implement a policy to fight poverty. During the pilot exercise, the relevance of the principles of cooperation in vulnerable states was tested.

At a training workshop in Kinshasa, the local donor community and a largely Congolese audience were told about the Paris Declaration, in which donors gave their full backing to greater harmonisation of development aid and tailoring that aid better to developing countries' policy.

Cooperation strategy

In anticipation of the establishment of a democratically elected government, a dialogue was launched via the authorities there on the future strategy for cooperation with DRC. In the meantime, at the instigation of the DFID (the UK Department for International Development) and Belgium (supported by the World Bank and the UN), discussions were started with a view to developing a joint strategic framework in response to the PRSP. Then the European Commission, which is also actively participating in these discussions, launched exploratory talks with the EU member states on a common strategy. This coordination is running in parallel with the discussions about a future Governance Compact and is making good progress. The goal is to produce a number of draft proposals that will form the basis for the future coordinated strategic frame-

work, or CAF (*Country Assistance Framework*). Belgium has played an important role in these discussions so far and must continue its active participation as this will increase the impact of Belgian cooperation and ensure that Belgium continues to play a leading role in DRC. At the same time, Belgium is working with a group of the major donors on setting up a coordination platform which will serve as an interface between the donors and the officials of the new Congolese government. In this area too, Belgium's input is important and its continued participation in the relevant discussions is absolutely crucial.

Emergency programme

The Minister for Development Cooperation pledged to make a significant and tangible contribution in order to show the impoverished population that the democratic process will also help improve their

Emergency programme for the Democratic Republic of Congo

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quality of life. The form chosen for this contribution is an emergency programme for DRC involving expenditure of €25 million for the period 2006-2007.

Key points of this programme are:

- creating jobs in the short and medium term using the EIP (Employment-Intensive Investment Programme) approach, i.e. the local population is directly involved in the implementation of the programme and also derives some limited financial 'benefit' from it;
- improving access to clean drinking water by enhancing sanitation in priority districts, improving access to these districts and opening up certain areas;
- creating synergies with existing governmental programmes for community development, the supply of water and sanitation, rehabilitation and maintenance of country roads;
- making a clearly visible impact in terms of meeting the basic needs of the population.

The programme is being implemented by Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC). Depending on the type of activity, work is done in conjunction with the municipal authorities and/or the ministries of Energy, Transport and Infrastructure.

Rwanda

The Joint Committee meeting between Belgium and Rwanda was held on 23 October 2006, with on the

agenda the two countries' governmental development cooperation. The meeting laid down the Indicative Cooperation Programme (ICP) for the period 2007-2010 with Belgium contributing €35 million a year.

Cooperation programme

The following points in this cooperation programme form the key to actions in the field:

- The project/programme-based approach taken by Belgian aid is gradually evolving into a sectoral approach.
- The project cycle was revised to ensure quicker implementation of the activities.
- The partnership is based on ownership of the programmes by Rwanda.
- A Joint Partners Committee was set up to follow up on and evaluate the cooperation.

The ICP's resources are distributed as follows across the priority activity sectors for Belgian development cooperation in Rwanda:

- rural development (€62 million);
- healthcare (€40 million);
- education and training (€13 million);
- good governance (€13 million);
- multisectoral projects (€12 million).

Burundi

In Burundi, the government that had emerged from the democratic elections took office. After a break of

12 years, a Joint Committee meeting was organised there again on 26 and 27 October 2006. The goal of the Indicative Cooperation Programme, signed at the Joint Committee meeting, is to guide Burundi's efforts so that the government regains its role of regulator and supplier of basic government services at both central and local government levels. Belgian cooperation is also aimed at supporting the two other branches of government: the parliament and the legal system. Striking the right balance between these branches is all the more important in a country like Burundi, where the democratic system is still very much in its infancy.

With the new cooperation programme Belgium wants to help Burundi to implement its strategy for combating poverty and give a boost to its economy.

The priority sectors for the programme are good governance (the rule of law, and security); the economy (agriculture); healthcare; and education. In addition to these sectors, the programme also involves a number of multisectoral activities: a study fund, an expertise fund, the programme for non-project scholarships and micro-activities.

A sum of €60 million is being set aside for the new ICP (Indicative Cooperation Programme) 2007-2009. The funds are distributed as follows over the priority activity sectors for Belgian development cooperation in Burundi:

- good governance (€15.5 million);
- agricultural development (€9 million);
- healthcare (€10 million);
- education (€10 million);
- multisectoral (€7.5 million);
- reserve, not allocated yet (€8 million).

The new cooperation programme also aims to form a reference framework for the other Belgian development cooperation instruments.

In the case of Burundi too, the Minister for Development Cooperation pledged to make a significant and tangible contribution in order to show the impoverished population that the democratic process will also help improve their quality of life, with an emergency programme covering 2006 and 2007. A total of €15 million was made available for this programme. The emergency programme for Burundi is aimed primarily at education, road building with an eye to opening up cities and towns, and the supply of drinking water in the countryside. The programme dovetails with the Burundian government's emergency programme and also gives special attention to refugees who fled to neighbouring countries and displaced persons within Burundi.

Improving evaluations of the operation of development cooperation

The Special Evaluation Service performed some autonomous and joint evaluations in 2006 aimed at helping enhance the operation of Belgian development cooperation. It applies the cri-

teria developed by the OECD/DAC (the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development/*Development Assistance Committee*) in its evaluations.

Evaluations performed

Evaluation of direct bilateral development cooperation

The purpose of evaluating direct bilateral cooperation or governmental cooperation was to check how much qualitative progress Belgian development cooperation made in the framework defined by the law of 1999 on international cooperation and Belgium's international undertakings.

Evaluation of trade union cooperation

Whilst trade unions have many years of experience of development cooperation in their specific domain - i.e. defending workers' rights - they are fairly new non-governmental partners for the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGD). The quality of their cooperation programmes was investigated. The findings will be useful for the next cooperation programme between DGD and the unions.

Study of federations and umbrella organisations in the North-South Movement

At DGD's request, the NGO federations Acodev and Coprogram and the umbrella organisations in the North-South Movement 11.11.11 and CNCD were reviewed, and the features of each organisation were discussed.

Joint evaluation of budget support

Budget support is a modern form of programmatic aid where the support for a partner country comes directly from government finances. Budget support encompasses not only financial assistance for the partner country's government but also a policy dialogue, and technical assistance if required. The evaluation was supported by about 25 donors, including Belgium, and coordinated by the UK Department for International Development's evaluation department.

European evaluation of coordination, complementarity and coherence

A European investigation was carried out - using six joint evaluations including four involving Belgium - to find out to what extent the three Cs of the Treaty of Maastricht are actually being applied in development cooperation. The analysis was based on country strategy papers, aid provided for decentralisation processes, *trade capacity building* and mechanisms for increasing the coherence of foreign policy in terms of development.

WTO Trade-Related Technical Assistance

The Special Evaluation Service was a member of the steering committee carrying out external evaluation, where the strengths and weaknesses of the training courses organised for the developing countries by the WTO were identified.

Seminar on Budget Support

The Special Evaluation Service together with the Belgian Senate's Globalisation Committee organised a seminar on

"Budget Support: neither a miracle cure nor a blank cheque" on 27 November 2006.

Feedback

All the parties involved receive evaluation results and recommendations. The annual report contains all communications sent to Parliament; the Special Evaluator is answerable to Parliament. The 2005 annual report of the Special Evaluator was presented jointly to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate's Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee on 9 May 2006 in the presence of the Minister for Development Cooperation.

Evaluation results expected in 2007

A number of evaluations took place in 2006, with the results of these being expected in 2007. They covered the following domains:

- evaluation of Belgian humanitarian aid;
- evaluation of the Rwanda programme;
- evaluation of the Belgian Investment Company for Developing Countries (BIO);
- the joint Total ODA evaluation, an evaluation of the impact of development cooperation as a whole on a specific partner country's development;
- the joint Voice and Accountability evaluation, in which the impact of foreign aid on giving the poorest demographic groups responsibility over their lives and how the govern-

ment makes itself accountable to its citizens are studied;

- joint evaluation of conflict prevention;
- external evaluation by the FAO.

'Master Plan' for Belgian humanitarian aid

Humanitarian aid has become an essential component of international solidarity over the last twenty years. This has meant that not only has the volume of aid increased, but also the concept 'humanitarian aid' itself has evolved.

This is explained by an increase in the number of crises (natural disasters and all kinds of conflicts) and the fact that they are of an ever more complex nature (DRC, Sudan and the Palestinian areas), and is also a result of the growing media coverage of these crises.

This important trend meant that the objectives of Belgian humanitarian aid and the allocation criteria needed to be stated more clearly.

2006 saw the introduction of the Humanitarian Aid Master Plan, which serves as a basis for Belgian humanitarian aid. The plan was approved by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Development Cooperation.

The Master Plan gives an extensive inventory of the various instruments that the government has at its disposal to carry out its humanitarian initiatives and lays down who will be given this type of aid and the circumstances where it will be effective.

Many of the points in the plan clarify items that already appeared in the 1996 Royal Decree on humanitarian aid. But, above all, the plan ensures that in future the Principles and Good Practices of Humanitarian Donorship, approved in Stockholm in June 2003 by many donor countries including Belgium, will also be applied to the other forms of this aid.

The Master Plan sets out a series of strategic key points for the Belgian federal government's humanitarian aid. The main ones are given below:

- priority for Belgian development cooperation partner countries;
- responses tailored to the countries' specific needs;
- a clear indication of the beneficiaries and, wherever possible, their participation in the supply of aid;
- an ongoing concern to ensure complementarity between initiatives supported by difference sources, and also an appropriate transition between normal development efforts and the emergency phase;
- dialogue with and transparency for the players involved in humanitarian aid;
- incorporation of major overarching themes in the projects, especially gender equality, health and safety, and local capacity building;
- respect for the March 2003 guidelines on the use of soldiers and civilians in complex emergency situations;

- adequate project follow-up and regular evaluations;
- aid for the multilateral development cooperation partners which is of a predictable nature and runs over an adequate period.

Reforming cofinancing of NGO programmes and projects

History

For over thirty years, the government has been providing subsidies to Belgian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating in developing countries.

By contributing to the financing of these NGOs' activities, the Belgian government aims to lend support to Belgian civil society's efforts to help civil society in countries in the South and to use these organisations as a vehicle for raising the Belgian public's awareness of the development issue and international solidarity.

With this in mind, the government carried out a reform of cofinancing procedures in 2006 to adapt cofinancing to a changing international situation and also get the NGOs to adopt a more professional approach to development issues. The major objectives of this reform were as follows:

- An approach favouring those NGOs that develop a medium-term development strategy. They are given financial security via the approval of three-year programmes covered by differentiated appropriations.
- A budget line to fund two-year projects for NGOs that have not secured 'programme approval'.

- Simpler procedures with a single programme being submitted every three years instead of a five-year programme with five annual action plans as specified in the 1997 regulations.
- Administrative simplification by splitting up the activities into 'North Actions' and 'South Actions' based on their objectives, instead of the current four categories.
- A uniform cofinancing percentage (80% subsidy and 20% NGOs' own contribution) calculated on the basis of the total cost of the programme or project, instead of using the current system of different percentages.

The new structure of the cofinancing system

Approvals

Until 14 December 2005, only one approval was required to secure cofinancing. The publication of the Royal Decree of 14 December 2005 saw the introduction of two types of approval: 'basic approval' and 'programme approval'.

Basic approval

To be recognised as a non-governmental development organisation, a non-profit association must meet various criteria covering its establishment, byelaws, autonomy and experience. It must, for example, present its vision of development and the mission that it has chosen for itself. The vision and mission are updated every five years. Basic approval entitles it to submit applications for project subsidies.

Programme approval

Following a public tendering procedure, the administration gave a specialist agency the task of thoroughly screening the structure and activities of the recognised NGOs that received subsidies over the past six years. The organisations that turn out to meet the criteria on financial autonomy, financial management, capacity to prepare, implement and follow up on development programmes and that can demonstrate adequate results in the field can be given 'programme approval'. This means that they can submit a subsidy application for a three-year programme.

Cofinancing procedures

The Royal Decree of 24 September 2006 laid down the new conditions for awarding subsidies to NGO projects:

Strategic plan

In the introduction to its application for subsidies for programmes or projects, the NGO must present the strategy that it intends to pursue over the following six years with the financial resources provided by DGD. This strategy must dovetail with the vision and mission as presented at the time of the original approval or, if applicable, the updated vision or mission.

The projects

NGOs that only have basic approval can submit projects that have a maximum duration of two years. These will be financed with non-

differentiated appropriations. In practice, this means that an NGO draws up a six-year strategic plan and uses that as its basis for drawing up and submitting two-year projects.

Projects must aim to meet a specific objective by achieving a number of interim results. To enable more effective follow-up, projects can be launched only in a limited number of countries and only in the sectors indicated in the law of 25 May 1999 regulating international cooperation.

The minimum total amount provided for a two-year project (NGOs' own contribution + subsidy) is €125,000, excluding the associated awareness-raising or educational campaigns, and the expenditure for these campaigns must be at least €40,000.

The 'programmes'

NGOs that have 'programme approval' can submit three-year programmes. These are financed via differentiated appropriations. Two three-year programmes can be presented for a strategic six-year plan.

A programme must consist of a coherent set of specific objectives. It is only evaluated on its intrinsic value. The only geographical restrictions taken into account are those laid down by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

An NGO that has 'programme approval' can submit either a programme or a project, but not both.

North Actions/South Actions

Until the Royal Decree came into force, the programmes could encompass four different activities:

- financing a partner in the low-income countries;
- raising awareness of international cooperation issues among the Belgian public;
- providing services to support the work of the NGOs and local partners;
- personnel cooperation, for example sending NGO development workers to low-income countries and providing study and training grants to citizens of those countries.

The new Royal Decree that has come into force involves the concepts 'South Actions' and 'North Actions':

- South Actions: the cofinancing of cooperation intended for developing countries, including the provision of development workers and experts.
- North Actions: the cofinancing of actions to raise awareness among the Belgian public of the development issue or strengthen the design and methodology of organisations that have their seat in northern countries but operate mainly in the South.

With a view to ensuring efficiency, simplicity and fairness, projects will be subsidised from now on according

to an 80:20 ratio, with the NGO itself supplying 20% of the resources.

The following rules apply to the calculation:

- The amount that a programme or project will cost includes all costs, except general administration costs, that are necessary to achieve the interim results, including the specific costs for drawing up and following up on the programme.
- At least 15% of the NGOs' own contribution of 20% must consist of cash contributions, and a maximum of 5% must be made up of a contribution in the form of value-added services. What precisely is considered 'value-added' will be specified at a later date.
- The cash contribution will have to be demonstrated at the annual inspection of the instalment, and will no longer be deposited in an account when the subsidy is paid out.
- The cost of the programme or project will be increased by a percentage for administrative costs, to be calculated on the basis of the subsidy amount. The specific percentage will be determined after an external study.

The subsidy of 80% provided by the government is one of the most generous contributions in Europe.

First report to Parliament about the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The Millennium Development Goals saw the international community signing up for the first time to a set of common general objectives that were fully accepted by all sides. These objectives relate to eradicating poverty, achieving universal primary education, eliminating gender inequality, reducing child and maternal mortality, combating AIDS and other epidemics, achieving environmental sustainability and developing a global partnership for development.

Belgium signed up to the MDGs from the start. Belgium has consistently acknowledged that meeting each objective is a milestone in the fight against poverty. To facilitate monitoring of the headway made in achieving the MDGs, a law on the monitoring of the government's performance in relation to the MDGs was approved on 14 June 2005. This law stipulates that the government must present a report to Parliament each year on the actions that it is undertaking to contribute to achieving the MDGs. This report must, among other things, offer an overview of the activities of Belgium's representatives in the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The progress made by the government in achieving the MDGs must be presented in the report as well.

Thanks to good cooperation between Development Cooperation and FPS Finance, the first report was presented to Parliament in November 2006.

The first report on the MDGs is available on the DGD website (<http://www.dgdc.be>).

It includes:

- a general evaluation of the progress made world-wide in achieving the MDGs;
- an evaluation of the situation in the eighteen Belgian development cooperation partner countries;
- the efforts that Belgium has made in the IMF, the World Bank and the UNDP with a view to ensuring that the MDGs are achieved;
- the contribution that Belgium has made to achieving the MDGs.

As far as the evaluation of the situation in the eighteen partner countries is concerned, the report opens with a general summary of the demographic trend, income and expenditure, the proportion of social expenditure in the budget, respect for the criteria on good governance, and so on. It turns out that Belgium's eighteen partners have made progress in a number of areas, but checking this against the *Progress Report*, it is clear that at least in the case of the African countries this progress is insufficient to meet the objective set for 2015. In contrast, Vietnam, the Latin American countries and the countries of the Arab world (with the exception of Palestine) have a good chance of achieving a number of MDGs by 2015 - if not sooner.

As far as Belgium's efforts at the IMF, the World Bank and the UNDP are concerned, it is clear that Belgium, alongside supporting of course the projects and policy of these organisations for achieving the MDGs, attaches great importance to improving cooperation between the World Bank and the United Nations system.

In general, DGD is working towards achieving the MDGs by using all the development channels (multilateral, bilateral, indirect development aid, and so on). Activities are also being developed to raise Belgian public awareness about the MDGs.

MDG 1

Poverty and hunger

The fight against poverty occupies a central position in DGD's efforts. Belgium is working on this through, for example, its support for the formulation and implementation of the PRSPs (*Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers*). Combating poverty is also the main objective of government-level bilateral development cooperation. Belgium is also paying special attention to eradicating hunger, through the actions of the Belgian Survival Fund.

MDG 2

Education

Improving education in developing countries is one of Belgium's priorities. Belgium is making considerable efforts to achieve this objective in its bilateral and multilateral coo-

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3. Policy

peration. In the case of the former, this takes the form of supporting national education plans, training teachers and so on, while the work being done in the case of the latter is demonstrated by the support being given to the Education For All - Fast Track Initiative.

MDG 3

Gender equality

To provide a response to the inequality between men and women, DGD is making gender an overarching theme in its policy and is promoting equal opportunities with a strategy aimed at reinforcing the efforts made by the partner countries themselves in this area.

MDG 4/MDG 5

Child mortality/Maternal mortality

Belgian development cooperation is focusing its efforts on strengthening healthcare in general and improving access to medical treatment.

MDG 6

AIDS and other diseases

Belgium is supporting various national programmes in the partner countries to combat diseases such as AIDS. It also played an important part in setting up the Global Fund to fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, which was created to attract additional financial resources to stop the spread of these illnesses.

MDG 7

The environment, access to clean drinking water and sanitation

The law on international cooperation makes the environment one of the overarching priorities of Belgian development cooperation. At multilateral level, Belgium is, among other things, contributing to the Global Environmental Facility and is supporting a World Bank initiative aimed at improving the supply of drinking water and healthcare for the impoverished inhabitants of suburbs of towns and cities in DRC and Rwanda. The range of governmental development cooperation projects sees the environment not only making an appearance as a specific sector, but also as an overarching theme to be taken into account in every project.

MDG 8

Global partnership for development

The contribution of countries like Belgium involves ensuring increased and more efficient aid and adaptation of the partner country's national policy in those domains that have repercussions for development. Expenditure on development cooperation has increased significantly since 2000. The Belgian government made a commitment to devote 0.7% of gross national income to development aid by 2010. Achieving the development goals also depends on the

decisions taken in a large number of policy areas such as foreign trade, foreign affairs, agriculture, and so on. That is why Belgium is trying to ensure a high level of policy coherence between the various domains.

The Voluntary Civil Service for Development Cooperation

On the initiative of Minister for Development Cooperation Armand De Decker, the Voluntary Civil Service for Development Cooperation (SVCD/VDOS) was set up by the programme law of 27 December 2005. The law of 21 December 1998 on the establishment of Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC) was amended to capitalise on the feeling of solidarity among young people and thus make the creation of a new generation of development workers possible. This initiative will also contribute to greater public awareness and help ensure that development cooperation endures in the long term.

The provisions of the programme law were enshrined in the Royal Decree of 3 May 2006, which lays down the conditions and procedures for the contracts of employment at the Voluntary Civil Service for Development Cooperation, and by an implementation agreement between BTC and the Belgian government signed on 20 June 2006. BTC will be responsible for the implementation of this project for five years. The project aims to permanently deploy a hundred volunteers

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to work on projects and programmes relating to a number of sectors and themes of Belgian development cooperation.

Following the first phase of the recruitment procedure, 55 candidates remained. While the selection procedure was running, the partner countries were told about the existence of the SVCD/VDOS. They were sounded out about their vision of its purpose, so that account could be taken of this when volun-

teers were eventually assigned to projects.

An appropriate project was found in one of the 18 partner countries for 29 of the candidates in 2006, and after taking part in preparatory training sessions, 22 volunteers left for the partner countries in the course of the year.

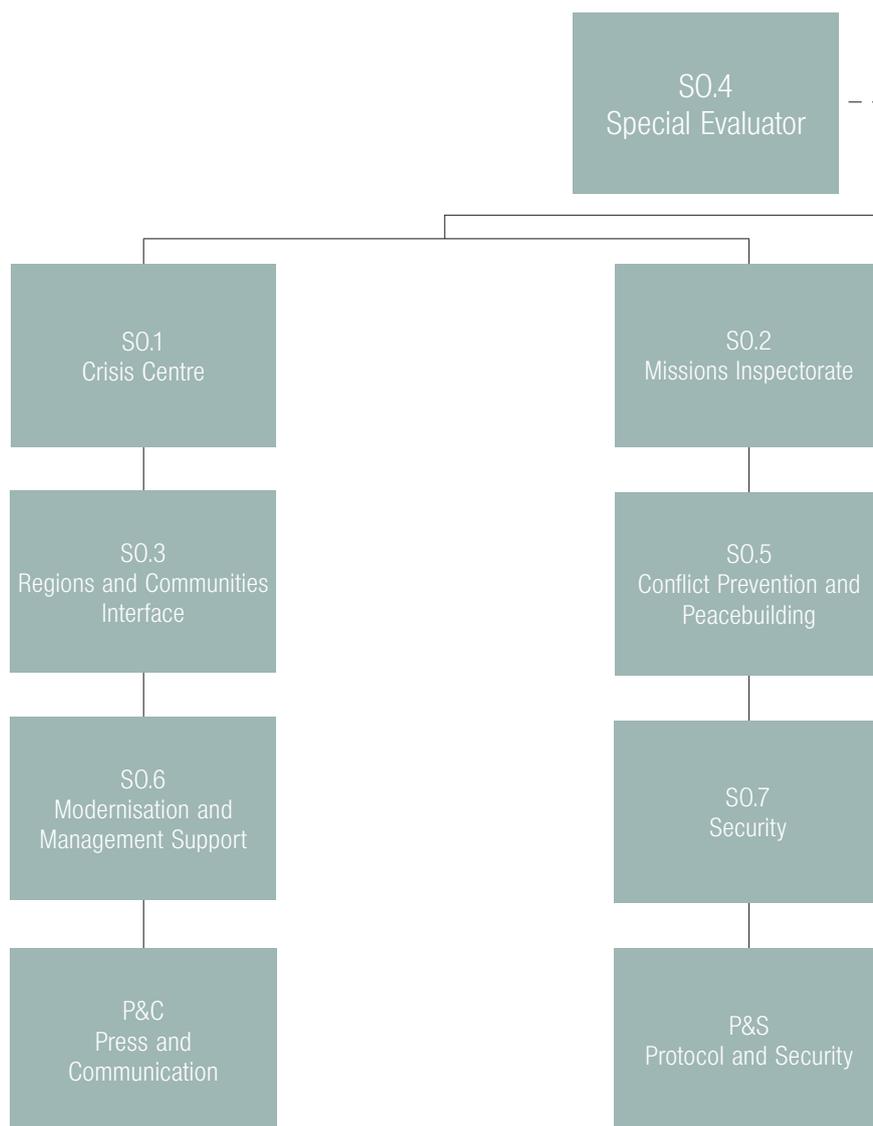
BTC will pinpoint further suitable projects over the months to come so that candidates who have not yet been given a place can still leave for the partner countries.

Number of volunteers who left for partner countries in 2006 (by country)

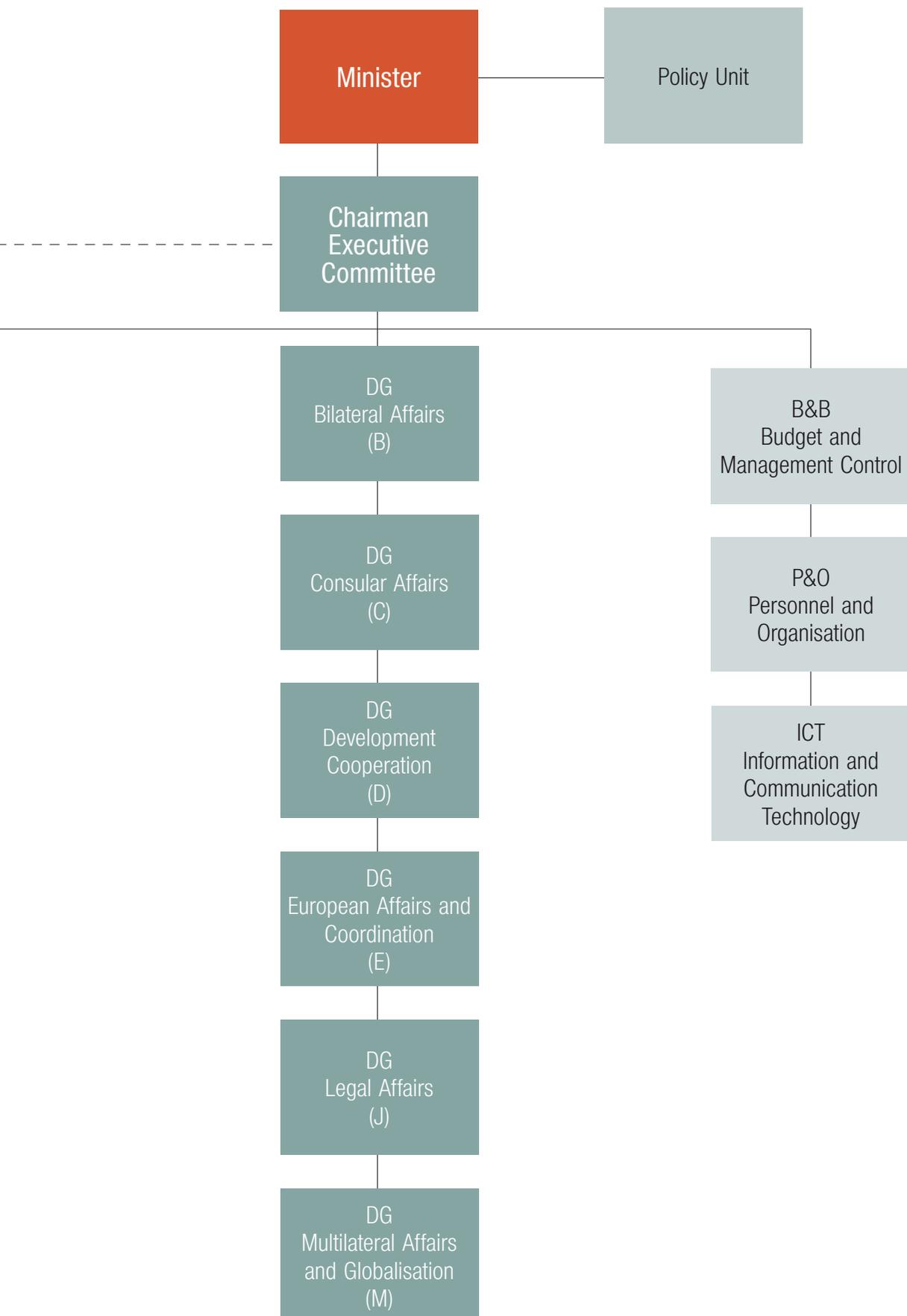
| | |
|--------------|---|
| Niger | 3 |
| Rwanda | 6 |
| Senegal | 1 |
| Peru | 1 |
| Ecuador | 6 |
| Uganda | 3 |
| South Africa | 1 |
| Mali | 1 |

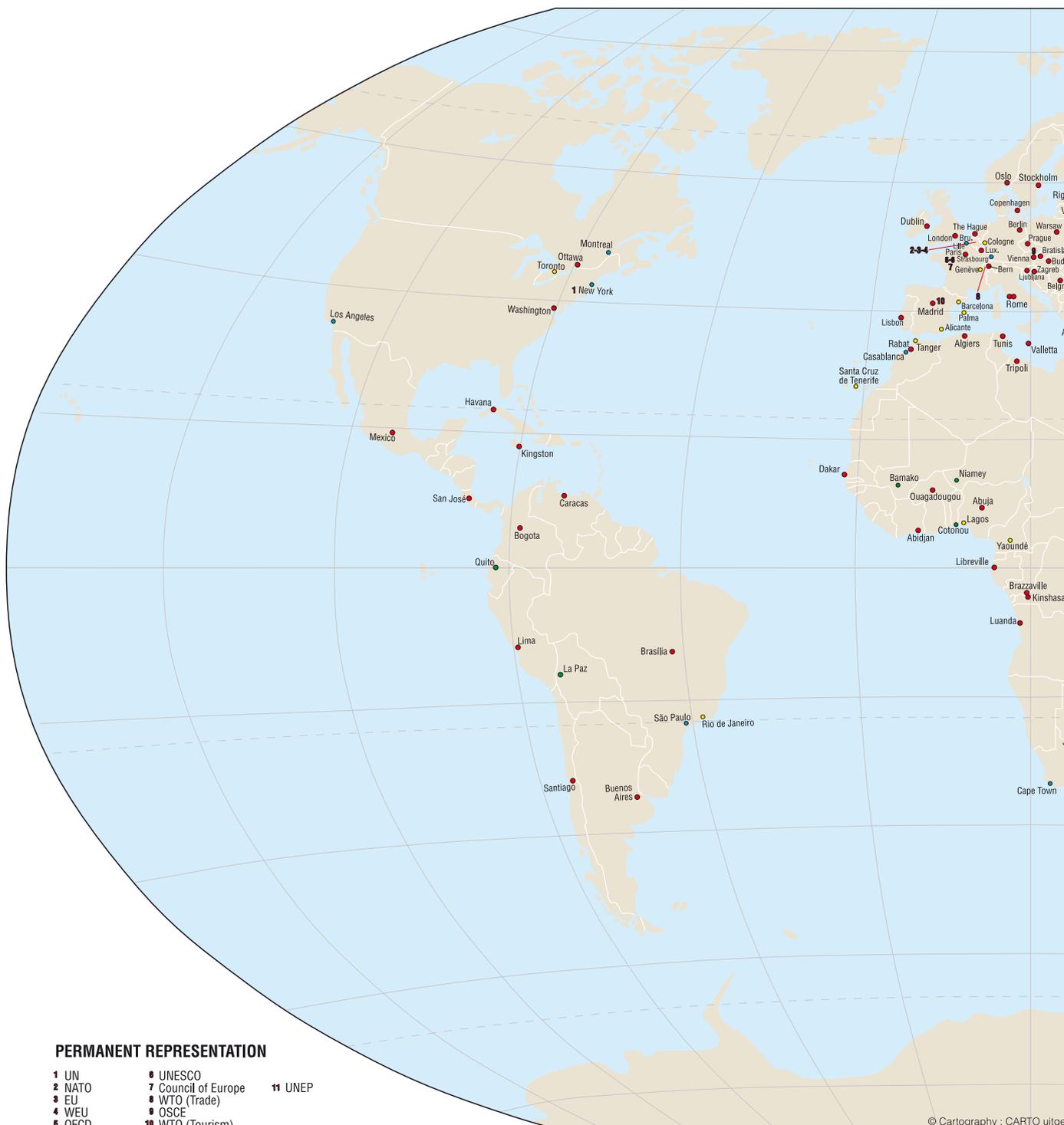
Annexes





Organisational chart of FPS Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation







Acknowledgements

FPS Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation Communication Department

Rue des Petits Carmes 15, B-1000 Brussels

tel. +32 2 501 81 11

www.diplomatie.be

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