ANNUAL REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES
OF THE EUROPEAN UNION 2013
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At the heart of Europe

The European Union is part of Belgians’ everyday life in a number of ways.

A number of European institutions, for instance the European Commission (which has its headquarters in the Berlaymont Building) and the European Council (housed in the Justus Lipsius Building), employing thousands of European civil servants, are based in Brussels – which is therefore often called ‘the capital of Europe’.

Brussels regularly hosts European Council meetings and summits, as well as plenary sessions of the European Parliament and meetings of European parliamentary committees.

Belgium has always worked to widen and deepen European integration, and Belgian politicians have played a crucial role in the development of the European Union.

All of this means that Europe is very close to Belgians’ hearts.

Belgium was one of the six founding members of what is now the European Union.
INTRODUCTION

In 2013 Europe emerged from the financial and economic crisis. In the second quarter of that year, the effects of the reforms became visible and the European Union emerged from the recession. It is still only a cautious recovery and much effort is still required to continue this trend. For instance, unemployment, particularly among young people, must be reduced and banks must provide more loans to individuals and companies. Still, the substantial support of political leaders and EU institutions, including the European Central Bank (ECB), are beginning to bear fruit for the Union and the euro. The euro area prepared to welcome its 18th member, with Latvia adopting the euro as its currency on 1 January 2014.

The major transformation of the economic and budgetary coordination was adopted in 2013, from which it appears that the EU is implementing lasting changes and addressing the serious structural and budgetary issues that have been building up over the last decade or longer. Four building blocks, which were already identified in 2012, should contribute to a more unified Economic and Monetary Union (EMU): an integrated financial framework (banking union); an integrated economic policy framework; an integrated budgetary framework; and strengthened democratic legitimacy and accountability. Continuing work was carried out on these projects in the course of 2013, albeit with varying degrees of intensity.

As concerns employment and social policy measures, the most prominent fact of 2013 was the implementation of the "Youth Employment Package", which the European Commission approved on 5 December 2012. On 28 February 2013, the European labour ministers formally approved the recommendations of the Council concerning the introduction of a "Youth Guarantee". The objective of the recommendation is to offer all young people under the age of 25 a job, continuing education, a place in vocational education or additional training within four months after they have left formal education or have become unemployed. In order to release the financial resources required for implementing the Youth Guarantee (YG), the European Council of 7 and 8 February 2013, on the occasion of the agreement regarding the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2014-2020, had already given the green light for a Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), for which 6 billion euro was allocated.

Concerning workers' rights, the European institutions have mainly focused their attention on Directive 96/71/EC concerning the posting of workers. At the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) of 9 December 2013, the Member States reached an agreement about this directive.

With regard to social affairs, 2013 was mainly the year in which the social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union came to the foreground, as well as the approval of a scoreboard with 5 key indicators concerning employment policy in the framework of the annual growth analysis and the European semester. Furthermore, there was the approval of the Regulation concerning the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived for the period 2014-2020.

As concerns the regional policy, in 2013 Belgium continued the negotiations begun in 2012 and made an active contribution to the agreement on the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020, whereby it convincingly appealed for the vision of an ambitious budget for Europe and the Cohesion Policy. Belgium may also be pleased with the approval of a new architecture for the Cohesion Policy, including a category of transition regions including 4 Belgian provinces (Hainaut, Luxembourg, Namur and Liege), all of this notwithstanding the heavy pressure that was exerted for a long time in the Council on this category.

In 2013, the climate and the reduction of greenhouse gasses assumed a prominent place within the workings of the Environmental Council. This was the case at the global level with preparations for the climate summit in Warsaw, but even more so at the intra-EU level. A variety of sectors are covered in this way. Passenger car and light carrier vehicle emissions will be addressed, biofuels will have to be cleaner in future and also the aviation sector will make efforts to pollute less. The first impulse was also provided for a climate and energy framework for the period until 2030.
The issue of biodiversity, and particularly the issue of invasive species, finally received a European response. European harmonisation of waste transit was also proposed, which Belgium, with its status as a transit country, can only welcome.

With regard to health, 2013 can be summarised as the year of revising the Tobacco Products Directive. In the shadow of this, an agreement was reached about a reinforced European framework regarding clinical trials and about better alignment of the efforts among the Member States in the event that cross-border health threats arise. For more information about these challenges you may consult Chapter I of this Annual Report (pages 9 to 16).

In 2013, the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission for the fifth time established inter-institutional communication priorities as intended in the approved common political statement, “Communicating Europe in Partnership” on 22 October 2008. The three selected common communication priorities for 2013 were: the economic recovery, the European Year of Citizens and the communication campaign for the European elections in May 2014. In Belgium, during 2013 there was continued implementation of the framework agreement of 6 December 2012, signed between the Belgian Government and the European Commission, which is the basis for a centralized indirect management partnership for the period 2012-2015. That new partnership, however, was terminated on 31 December 2013 due to the drastic reduction of the communication budget and the cessation of the Management Partnership Agreements.

The Belgian interest consists on the one hand in demonstrating a proactive stance concerning cooperation with European institutions. On the other hand, the Belgian government emphasises that the will to implement a coherent and focused European communication and information strategy is optimally present in order to raise the quantity and quality of the public debate about the theme of “Europe” and to develop educational communication activities. On 27 November 2012, the BE-EU Task Force Working Group was set up under the auspices of the Directorate General for European Affairs and Coordination of the FPS Foreign Affairs with a view to developing this cooperation. For more information about the EU information initiatives undertaken in 2013, namely 4th European Conference on Public Communication “EuroPCom” in October 2013, the activities in the framework of the European Year of Citizens (2013) and preparations for the European elections in Belgium, you can turn to pages 16 through 27 of the current report.

In 2013, the EU involved its citizens in the debate about the future of Europe. While the debate is currently conducted more informally than formally, in 2013, various actors spoke out for deepening European integration and particularly that of the Economic and Monetary Union. One of the points that is often emphasised in this context is the need to strengthen the democratic legitimacy of the European decision making process. In the same spirit, the proposal for a Regulation concerning the status and financing of European political parties and the European political foundation by the European Commission was proposed as one of the elements that could promote the development of a European political space. The content of the proposal, however, is cause for some concern.

2013 was also characterised by continued development with regard to accession of the European Union to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights. In April, agreement was reached on a draft of an accession treaty. Finally, 2013 was also the European Year of Citizens on the occasion of the 20-year existence of European citizenship, as written in the Maastricht Treaty. There were many debates and institutional initiatives to make people aware of the rights and responsibilities that are linked to Union citizenship. In 2012, a series of dialogues was started up with citizens. These citizens' dialogues recommenced in 2013 and will continue until March 2014 (for more information see Chapter II).

2013 was the fourth year in which the Stockholm Multiannual Programme has been implemented. This programme determines the framework in which works are conducted with a view to reinforcing the space of freedom, security and law. In 2013, progress was made in several areas:
- judicial cooperation in civil and criminal law cases (decision of European Investigation Order, right to an attorney, works on the regulation concerning seizure of bank accounts...);
- combating crime and terrorism (setting up the Schengen II system, consultation about the issue of foreign fighters, proposal of a European public ministry for combating fraud against the EU budget, policy cycle of the fight against serious and organised crime, approval of the EU action plan against drugs...);
- access to the territory, immigration and asylum (among others, strengthening Schengen governance, an agreement about the Common Asylum System, review of Visa regulation, Directive concerning seasonal labourers...);
- civil protection;
- reinforced external intervention in the framework of Justice and Home Affairs (mobility partnerships, ministerial EU-US).

As a result of the shipwreck near Lampedusa in early October 2013, a Task Force for the Mediterranean was set up, which developed a package of short and medium term measures concerning asylum and migration in order to help prevent a repetition of such tragedies in future. Discussions about the proposal for a Regulation regarding the protection of privacy were continued in 2013. More information about these policy areas as well as the Belgian position is available in Chapter III of this report.

The EU’s activities for the benefit of its citizens go much further than the economic recovery plan, the climate and energy strategy and the space for freedom, safety and justice, as reported in Chapters III and IV. Its influence is noticeable in many areas besides institutional affairs and external relations. In 2013, the European Union continued to develop the internal market and freedoms that this represents. It has made the movement of persons and goods in Europe easier. They acted as a consumer watchdog, defended the interests of citizens regarding product safety and their rights as consumers. Its regulations and programmes have brought the opportunities of advanced technologies closer to the citizens and have improved the competitive capability of Europe. Globalization has significantly changed the global economy and, together with many challenges, it also offers new opportunities. Given the ambition of Europe to make the Union the most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy in the world, further development of a European research and innovation policy is of strategic importance.

For the SOLVIT network, 2013 was a time of renewal. This report is subdivided into four sections: outline of the general context and evaluation of the network; balance of activities; communication activities by the SOLVIT BE centre in 2013 (figures only); visibility and objectives for the year 2014. More information about Solvit BE and competitiveness policy areas - including industry and the internal market, research and innovation, space - as well as transport, telecommunications, digital agenda and energy can be found in Chapter IV of this report.

In the field of Agriculture and Fisheries, in December 2013 the Council and the European Parliament reached an agreement about four Regulations that lie at the foundation of the reformation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and on two of the three Regulations for reforming the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). Information about the Belgian position concerning these EU policy areas can be found in Chapters V and VI of this report.

In the course of 2013, the continuation of negotiations with a view to a global and balanced agreement on the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) from the WTO continued to be a priority for Belgium and all its European partners. An important step toward this global agreement was taken at the Ministerial Meeting in Bali on 7 December 2013, where the 159 Member States of the WTO signed an agreement on the "Bali Package". This Package includes a series of measures to strengthen trade, to offer developing countries more opportunities to guarantee their food security, to promote trade from the least developed countries (LDC) and, more generally, to promote development. This agreement is of crucial importance for safeguarding the credibility of the multilateral trade system.
Since 2007, the EU has conducted negotiations about several bilateral free-trade agreements. Increasing the presence of the EU on the quickly emerging growth markets correlates with the WTO’s multilateral trade system because in this way, liberalisation expands and other aspects of international trade are interwoven with it. For Belgium, these free-trade agreements with strategic trade partners guarantee greater market access for its products, services and investments. In 2013, negotiations continued with Canada, India, Malaysia and Vietnam, and a free-trade agreement was initialised with Georgia and Moldavia. In addition, negotiations were initiated with Thailand, Japan and the United States with a view to a “Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA)”. Negotiations on the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPOs) with the ACS countries, which were initiated in 2010, continued. Activities in the framework of market access strategy received support. You will find more information about this on page 45 to page 46 of this report.

Building on the work conducted in 2012, implementation of the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty in the field of **External action** was also pursued in 2013. The European External Action Service (EEAS) has now been in existence for three years. With a network of 141 delegations around the world, the Service ensures that the policy and values of Europe are represented and spread globally. Also in 2013, the European Union and the Member States worked on more coherent and more coordinated external action. In July 2013, the Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice Chairman of the Commission Catherine Ashton presented an evaluation report on this that received broad support by the Council (General Affairs) of 17 December 2013. In 2013, an agreement was also reached on the various financial instruments from Section IV of the EU budget that contains resources for external action.

With regard to expansion, the accession negotiations with Iceland were suspended after the new government took office. A negotiation chapter could finally be opened again with Turkey, while 5 new chapters were handled with Montenegro. Notwithstanding new attempts, once again no agreement could be reached within the Council about commencing negotiations with the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia. On 28 June 2013, it decided to open negotiations with Serbia. Conferring the status of candidate country to Albania was postponed until 2014. No progress was made with Bosnia-Herzegovina. Croatia became a Member State on 1 July 2013 – a strong signal of hope and trust less than 20 years after the end of the Balkan wars. Finally, on 28 October 2013, negotiations started with Kosovo about a Stabilization and Association Agreement.

In 2013, the EU continued work on implementation of its European Neighbourhood Policy, in its southern as well as eastern dimension. In the framework of the latter, the 3rd Summit took place, during which Association Agreements were initialised with Moldova and Georgia. Ukraine eventually discontinued this. A visa facilitation agreement was signed with Azerbaijan and a readmission agreement with Armenia.

Finally, the EU continued to build its relationships with (strategic) partners. Summits were held with all Central and Latin American countries and the Caribbean States (CELAC), Brazil, China, South Korea and Japan. Additionally, the European Union transitioned to the signing of a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Mongolia and the initialising of one with Singapore and Thailand. **More information about the role of the European Union as global partner is available in Chapter VIII of this report, “External action of the European Union”**.

In 2013 Belgium also further committed to a united, targeted, balanced and, where necessary, resolute European Foreign Policy in service of our common interests. **For more information about the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), we refer to Chapter IX of this report.**

François Roux  
Director General European Affairs  
DGE
I. Deepening the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020, Employment and Social Affairs, Environment and Sustainable Development, Health, Regional Policy

1.1. Deepening the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)

Due to the debt crisis and the subsequent economic recession, the flaws in the Economic and Monetary Union became visible. Four building blocks, which were already identified in 2012, should contribute to a more cohesive EMU:

i) an integrated financial framework (banking union);

ii) an integrated economic policy framework;

iii) an integrated budgetary framework; and

iv) strengthened democratic legitimacy and accountability.

Continuing work was carried out on these projects in the course of 2013, albeit with varying degrees of intensity.

1.1.1. The most tangible progress was made on the way toward a fully-fledged European banking union

On 18 April, an agreement was reached between the European Parliament (EP) and the Council about a Single Supervisory Mechanism for banks. In this way, the European Central Bank (ECB) in future will assume final responsibility for supervision of all banks in the Eurozone and banks in Member States that wish to participate in this mechanism. The ECB itself will exercise direct supervision over some 140 system-significant banks and will have the supervision of other banks conducted by national competent authorities. At any time (e.g., in the event of urgent problems), however, the ECB will assume oversight of the latter banks.

Furthermore, on 20 December, an agreement was reached between the EP and the Council about harmonised rules regarding recovery and resolution of banks. In this way, the national resolution authorities in all EU-Member States will have the same instruments available for repairing problematic banks or resolving them in an orderly manner. The most notable instrument is the bail-in, which the government allows in order to enable losses borne by the shareholders and creditors, whereby the use of public resources is heavily reduced. Holders of savings less than 100,000 € constitute the most important exception in this regard. They are protected unconditionally.

Additionally, in December the Council and the European Parliament also reached an agreement about harmonised rules for national deposit guarantee systems. In this way, payment terms and the degree of coverage of savings, among others, will be harmonised in all EU Member States. New in this regard is that these funds could also be obtained for financing bank resolution, but after that they must be discharged back.

In parallel with harmonising the national rules, the Council devoted intense discussions to the proposal submitted by the Commission on 20 July to reach a Single Resolution Mechanism, required for the members of the Eurozone, with the potential for other Member States to participate. The purpose of this proposal is enable final decisions to be taken regarding the resolution of banks in future by a resolution council. The resolution costs will then be financed with the assistance of a common resolution fund, funded by contributions from the banking sector. During the ECOFIN Council of 18 December, the Council reached an agreement about a general approach, but the file also took an important turn. In this way the European regulation in the making was split up into two legal texts: the establishment of the resolution council and of the fund was laid down the regulation proposed by the Commission; the functioning of the fund, on the contrary, will be formed by an inter-governmental agreement (IGA). The objective is to complete negotiations with the EP (trilogue) on the regulation, as well as negotiations on the intergovernmental agreement before concluding the EP election of May 2014.
1.1.2. In the course of 2013, further consideration was also given to the question of how to reinforce the economic policy framework

For instance, on 20 February, an agreement was reached between the Council and the EP on the so-called two-pack that entered into force on 27 May and further supplements the European Semester for policy coordination. It concerns two regulations that are based on Art. 136 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and thus only apply to Eurozone members. A first regulation requires the Member States to make a parallel budgetary timeframe. For instance, the Member States must present their draft budget plans to the Commission for the first time on 15 October. The other regulation reinforces the economic and budgetary oversight of Member States that are dealing with (the threat of) serious financial instability. Actually, in this way the agreements or guidelines that already existed in the framework of the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) are included in the secondary legislation.

Also associated with the European Semester, in 2013 best practices were continued in order to provide bilateral consultation meetings between the Member States and the Commission that concern implementation of country-specific recommendations. This bilateral dialogue enables both sides to arrive at a common understanding of analysis or figures and to obtain clarification of the reasoning behind policy choices that have been made or proposed.

Reflection on reinforced policy coordination is furthermore fuelled by means of two communications from the Commission, submitted on 20 March, on respectively (i) ex ante coordination of major reforms that have been proposed and (ii) financial stimuli for helping to realise structural reforms (the so-called “Convergence and Competitiveness Instrument”).

Reflection on the ex ante coordination of major reforms has its origin in Art. 11 of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance of the EMU and was so advanced in June 2013 that the Commission intended to submit a regulatory initiative in the fall of 2013. This was postponed because the Committee for Economic Politics launched a pilot project in the fall of 2013. Now the Commission will wait on the results of this before assuming a regulatory initiative.

The concept of quasi-contractual agreements and their corresponding solidarity mechanisms has received little support to this point. During the European Council of 19-20 December, state and government leaders did not get any further than establishing a few guiding principles about these so-called “Partnerships for Growth, Jobs and Competitiveness”. It was agreed that President Herman Van Rompuy, in close coordination with the Commission Chairman and in consultation with the Member States, will develop this file further and will issue a report to the European Council of October 2014 with a view to a general agreement about both elements.

The Commission's submission of the Communication on “Strengthening the social dimension of the EMU” on 2 October again gave rise to a new scoreboard with five social and employment indicators in the framework of the European Semester. This scoreboard aims to achieve quicker and improved identification of employment and social issues. In addition, work was carried out on reinforcing the analysis in the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure (MIP) through supplementary sub-indicators at the social level. Both elements will be utilised for the first time in the European Semester 2014.

1.2. The Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2014-2020

In late 2013 the European Parliament adopted the agreement reached in February 2013 in the Council on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2014-2020. The Members of the European Parliament, obstinately and with partial success, did accomplish a few qualitative improvements: greater flexibility, an interim review and some perspective on greater budgetary autonomy for the EU. Furthermore, the EP requested more leniency on the part of the Council in order to settle the apparent shortages in the 2011 and 2012 budgets and to give the 2014 budget a higher level of ambition.
The legislative work concerning the application area, allocation criteria and working methods of the numerous programmes, funds and financial instruments included in the MFF, could be largely concluded in the course of the past year.

1.3. Employment and Social Affairs

1.3.1. Employment measures and right to work

2013 was a pivotal year for employment with implementation of the Youth Employment Package that the European Commission approved on 5 December 2012.

On 28 February 2013, the European ministers of employment and social affairs formally approved the recommendations of the Council concerning the introduction of a “Youth Guarantee”. The objective of the recommendation is to offer all young people under the age of 25 a job, continuing education, a place in vocational education or additional training within four months after they have left formal education or have become unemployed.

In order to release the financial resources required for implementing the Youth Guarantee (YG), the European Council of 7 and 8 February 2013, on the occasion of the agreement regarding the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020, had already given the green light for a Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). The initiative is aimed at implementing the Youth Guarantee in regions (NUTS II) of the Union with youth unemployment higher than 25% in 2012. As concerns the financial side of the matter, the European Council decided to use 3 billion € of a budget line that specifically serves for youth employment. On top of that, there will also be an allocation of at least 3 billion € extra from the European Social Fund (ESF). In Belgium, the Brussels-Capital Region and the provinces of Liege and Hainaut are eligible for the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI).

In December 2013, countries that are eligible for resources in the framework of the YEI must present to the Commission a national implementation plan for the Youth Guarantee, and thus Belgium as well. In the plan, each country explains how it will implement the Youth Guarantee at the national level, what the share in this is of the public authorities and other organisations, how the financing will occur and how progress will be monitored. In Belgium, the Regions are mainly responsible for this material. The DGE has played a pivotal role between the Regions and the federal level, also as concerns monitoring the work of the regions with regard to implementing the national plan, which is a pooling of the plan of each of the public services for employment (ACTIRIS, FOREM, VDAB, ADG) and which also includes a federal chapter.
As concerns the specific aspects related to the rights of workers, the attention of the European institutions mainly went to the proposal of a directive concerning the enforcement of Directive 96/71/EC concerning the posting of workers. The purpose of this initiative is to guarantee the application of the same rules in the entire Union and to more strictly apply Directive 96/71 by obtaining greater clarity about the obligations of the national and regional authorities, the employers and employees, with regard to the applicable law and the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice. After months of negotiations, the Member States reached an agreement at the EPSCO Council of 12 December 2012 on the draft of the directive. Now the issue in this regard it to come to a consensus with the European Parliament in the coming weeks. In the compromise negotiated in the Council, two points remain that Belgium finds extremely important and for which it appealed with verve during the negotiations:

Article 9 regulates the adoption of an open list of national control measures whereby the Member States can adjust and tighten the relevant control measures according to the further development and specific characteristics of the labour market and the legislation of each country. In short, it will work according to an 'open' list, which enables more effective control.

Then there is still Article 12 that acknowledges the principle of joint and several liability in subcontracting, even if its application is not obligatory. Belgium has laid down this principle in its legislation and is therefore of the opinion that obligatory application throughout the entire Union would have been preferable. This does not change the fact that acknowledgement of the principle of joint and several liability of contractors may be called a victory for Belgium; it fills a legal void, and the Member States that have included the principle in their legislation obtain the possibility to initiate infringement proceedings.

1.3.2. Social affairs

With regard to social affairs, 2013 was the year in which the focus was on reinforcing the social dimension of the European and Monetary Union (EMU). After the European Council had approved the roadmap for completing the Economic and Monetary Union in December 2012, and after extensive consultation of the Member States about reinforcing the EMU, which occurred simultaneously in various Council formations (ECOFIN, EPSCO, COMPET), the President of the European Council invited the Member States to put on paper their contribution to the social dimension of the EMU by April 2013. Belgium, like a number of other Member States, accepted the request and on 2 April 2013 published its Belgian contribution to the social dimension of the EMU. The coordination was taken care of by the DGE.

It became a text that reflects commitment. In this way, Belgium appeals to extensive cooperation between the Council formations EPSCO and ECOFIN and for reinforced dialogue with, and more consultation from, the social partners. Furthermore, it includes an appeal for approval of a Scoreboard for employment and the social sector, analogous to the Macroeconomic Imbalance Scoreboard. The Belgian proposal amounted to developing this scoreboard, under the responsibility of EPSCO, with regard to no less than 9 'employment' and 12 'social' indicators.

Afterwards, the Commission included this ambitious vision in its Communication on the strengthening of the social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) of 2 October 2013, which contains the proposal of a number of initiatives for strengthening the social dimension, with the understanding that the competence for social policy and employment rests mainly with the Member States. Ultimately, the Commission arrived at a scoreboard with 5 key indicators for employment and social policy that are included in the Common Report on Employment, and 4 supplementary social indicators that are added to the Warning Mechanism Report.

Further, on 16 December 2013, the Council and the European Parliament approved the regulation concerning the European Globalization Adjustment Fund 2014-2020. For the years 2014 to 2020, the Fund may make a maximum of 150 million euro available. The Fund has a broad area of application and also covers independent contractors and all sorts of labour agreements, also those of limited duration and temporary work. Of course the Fund cannot get
around the fact of business closures, and therefore again uses the 'crisis' as a support criterion, also leaving the possibility open to provide support in the event of a takeover of the production facilities by employees.

Many Member States were not proponents of its continuation after 2014, but Belgium continued to defend the importance of this European Union solidarity instrument together with redundant employees.

On 17 December 2013, the European institutions finally reached an agreement on a Regulation concerning the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD). A minority of Member States (CZ, DE, DK, NL and SE), however, continued to insert question marks concerning the use of its continuation after 2014. In the approved regulation, it says that the FEAD will receive 3.5 billion euro for the period 2014-2020. A percentage of this amount consists of voluntary contributions from the Member States. The resources are intended for the distribution of food and clothing to the most deprived and for projects for easing the worst forms of poverty and social exclusion. Belgium is one of the Member States that believes the European Union has a role to play in demonstrating actual solidarity. Belgium contributes 65.5 million euro to this Fund, a portion of which at the expense of the federal state and the decentralised levels. This position, coordinated by the DGE, to which all bodies involved are committed, was systematically defended on the occasion of negotiations at the European level about the role of this Fund and the resources that are assigned to it.

1.4. Environment and Sustainable Development

As is the case each year, the EU should establish its mandate with a view to the ongoing climate negotiations. Last year this occurred with a view to the Warsaw Climate Conference ("COP19"). The Environmental Council of 13 October adopted conclusions in this regard.

The central points of the conclusions concerned:

- The possibility that parties can already submit specifically calculated objectives regarding emissions reduction (mitigation) in 2014, and that these would be formalised and evaluated in the framework of a phased approach toward 2015 and the Paris Climate Conference ("COP21"). This is coherent with the works within the first track of the UN negotiation vehicle “Ad Hoc Durban Platform of Action” (ADP), which was created in Durban at the end of 2011.

- Raising the level of ambition concerning the quantified objectives regarding emissions reduction (mitigation) for the period up to and including 2020 in the context of the second track of the “Ad Hoc Durban Platform of Action” (ADP).

The main objective of the Warsaw Conference was to prepare further steps for reaching a new global climate treaty in 2015, which then must be in force starting in 2020. To the great satisfaction of the EU and Belgium, the conference succeeded in its mission and negotiations were kept on track.

Still on the multilateral level, the Environmental Council of 18 June changed its opinion about the follow-up to the Rio+20 Conference, particularly the report with recommendations about the Development Agenda from 2015 that was presented by the so-called ‘High Level Panel of Eminent Persons’ in late May 2013 to Ban Ki Moon and about works regarding Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The Council also endorsed conclusions that had already been adopted by the Development Cooperation Council. Belgium is still very active in the EU and in the UN in order to provide specific follow-up to the results from Rio, with 2015 as the culmination point.

At the internal European level, the Irish and Lithuanian Presidency have made great efforts to reach an agreement on the proposal of the ILUC Directive (Indirect Land Use Change). This proposal in an adaptation of the directive concerning renewable energy sources and the directive concerning fuel quality, and aims to limit the impact of indirect land use and the phenomenon of the global transformation of land with a view to the production of biofuels. In
this way, the Commission hopes to make a start on the transition to biofuels, which significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Within the Council there is a consensus to address this issue and to improve the greenhouse gas balance of biofuels; on the contrary, there are still differences of opinion among the Member States on the way to achieve this.

Another difficult file concerns the proposals to identify the modes with a view to achieve the Horizon 2020 emission reduction objectives for passenger cars and light commercial vehicles. After a compromise was found in June 2013, Germany reopened the debate about the proposal regarding passenger vehicles in order to obtain postponement for its own industry. The Environmental Council of 14 October could not force a breakthrough and the file was finally finished only at the end of November after intense negotiations between the different European institutions. This agreement will be confirmed definitively in early 2014.

In late March 2013, the Commission published a green paper in which they kicked off the debate about how the EU Horizon 2030 climate and energy policy should look. This green paper was welcomed by the European Council of 22 May and it constitutes part of the basis of the proposals regarding a climate and energy framework that will finally be published in early 2014.

Within the European climate policy, the Emission Trading System (ETS) Aviation was also at the centre of interest in 2013. The 38th meeting of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) decided to start negotiations that in 2016 should lead to the inclusion of the aviation sector within a global emission trading system. In the follow-up to this, and in order to meet the continuing concerns of certain third countries, the Commission presented an adapted and limited proposal for including aviation emissions in the European Emission Trading System. Negotiations between the Council and the European Parliament in this regard will likely be concluded prior to the European elections.

A proposal for amending the existing Regulation 1013/2006 concerning waste transport was first discussed during the Environmental Council of 13 October. From the Belgian perspective, it concerns an important legislative file, given our status as a transit country for waste (role of the Port of Antwerp). The main objective of the proposal is harmonising and strengthening the inspection regime for waste transports, by means of 1) imposing a requirement on the Member States to develop an inspection plan and 2) a reversal of the burden of proof with regard to the exporter: it will be the organiser of the transport that will have to prove whether or not his transport entails waste, and in the confirming instance, deliver evidence that the waste transport meets all the legal environmental provisions.

The Environmental Council of 21 March held an exploratory debate about the proposal to adapt the provisions of the existing Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (EIA Directive 2011/92/EC). More specifically, the directive intends to harmonise environmental impact assessments in the Member States, improve the quality of these environmental impact assessments and improve coherency with other relevant EU legislation. Belgium, which at the level of the regions already has well-established procedures available, is mainly interested in this final point. Also essential for BE is that the environmental impact assessment and the issuance of licences should remain separate.

Finally, on 9 September, the Commission made a proposal for creating a framework for preventing and managing the spread of invasive alien species. Here it concerns in se an issue of biodiversity, with additional negative socio-economic effects over which, to this point, no European framework has existed. The Member States do take measures on a national level, but these are rather of a reactive than a preventative nature. The Environmental Council of 13 December examined this proposal for the first time. Belgium supports the proposal in general, and in particular the focus of the Commission on invasive species that entail a risk for the EU as a whole.
1.5. Health

1.5.1. Tobacco Products Directive

The Health Council dedicated the majority of its activities under the Irish and Lithuanian Presidency to the proposal for reviewing the Tobacco Products Directive, which dates from 2001.

With its proposal, the Commission firstly wishes to discourage smoking among youngsters. At the same time, the proposal responds to a number of new market developments (new products and new strategies from the tobacco industry) and new scientific studies. Finally, it is necessary to align European legislation to the altered international situation since the existence of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). The proposal thereby attempts to find a proper balance between efficient functioning of the internal market and a high level of health protection.

Within the European Parliament as well as among the delegations, this file formed the object of intense discussion. The Irish Presidency, which had made a top priority of this file, succeeded during the EPSCO Health Council of 21 June to reconcile the positions of the various delegations. The size of the health warnings on cigarette packages, a ban on typical aromas and the handling of so-called electronic cigarettes constituted the primary sticking points.

After several rounds of negotiation between the Council and the European Parliament, finally, at the end of the Lithuanian Presidency, a compromise was reached. The main elements concern:
- From this point forward, no less than 65% of the surface of a package of cigarettes must be printed with deterrent texts and images, on all sides;
- A ban on adding typical aromas that can make cigarettes more attractive. Specifically for menthol, there is a 4-year transition period, after which this flavour will also be forbidden;
- Concerning e-cigarettes, it was finally decided not to consider them as pharmaceutical products, so that they cannot be sold exclusively in the pharmacy, but also in the regular tobacco shop. These products will indeed have to meet strict conditions. Furthermore, the Member States can opt to be stricter and allow e-cigarettes to be sold exclusively through the pharmacy.

Belgium showed itself to be very active in the work concerning this file and can definitely be satisfied with the result achieved. The final vote in the European Parliament took place on 26 February 2014, after which formal acceptance by the Council will follow.

1.5.2. Clinical trials

This Draft Regulation replaces the existing Directive 2001/20/EC and consists of establishing harmonised rules for authorisation and implementation of clinical trials. This should promote the development of new medicines and restore the competitive position of the European pharmaceutical industry with respect to clinical trials.

The Commission proposal provides for, among others, ambitious approval periods, a uniform authorisation procedure and regulations concerning the free and informed consent of the patient.

At the Health Council of 21 June, the Irish Presidency only dedicated a progress report to this file, but with the start of the Lithuanian Presidency, the activities gained momentum. This ultimately led in mid-December to a compromise between the Council and the European Parliament. The main bottleneck concerned the term for approving clinical trials. The EP and the Commission wished to keep this as short as possible in the interest of the patient and the competitiveness of the pharmaceutical industry. Belgium has been a leader in the EU for years with regard to clinical testing and therefore played a leading role in the negotiations.
1.5.3. Cross-border health threats

Finally, a decision was also taken in the Health Council concerning cross-border health threats. The objective of this decision is, in future, to harmonise and better align the procedures and efforts of the Member States with one another in the event that a pandemic or threat arises.

1.6. Regional policy measures

In 2013, Belgium continued the negotiations begun in 2012 and made an active contribution to the agreement on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2014-2020, whereby it convincingly appealed for the vision of an ambitious budget for Europe and for the Cohesion Policy. There is indeed a declining trend for the overall budgetary provision, yet Belgium has still ensured that, for section 1b concerning the Cohesion Policy, a substantial allocation is established.

In this way, a new regional category has been introduced that contains all transition regions. It was approved notwithstanding the heavy pressure that has weighed on this category for a long time in the Council. It was certainly a struggle, but Belgium still booked an unmistakable success, despite the relatively limited support it received in the Council. Four Belgian provinces are eligible for this category (Hainaut, Luxembourg, Namur and Liège). Furthermore, there were a number of recent economic developments (Ford Genk, Arcelor Mittal...) for which the Belgian negotiators received an additional budgetary provision of 133 million euro. For the period 2014-2020, the total budgetary provision that all the Belgian regions were allocated as cohesion fund financing amounted to approximately 2.066 billion euro.

II. Communicating about Europe

2.1. Communicating about Europe in partnership and inter-institutional relationships

In 2013 the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission for the fifth time established inter-institutional communication priorities as intended in the approved common political statement, "Communicating about Europe in Partnership", on 22 October 2008. Emphasised herein is that communication about Europe requires political commitment from the EU institutions and Member States at all levels.

The three selected common communication priorities for 2013 were: the economic recovery, the European Year of Citizens and communication campaign for the European elections in May 2014. The most important objective of the political statement is to give citizens access to objective and diverse information about the European Union so that they can actively participate in the public discussion about European issues. With this statement, the EU institutions took up the political obligation to address communication concerning EU issues together with the Member States so that it is possible to communicate at an appropriate level with as broad an audience as possible. To this end, they wish to work diligently to develop synergies with the national, regional and local authorities and with representatives from civil society. The Commission was requested to report to the other EU institutions at the beginning of each year about the most important results that it booked in the previous year while implementing the common communication priorities. The 2012 report was presented to the Working Party on Information of the European Union Council on 25 April 2013 under the Irish Presidency.

Since 2007, the Commission has advocated a structured partnership with the Member States in the area of communication in order to promote coherence and synergy between the activities of the Member States and the various institutions. The objective is to improve the access of the citizen to information, to strengthen her understanding of the European, national and local dimensions of the EU policy, and to involve her in a permanent dialogue about European matters. In 2013 in Belgium, continuing work was done on the renewed framework agreement that was signed on 6 December 2012 between the Belgian Federal Government - represented by the Federal Public Service (FPS) Chancellery of the Prime
Minister - and the European Commission - represented by the Head of the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium. This framework agreement was the foundation of a new centralised indirect management partnership for the period 2012-2015 and of an annual communication plan.

In late 2013, the European Parliament adopted the agreement reached in February 2013 in the Council on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2014-2020. In the framework of preparing the 2014 budget plan, the European Commission has cut 20% from its overall communication budget lines, and specifically for budget line 16 03 04 "Go local – European communication in partnership", the European Commission decided to put an end to the Management Partnership Agreements with the Member States as of 31 December 2013. In the formal EU Council Working Party on Information Policy and the informal Venice Club, the Belgian delegation actively defended its framework agreement starting from the regulated framework for the realisation of common communication activities about priority themes. Belgium argued for this in order to maintain the significance of this form of framework agreement and had likely preferred to see its retention together with other Member States. Nevertheless, Belgium took note of this significant change by the Commission and terminated its framework agreement on 31 December 2013. On the other hand, in late 2013, Belgium started up negotiations for new, reinforced collaboration at an institutional level in the form of a strategic partnership agreement (Memorandum of Understanding/MoU) that will be signed in early February 2014.

2.1.1. BE-EU Task Force: Information initiatives in 2013

In the framework of inter-institutional cooperation, the Belgian Government in 2013 further developed the strengthened cooperation with the competent authorities of the European institutions, particularly the Representative of the European Commission in Belgium and the Information Office of the European Parliament in Belgium, and other partners such as the European Movement-Belgium (EMB) and the Europe Direct information network. On 18 December 2012, the first intense preparations started within the BE-EU Working Group Task Force set up on 27 November 2012 for realising the Belgian website www.youreurope.be on the occasion of the European Year of Citizens 2013. This website was officially launched on 10 January 2013 (see point 2.2.1.).

![Logo and banner of the site youreurope.be](image)

The BE-EU Task Force Working Group, under the Presidency of the Directorate General for European Affairs and Coordination at the FPS Foreign Affairs, met regularly in 2013 in order to draft a state of affairs concerning information activities on Europe, examine cooperation possibilities, ensure that the existing documentation received wider distribution and to discuss future information projects. They also delved deeper into a structural information policy concerning European affairs for the benefit of schools in order to make young people aware of what is at stake now and in future in the making of Europe. The celebration of "Europe Day", an educational project with the final-year students from secondary schools in Belgium on 7 & 8 May 2013, was a great success (see point 2.1.3.).

Also the realisation of an annual report about European activities, a required exercise, intended for the Federal Parliament as well as the drafting of an annual report, the book "EUROPA: WAT DE BELGEN ONS TE VERTELLEN HEBBEN" (ISBN: 978-92-79-32965-4; DOI: 10.2775/35778 – IC-03-13-550-NL-C- © European Commission, 2014) on public opinion in Belgium concerning the European integration process was realised pursuant to the “Lessen uit de Burgerdialogen – 2013” (Lessons from conversations with citizens) organised on the occasion of the European
The Belgian interest consists on the one hand in demonstrating a proactive stance concerning cooperation with European institutions. On the other hand, the Belgian Government emphasises that the will to implement a coherent and focused European communication and information strategy is optimally present, for the purpose of raising the quantity and quality of the public debate on the theme of “Europe” and to develop education communication activities, for instance the realisation of “Europe Day” for final-year students in secondary education in Belgium, the game about Europe, “NeurOdyssée”, the self-adhesive puzzle “Help build the European Union”, citizen discussions, debates and the information activities of the Belgian network, Europe Direct.

The game about Europe, “NeurOdyssée”, intended for youth 12 years and older, was developed in 2008 in the framework of the partnership agreement and won the Special Jury Award, “Serious Game Expo”, in Lyon in 2010. Young people can test their knowledge of the European Union in a playful and didactic manner by answering multiple-choice questions about divergent themes: geography, history, culture, politics, institutions, sports, cinema, science, gastronomy, traditions, architecture, languages... In order to reach as wide an audience as possible, the “NeurOdyssée” game exists as a role-play card game, a DVD and online game for several players on the site www.neurodysssee.eu available in 23 official European Union languages.

Early 2013, the new edition of the self-adhesive puzzle “Help build the European Union” by the Europe Communication Unit of the Directorate-General for European Affairs and Coordination (DGE) of the FPS Foreign Affairs was distributed. The layout was entirely reworked in order to improve the pedagogical use of the puzzle and to generate interest in Europe among young people. The intention is to provide an initial insight into the European Union with 27 Member States, an acceding member and 5 candidate Member States. Furthermore, this educative product was updated in 2013 following the accession of Croatia as the 28th EU Member State. Students point to each country on a geographical map and attach the respective sticker to it. Information about the different countries is provided on the back. There is also space for a sticker with the flag of the country.

The puzzle is available at no charge at every Europe Direct information centre and at Infoshop.be from the federal government. Raising the awareness of schools in Belgium for the European project is closely related to the year 2013 that was named the “European Year of Citizens”. The intention is mainly to make EU citizenship and its specific advantages visible. The Europe Communication Unit has sent a standard mailing to some 4,000 elementary schools throughout Belgium via a letter signed by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and European Affairs. An online version of the puzzle is anticipated for 2014.
2.1.2. Role and tasks of the information network Europe Direct in Belgium

As a result of the signing in December 2012 of the framework agreement at the national level, the role that the European networks and information centres, named “Europe Direct”, play in the regular distribution of information, which guarantees the permanent nature of the European public debate, was recognised.

Via its Representation in Belgium, on 21 June 2012, the European Commission made a call for submitting proposals with a view to selecting organisations that are eligible for an action subsidy in exchange for managing one or more public information centres that are commonly known as the "Europe Direct Information Network" during the period 2013-2017 (Decision of the Commission C/2012/4158 of 21 June 2012).

In Belgium there have been **12 Europe Directs since 2013**. These are, namely: Europe Direct West Flanders, Europe Direct East Flanders, Europe Direct Antwerp, Europe Direct Limburg, Europe Direct Flemish Brabant, Europe Direct Hainaut, Europe Direct Namur, Europe Direct Luxembourg, Europe Direct Walloon Brabant, Europe Direct of the German-speaking Community, Europe Direct Liège, particularly “Le Bureau des Relations extérieures de la Province de Liège, Service du Collège Provincial de Liège” and Europe Direct Brussels. The European Commission provided a third, five-year mandate for this information network for the period 2013-2017, and as of 1 March 2013, the 12 new and recognised Europe Direct Brussels information centres started up, with their host organisation as VZW Visitbrussels.

In this way, for the **period 2013-2017**, Belgium committed, according to the Commission Decision of 21 June 2012, to observe the direct management form and to make use annually of the service that will be set up for the Belgian information network "Europe Direct". For instance, in 2013, the network was actively deployed at a decentralised level in the 21 secondary schools in Belgium on the occasion of organising the “Europe Day” on 9 May 2013. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and European Affairs Didier Reynders gave the starting signal on 8 May 2013 around 9 a.m. in the secondary school “L’Athénée Royal Serge Creuz” in Molenbeek-Saint-Jean. At the same time on 7 & 8 May 2013, 20 other speakers (experienced diplomats or officials from the FPS Foreign Affairs) provided a similar explanation in 20 other secondary schools in Belgium, regardless of the educational network. The selection of the 21 schools, from each of the provinces and the German-speaking community, was done by the Policy Cell of the FPS Foreign Affairs on the basis of 6 school proposals per province by the Europe Direct network that provided a promotion and information booth in the relevant schools. The Europe Communication Unit from the Directorate-General for European Affairs of the FPS Foreign Affairs was responsible for the plan of approach, provided coordination with Europe Direct, the speakers and the educational staff from the 21 schools and worked closely together with the Communication and Press Directorate of the FPS Foreign Affairs (see point 2.1.3. for more information).

Also during the European Year of Citizens in 2013, among others the twelve Europe Direct information centres worked closely with the Representative of the European Commission in Belgium for setting up the citizens’ dialogues (see point 2.2.2.). The Europe Direct centres will also take responsibility for organising debates, seminars, and the distribution of the countdown calendar to 10,000 youth in Belgium (an edition of the European Movement-Belgium (EMB)) provided in early 2014 in the run-up to the **European Parliament elections of 22 to 25 May 2014** (see point 2.3.).

The Federal Public Service (FPS) Foreign Affairs provides an e-mail address for citizens where they can ask their questions. This initiative supports dialogue with citizens. There are many questions about the European Union in particular. The FPS Foreign Affairs makes it a point of honour to answer within the proposed term. Statistics show that the most prevalent questions concern, on the one hand, the functioning of the European institutions, and on the other hand, current affairs (the future of Europe). The most frequently asked questions ask for information
rather than make remarks. Furthermore, the website www.diplomatie.belgium.be of the Federal Public Service (FPS) Foreign Affairs includes a “Europe” theme that is updated regularly and they work closely together with the Press and Communication Directorate in the context of applying social communication media tools (Facebook and Twitter).

2.1.3. Europe Day on 9 May in Belgium

On 7 and 8 May, the FPS Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with the Europe Direct network, commemorated Europe Day and the European Year of Citizens 2013 with a large-scale educational event throughout Belgium. The Deputy Prime Minister, diplomats and experts criss-crossed Belgium from Knokke to Ath to meet students between 16 and 18 years of age and to shine a spotlight on the European Year of Citizens (more information on the site www.youreurope.be and point 2.2.1.).

In this double context, Deputy Prime Minister Didier Reynders and the FPS Foreign Affairs directly addressed students from twenty-one Belgian schools about "Our Europe: yesterday, today and tomorrow". After the success of the first edition in 2012, twice as many schools participated in this initiative in 2013 (from 13 to 21 schools).

Didier Reynders spoke to the sixth year secondary education students at the Atheneum Serge Creuz in Molenbeek-Saint-Jean about the topic "Our Europe: yesterday, today and tomorrow". The minister talked about the creation and history of the European Union and its significance for us today and tomorrow. The presentation and question-and-answer session lasted approximately an hour. On Tuesday 7 and Wednesday 8 May, twenty diplomats from Foreign Affairs visited twenty other schools in each Belgian province and in the German-speaking Community. These schools, from every system, were selected in cooperation with the provincial departments of the Europe Direct Network (http://www.europe-direct.be).

They were welcomed with much hospitality and the schools seemed well prepared for the meeting, but the European Union is still not of much concern to them. Nevertheless, specific actions such as those from Foreign Affairs on 7 and 8 May are best suited to get young people involved in Europe. As in 2012, particularly the crisis, Greece and the euro were the topic of many questions. Other topics that are more relevant to the youth were also addressed: the free movement of employees, youth unemployment and the Erasmus budget. This exercise signified mutual enrichment for the students as well as the speakers, as they were obliged to clearly reformulate the European integration process and its favourable effects.

Each school could also participate in a competition on the theme: "YOUR idea so that young people can experience Europe MORE and BETTER". Each region selected one school on the basis of the originality and creativity of their project. In this context, there was an awards ceremony on 28 June 2013 in the Egmont Palace.

The three winning schools, namely “the Institut provincial d’enseignement secondaire de Huy (IPES), the Higher Institute for Nursing Sint-Elisabeth (HIVSET-Turnhout), BIB-Bischöfliches Institut Büllingen”, presented their project and received an award (a total of 185 gift packages) from the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and European Affairs. The special award went to the school Visitatie Mariakerke “Broeders van Liefde” in Ghent, which had submitted an interesting compilation of diverse projects realised during the year. Afterwards they took a tour of the Egmont Palace.

The event was coordinated by the Directorate-General for European Affairs & Coordination (DGE), Europe Communication Unit.
The Council and the European Parliament announced their decision to name 2013 the European Year of Citizens 2013 on 23 November 2012 in the Official Journal. During the preparations for this European Year, the Commission invited representatives from the Member States in the Information Group (WPI) to investigate which public service or body could serve as a national contact point for the European Year of Citizens in their respective countries. These contact points, such as for Belgium, were important hubs for coordinating the activities of the European Year of Citizens at a national level. The Europe Communication Unit from the Directorate-General for European Affairs and Coordination (DGE), namely Mrs Jacqueline De Hanscutter and Mrs Caroline Huynen, were appointed as contact points on 6 December 2012. In this role they maintained contacts with the national societal organisations, other central public services, public authorities at a regional and local level, companies and other stakeholders. They were also invited to send news and information about events that were held on occasion of the European Year of Citizens in Belgium to the European Commission Task Force and to help distribute information about the European Year of Citizens among national stakeholders.

The official opening even of the European Year of Citizens took place on 10 January 2013 in Dublin and went together with the opening of the Irish Presidency of the Council. The first citizen dialogue followed immediately.

In the course of the Year of Citizens, a variety of documents were approved to ensure that the European Year of Citizens retains notable results for citizens long after it is over. The first of which was the 2013 edition of the report on EU citizenship that was approved on 8 May and received a warm welcome on 6 December from the Member States in series of conclusions from the Council.

Then, on 13 December 2013, the European Year of Citizens Alliance (EYCA), a large network of social organisations that are committed to promoting social involvement and European integration, published a number of policy recommendations. The EYCA policy statement provides important insights from the point of view of social organisations.

At the closing event on 13 December in Vilnius, organised together with the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council, the most important results from the European Year of Citizens were presented. On the same day in Vilnius, a citizens’ dialogue was held with the cooperation of
In the course of the Year of Citizens, 36 citizens' dialogues were organised in 21 Member States with a large number of European Parliament members, nearly all commissioners and representatives of national, regional and local authorities. The entire series of citizens' dialogues runs from September 2012 through March 2014, with some fifty events in all 28 Member States, including in Belgium (see point 2.2.2.). The Commission will present a document about the dialogues in 2014.

2.2.1. Youreurope.be, your website – press release launching the European Year of Citizens on 10 January 2013

Belgian citizens, citizens of Europe, in 2013 we celebrated your 20th anniversary of European citizenship. Travelling, studying or working throughout Europe, access to healthcare, less expensive surfing on your smartphone ... these are just a handful of specific examples of the not always visible impact that Europe has on our daily lives.

In order to make you more familiar with your rights and to encourage you to dialogue, the Belgian Government launched on 10 January 2013 a website specially dedicate to the European Year of Citizens: www.youreurope.be. This site had the intention to inform the citizen and gather the events, questions, opinions, experiences, photos and video the whole year through. The slogan was: “Let’s shape the Europe you want in 2020 together!”.

The FPS Chancellery of the Prime Minister and the FPS Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation designed the site in collaboration with the European institutions in Belgium.

2.2.2. Ideas, debates and actions for Europe! Lessons from the citizens' dialogues in Belgium in 2013

In 2013 the European Representative in Belgium organised nine “Citizens’ dialogues” and several debates throughout Europe. It was once again an occasion for the audience to have a discussion with a European Commissioner, politicians and personalities from the world of education, business and culture.

In cities such as Ghent, Eupen, Brussels, Antwerp, Genk, Liège and Namur, citizens asked their questions, gave their advice and shared their hopes and fears about the future of Europe. In
our view it seemed essential to save and disseminate these messages. This was done by means of the book "Europa: Wat de Belgen ons te vertellen hebben" (Europe: What the Belgians have to tell us).

The book is available for free in Dutch, French and German and can be ordered as an e-book on the EU bookshop website:
http://bookshop.europa.eu/fr/europe-ce-que-nous-disent-les-belges-pb1C0313550/

The future of Europe, civil rights, the exit from the financial downturn, democracy: Belgian citizens, politicians, European commissioners, members of the European Parliament and representatives of numerous associations discussed these issues during nine meetings named "Citizens' dialogues", organised on the occasion of the European Year of Citizens in 2013.

Emotions often ran high during these debates. During the discussions, in the north as well as south of the country, it became clear that people not only expect more from Europe, but also desire a different Europe: a Europe with more structure and coherency, in which the policy lines and the institutions are better aligned than they are now. A Europe that combines growth, social policy and re-industrialisation, but also a Europe with an eye for values: 73% of the residents of Liege that participated in the dialogue of 17 October is of the opinion that Europe must show solidarity; at the debate of 23 April, it also appeared that 95% of the residents of Eupen feel European. It is absolutely necessary that these citizens' wishes are taken into account; otherwise we run the risk that even the most positive voices turn their backs on the European ideal. The EU Statistical Agency confirms this and, in its most recent opinion poll, underlines the development of Belgian opinion. For instance, a little more than a third of Belgians has a positive overall image of the Union. A similar desire has been noted in the other Member States. In comparison to other topics, such as the future of the Union and Belgium's interest in EU membership, more than 60% are positive. An analysis of these figures, in the framework of the citizen dialogues that took place throughout the country, provides a clear signal. It must be emphasised that the Belgians are not against Europe and are even more aware that the Union now forms part of their daily lives.

From this perspective it is good that the federal, regional and European elections fall together in May 2014, because in this way Europe receives the opportunity to turn the debate into a real national election theme, and not as an ancillary element imposed from the outside. In short, there is a realistic image of the situation, an image that takes the middle road between long-term hope and an urgent demand for changes to the current state of affairs. Belgians are known for operating in a broad-minded and balanced manner, without having recourse to aggression or stereotypes, which indicates a moderate realism. The signals that the citizens gave during the dialogues are very clear and indicate precisely what people expect. Now the various actors involved must assume their responsibility at every level in order to in this way put the demand for "more Europe" into practice for the benefit of citizens.
The Representative of the European Commission in Belgium organised these nine citizen dialogues and more debates about Europe by means of the close and fruitful cooperation with their partners, namely: the FPS Chancellery of the Prime Minister, FPS Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development cooperation, the Information Office of the European Parliament in Brussels, the European Commission Directorate-General of Agriculture and Rural development, the European Commission Directorate of Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, the Ministry of the German-speaking Community in Belgium, the Walloon Region, the twelve Europe Direct information centres in Belgium, the Enterprise Agency, the Agency for Sustainable Economic Development in the Namur province (BEP), Euregio Meuse-Rhine, the province of East Flanders, the province of Antwerp, the province of Limburg, the province of Liege, the City of Liege, the City of Ghent, the University of Liege, the Palace of Fine Arts in Brussels (Bozar), Europa Nostra, the Camoes Institute, the newspapers GrenzEcho and La Libre Belgique, and all institutions that supported the European Year of Citizens.

2.2.3. Video competition on European citizenship (starting 1 October 2013 - ending 30 November 2013)

A video competition for students from the 6th year of secondary school entitled, ‘@jongeburger: jouw ideeën voor #Europa/ Welk idee voor Europa?’ was launched on 1 October 2013. The objective of the competition was to make young people - some of whom will vote for the first time during the 2014 elections - enthusiastic about European citizenship and the rights that go along with it.

Each class from the 6th year could submit a short video in which they propose their project for Europe. Below you will find the criteria that the video must meet:

- in colour or black and white,
- images in digital format (avi, flv of mp4) only,
- videos taken with a smart-phone are acceptable,
- no more than 90 seconds.

The class with the most creative video won a trip to an EU Member State. The video competition in the framework of the European Year of Citizens was a great success: 36 classes and more than 450 6th-year students participated. The awards ceremony for the students took place on 30 January 2014. The jury was most impressed by the quality of the submissions and the message, and therefore found it difficult to make a selection from the projects. For this reason, two classes received first prize: class 6D from the “Institut Sainte-Ursule” from Vorst and class 6B Human Sciences from the Sint-Theresia College from Kapelle-op-den-Bos.

The other prizes were awarded to classes from Ronse (KSO Glorieux) (second place), La Louvière (Athénée Royal/Koninklijk Atheneum) and Ghent (Sint-Pietersinstituut) (third place ex aequo), Florennes (Instituts Saints-Pierre-et-Paul) (originality award) and for a school for special education from Marcinelle (Institut Médico-Pédagogique René Thône) (Jury Award).

This competition was organised by the Representative of the European Commission in Belgium and the FPS Chancellery of the Prime Minister, in the framework of a partnership. More information at:
http://www.youreurope.be/fr/concours

2.3. Preparing for the European elections in May 2014

During the dialogues in 2013, citizens were invited to participate in the debate about paving the way for the European Parliament elections in 2014. These elections will be special for two reasons:

- Firstly, the elections will occur for the first time according to the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty, whereby EU citizens play a larger political role. Also, the competences of the Parliament will be reinforced, its role as co-legislator will be consolidated, and it will receive additional responsibilities, including the right to select the President of the
European Commission on the basis of a proposal by the European Council, which gives consideration to the results of the European elections.

Secondly, the approaching elections are of critical importance for the future of Europe. Due to intensive reforms introduced during the financial crisis, the EU finds itself at a crossroad. The European elections offer the citizen an opportunity to indicate which direction the Union should go and what they want from Europe in future.

In the run-up to the European elections and the election of the Commission Presidency, the Commission published a Communication (COM (2013) 126) and a Recommendation (PB L 79 of 21.03.2013) in which it calls for stronger ties between EU citizens by means of measures. In July of 2013, the Parliament pronounced its support for these proposals and set the election dates for 22 to 25 May 2014.

The European Parliament launched an awareness & information campaign for the elections on 10 September 2013. The campaign will run until the time - after the elections - that the newly elected Parliament in turn has elected new chair of the European Commission. The campaign consists of four phases. The first phase starts with the presentation of the slogan ACT.REACT.IMPACT. In this phase, the new competences of the Parliament were explained, as well as how they influence the everyday lives of European citizens. Phase two, from October to February 2014, placed five crucial themes in the spotlight: the economy, jobs, quality of life, money, and the EU in the world. This took place during a series of interactive events in European cities. Phase three, the actual election campaign, started in February 2014. This will focus on the election dates of 22-25 May. These dates will be added to the election logo when the elections are approaching.

After the elections, the final phase starts in which the newly elected Parliament selects the new Commission Chairman and inaugurates the new Commission. The slogan ACT.REACT.IMPACT emphasises that European voters can exert power by means of the ballot, and in this way can contribute to determining the future state of the European Union.

In Belgium, a special effort was made during 2013 by the European Movement-Belgium (EMB) in order to develop a pedagogical tool, namely, a countdown calendar intend for youth between 18 and 26 years of age.

Many young people will vote for the first time in Belgium on 25 May 2014, and therefore the EMB developed the countdown calendar, Your Vote Counts! with the support of the FPS Foreign Affairs, FPS Chancellery of the Prime Minister, the National Lottery, the European Parliament and Europe.Brussels Liaison Office.
In order to raise **youth awareness of the European project**, the EMB developed a countdown calendar that counts down 100 days to the European election. It presents a funny but also pedagogical message about the Union every day: political messages, cartoons, "Did you know?" facts, practical information about the European Parliament, young people telling their own European story, descriptions about what the EMB and its partners do, and quotations.

To promote the countdown calendar in 2014, the FPS Foreign Affairs decided to invest in partnership with the European Mouvement in Belgium (EMB).

### 2.4. 4th European conference on government communication (EuroPCom) "[S]electing Europe" from 16 to 17 October 2013

**EuroPCom was the fourth European Conference on Public Communication.** This two-day event took place in Brussels on 16 and 17 October 2013 under the Lithuanian Presidency and on the initiative of the European Committee of the Regions. It was jointly organised with the European Parliament, the European Commission, the EU Council and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). The first EuroPCom took place in 2010, an initiative in the framework of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The concept, the content and the promotion of the conference was defined by the EuroPCom "Advice Council" composed of representatives from the institutional partners, regional partners from prior conferences and various directors of European communication networks (such as the Venice Club of the EACD (European Association of Communication Directors), communication agencies (EACA) and researchers in the field of government communication, media and journalism (ECREA – European Communication Research and Education Association)).

The conference invited 650 government communication officials from various administration levels from the 28 EU Member States:
- communication directors from European institutions;
- communication directors from the European regions and major cities;
- communication directors and spokespersons from the Member States;
- communication directors from European and national associations from local and regional authorities;
- members of networks and associations from government communication officials.

The objective of the conference: to promote professionalization, setting up new cross-border networks, knowledge exchange and development of a decentralised EU communication policy by government communication officials. Explanations, debates and interactive workshops were held with their focus on the most important challenges for European and public communication. More than 75 experts focused their attention during the plenary sessions on the approaching European elections in 2014, and more generally on the role and position of communication officials during the election period.

The following topics took centre stage during the thirteen workshops and via parallel sessions: a European campaign; European elections at a local level; European candidates; online public communication (from tools to strategy), e-government, e-citizens, e-lusions?; public
communication – policy and policy agenda; monitoring and evaluating strategies and campaigns, strengthening the administrative reputation; administrators or ambassadors; reputation of the EU institutions, story telling in public communication; speaking about EU projects. The participants considered themes and exchanged ideas during workshops, debates, studios and visits to the information booths. The conference was very interactive due to the use of social media, the webpage with live video streaming and 680 visitors and 3,500 tweets sent by the EuroPCom hashtag by 490 Twitter users.

All the conference presentations and documentation is available at the website: http://www.cor.Europe.eu/EN/EVENTS/EUROPCOM/Pages/european-conference-on-public-communication.aspx

2.5. The Europe Days of the DGE: State of the Union from 14 until 15 October 2013

The Directorate-General for European Affairs and Coordination (DGE) brought the staff of embassies in the EU Member States, candidate countries and the Permanent Representation gathered around the files that dominate the European agenda. The meeting took place on 14 and 15 October at the Egmont Palace.

Director-General for European Affairs François Roux and Ambassador Permanent Representative of Belgium to the EU Dirk Wouters first outlined the general state of the European Union and its financial, political and institutional perspective after the crisis that the European project had been struggling since 2008.

Then they went deeper into the topic of economic and monetary union and consequent issues such as the future banking union, the social dimension, the democratic legitimacy and the future of the Union after the European elections.

Elaborating on the collapse of Lehman Brothers, who laid bare the flaws of the eurozone, the diplomats viewed all aspects of financial regulation that Europe has worked to counter them.

The discussion also concerns the impact of EU measures on industrial policy in the view of the EU climate and energy targets for 2030. Moreover, the regional and multilateral trade, enlargement and the Eastern Partnership were discussed during this meeting.

For the diplomats it was also an opportunity to examine the triangular cooperation between the DGE, the Permanent Representation and bilateral missions in the EU and the candidate countries and to evaluate, to optimize their future working method.
III. Institutional, Justice and Foreign Affairs (JFA)

3.1. Institutional

General

3.1.1. The future of the European Union

The discussions about the future of the European Union continued in 2013. Several developments are under way.

One of them is based on contributions that were presented in 2012\(^1\) and argues for assigning the Union new competences, in particular with a view to deepening the Economic and Monetary Union. One of the points that is often emphasised in this context is the need to strengthen the democratic legitimacy of the European decision-making process.

After her re-election at the end of 2013, the German Chancellor took a clear position for revising the treaties. With the approval of the reports by Lamassoure and Trzsakowski-Gualtieri in December, the European Parliament is heading the same way. This perspective of revision, however, remains hypothetical, taking into account the opposed expectations of the Member States, but also the difficulties that have arisen in the ratification process of the most recent treaties.

On the other hand, the scope and competences of the Union, or at least the way in which these competences are put into practice, were also addressed.

For instance, in 2013 the British Government continued an exercise that it had started in 2012 concerning the distribution of competences between the European Union and its Member States “balance of competences”. This exercise should deliver an evaluation by the spring of 2014 of the scope and competences of the Union, of the way in which these competences are put into practice and of their impact on the United Kingdom. The investigation, which rests on extensive discussions (Parliament, civil society, the business world, administrations, European partners...), intends to be descriptive and not prescriptive. The research results could in any event be used for redefining the relationships between the United Kingdom and the Union. In a speech in January 2013, the British Prime Minister indeed announce his intention to again negotiate about the relationships between the United Kingdom and the European Union after 2015 (year of the general elections in the United Kingdom) and on this basis to hold a referendum on the EU membership of the United Kingdom no later than 2017.

The Dutch Government from its side proposed to seize the opportunity for a renewal of the European Commission in 2014 in order to re-examine the priorities of the Union and to set up an action plan with a view to improved observance of subsidiarity. This proposal was the object of a note from the Dutch Government and was discussed for the first time in the General Affairs Council at the end of 2013. The future Dutch Presidency of the Council (1st semester 2016) could promote the idea in its programme.

Belgium is of the opinion that consultation about the distribution of competences between the Union and its Member States, or about the way in which the Union puts these competences into practice is justified, but that this consultation must rest on a dynamic principle. It can in fact go in two directions. The analysis can lead to the decision that an action of the Union in certain areas is not justified, but just as well to the finding that the intended objective can only be achieved by means of a European action.

\(^1\) Report from the Westerwelle Group, Blueprint of the European Commission
3.1.2. Proposal for a regulation concerning the European political parties and the European political foundations

On 12 September 2012, the Commission submitted its proposal for a regulation concerning the status and financing of European political parties and European political foundations. This proposal was submitted due to the intention of the European Commission to form a "European public space". The objective of the proposal is to assign a European status to the political parties and the foundations associated with them. Approximately half of the parties and foundations are currently signed up as non-profit organizations under Belgian law (vzw or ivzw). The negotiations about this instrument, which were more difficult than expected, were continued under the Cypriot, Irish and Lithuanian Presidency. For a number of delegations, including the Belgian, and notwithstanding the improvements that were added to the basic text, some provisions continue to be problematic (namely the provisions concerning financing). The Presidency maintains its objective to reach an overall political agreement before the end of this legislature, even though a transition period of several years is taken into consideration for its complete implementation.

3.1.3. Accession of the European Union to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights

Accession of the European Union to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights (ECHR) is ordained by Article 6 of the Treaty of Lisbon and is possible on the basis of Article 59 of the Convention, as amended by Protocol no. 14. In June 2010, the Council set up a negotiation mandate and since then the negotiations are ongoing. During the latest round of negotiations (3-5 April 2013) an agreement was reached at the level of the negotiators. The Commission then asked the European Union Court of Justice in July 2013 for an advice concerning the compatibility of the agreement with the EU conventions. This advice was still pending at the end of 2013. Once the European Union has given an opinion about the compatibility of the accession convention with EU conventions, it is up to the European Commission to make a proposal for a Council Decision for approving the signing of the ECHR. Furthermore, prior to accession, also a few internal EU application rules will be established (particularly the possibility for the Union to participate in disputes as a co-respondent, the Representative of the Union for the Court, and fulfilling the obligation for loyal cooperation). The decision sealing the agreement will only enter into force after ratification by all Member States. It also must be ratified by all the parliaments of the 47 Member States of the Council of Europe.

Belgium attaches great importance to this accession that makes it possible to subject the European Union to external monitoring of observance of fundamental rights. It therefore hopes that the works will be completed quickly. It is possible (but not very probable) that the accession of the European Union to the ECHR will fall together with the Belgian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (November 2014-May 2015).

3.1.4. Citizenship and fundamental rights

2013, the year of the twentieth anniversary of the institution of Union citizenship included in the Maastricht Treaty, was named the European Year of Citizens in order to promote debates and to make people more aware of the rights and responsibilities that are associated with citizenship. In December, the Council adopted conclusions concerning the report on EU citizenship 2013. The report contains new initiatives that should make it easier for citizens to enjoy their EU rights. The Council also adopted conclusions about the evaluation of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA).

In June, the Council adopted conclusions about fundamental rights and the rule of law and about the application of the 2012 EU Fundamental Rights Charter from the Commission. These conclusions build further on the debate about the potential need for, and the form of, a future initiative for the protection of the fundamental values of the Union.
The theme of 2013 was also the action that the EU undertook to prevent hate crimes, racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and homophobia. In December, the Council adopted conclusions on combating hate crimes. Their objective is to raise awareness about hate crimes and to make some specific proposals for better prevention of them, at the EU level as well as at the level of the Member States.

3.2. Justice and Home Affairs (JHA)

General

In the course of 2013, the debate about the post-Stockholm multi-annual programme (2015-2020) commenced. In June 2013, the European Council decided that the European Council would hold a debate during its meeting in June 2014 with the objective to formulate strategic guidelines for legislative and operational programming in the area of freedom, security and law. Since then, a process of reflection is under way in which the Presidencies, the Commission and the Member States participate. Belgium is actively committed to influencing the future JHA multi-annual policy framework. Belgium delivered its own national contribution on its vision of the post-Stockholm programme. Aside from the message concerning the implementation and consolidation of existing European legislation with regard to justice and home affairs, it also refers to the need for a political orientation and legislative initiatives that the multi-annual programme must address.

3.2.1. Immigration, asylum and controlling the external borders of the Union

During the JHA Council of 7-8 March, the Commission presented the 'Smart Borders Package' that, on the one hand, consists of a system to make border controls safer (Entry/Exit system), and on the other hand, of a fast-track system for frequent and reliable passengers (Registered Travellers Programme). In particular the high costs and technical feasibility of the system were questioned, as well as not providing immediate access to data for law enforcement services. After difficult technical discussions, in November 2013 on the suggestion of the Commission, it was decided to take a pause in the negotiations and to set up a technical study in 2014 on the feasibility and cost price of the system, and thereafter to test the solutions identified in the study with a pilot project in 2015. This is all in order to bring the legislative negotiations to a good end during the course of 2016 based on a good "proof of concept".

In mid-April, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria and the United Kingdom (UK) presented a joint letter to the Presidency and the Commission with a request to hold a discussion about the free movement of EU subjects, and more specifically the issue of fraud and abuse concerning social security. During a discussion about this in the JHA Council of 7 June, the Member States decided to work together on data exchange on this issue and to wait on a report from the Commission about this. The principle of free movement was also not questioned. The Commission report with specific action to prevent abuses (among others, the manual regarding marriages of convenience) was discussed during the JHA Council of 5-6 December. The JHA Council of June 2014 will follow up on this. According to Belgium, abuses and social fraud should be combated, without thereby touching the European acquis for free movement.

After four years of negotiations about the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), the (revised) Dublin and Eurodac regulations as well as the (revised) asylum procedure guidelines and reception conditions that form part of the CEAS were approved on 20 June. There was already an agreement about the qualification guideline since December 2011. This legislation now must be converted in order to be specifically applied in the national asylum systems and by the Member States. Belgium is pleased with the completion of these works that belonged among the priorities of its Presidency in 2010.

In June 2013, a political agreement was reached on the regulation concerning the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR). This is a system for information exchange regarding border surveillance, the objective being to identify and prevent illegal migration and cross-border crime (through real-time information-exchange about what is happening at the external borders). A national Coordination Centre was set up in each Member State that is in direct
contact with the Eurosur network, managed by Frontex. Since 2 December 2013, the system has been effectively in use.

In July 2013, the negotiations could be concluded on the changes to the Visa Regulation 539/2001, which establishes the list of countries where the residents are subjected to the visa requirement and the list of countries whose residents are exempt from this obligation. The central element in this text is the integration of a safeguard clause that allows quick and temporary suspension of the visa exemption in favour of a third country in an emergency situation. Further, this regulation includes a reciprocity clause. During the JHA Council of December, the regulation could be formally approved. In December, the Presidency furthermore succeeded in reaching an agreement concerning the second revision of Regulation 539/2001, whereby 16 small island states, as well as United Arab Emirates, Moldavia, Peru and Columbia will be exempt for the visa obligation (both the last two provided indication that the visa exemption only enters into force when a visa exemption agreement is signed).

On the occasion of the tragic event near the island of Lampedusa in early October 2013, where at least 360 people lost their lives, it was decided at the JHA Council of 7-8 October 2013 to set up a Task Force for the Mediterranean (TFM). The task of this TFM was to identify a number of operational measures for the short and mid term in order to avoid such tragedies in future. The TFM met twice in 2013 under the Presidency of the Commission. The Commission communication about the work of the TFM was discussed during the JHA Council of 5-6 December 2013 as well as at the European Council of 19-20 December. The TFM drafted 38 specific measures for the following 5 fields of action: 1) cooperation with third countries, 2) resettlement, regional protection and reinforcement of legal channels of migration, 3) combating human trafficking and smuggling and organised crime, 4) border surveillance and protection of human lives in the Mediterranean Sea and 5) solidarity with and support for Member States with increased migration pressure on their borders. These measures are based on existing instruments and actions and their goal is to make these initiatives stronger, more coherent and more coordinated. The European Council of December 2013 has asked the JHA Council to regularly monitor implementation of the actions. In June 2014, the European Council will revisit the asylum and migration question in the framework of the anticipated discussions on the multiannual programme 2015-2019 with regard to Justice and Home Affairs. Belgium is pleased with the overall approach that was taken in the communication from the Commission. Further, Belgium has particular interest in prevention measures in the third countries and is of the opinion that the European migration policy should be better coordinated with the other policy areas of the Union.

After laborious discussions, the Council and the European Parliament agreed in October about the “Schengen Governance Package”. This package will enter into force at the end of 2014 and consists of a new evaluation mechanism and of updated rules concerning special control of the internal borders. Whereas the evaluation mechanism was previously a pure peer-to-peer mechanism, this now is evolving into an approach in which the Commission receives a much stronger role and is assisted by a committee with representatives from the Member States. In the exceptional case that it would be necessary to again introduce control of the internal borders, the new rules provide that such a decision must take into account the interests of the Union and of all Member States.

While Romania and Bulgaria have met the technical criteria since 2011 for full accession to Schengen, the JHA Council has still been unable to make a positive decision about eliminating the internal border controls. During the Council of December, it again appeared that the requisite unanimity was not attainable.

In December 2013, the Coreper reached an agreement about the Council position concerning the rules for FRONTEX operations at sea that enabled the start of negotiations with the European Parliament. This regulation was considered to be a priority by the institutions.

Concerning legal migration, at the end of 2013, the Council reached an agreement with the European Parliament about the guideline concerning the conditions of entry and stay of seasonal workers from third countries. The negotiations with regard to the Directive concerning
the conditions for access and stay of third-county subjects in the framework of a transfer with a company (intra-corporate transfer) have already been active since 2010 and gradually entered into a final phase at the end of 2013. Further, in the spring, negotiations started about the Directive concerning the conditions of entry and stay for students, researchers and au pair personnel from third countries. Belgium places particular importance on well-framed legal migration based on the needs of the labour market in the Member States.

3.2.2. Police cooperation, combating organised crime and terrorism and civil protection

In March 2013, the Commission presented a new draft regulation for Europol. The draft adapts the legal basis of Europol to the Lisbon Treaty (the Council decision shall be replaced by a Regulation that will be approved in a joint decision with the European Parliament). In addition, the Commission utilised the occasion to propose a merger of Europol and Cepol (European Police Academy), as well as stricter rules for the Member States about passing information on to Europol. At the JHA Council of June, where an initial exploratory debate on the Commission proposal was held, a vast majority of Member States spoke out against a merger of Europol and Cepol. Much criticism has also arisen from the European Parliament on this proposal. An additional complication was the fact that the United Kingdom let it be known that, by the end of the year, it could no longer make offices available to Cepol in Bramshill. For this reason, in October 2013 the Council arrived at a political agreement to temporarily house the headquarters of Cepol in Budapest.

Thanks to the efforts of the Member States and the Commission, operations to implement the Schengen information system from the second generation of SIS II (information system that enables the authorities to obtain information about signalled persons and objects) could be concluded so that the transition to its new system could take place on 9 April 2013.

In the framework of combating serious and organised crime, during the JHA Council of June 2013, following up on the policy cycle introduced under the Belgian Presidency, eight new priorities were adopted for the period 2014-2017. They concern illegal immigration, human trafficking and smuggling, counterfeiting, VAT and excise duty fraud, drugs, cybercrime, illicit arms trade and organised property crime. Strategic plans and operational action plans were prepared for each of these priorities.

In 2013, much attention was paid to the issue of ‘foreign fighters’ in Syria. At the Council of 5 December, the European Anti-terrorism Coordinator presented a note with specific proposals for priority actions, including on the level of prevention, information exchange and detection of travel movements, criminal court cooperation and cooperation with third countries. Consultation also took place on this topic between the COSI (Permanent Home Security Committee) and the COPS (Politics and Security Committee). This point will continue to assume a prime position in 2014-2015 on the agenda of Justice and Home Affairs. Belgium plays a leading role in this file together with France, Germany, Spain, Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Denmark and Sweden.

In November 2013, a JHA ministerial meeting took place between the EU and the United States, where they not only discussed data protection and the practices of the American information services, but also existing collaboration in the area of combating cybercrime and terrorism. The EU and US are slowly making progress in the negotiations on the so-called "Umbrella agreement" concerning data protection (also see section, 'data protection' – page 34).

After two years of laborious negotiations, Council Decision 1313/2013 concerning a mechanism for civil protection of the Union was published on 20 December 2013, and entered into force in January 2014. Belgium, which actively participated in the negotiations, takes a favourable view of this decision that - while less ambitious than the original Commission proposal - still introduces a number of positive measures with a view to increasing the capacity of the Unions against disasters by means of prevention as well as preparation and response (chapter on prevention, voluntary pool of previously defined response capacities, reinforcement of the
coordination centre for response within the Commission, increasing the possibilities for co-financing).

### 3.2.3. European area of justice

#### 3.2.3.1. Civil law

The Council of December agreed about a general orientation (basis of negotiations with the European Parliament) concerning a draft regulation establishing a European Account Preservation Order on bank accounts. The proposal simplifies cross-border debt recovery and offers creditors greater certainty that their debt will be repaid, thereby increasing confidence in trade within the unified European market. Belgium takes a positive view of the European system of attaching bank accounts with regard to the fact that the regulation will put an end to the exequatur procedure for seizure orders.

In December, the Council also reached an agreement on a general orientation with regard to a regulation amending the regulation concerning jurisdiction in civil and trade matters. This amendment is necessary as a result of the agreement regarding a single patent law.

Further, in the year 2013, work continued concerning a regulation proposal to amend the regulation concerning insolvency procedures (with the objective being to make this more modern and efficient), a regulation proposal promoting the free movement of citizens and companies by simplified acceptance of certain public instruments in the European Union (these should reduce the administrative formalities), and a regulation proposal on the Common European Sales Law.

#### 3.2.3.2. Criminal law

Directive 2013/921, approved in October 2013, gives all EU citizens the right to be assisted by an attorney when one is criminally prosecuted. The new rules entail that suspects – anywhere in the European Union – receive the right to consult an attorney, as well as to communicate when detained, from the moment when a suspicion arises to the moment the trial ends. Belgium has had reservations from the very beginning as concerns this directive that imposes obligations on Member States that seem disproportionate.

In December, an agreement was also reached in the Coreper about the Directive concerning the European Investigation Order in criminal matters. This Directive, for which Belgium took the initiative along with 6 other Member States during its EU Presidency in 2010, intends to replace various existing instruments regarding European criminal investigation by an instrument of mutual recognition for collecting evidence in European territory. The European Parliament will adopt this agreement in the course of 2014.

In October, the Council arrived at a general orientation concerning the proposal for a Directive concerning criminal protection of the Euro and other currencies against counterfeiting. The proposal intends to focus the existing provisions to be able to better prevent, investigate and punish counterfeiting in the Union. Negotiations with the European Parliament about this instrument have started.

In July 2013, the European Commission submitted proposals about establishing a European Public Ministry and on the EU Agency for Judicial Cooperation in criminal matters (Eurojust) (12566/13). Both proposals are closely related to one another. According to the Commission proposal, the European Public Ministry will have exclusive responsibility for investigating, prosecuting and bringing to judgment perpetrators and accomplices of punishable offences that harm the financial interests of the Union. Fourteen parliaments in 11 Member States signed a protest against the proposal, but the Commission confirmed in November 2013 that its proposal is coherent with the subsidiarity principle. It seems that the appeal to the principle of closer cooperation will be inevitable. Due to its separate position, Denmark cannot participate, and also the United Kingdom and Ireland have indicated that they will not make use of their right to opt-in. Belgium is in principle a proponent of establishing a European procurer, but
asks that the Commission initiate an impact study. In order to enable this new instrument to be successful, it is also important that as many Member States as possible participate.

### 3.2.4. Drugs

The June Council has adopted the new EU Action Plan on Drugs (2013-2016). The plan provides specific, empirically supported initiatives with regard to reducing the demand for and supply of drugs, coordination, international cooperation, information, research, monitoring and evaluation. In 2013, the Commission also submitted two legislation proposals with the objective of improving the effectiveness of EU interventions with respect to new psychoactive substances. According to these rules, harmful psychoactive substances must be quickly removed from the market without infringing on their various industrial and commercial legal applications.

### 3.2.5. Data protection

On 21 October 2013, an exploratory vote was held at the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE Committee) in which the two European Parliament reporters received a mandate with a large majority of votes to negotiate with the Council and the European Commission. However, negotiations with the Council can only commence after it has determined its position, which has not been possible to this point.

The European Commission still hopes for approval before the end of 2014 despite the large number of imperfections in the current text that are still waiting for a solution. In the European Council conclusion of October 2013, there is talk of a commitment regarding the timely adoption of the proposal for the regulation concerning data protection with a view to completing the internal digital market by 2015. In general, Belgium and several other Member States believe that there is still a long way to go in the negotiations about the approval of this proposal, which is unacceptable in its current form. The quality of the final text, which is of great importance for citizens, companies and the public services, must remain a priority point of attention.

Due to the recent Snowden and PRISM affairs, the pressure for quick approval of the data protection package has increased even more. As a reaction to the alleged observation of European citizens by the information services of the United States, a mixed US-EU (and its Member States) Working Group on data protection was started up in the short term. This Working Group met three times between July and November 2013. The Chairman of the Committee for the Protection of Privacy represented Belgium here. The EU subsequently proposed and recommended a series of actions for strengthening trust between America and Europe. The intention is to revisit the existing protection guarantees for transatlantic flows of information. Belgium takes a positive view of the dynamic that was originated by the European Commission in this regard.

### IV. Solvit, Competitiveness (Industry and Internal Market, Research and Innovation, Space), Transport, Telecommunication and Digital Agenda, Energy (TTE)

#### Introduction

For the SOLVIT network, last year was a time of renewal. The European Year of Citizens in 2013, the consequences of the economic crisis and the need to reinforce the functioning of the internal market are just a few of the reasons for European institutions to focus their attention on SOLVIT.

After several years’ work, the Commission on 17 September 2013 adopted the text for the new Commission Recommendation on the principles governing SOLVIT. The most important element of this text is the expansion of SOLVIT’s mandate, so that now structural issues can be addressed as well.
At the European Parliament level, the Committee is currently putting together a report for the internal market and consumer protection (IMCO).

The Competitiveness Council finally confirmed again on 2 and 3 December in its conclusion that the Commission as well as the Member States must pay more attention to SOLVIT (1):

(...) ACKNOWLEDGES the unique role SOLVIT plays in solving problems encountered by citizens and business in the Single Market and thus contributing to compliance with EU law. ENDORSES the Commission's Recommendation of 17 September 2013 on the principles governing SOLVIT, while stressing that SOLVIT is primarily a network between Member States which functions through their cooperation, reinforced by the involvement of the Commission; URGES the Commission to ensure a better coordination between the informal SOLVIT network and the EU-pilot with a view to an efficient and structured follow-up of unresolved SOLVIT cases, use SOLVIT data to identify key Single Market areas for improvement both at EU and national level. CALLS UPON the Commission and the Member States to ensure the necessary support and expertise for the national SOLVIT centres to deal effectively with the cases received; INVITES the Commission to present a roadmap to Member States concerning the next steps for the reinforcement of SOLVIT through the better coordination of EU law enforcement tools and a better engagement of its services in supporting the work of SOLVIT.

At a technical level, the SOLVIT centres now have a new database available, which will be integrated in the IMI system (Internal Market Information System) that offers new possibilities.

Also due to the accession of Croatia to the European Union, a new partner has been added to the network: on 1 July 2013, the SOLVIT centre in Zagreb started up.

At SOLVIT Belgium, the year started off with the addition of a third employee for the team, who is responsible for legal expertise. This reinforcement enables an improved task distribution and responds to the Commission's demands for internal legal expertise at each centre.

In the pages that follow, in addition to a short presentation of SOLVIT, you will find an overview of the activities in 2013, the work balance for 2013 and the prospects for 2014.

4.1. SOLVIT: a brief introduction

The SOLVIT network is a European Commission initiative that has existed since July 2002. Its stated goal is to solve the specific issues of citizens and companies in an informal, pragmatic and fast way. Complaints can only be taken into mediation if they meet a number of criteria:
- The issue must be cross-border in nature;
- It must be attributable to wrongful application of European internal market rules by a public administration;
- An informal solution must be possible.

There is a SOLVIT centre in each European Member State and in the following three Member States of the European Economic Area: Liechtenstein, Iceland and Norway.

When the centre in the Member State where a solution must be sought (Lead Centre) accepts the file, there is a term of 70 days to arrive at a solution. Positive cooperation between the two national centres on the one hand, and the administrations involved on the other, is hereby indispensable for the proper functioning of the network.

The areas of action are varied and concern all issues related to the functioning of the internal market: coordination of social security systems, recognition of professional qualifications, vehicle registration, right of residence, taxes, etc.

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(1) http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&t=PDF&gc=true&sc=false&f=ST%2016443%202013%20INIT
4.2. The SOLVIT network in 2013

For the SOLVIT network, 2013 was a time of renewal.

4.2.1. New database

At the technical level, a new database was provided for the network. Due to savings, this was not created specifically for SOLVIT; rather, a previously existing platform, IMI (Internal Market Information), was further expanded. The database generally works correctly, but there are still a number of adjustments the system needs in order to provide for the needs of SOLVIT.

4.2.2. "New Commission Recommendation on the principles governing SOLVIT of 17 September 2013"

The text for the new recommendation, which has been worked on for several years, was published in September 2013.
Why a new recommendation?

After ten years, the SOLVIT network processes on average some ten times more files than at the start. The diversity of the problems presented is much larger than was estimated at the beginning. From an extensive survey from 2010, it appeared that the network had to be reinforced in order to be able to take on new challenges. The text attempts to provide and answer to this.

What do we retain from the new text?

The most important adjustment is that from this point on, SOLVIT centres can also handle files concerning structural issues ("infringements caused by a national rule that does not conform to the Law of the Union"), whereas previously, only faulty applications of the European regulation were handled. Specifically, we are thus facing an expansion of the mandate of the SOLVIT centres, even if the proportion of structural files remains minimal.

The internal organisation of the centres were also discussed in details, as were the procedures, the role of the Commission, quality control and the transparency of the network.

4.2.3. Report on the functioning of SOLVIT – IMCO – European Parliament

In the framework of the activities by the IMCO Commission (Internal Market and Consumer Protection) M. Morten Lokkegaard, MP, presented a proposal for a report on the activities of the SOLVIT network. The text is currently being studied and will be the object of amendments.

In the meantime we retain the following ideas:

- **SOLVIT's alarm bell function when a problem arises on the internal market must be better examined.**

- **Despite the fact that SOLVIT works, there is a large margin for improvement, particularly for services to companies. To this end, the Member States must make an effort and ensure the resources needed (with regard to personnel as well as financially) for the proper functioning, development and promotion of SOLVIT.**

The text is currently being discussed. SOLVIT BE follows the development of this debate with interest by means of the representatives of the Belgian Permanent Representative at the European Union.

4.3. State of affairs for SOLVIT BE

4.3.1. A few figures

The SOLVIT network handled 1,430 cases in 2013, with a solution level of 92%. The average duration for clearing up a file was 66 days.

The Belgian SOLVIT centre processed 142 files, 70 as Home centre and 72 as Lead centre. The number of solved cases (Lead) was 67. Of the files that were submitted by Belgium to a public service in another Member State (Home), 66 were solved.

**Distribution Home/Lead SOLVIT BE**

By way of reminder, when a file is processed as Home, this means that it concerns a Belgian or a Belgian company that has an issue in another Member State. The work of SOLVIT BE consists then of maintaining contact with the client, verifying whether his issue agrees with the criteria and setting up a legal analysis before transferring the file to the centre in the Member State where the problem occurs. Once a solution has been proposed, this is communicated to the client and, if necessary, implementation of the files is further monitored.
When a file is processed as Lead, it concerns a citizen or country from another Member State who is having difficulties with a Belgian public service. We receive the complaint and the analysis from another SOLVIT centre and present it to the relevant administration with which we cooperate in order to arrive at a solution as quickly as possible.

### 4.3.2. Making SOLVIT more widely known

In 2013, the **European Year of Citizens** provided the ideal springboard to make the activities of the Belgian SOLVIT centre more widely known. Even if the number of actions remained deliberately limited for the public at large, the presentations for colleagues at other FPSs, in
co-operation with other networks (EEN, ECC) or intended for the business world, followed one after another up in succession.

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17/01</td>
<td>Information session with the Euro-coordinators from the Municipalities and the Regions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/04 - 03/05</td>
<td>Booth in the framework of the European week of the FPS Foreign Affairs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>26/04</td>
<td>Presentation for HVV Pajottenland.</td>
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<tr>
<td>04/05</td>
<td>Booth at the Open Door Days of the European Parliament.</td>
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**European Year of Citizens**

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<tr>
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**SOLVIT and other public services**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18/02</td>
<td>Presentation at the FPS Mobility</td>
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<tr>
<td>20/02</td>
<td>Meeting at the FPS Social Security concerning the problems with reimbursement of healthcare in Spain.</td>
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<tr>
<td>01/03</td>
<td>Meeting with the FPS Home Affairs, the Federal Police and the FPS Mobility (registering motor vehicles for European students).</td>
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<tr>
<td>17/06</td>
<td>Presentation to the Mediator of the French Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/09</td>
<td>Meeting with the Pensions Ombudsman</td>
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<tr>
<td>15/10</td>
<td>Presentation in the framework of the European diplomatic days.</td>
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<tr>
<td>28/11</td>
<td>Meeting with the FPS Home Affairs and the DGC (C4) for questions concerning Directive 2004/38.</td>
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**SOLVIT and the other European networks**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23/01</td>
<td>Europe Direct seminar in Bruges</td>
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<tr>
<td>17/06 and 17/12</td>
<td>Meeting with EURES/VDAB Flanders</td>
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<tr>
<td>29/07</td>
<td>Presentation at UNIZO</td>
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<tr>
<td>25/09</td>
<td>Meeting with ECC</td>
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<tr>
<td>03/12</td>
<td>Meeting with SOLVIT COM on the renewal of the SOLVIT website</td>
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**SOLVIT and the companies**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23/05</td>
<td>SOLVIT presentation to the SME in the framework of a seminar organised by EEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05 and 06/12</td>
<td>Participation in the fair, &quot;Wallonia Export Invest/Fair&quot; in Liege (at the invitation of Europe Direct Liege)</td>
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**SOLVIT Workshops**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>20 to 22/03</td>
<td>Brussels</td>
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<tr>
<td>03 to 04/10</td>
<td>Sofia + meeting with the Consul</td>
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The objective of making the activities of SOLVIT more well known is included in the text of the new recommendation: "The Member States should also undertake activities to raise awareness about SOLVIT amongst its stakeholders”.

Good communication with the other FPSs is also essential. We count on the Euro-coordinators and experts for their assistance in solving our files or for obtaining a specific analysis. Each presentation gives us the chance to explain SOLVIT’s activities, our working method, limitations and objectives. The better the experts are informed, the better the collaboration goes.

**4.4. Objectives for 2014**

**4.4.1. Cooperation agreement with the FPS Mobility complaints desk**

A cooperation agreement with the FPS Mobility will be set up by analogy with the already existing protocol with the Pensions Ombudsman Service. These agreements make it possible for SOLVIT to quickly receive the necessary assistance when preparing cases and for solving technical matters. On the other hand, the SOLVIT BE contacts in other Member States can simplify exchanges between administrations.

**4.4.2. Drafting a newsletter**

In 2014, SOLVIT BE would like to set up a tri-monthly online newsletter. The objective is to proactively and qualitatively broach the issues that SOLVIT regularly has to deal with.

**4.5. Competitiveness (Industry and Internal Market, Research and Innovation, Space)**

**4.5.1. Industry and Internal market**

The Irish Presidency turned growth and employment into a horizontal centre of gravity and additionally worked hard on deepening the internal market (Single Market Act I & II) as the recommended instrument to combat the crisis. More specifically, it wished to help advance the digital agenda and entrepreneurship (SMEs).

A sophisticated financing programme was set up for the competitiveness of business and SMEs (COSME) (2014-2020) with a budget of 2 billion euro.

An enormous amount of work was done regarding the collective management of copyright with a view to more transparent and good governance and the creation of a framework for online music licences. Modernising copyright was also the topic of an informal council in Dublin in line with the Vitorino Report. Belgium has repeatedly pointed out that it comes down to the faith of the citizen in e-commerce and in others to strengthen the electronic signature or e-invoice related files.

As concerns the corporate law section, the Presidency came to an agreement with the Council and the European Parliament about reforming the audit that it considered a priority. It continued negotiations about the European Foundation with the result being that the financial provisions from the proposal for a regulation were removed.

As concerns the consumer aspect, the package of measures with regard to product safety and market oversight was discussed in the Council. The Council was able to reach an agreement about these measures, but it could nonetheless not make a decision about the required indication of origin, a point for which France and Italy are pushing.

The agreement concerning a single patent law was signed by 25 Member States in the margin of the Competitiveness Council (COMPET) of 19 February 2013, but its implementation is uncertain due to a complaint that Spain filed at the Court of Justice against two regulations. A preparatory committee with the States that signed will be composed to handle practical
arrangements for introducing the new system. From its side, Belgium has started up the procedure for the confirmation and implementation of the treaty and opts for setting up a local division in Brussels.

The important package on modernising public contracts, a theme that took several Presidencies (DK, CY, IE) to complete, was concluded with its final point being the political agreement that the Council reached under the Lithuanian Presidency about the Directive on e-invoicing for public contracts.

The Directive on professional qualification went to a vote in October in the European Parliament and must be converted into national law in early 2016. From its side, the Commission must designate regulated professions and work on mutual evaluation of professional qualifications as stipulated in the revised Directive on professional qualifications, whereby it mainly concerns limitations to access to regulated professions. In this file, Belgium again indicated that it is a proponent of deepening the internal market, namely by means of greater mobility of qualified personnel, but without this leading to a lowering of the minimum standards for certain professions (healthcare, doctors, notaries) or unfair competition.

In the file concerning state aid, a sensitive file for Belgium, Commissioner Alumunia has been working since May 2012 on a threefold reform on:
1. Modernising the control of state aid (SAM – State Aid Modernisation), a far-reaching reform by the Commission that resulted in a Regulation to which Belgium is opposed;
2. Reforming the rules regarding authorisation (whereby the Commission can publish/reform community framework regulations for various areas) and a review of the procedures (for accession) for which Belgium voted;
3. Reforming the framework regulations and guidelines for a whole series of areas (regional support measures, de minimis aid (ongoing reform), support for SMEs (ongoing reform), restructuring and recovery aid (public consultation ongoing), aid for energy (reform yet to start), aid for research, development and innovation - RDI (reform yet to start)).

The conclusions of the Council on the REFIT programme (‘regulatory fitness’) were approved by the Council in December: for Belgium, the simplification and downsizing of European regulations deserves all the attention, but "better regulation" may not serve as a pretence for deregulation.

At the discussions, consideration was also given to a more active role for the Competitive Council by means of an active contribution from its High Level Group on Competitiveness.

The debate about a new European industrial policy that the Cyprus Presidency initiated (European Council of October 2012) was intensified under the Ireland Presidency. The Commission took extraordinary measures for three industries that are suffering heavily due to the crisis (steel, automotive and construction).

Belgium wished to provide an active contribution to the debate and the exchange of views on the industrial policy at the European level and drafted two papers on this, one in October 2012 as a reaction to the Commission Communication on "A stronger European industry to contribute to growth and economic recovery " and a second in May 2013 with ten action proposals for the Council of the Ministers of Industry. The Council was an occasion to think about the path that must be followed in order to introduce horizontal instruments whereby a European industrial policy can be developed. Belgium ensured that the industrial policy was on the agenda of the European Summits in March and June, and later in December, when the European Council gave its approval to conclusions about the European defence industry.

Because the theme of the industrial policy has gained in importance in recent months (the European Council called upon Europe to work on a sound industrial foundation), the Member States have changed their attitude.
Ultimately, the most important questions that have an immediate influence on the competitiveness of industry at the European level were discussed, namely: the need to invest more in the actual economy; the expansion and functioning of the internal market; improved access to financing, particularly for SMEs; taking into account the impact of other policy measures on competitiveness (energy, climate, trade policy, competition...); the step toward a digital economy and an improved and more streamlined regulatory framework. All of these focal points largely correspond with the priorities that Belgium put forward in its various contributions.

4.5.2. Research and Innovation

After two long years of negotiations, the Competitiveness Council, Research formation, formally approved the package of legislative measures with regard to the following framework programme for research and innovation - "Horizon 2020" - for the period 2014-2020 (budget of 77 billion euro in current prices).

The Council reached an agreement about the general guidelines concerning public-public and public-private partnerships in accordance with Article 185 and 187 TFEU.

In this way, it is likely that five public-private partnerships will be continued or set up with regard to bio-industry, aeronautics, electronics, fuel cells and hydrogen cells and with regard to innovative medicines. Between 2014 and 2020, public-public partnerships will likely be set up for active lives, metrology, innovative SMEs and clinical trials in Africa with the objective being "to help reduce the social and economic burden of poverty-related diseases". The EU wishes to make 22 billion euro available for the entire implementation period.

Finally, the EURATOM programme (2014-2018) was approved. This was not obvious given that little progress had been made by the end of the Irish Presidency.

The decision of the Council concerning a supplementary research programme for the ITER project (2014-2018) was also approved.

4.5.3. Space

With regard to the aerospace policy, the Competitiveness/Space Council of December approved a general approach for the Copernicus Regulation. The question of the relationship between the EU and the ESA (European Space Agency) constituted the core of the discussion all year long. Belgium was a proponent of a distribution of activities (= honouring ESA expertise) that should have a supplementary character (Galileo-Copernicus, for example) and resources among these actors, without losing sight of its own interests (niche industry).

4.6. Transport, Telecommunication and Digital agenda, Energy (TTE)

4.6.1. Transport

Rail transport

The Council of September 2013 handled the six proposals that the Commission had presented in January 2013 and that form part of the 4th Railway Package. The proposals are focused on further opening of the markets, particularly for domestic passenger transport, and on harmonising and standardising the technical specifications for rail networks and for the material operators.

In this connection, Belgium focused attention on passenger safety - still a matter of fundamental importance. Given that the national regulators have the required expertise on this matter, the European Railway Agency, which is located in Valenciennes, can and must utilise this national expertise.
Maritime transport

Regarding maritime transport, the Council continued its discussions about the "Blue Belt" project that the Belgian Presidency put forward in the second half of 2010, particularly via conclusions from the Council. The objective of this project is to facilitate the intra-European maritime cabotage by simplification of the customs procedures to which the ships are always held. These procedures have an impact on the cost and duration of maritime transport, so that it has a weaker competitive position with regard to road transport.

The European Agency for Maritime Safety received more clout. It is moreover the intention that it contributes to disaster response, for instance when a large amount of oil is spilled into the sea, by supporting the prevention efforts organised by the Member States.

Air transport

In July 2013, the Commission submitted proposals with regard to the establishment of the "Single European Sky 2+" at the time when all measures from the second package of the Commission (Single European Sky 2) started to take effect. The Member States therefore advised caution and indicated that they wished to give priority to implementation of the current framework. During the discussions underway concerning the rights of air passengers in airports, it appeared that it is difficult to reconcile the rights of air passengers with the regulations and support for competitiveness, also in an international context.

Road transport/environmental aspect

The Clean Power for transport project that the Commission submitted in January 2013 has the objective to achieve diversification of the fuels that are used in Europe for internal transport (road, inland waterways and supplying ports) so as to be less dependent on petroleum. The Council reached an agreement about a general approach for this project at the Transport Council of 5 December where a few of the Commission's proposals received a somewhat more realistic interpretation - more specifically, the proposal on the introduction of alternative fuels and on the distribution channels (for instance, charging stations for electric vehicles in densely populated urban areas).

4.6.2. Telecommunication and Digital agenda

Two main themes were followed for the relevant works. Firstly, the Council continued research of the designs that the Commission had submitted so that an agreement would be reached before the end of the current legislature. It concerns simplifying the distribution of electronic services and lowering the infrastructure costs for digital communication. The proposal for a Regulation concerning electronic identification and trust services and the proposal of a guideline concerning measures to lower the costs for installing high speed electronic communication networks are the two most important dossiers on this issue.

Secondly, the European Council of 24 and 25 October 2013 examined the impact that digital technologies have on economies, and more generally on European society. The Council came to the conclusion that Europe has indeed lost the leading position that it had in this field in the 1990s, but also emphasised that this deficit can be made up, namely by means of promoting investment in the digital economy, defending consumer interests in a more competitive market, and by encouraging employees and entrepreneurs to obtain the necessary skills.

4.6.3. Energy

Taking account of the fact that the energy mix falls under the competence of the Member States, the European Council of 22 May 2013 again confirmed that the intention is to actually establish an internal market by the end of 2014, particularly for gas and electricity, knowing that there are still physical obstacles and problems with regard to infrastructure and regulations (tariff policy). The goal of an interconnection among the 28 Member States by 2015 was also discussed. Belgium is a proponent of this due to its close interconnection with
its neighbouring countries and the role that it fulfils as an energy platform (hub) for gas storage and the transport of electricity.

In 2013, the energy prices and the energy costs were followed with greater interest, and more attention was paid to their impact on the competitiveness of the European economy with regard to international competitors. In the fall of 2013, the Commission published a communication that contains the analysis of the factors that influenced the development of energy prices in recent years; more specifically, on the production, transport and distribution of energy, and for industrial users, services and consumers. Given that the Belgian economy is energy intensive, Belgium places great importance on this theme and is committed to a comprehensive approach in which attention is primarily paid to the competitiveness of industry, the energy policy and the environmental and climate aspects.

V. Agriculture

5.1. Reforming the Common Agricultural Policy

In 2013 the Council debates mainly concerned reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The reform, which after two years of negotiations was approved in December 2013, is focused on more equitable distribution of the available financial resources and on a ‘greener’ and more efficacious policy. Furthermore, it is also the intention to reinforce the market orientation of European agriculture. The reform covers the period 2014-2020. It is necessary to mention that the European Parliament, in accordance with the Lisbon Treaty, acted for the first time as co-legislator of a CAP reform.

The four fundamental regulations at the heart of the reform concern direct payments to farmers, the common organisation of markets for agricultural products, support for rural development and the financing, management and monitoring of the CAP. The reformed CAP can, in all its components, be applied at the regional level, and this is important for Belgium.

As concerns direct payments to agricultural businesses, the exceptionally large difference that exists among the Member States in this regard will be gradually reduced. Furthermore, work will be made of a more equitable distribution of resources among agricultural companies/farms within the same Member State by means of a partial and gradual convergence of payment levels per hectare. Each agricultural business/farm will henceforth receive a payment in exchange for applying environmental and climate-friendly agricultural methods. This CAP ‘greening’ measure is obligatory for all farmers and the Member States must dedicate 30% of their national envelope to this end. Included among the other new measures that the reform provides are payments for young farmers that are setting up for the first time and redistribution payments that incorporate additional support for the first hectares. Finally, the Member States may still, within certain limits, assign support linked to a product when this support is important for economic, social or ecological reasons.

As concerns the common market organization, the Milk Quota Regulation expires in April 2015 and in September 2017 the Sugar Quota Regulation comes to an end. The effectiveness of the existing systems for public intervention and additional private funds were increased, namely by means of technical adaptations in the beef and dairy industries. The Commission is responsible for taking exceptional market-supporting measures to prevent market disturbances as a result of substantial price fluctuations on the internal and external markets when trade is limited in connection with animal diseases or when there is loss of trust from the consumer as a result of risks to the health of people, animals or plants.

The negotiation position of farmers in the food chain is strengthened because the recognition of producer organisations and unions of producer organisations and sector organisations has been expanded by the Member States to all industries. Following the example of measures in the milk industry that were introduced after the milk crisis of 2009, the farmers will furthermore have the opportunity to negotiate collectively about delivery contracts for certain products, more specifically in the beef and grains industry.
In the framework of the rural development policy, Member States or regions continue to develop their own multiannual programmes based on the package of measures that is available at the EU level. They must also commit at least 30% of the European Union resources to measures that have a favourable effect on the environment and climate.

VI. Fisheries

6.1. Reforming the Common Fisheries Policy

After having debated for two years, in December 2013 the European Parliament and the Council reached an agreement on the new basic Regulation for a Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and the new Regulation containing a common market regulation for fisheries and aquaculture products. It is anticipated that in 2014 an agreement will be reached on the third component of the reform concerning the future European Fund for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (EMFF).

The most important changes to the basic regulation concern the determination of fishing opportunities, the gradual abolishment of discards into the sea and the regionalisation of certain decision-making processes.

The levels of exploitation of the fish stock must in future be established in such a way that it gradually restores and maintains the populations of the species caught above the levels of biomass that enable attainment of the maximum sustainable yield (MSY). These levels of exploitation must be achieved in 2015 if possible, and at the latest in 2020 for all stocks.

All catches for which catch limitations apply and, in the Mediterranean Sea, also catches for which minimum sizes apply on landing, must gradually be landed between 2015 and 2019 according to a precise time schedule for each fishery. For species with a high chance of survival after being discarded, an exemption of the landing obligation applies. Given that catches that do not reach the minimum sizes may not be designated for direct human consumption, the fishers will be inclined to use more selective fishing vessels.

The regionalisation of certain decision-making processes will provide Member States in a specific geographical area the opportunity to - after consultation with the competent advisory councils - present common recommendations concerning the multiannual governance plans and, lacking such plans, specific plans concerning landing obligations to the Commission.

The new Regulation concerning the common market organization namely provides for intervention by the European Union in supporting private contractors in the case of a steep decrease in prices, and specifies new labelling rules for obligatory and optional information for consumers.

6.2. Management and maintenance of fish stocks

During the last quarter, the Council reached an agreement on three proposals for a Regulation concerning fishing opportunities in 2014. These proposals concern fish stocks in the Atlantic Ocean, the North Sea, the Baltic Sea and Black Sea, managed exclusively by the European Union, as well as fish stocks that must be managed in the framework of the regional fishery organisations (RFOs) or in consultation with third countries.

6.3. Fisheries Agreement Protocol between the EU and Morocco

On 16 December 2013, the Council gave its approval to the new Fisheries Agreement Protocol between the European Union and Morocco after the European Parliament approved it. This new protocol will be in effect for four years from the date of its entry into force. Belgium supported the new protocol because it largely answers its primary concerns regarding the inclusion of a clause concerning honouring human rights and democratic principles, because the cost-benefit ratio is now more advantageous for the European Union than the prior protocol, and because
this protocol offers sufficient guarantees about the correct distribution of the advantages of sectorial support for all population groups concerned.

VII. Common Trade Policy

7.1. Doha Development Agenda (DDA)

Since the beginning of the Doha Round in 2001, progress has only been made slowly. Still, 2013 constituted an exception to this rule. On Saturday 7 December at the 9th Ministerial conference of the WTO, the 159 Member States namely succeeded, after several changes of course, in reaching an agreement on the Bali Package.

This package includes a series of measures intended to strengthen trade in goods and services, to offer developing countries more opportunities to guarantee their food security, to promote trade from the least developed countries (LDC) and, more generally, to promote development. This agreement is important for safeguarding the credibility of the multilateral trade system.

The core of this partial agreement on the Doha Round that started in 2001 is an agreement about facilitating trade, including a series of binding rules for simplifying and easing the customs procedures, and thus promoting trade. It concerns the first multilateral agreement since the establishment of the WTO in 1995. Savings on customs duties are estimated at $400 billion per year. Such an agreement reflects the great demand from our businesses.

For the following phases and for the post-Bali working programme, the WTO Member States receive 12 months' time to work out a roadmap with a view to an ambitious liberalisation programme. Priority is currently given to implementation of the Bali Package, and in particular the agreement on facilitating trade.

7.2. Bilateral and regional free trade agreements

In 2007, the EU opted to abandon a parallel approach, without the multilateral trajectory, and it started up negotiations with a large number of partners about Free Trade Agreements (FTA), but then Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA). In 2013, negotiations were continued with Canada, India, Mercosur, Malaysia, Vietnam and the ACP countries. Agreements with Georgia and Moldova were initialled. The agreement with Armenia was not initialled. The EU has commenced talks with Thailand. Additionally, trade negotiations were started up with the first and third economy in the world, namely a DCFTA with the United States and a FTA with Japan.

In 2013, plurilateral negotiations were started concerning an agreement on trade in services. It remains the intention of the EU to eventually make these plurilateral results multilateral.
The main objective is and remains the promotion and maintenance of competitiveness on the external markets. Reinforcing the presence of the EU on emerging markets indeed constitutes a supplement to the multilateral WTO system by expanding liberalisation to a number of key areas. These agreements, which cover numerous areas (liberalising industrial and agricultural products, liberalising services, rules, sustainable development, the environment, intellectual property rights and access to public contracts), intend to go further than the points that were negotiated in the framework of the Doha Round.

7.3. European investment policy

Also in 2013, work continued on the transfer of competences with regard to investments as stipulated by the Lisbon Treaty. (Since the entry into force of the new Treaty, 'direct foreign investments' are an exclusive competence of the European Union).

On 9 January 2013, the Regulation that arranges the transition from the entirety of existing bilateral investment agreements between EU Member States and third countries entered into force. In 2013, the first authorisations were granted for further discussion of a few bilateral investment agreements between EU Member States and third countries. This practice will decline as the EU itself undertakes negotiations with third countries.

The discussions of a Commission proposal for a Regulation with regard to financial responsibility at the international level in the framework of dispute settlements between investors and the States were continued in 2013. However, an agreement could not be achieved.

On the other hand, consultation continued on delineating the new European investment policy. Negotiations on an investment chapter in the EU free trade agreements with Canada and Singapore ensure precise and balanced provisions that take into account the right to regulate. Also in 2013, a negotiation mandate was approved for negotiating an investment agreement between China and the EU. The negotiation mandate from a free trade agreement with ASEAN (currently negotiated ASEAN country by ASEAN country) was supplemented by a mandate for an investment chapter.

VIII. The European Union’s external action

8.1. Enlargement

On 16 October 2013, the Commission adopted its “enlargement package” that contains the annual evaluation of the European Union’s enlargement policy.

On 17 December 2013, the General Affairs Council (GAC) adopted its annual conclusions concerning the enlargement strategy and the accession of each (potential) candidate Member State to the European Union.

Turkey: following protracted negotiations in June 2013 concerning the question whether, after the springtime events in the streets of Istanbul and Ankara, it was advisable to open Chapter 22 for discussions about the regional policy, the GAC meeting of 25 June 2013 decided to effectively do so. The caveat was nonetheless expressed that the inter-governmental Conference with Turkey would only take place following the presentation of the Commission’s annual report and the discussion thereof by the GAC. The chapter was opened at the Accession Conference of 5 November 2013. However, the Council was unable in December 2013 to reach consensus on the opening of Chapter 23 (judiciary and fundamental rights) and Chapter 24 (justice, freedom, and security), as proposed by the Commission. Finally, on 16 December 2013, Turkey and the EU signed a readmission agreement. At the same time, formal negotiations were initiated concerning the cancellation of the visa requirement for short-term stays by Turkish nationals as of the moment that all requirements have been met (as set forth in the roadmap drafted by the EU).
**Iceland:** the new Icelandic Government, formed following the 27 April 2013 parliamentary elections, made it known that it did not wish to continue the accession negotiations with the EU as long as no referendum about the question had been held, in consequence whereof the government suspended the talks. At the government’s request, a team of independent Icelandic specialists composed an evaluation paper concerning the accession negotiations up to the present moment and concerning the development of the EU ("where is the EU going"). The evaluation will be presented to the Parliament in early 2014. Subsequently, a referendum will be organized to offer the population the opportunity to voice its opinion about what future course to take. As yet, no information is available about the time frame or about the questions that are likely to be posed within the context of the referendum.

**Montenegro:** the negotiations are being continued and on 18 December 2013 five new chapters could be opened: the chapter concerning the judiciary and fundamental rights (23), freedom, security, and justice (24), public procurements (5), company law (6) enterprises and industrial policy (20).

**Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia:** in its conclusions of December 2013, the Council notes that it largely shares the Commission’s analysis according to which generally sufficient attention is being devoted to the political criteria, yet underlines that it (the Council), taking due account of the possible decision to open accession negotiations, intends to re-open this question in 2014 on the basis of an upgraded report from the Commission. This upgraded report shall deal with the further implementation of the reforms within the context of the high-level accession dialogue and implementation of the political accord that was concluded on 1 March concerning the specific measures that were undertaken with a view to promoting good neighbourly relations and a negotiated and mutually acceptable solution to the question of the name.

In its conclusions, the Council voiced its satisfaction with the fact that the European agenda still remains the country’s strategic priority. The Council further applauds the progress that was achieved in improving the country’s capacity to fulfil the obligations and commitment resulting from the act of accession. The ministers emphasize that special attention needs to be paid to the legal priority, including the independence of the judiciary and the achievement of other results in the combat against corruption and organized crime. The freedom of expression and the place of the media in general raise questions. The Council requests that the matter of high unemployment be addressed, that the administration of public finances be reinforced, and that the problem of distinction between state and party be resolved.

### 8.2. Western Balkans

Following the initial agreement in principle concerning the normalisation of the relations concluded between the Serbian and Kosovo premiers, and given the progress achieved in the most important areas, the European Council, at the Commission’s recommendation, decided to open accession negotiations with **Serbia** on 28 June 2013. The Council did, nonetheless, point out that the phases in the normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Pristina shall form a component in the negotiations framework and requested High Representative ASHTON and the Commission to report further to the Council about the progress made by Belgrade in the implementation of the accord of 19 April. The General Affairs Council (GAC) meeting of December 2013 decided that the first accession conference shall take place on 21 January 2014 and approved the negotiations framework.

Notwithstanding the Commission’s recommendation to start negotiations with **Albania,** particularly due to the successful conduct of the parliamentary elections of 23 June 2013, the Council nonetheless decided on 17 December 2013, on the grounds of a report from the Commission, to postpone the question of granting Albania the status of candidate Member State until June 2014.

Given the lack of political will on the part of the Bosnian leaders and the rules governing language use that give rise to divisions, the General Affairs Council of December 2013 voiced its concern about the stagnant European integration process in **Bosnia-Herzegovina.** Based
on the determination that no solution could be found for implementing the decision by the European Court of Human Rights in the SEJDIC-FINCI case, nor for introducing a coordination mechanism for European subjects, the EU therefore approved in December 2013, within the framework of the pre-accession support instrument, a national programme for Bosnia-Herzegovina that is some 40 million Euro lower.

**Kosovo**: the negotiations concerning an Association and Stabilisation Agreement (ASA) with Kosovo formally got underway on 28 October 2013 on the basis of a decision by the Council meeting of June 2013. At the conclusion of the negotiations, the ASA should provide for broader collaboration towards promoting the development of economic and commercial relations, the free movement of workers, the freedom of establishment, the free provision of services as well as the free movement of capital. It is assumed that the agreement shall likewise contain a political component and a justice component.

The roadmap concerning visa liberalisation saw further implementation in 2013. It appears from an initial interim report issued by the Commission on February 2013 that Kosovo has made progress in reforming the legislation, though much work remains to be done as concerns its implementation (more specifically with reference to amendments to the laws on names, foreigners, asylum, border controls, and the funding of the political parties. Likewise, explanations need to be provided in the drafting of a law about the interception of telecommunications, the provisions of the new Criminal Code and the Criminal Procedures Code, plus the drafting of a law concerning the recovery of sums; in addition, there is the need to ratchet up the battle against organized crime and corruption). End of March 2013, Kosovo drew up an action plan in response to the recommendations of the Commission, which in early 2014 (presumably in February) shall proceed to a second evaluation of the implementation of the roadmap.

### 8.3. European Free Trade Association (EFTA)

2013 was also the year of further evaluation of the 20-year functioning of the EEA agreement, and also the year of the evaluation of the relations between the EU and the EFTA countries (Norway, Liechtenstein, Iceland, and Switzerland), based on the conclusions of the Council of 14 December 2010. The idea is to determine whether the existing relations framework adequately serves EU interests. While the EEA agreement may be said to be working well in general, there remain certain areas and topics that need further upgrading.

The institutional negotiations with Switzerland entered into a new phase in 2013. Based on the various hypotheses formulated by the EU, the key purpose of the matter was to replace the exclusively sectoral agreements by a horizontal mechanism. The discussions will be continued based on the choice of the Swiss population.

In 2013, multiple contacts were also established with the microstates (Andorra, San Marino, and Monaco) with a view to their increased rapprochement to the EU. An impact assessment of the Commission was distributed on 18 November 2013. In it, a plea is entered for the signing of one or several association agreements with the microstates. On 16 December 2013, the Council gave its approval to conclusions in that sense. They contain the recommendation that the EEAS and the Commission draw up in 2014 the draft negotiation mandate for one or several association agreements with the microstates.

The session of the EEA Council of 19 November 2013 likewise offered the opportunity to more closely investigate the delay in the application of EU legislation by Norway and the liberalisation of the agriculture.

A negotiation mandate concerning the contributions of EEA/Norway to the Cohesion Fund 2014-2020 (economic and social differences in the EEA) was approved.
8.4. European Neighbourhood Policy

8.4.1. Eastern Partnership

The Council of Foreign Affairs in 2013 paid ongoing attention to the Eastern Partnership in preparation of the Third Summit of the Eastern Partnership that took place on 29 and 30 November 2013 in Vilnius. Premier Di Rupo represented Belgium. At the informal dinner on 28 November, the Prime Minister of Luxembourg, Juncker, addressed the gathering on behalf of the Benelux.

Following busy negotiations in 2013, the EU initialled a number of association agreements with Moldova and Georgia at the Vilnius Summit, including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (AAs/DCFTAs).

On 25 November 2013, the Ukrainian authorities decided to suspend preparations for the signing of the AA/DCFTA. The EU repeated that its proposal remained in force and that it was ready to sign the agreement as soon as the conditions laid down by the Council of Foreign Affairs of December 2012 have been fulfilled. Within Ukraine, multiple voices were raised to try to convince the government to review its position on this matter. At the close of 2013, the country remained divided into two camps.

As concerns Azerbaijan, negotiations pertaining to the Association Agreement have not gone smoothly. Taking into account the Azeri preference to frame relations with the EU within a strategic partnership, the EU presented Azerbaijan in May 2013 with a strategic and modernisation partnership and matrix. The matrix provides, among others, for a security dialogue and contains an energy component with a temporary MoU until implementation of the Association Agreement.

The decision by Armenia to join the customs union with Russia meant that the DCFTA could not be initialled given the fact that membership in the customs union is incompatible from a technical and commercial perspective with the conclusion of a DCFTA with the EU. Since the DCFTA forms an integral part of the AA, the initialling of the AA was also impossible. The nature of the future EU-Armenian relations remains to be determined.

As concerns mobility, Georgia and Ukraine are currently in the process of implementing the action plans for visa facilitation. Since Moldova is fully ready to implement the action plan for visa liberalisation, the Commission proposed to facilitate the visa regulations with that nation; the Council and the European Parliament must make a pronouncement about this in 2014.

At the Vilnius Summit, a visa facilitation agreement was also signed between the EU and Azerbaijan. This agreement shall only enter into force when also the EU-Azerbaijan re-admission agreement has been signed. Following the EU-Armenia visa liberalisation agreement signed in December 2012, the EU-Armenia re-admission agreement was signed on 19 April 2013. Both agreements entered into force at the beginning of December 2013.

Belarus finally declared itself prepared to negotiate a re-admission and visa facilitation agreement with the EU and, hence, adopted a proposal that the EU had presented already in June 2011.

8.4.2. Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity (Southern Partnership)

Also in 2013, the EU paid special attention to its southern neighbour. Since the start of the "Arab Spring", the Council of Foreign Affairs has been discussing the situation during its monthly meetings.
For what concerns the European actions, account needs to be taken of the various factors that in the course of the past year have become even more conspicuous:

1. **The very divergent situations** in the southern Mediterranean. The media have devoted special attention to the dire situation on the ground and the political-military impasse in Syria. At the same time, it cannot be doubted that the entire region shall in future become affected by more or less drastic changes. Some countries appear to have taken this transition in their stride (Morocco, even Algeria), while others have fallen victim to the Syrian conflict (Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon), and still others have had to cope with a host of problems following the revolution (Egypt, Tunisia, Libya).

2. A great number of countries are still plagued by political instability, which confirms that the road up ahead remains long and arduous. Political Islam, which emerged after the elections as a prime political force, failed to meet expectations as the inclusivity of the political processes were all too often ignored.

3. The aspect of security has developed into a central issue and the re-institution of security has therefore largely become a determining factor for what lies up ahead. Because of the notable emergence of authoritarian military regimes that smooth the path for human traffickers and terrorists, security has in almost all of the countries involved been unable to keep pace and been relegated to the background. For example, the situation in the Sahel region is particularly alarming as the central authorities are not able to adequately oppose the militia organisations there and are floundering in their attempts to secure their borders. As a direct consequence, the frontier regions are being overwhelmed by all kinds of illicit trades, including the trade in migrants seeking a way to enter Europe. The Syrian war, with all of its horrific consequences for humanity, is slowly spreading and expanding into a regional conflict that threatens to envelop neighbouring countries such as Jordan and Lebanon. Moreover, this war has once again rekindled regional rivalries, as in the case between Iran and Saudi-Arabia.

4. Likewise the social-economic challenges are very important in the further course of the process. In most countries, economic problems and unemployment have increased. The intervention by the international community will only have meaning when political stability has been restored and properly adapted reforms have helped the economy on its way again, thus to once more attract investors and clients and offer the youthful segment of the population increased prospects of gainful employment.

Notwithstanding the undeniable impasse in which the region currently finds itself mired, there remains nonetheless a ray of hope. In some countries, the Arab Spring has sowed the seeds of a form of democracy, though this is still fragile. A structural movement has been started, fuelled in a number of countries by the population’s longing for greater freedom, prosperity, and justice. Tunisia may in this respect grow into a successful democratic transitional model, despite the political and economic problems in the area of security that remain to be dealt with. Likewise the negotiations in the context of the Peace Process in the Middle East, which in August were reopened for a period of 9 months under the American aegis, caused a relaxation of the tensions between Israel and Palestine within that conflict area.

Against the background of all of these developments, the EU has continued the implementation of its new European Neighbourhood Policy, initiated following the Arab Spring manifestations and founded on the principle of conditionality, own input and quick action. It is self-evident that the EU has had to demonstrate flexibility and adaptability in order to adequately deal with these principles within a changing context, which in turn has consequences in a number of areas, the impact of which cannot always be predicted accurately. Yet it is a fact that the support for civil society and the improvement of the socio-economic situation of the population in the various countries are and remain priorities. That was also the reasoning at during the Council of Foreign Affairs of August 2013, after President Morsi was ousted from power by the Egyptian military.
8.5. Russia

During the Yekaterinburg Summit in June 2013, it became evident that the EU and Russia continue to maintain very different standpoints on political and commercial issues, although the desire to establish closer economic ties is undeniably present. The EU once again stressed the importance it assigns to its strategic partner and reiterated its desire to complete the negotiations about a new all-encompassing agreement. At the same time, a number of problematic areas were addressed, such as unjust trade barriers, arrests, ongoing convictions and investigations of opposition members; the approval of laws that impede the freedom of associations, legislation concerning the financing of NGOs, the Internet, slander, defamation, blasphemy and betrayal; ... the ambiance between the EU and Russia suffered under the pressure that Moscow is exerting upon EU partner countries within the context of “EaP” (threats concerning energy prices, the erection of artificial trade barriers, the instrumentalisation of frozen conflicts in the region...), in order to dissuade them from initialing/signing the AA/DCFTAs. This kind of pressure even persuaded Armenia to join the Eurasian Community, which means that a DCFTA with the EU is now excluded.

In view of the above, not the slightest progress was made in the negotiations about a new agreement between the EU and Russia. In December, there was again a glimmer of hope when Moscow made known its readiness to discuss a number of proposals concerning trade and investments.

Finally, it should be mentioned that there has been further implementation of a number of “common measures” with a view to visa facilitation and that the parties in casu have organized several expert missions. The report presented by the Commission in December makes mention of progress in a number of areas but arrives at the conclusion that Russia at this stage has not yet undertaken all of the measures.

8.6. Central Asia

As it has been the case during the past years, EU relations with the five Central Asian Republics were conducted primarily within the framework of the EU Strategy for Central Asia as adopted in June 2007. The most recent progress report about implementation of the strategy released in June 2012 places the emphasis on new challenges such as the regional security situation within the context of the ISAF withdrawal from Afghanistan. In this context, on 13.06.2013 an initial meeting of the “High Level EU-Central Asia Security Dialogue” took place in Brussels, where a number of political and security issues, such as terrorism, the rise of Muslim extremism, drug trafficking, and the stability in Afghanistan were on the agenda. Furthermore, in October 2013, a “Central Asia Border Security Initiative” (CABSI) was also held in Ashgabat with the first-time involvement of Afghanistan.

On 20 November 2013, the Ministerial Meeting of EU-Central Asia was held in Brussels. Topics during this meeting included the “rule of law”, energy, trade and investments, WTO accession, and the role of the civil society. More sensitive issues were discussed during lunch, such as water management, the situation in Afghanistan, and the security risks.

Early December 2013, the European External Action Service resolved to develop a “Conflict Prevention Early Warning System” (CPEWS) for Central Asia, analogous to the pilot project that was started in July 2013 for the Sahel region. The choice of Central Asia was inspired by concerns about the security and safety situation following the ISAF withdrawal from Afghanistan. The objective of this system is the timely prevention of violent conflicts by means of risk analysis and the application of EU instruments.

In addition, discussions between the EU and Kazakhstan were restarted within the framework of the negotiations concerning a new and reinforced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, although on a less ambitious scale. Since July 2012, these negotiations have been lying fallow for quite some time because of lack of interest on the part of Kazakhstan. Mid-2013, however, Kazakhstan felt again motivated to reopen the talks. On 9 and 10 October 2013, the 4th negotiations round took place in Astana.
8.7. EU-Gulf Cooperation Council Relations

The high point in the relations between the EU and the GCC was the Foreign Affairs Ministerial Meeting of 30 June 2013 in Manama. While relations are primarily focused on political questions of common interest (Iran, Iraq, the peace process in the Middle East, Syria, the Arab Spring, and terrorism), it does not detract from the fact that in 2013 also attention was devoted to two other dossiers: the attempts to reboot the negotiations about a free trade agreement (FTA) that were initiated some twenty years ago but relegated to the background by the GCC at the end of 2008 for lack of an accord about “exports duties”, and the start of the new joint action plan 2014-2016. Notwithstanding the efforts of the Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission, Catherine Ashton, to turn it into a priority objective, it proved not possible to give the political signal for the start of the negotiations concerning the new action plan during the Foreign Affairs Ministerial Meeting in Manama. Now, the GCC has conceived the idea to negotiate about a Free Trade Agreement from which the export duties are to be absent (and about which there would be separate talks), and that is not acceptable to the EU. It is also a fact that the EU has become less attractive to the Gulf States, which are increasingly focusing more and more on Asia, and that the negotiations are likewise hampered by the dialogue concerning human rights and the EU’s decision to remove the GCC nations from the European list of countries that qualify for the Generalized System of Preferences (fewer customs duties for developing countries).

8.8. EU-Iraq Relations

Despite the unstable internal and external context (increased sectarian violence and the impact of the Syrian conflict), a start was made in 2013 of the implementation of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Iraq, which was signed on 11 May 2012. Three subcommittees met: “Energy and Trade” (9 and 10 October, Brussels), “Human Rights and Democracy” (11 November 2013, Baghdad) and “Cooperation” (12 November, Baghdad). The accord establishes the juridical basis for the future contractual relations between the parties and is inspired by the European desire to play an important role in the country and to assist it in achieving its integration into the region and within the international community. Likewise, the EU wishes to safeguard its interests in the country with respect to stabilisation and energy supplies. Be it further noted that this accord contains a number of important provisions: the principles of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and the fight against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are recognized as fundamental principles. For the first time ever, provisions concerning the recognition of the International Criminal Court have been entered into an agreement with an Arab state.

8.9. EU-United States of America Relations

Ever since President Obama took office, relations between the EU and the United States of America testify to broad agreement. The trans-Atlantic agenda has remained focused on general security, the economy, energy, and the environment. Topics concerning growth and employment have invariably remained high on the agenda and the parties are preparing the field with a view to eventual negotiations about a free trade agreement that will last for several years. For what concerns security, attention was given to Iran’s nuclear programme, the Middle East peace process, Syria, and Afghanistan.

8.10. EU-Canada Relations

The relations between the EU and Canada were primarily centred on the continuation of the negotiations concerning the “Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement” about which the parties on 18 October 2013 reached an agreement in principle, and on the negotiations about a new framework agreement to replace the agreement of 1976. The prime objective is to upgrade the framework for the relations between the parties, taking into account the many changes that have taken place in the EU during the past thirty years and to create a general framework for the many sectoral relations between the parties.
8.11. Central and Latin America

The 7th Summit Meeting between the countries of the European Union and those of Central and Latin America and the Caribbean (EU-LAC) took place on 26-27.01.2013 in Santiago de Chile (Chile). Given the internal dynamic within the region, it instantly became also the first EU-CELAC Summit, the new name for the cooperation between all 33 States south of the United States of America. In the course of this Summit, except for a final declaration, also a renewed Action Plan was adopted that builds further on the Madrid Action Plan but updates and expands it into new domains such as “gender” and investments.

In the course of 2013, the commercial and trade component of the Association Agreement between the European Union and the 6 countries of Central America (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama), signed on 29 June 2012 in Tegucigalpa (Honduras), officially entered into force, awaiting ratification of the global accord by all parties. An identical provisional application occurred with reference to the multi-party trade agreement between the EU-Colombia-Peru that was signed in Brussels on 26 June 2012. In contrast, negotiations concerning the EU-Mercosur Association Agreement made little or no progress.

On 24 January 2013, the 6th EU-Brazil Summit took place with and in Brazil. The trade and economic dossiers dominated this meeting. The Summit decided to create an ad-hoc Working Group in order to be able to follow up even more intensely the bilateral economic dossiers. Furthermore, agreements were concluded in the areas of scientific collaboration and animal welfare.

8.12. Africa: EU-Africa Strategy

In 2013, the study about the review of the EU-Africa strategy (the second Action Plan 2011-2013, which is divided into 8 partnerships, was approved at the third EU-Africa Summit in Tripoli at the end of 2010) was given concrete form on the European level and on the joint level with the African partners. It concerns the institutional architecture, the operating methods, and the resources, and is oriented towards simplification in order to render the strategy’s actions more effective.

At the same time, a start was made of the initial preparations for the 4th EU-Africa Summit on the topic: “Investing in the Population, Prosperity, and Peace”, which will be held on 2 and 3 April 2014 in Brussels.

8.13. The Cotonou Agreement (partnership between the ACP countries and the EU and its Member States that was concluded in 2000 and revised in 2005 and 2010)

In the final compromise concerning the multiannual financial framework 2014-2020 for the ACP countries and the overseas countries and regions, the European Council meeting of 8 February 2013 established the total amount for the 11th EDF (European Development Fund) at 30.506 million Euro. Following the implementation of the 11th EDF, the Member States have concluded an internal agreement in confirmation of the EDF amount. The agreement likewise establishes the distribution formula among the Member States and determines the distribution of the entire volume of the funds over different envelopes. For Belgium, the distribution formula is 3.24927% of the EDF, which translates into the amount of 991,222,306 Euro. The official signing by the Member States of the internal agreement about the 11th EDF (for the period 2014-2020) took place during the Foreign Affairs Council meeting of June 2013.

The 38th joint EU-ACP Council of Ministers took place in Brussels on 6 and 7 June 2013. Progress was made in a number of sectors: the EU and the ACP nations undertook to draft a joint declaration with a view to the second session of the High Level UN Dialogue on Migration and Development and a joint standpoint on post-2015 development. The EU presented the ACP party with the proposal to exchange ideas within the mixed EU-ACP working groups concerning the instruments to support the private sector. The purpose of this is, on the one hand, to draw up a status report of the results achieved by EU support of the private sector and, on the other, to determine the best way to assist this sector.
In the course of the year, discussions were held about the proposal for a decision of the Council concerning the overseas countries and regions’ association with the EU.

Likewise worth mentioning is the accession on 5 September 2013 of the Federal Republic of Somalia to the Cotonou Agreement.

8.14. Asia

Following the 9th “Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)” at the Heads of State and Government of Vientiane (Laos) level (see last year’s report), the ASEM Foreign Affairs Ministers gathered in New Delhi (India) on 11 and 12 November 2013. This meeting took place at the time when the super-typhoon “Haiyan” devastated the Philippines, as a result of which, aside from discussions on the world economic and financial situation, a great deal of attention was given to the Euro-Asian cooperation for what concerned ways to deal with natural disasters. In addition, important international topics such as non-proliferation, the Middle East situation, and maritime safety matters were discussed.

In the context of the relations with the “Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)”, further implementation was given to the New Action Plan for the period 2013-2017, adopted on 26-27.04.2012 in Bander Seri Begawan (Brunei) during the 19th Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting.

On the institutional plane, the European Union further expanded its relations with Asia. Hence, on 14 October 2013, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between the EU and Singapore was initialled. On 7 November 2013 followed the initialling of the PCA with Thailand. Negotiations with Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia concerning the PCA were continued. In the course of 2013, three rounds of negotiations were held with Japan about the Framework Agreement. Finally, a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement was concluded with Mongolia on 30 April 2013, and this in the course of the visit to the nation of the High Representative/Vice-President of the European Commission, ASHTON. In November 2013, also the Commission Chairman BARROSO paid a visit to the nation.

Finally, the European Union continued to develop its relations with its strategic partners. Summit meetings took place with South Korea (Brussels, 8 November 2013), Japan (Tokyo, 19 November 2013), and China (Beijing, 21 November 2013). With the latter country, an EU-China Strategic Agenda 2020 was concluded and negotiations for a bilateral investment agreement were launched.

8.15. The Pacific Ocean

The negotiations concerning a Framework Agreement with Australia, which had been decided upon in 2011, failed to book real progress in 2013, among other reasons because of disagreement about the suspensive clauses in the draft of the text as presented by the EU. However, two negotiation rounds were in 2013 conducted with New Zealand, in the course of which significant progress was made about the text of the agreement.

8.16. The Arctic Region

Given the growing strategic importance of the North Pole region, the EU has for a number of years been trying to develop its own policy vis-à-vis the arctic territories. One of the EU’s objectives in its North Pole strategy concerns international cooperation.

In this context, the EU in 2013 submitted its candidacy to gain the status of permanent observer in the Arctic Council, the most prominent cooperative forum in the region wherein the eight Arctic States (US, Russia, Canada, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark (Greenland) and Iceland) are collaborating on topics such as environmental protection and sustainable development. The EU candidacy was discussed during the Ministers Meeting of the Arctic Council held on 15 May 2013 in Kiruna (Sweden). The EU candidacy was “positively received”
but a final decision about its implementation shall only be taken when a solution has been found for Canadian objections to the EU import ban of seal products. In the meantime, the EU will be allowed – just as was the case during its ad hoc observation status – to attend the meetings of the Arctic Council, subject to a decision otherwise by the Council’s members.

8.17. The External Policy and the Financial Instruments in Support thereof

During its meeting of 17.12.2013, the Council (General Affairs) adopted conclusions related to the “review” of the European External Action Service (EEAS) on the basis of the report concerning the functioning of the service as presented by High Representative Catherine Ashton in July 2013. The Council expressed its broad support for the internal aspects of the EEAS’s organisation and its function.

Furthermore, in 2013 an agreement was reached on the various financial instruments of Rubric IV of the EU budget containing the means and resources for external action.

8.18. The European Union’s Development Cooperation

8.18.1. Objective of the EU’s Official Development Aid (ODA)

In 2012, the total ODA sum dropped from €56.3 billion in 2011 to €55.2 billion, or from 0.45% to 0.43% of the European gross national product (GNP). The total ODA sum for all of the EU Member States alone dropped from €52.8 billion to €50.6 billion, or from 0.42% to 0.39% of the GNI.

Nevertheless, the EU and its Member States remain the principal financiers in terms of ODA and their contribution accounts to more than half of all aid worldwide.

In 2012, further efforts were devoted on several fronts to working out a new definition of ODA, and a number of different expert groups were studying the various approaches. Discussions are being held within the OECD-DAC, which, aside from the Commission, is composed of various (but not all) Member States in the Development Aid Committee. They have a direct link with the discussions that are ongoing within the UN concerning the financing of the post-2015 Development Agenda.

8.18.2. Millennium Objectives (MO)/framework for development - Follow-up of Rio+20: Preparations for the post-2015 Period

The Council’s conclusions about the European complementation of the post-2015 agenda, which were approved in June, largely demonstrate broad consensus about a cautious approach: the EU specifically underlines the willingness to become engaged in the process and at this stage is not yet advancing any specific objectives in order to offer sufficient opportunities to the negotiations. The EU strongly advocates an integrated approach. This will, in the course of the year, be taken up again in the various high-level meetings. Belgium does, however, insist on internal deepening of the different topics.

8.18.3. Updating of the European Union’s Development Policy

Gradually, each topic is being weighed against this post-2015 agenda and incorporated within its framework. Updating development cooperation within the international context ought to happen within this framework. New instruments for financing need to be encapsulated; the importance of ODA is declining in international flows to the benefit of private flows and remittances. Nevertheless, it does remain an important element, certainly for the poorest nations that often have to cope with lingering problems of fragile constitutions and the aftermath of conflicts.

A number of Council conclusions may be situated within this framework. The Communication concerning nutrition led to Council decisions about food safety and nutrition. Still more far-reaching is the new approach to resilience, also the subject of Council decisions that were
approved in May. This new broader approach is focused on greater coordination between emergency aid and structural reconstruction to prevent a relapse in the future. Moreover, Council decisions were approved about the local administrations and their role in development action. In the context of new trends in global financing of development cooperation, mention ought also to be made of the follow-up and reporting of the functioning of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, formed to follow up on the post-Busan period.

Much of the year was devoted to the sometimes very technical discussions concerning the drafting of the new rules concerning the financing of the EU’s external aid via the various instruments for, among others, cooperation with developing nations (aside from neighbourhood…). These discussions proved quite difficult and have not yet been concluded for the European Development Fund (EDF). For instance, in order to arrive at a compromise, no ruling was worked out about a list of countries that would be beneficiaries of the DCI instrument (since no agreement could be reached about which countries would be graduating to a higher status and, hence, no longer would have access to bilateral funds, only to regional and thematic funds).

Within the context of working out the new rules and the distribution of the budget for the EDF, the Council decisions concerning democratic governance were important. These decisions were drawn up following the EU report about the use of the specific extra financing that was provided as encouragement to good governance in the 10th EDF. The discussions concerning a similar initiative are being continued in 2014. In this context, also worth mentioning is the drafting of the Council conclusions (not yet completed in 2013) concerning the very critical audit report of the European Court of Auditors on the implementation of the governance programmes in DRC.

In 2014, joint programming shall in the first on a list of more than 40 countries be worked out in concreto. The aim is to improve the coordination between the EU and its Member States as concerns the joint preparation of the country programmes.

8.18.4. Coherence of the Development Policy

In November, the fourth bi-annual report about policy coherence resulted in Council conclusions that were debated within the Foreign Affairs Council. It concerned a reaffirmation of the importance that is being attached to the reinforcement of coherence in the pursuit of objectives aimed at the eradication of poverty and improving the effectiveness of EU’s external aid.

8.19. Participation in Aid Programmes

8.19.1. The EU Aid Programmes concerning the community acquis: Twinning and TAIEX

On 3 June 2013, the Directorate-General for European Affairs and Coordination, jointly with the European Commission, organised its annual information meeting about the European Aid Programmes Twinning and TAIEX for the Belgian federal and federated administrations and semi-public institutions. In this context, also an explanation was planned about the “Task Force for Greece”. The “Task Force for Greece” was formed in September 2011 for the purpose of proffering technical assistance within the framework of the reform programme worked out by the EU and the IMF for Greece.
In 2013, our country (on the part of the Socio-Economic Council of Flanders), together with Germany and Lithuania, submitted a proposal for a Twinning project to promote social dialogue in Serbia. The German-Belgian-Lithuanian consortium was not selected and the project was assigned to Slovakia. In addition, Belgium at the end of December submitted on the part of the Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain and the Centre for Veterinarian Research and Agrochemistry proposals for two Twinning projects in the veterinarian sector for Algeria. The results of the selections for these projects shall be released in early 2014.

In addition to the above, in 2013 a great number of experts participated in short-term activities (missions, study visits) within the context of TAIEX for the following nations: Iceland, Turkey, the western Balkan States, the eastern neighbouring countries of the EU (more specifically for Armenia, Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine) and the southern neighbouring countries (specifically for Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia). Belgian aid encompasses a great number of domains: customs, domestic affairs (combat against organized crime, asylum and migration control), the public sector, the environment (with a focus on waste management), assistance to SMEs and the promoting of the business climate, port infrastructures, agriculture, food safety, public health, consumer affairs, employment, the protection of human rights, the banking sector, local administrations, urban mobility, trans-Europe networks, electricity supply, and support for the security sector.

8.19.2. The Bilateral Aid Programmes: information sessions and information seminars

From 30 September to 4 October 2013, the Directorate-General for European Affairs and Coordination organized a training session about the EU Policy for ten Montenegrin diplomats and civil servants. During this session, the Belgian experts provided explanations on topics such as economic diplomacy, the management of the structural funds, regional cooperation, the transposition of directives, environmental policy, financial and budgetary provisions, justice and domestic affairs, and the combat against money laundering.

IX. Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)

Belgium also in 2013 continued its pursuit of a united, purposeful, well-balanced and, where needed, forceful European Foreign Policy in the service of our common interests. In the process, Belgium continued to offer further assistance to the continued development of an efficient European External Action Service (EEAS), as likewise to the High Representative and Vice-President of the Commission, Catherine Ashton, that she might wear both her ‘hats’ in rendering the best possible service to the European External Policy. Belgium therefore took great satisfaction in a number of significant diplomatic successes achieved in 2013 by the High Representative, not the least among which was the EU-negotiated agreement between Serbia
and Kosovo about the normalisation of mutual relations (19 April 2013) and likewise the interim agreement with Iran on the nuclear question and sanctions (24 November 2013). Up to now, Belgium has participated in all current military CFSP operations and training missions (a total of 8), and in 15 of the 20 civil CFSP missions, while also making a substantial contribution to two CFSP missions launched in 2013: EUTM in Mali and EUBAM in Libya.
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