

*Please provide the following details on the origin of this report*

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Date of submission:	31 October 2001

***Please provide summary information on the process by which this report has been prepared, including information on the types of stakeholders who have been actively involved in its preparation and on material which was used as a basis for the report***

05.10.2000. During the 14<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting of the Steering Committee 'Biodiversity Convention'<sup>1</sup>, members were informed on COP decision V/19 regarding the drafting of the Second National Report of Belgium to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

14.02.2001. 16<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting of the Steering Committee 'Biodiversity Convention': establishment of a contact group aiming to develop the second national report and consisting of experts and representatives of federal and regional departments directly involved in the reporting process.

06.03.2001. First formal meeting of the contact group 'National reporting': determination of the adequate redaction methodology for, and format of, the second national report. For this purpose, a consensus was reached upon the use of the questionnaire developed by the CBD-Secretariat and recommended in decision V/19 of COP-5.

March-April 2001. Written consultation round through which all stakeholders (experts and departments not represented during contact group meeting, scientific institutions, private sector, non-governmental organisations, etc.) were invited to contribute on the basis of the questionnaire.

19.04.2001. Second formal meeting of the contact group 'National reporting': based on compiled written contributions received before the meeting and oral contributions of the participants during the meeting, the questionnaire was completed as much as possible. Due to the appropriate meeting organisation (big screen projection and on-line completion of questionnaire), all 377 questions were discussed or at least quoted.

End of April 2001. Based on all oral and written contributions, a first version of the second national report was widely disseminated. The members of the CCIEP-groups 'Biodiversity Convention', 'Nature', 'Forests', 'Agriculture and environment', 'Trade and environment' and 'Biosafety', the experts of the thematic contact groups such as 'Ecosystem approach' and 'Impact assessment, liability and redress' and all the persons who already made some kind of contribution received this first version and were asked to further complete the questionnaire, to make additional notes, to give comments, etc.

June 2001. Based on the resulting contributions, comments and suggestions, a second version of the national report was developed. This version was placed on the Belgian Clearing-House Mechanism (B CHM) website as a consultation draft giving the opportunity to all stakeholders to transmit final comments and contributions to the National Focal Point.

The final version was submitted for approval to the CCIEP and the Interministerial Conference for the Environment. After approval, the official final version was published as a paperback on 31.10.2001 and placed on the B CHM in replacement of the consultation draft.

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<sup>1</sup> The Steering Committee 'Biodiversity Convention' acts under the Co-ordinating Committee for International Environmental Policy (CCIEP) and includes representatives of all federal and regional departments involved with biodiversity, experts specialised in various related themes, and the presidents, or their representatives, of related CCIEP-groups such as 'Nature', 'Forests', 'Agriculture and environment', 'Trade and environment' and 'Biosafety'.

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**Please provide information on any particular circumstances in your country that are relevant to understanding the answers to the questions in this report**

1. Geographical notes

Belgium is situated in the west of Europe, bordered by the North Sea, the Netherlands, Germany, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and France. Although a small country (30,528 km<sup>2</sup>), its location favoured its past and actual position as an economic and urban nerve centre of Europe.

Belgium has a mild temperate wet climate, the south-eastern parts of the country (High Ardennes, Eiffel) nevertheless display features of a slightly more continental climate. Belgium offers a diversity of sites and landscapes due to its very long, eventful geological history, as well as the widely varying - at first glance almost imperceptible - climatic conditions from one region to another.

At the end of 2000 Belgium had a population of 10,239,000 inhabitants. The population density reaches 335 inhabitants per square kilometer, which makes Belgium, together with the Netherlands, one of the most densely populated countries in Europe. The gross national product (GNP) of Belgium for 1998 amounts to 9,189 billions BEF. The greatest part of the GNP comes from the tertiary sector, employing the largest part of the working population.

Geographically Belgium shows three major areas: Lower Belgium (up to 100 m above sea level), Middle Belgium (between 100 and 200 m above sea level) and Upper Belgium (from 200 to over 500 m above sea level).

2. Biological diversity

The diversity of the physical environment has resulted in an equally great biological diversity. The vast majority of components of the actual fauna and flora, roughly estimated at more than 40,000 species, colonised Belgium after the last glaciation, some 12,000 years ago. During the last 100 years, wildlife, plants, and ecological processes have been threatened by pollution of water, air and soils, intensive agricultural practices, fragmentation of nature areas, etc. A significant number of wild species has disappeared. This is particularly well-documented for higher plants, vertebrates, various insect groups, spiders and non-marine molluscs. In recent years, a recovery of formerly declining populations in various groups has been observed, most probably as a result of many conservation regulations and actions.

3. Political framework

Belgium gained its independence in 1830. In recent years, the country has rapidly evolved, through four sets of institutional reforms (in 1970, 1980, 1988-89 and 1993) into a federal structure. A fifth one is currently under process. As a result, the first article of the Belgian Constitution states nowadays: "Belgium is a Federal State which consists of Communities and Regions" (see Fig. 1).

The redistribution of competences followed two broad lines. The first line of reforms concerns linguistic matters and, more broadly, everything related to culture. Thus Belgium has three Communities today, based on language: the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-speaking Community.

The second line of the State reform is historically inspired by economic

concerns, expressed by Regions who wanted to have more autonomous power. This gave rise to the founding of three Regions: the Flemish Region, the Brussels Capital Region and the Walloon Region. To some extent Belgian Regions are similar to the German 'Länder' or the Swiss cantons. The country is further divided into 10 provinces (since 1 January 1995) and 589 communes or cities.

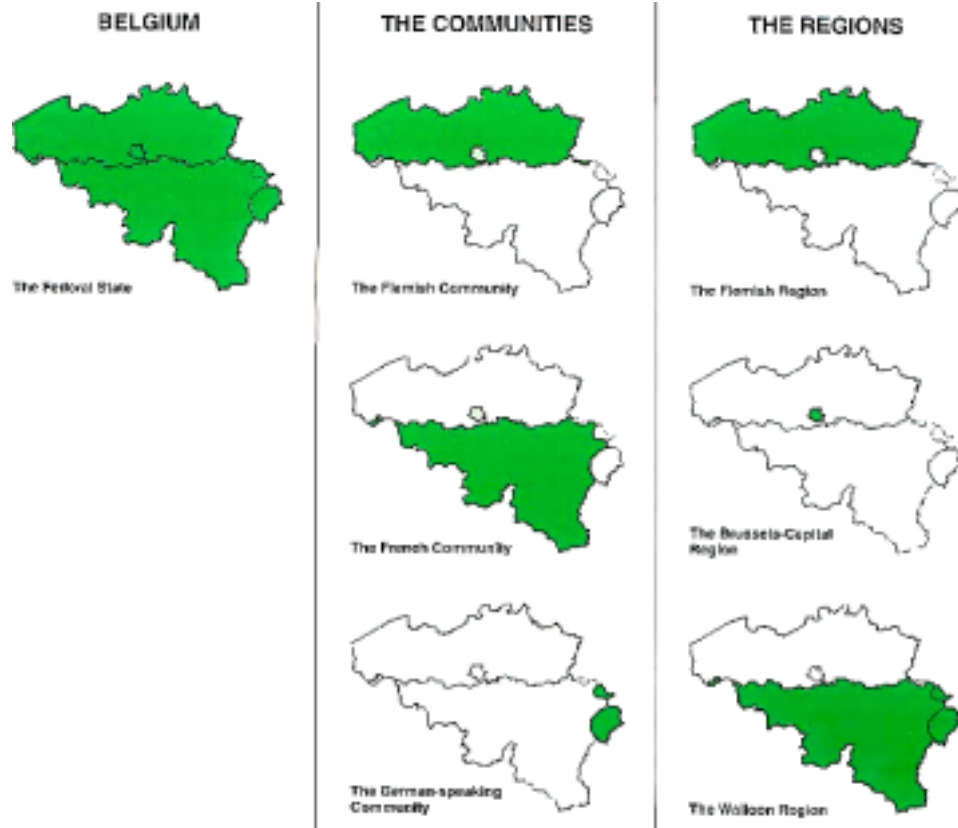


Fig. 1 - Belgium, a Federal State which consists of Communities and Regions

Because of these reforms, Belgium has a very distinct and unusual character. Under the level of the Federal Government are situated two lower levels of government: that of the Regions and that of the Communities, each with their own parliament and government. Since 1980, nature conservation is a shared responsibility of the Federal Government and the Regions.

The Federal State level retains important areas of competence including: foreign affairs, defence, justice, finances, social security, important sectors of public health and domestic affairs, etc. The Regions are *inter alia* competent in the fields of nature and water management, land zoning and nature conservation, spatial planning and public works. Furthermore the Regions and Communities are entitled to run foreign relations in those areas where they are competent.

Although nature conservation policy is mostly a regional matter, co-ordination bodies, under the authority of the Federal Minister for Environment, are in charge of its international aspects. For environmental matters the federal co-ordinating body is the Co-ordinating Committee for International Environmental Policy (CCIEP), composed by representatives of all the federal and regional competent administrations. This body functions

under the high level authority of the Interministerial Conference for the Environment (ICE), chaired by the Federal Minister for Environment.

#### 4. Belgium and the Convention on Biological Diversity

Belgium signed the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) on 5 June 1992, during the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro). Due to the fourth set of the institutional reform (1993) the ratification process was complex. The instrument of ratification of Belgium was deposited at the United Nations in New York on 22 November 1996. Belgium became hence a Contracting Party to the Convention on that day. In pursuance of Art. 36, point 3, of the Convention, the Convention on Biological Diversity entered into force for Belgium on 20 February 1997. In July 1995, the CCIEP designated the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (RBINS) as the National Focal Point for the follow-up of the CBD.

Several steering committees are currently operating under the direct authority of the CCIEP, one of these is the Steering Committee 'Biodiversity Convention'. Concerning the terms of reference for this Steering Committee, priority was given to the preparation of the First National Report and of a Country Study on Biological Diversity. The Steering Committee has also a more political function concerning the preparatory, participatory and negotiation activities related to the CBD process.

As mentioned above, the implementation of Article 6 of the Convention on Biological Diversity is mostly a Regional competence. The objectives, strategies and action plans of the Regions are reflected by detailed information in relevant text boxes. However, several federal bodies also have an important role in the achievement of the aims of the Convention. These federal bodies are mainly the Ministry for Consumers interests, Health and Environment, the Ministry for Economy and Scientific Research, the Ministry for Agriculture and Middle Classes, and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Co-operation.

Since the Convention on Biological Diversity does not afford particular attention to urban biodiversity, the implementation of the Convention in urban areas, such as the Brussels Capital Region, is not evident. At times were almost half of the world's population lives in urban areas, a debate on urban biodiversity has become inevitable. Not only cities are suitable for a high level of biodiversity, recent development has also shown that suburban areas often have richer biodiversity than the surroundings of agricultural areas.