



# GLOBAL GOVERNANCE INSTITUTE

## National Backgrounders – European Foreign Policy

### Country Profile

#### *Belgium*

<b>Capital:</b>	Brussels
<b>Geographical Size:</b>	30 528.0 km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Population:</b>	11 203 992 (2014)
<b>Population as % of total EU population:</b>	2.2% (2014)
<b>GDP:</b>	€ 382,692 billion (2013)
<b>Defense Expenditure:</b>	€ 3.939 million (2013)
<b>Official EU language(s):</b>	Dutch, French, and German
<b>Political System:</b>	Federal parliamentary constitutional monarchy
<b>EU member country since:</b>	1 January 1958
<b>Seats in European Parliament:</b>	1 January 1958
<b>Currency:</b>	Eurozone member since 1 January 1999
<b>Schengen area member?</b>	Schengen Area member since 26 March 1995
<b>Presidency of the Council:</b>	12 times between 1958 and 2010

Source: Europa.eu

## GGI National Backgrounders – European Foreign Policy 2015

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Peace & Security Section

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### a. Political System

Belgium is a federal parliamentary constitutional monarchy, divided into communities and regions, which handle different competences. Its capital is Brussels, and its head of state is the King Philippe of Belgium, most of the time represented by the Prime Minister and head of government (currently Charles Michel, *MR*). Due to the three official languages and various cultures in Belgium, the political system is complex and tensions between the various identities are common.

Competences in the country are distributed between the different communities (French Community, Flemish Community, and German-speaking Community) and regions (Walloon Region, Flemish Region, and Brussels-Capital Region). They have proper legislative and executive organs. **Communities** were defined according to the spoken language, and thus deal with matters such as education, culture, and the media. **Regions** were delimited with regard to economic interests, and thus handle issues such as trade, employment, housing, energy, and transport. The **federal state** still remains competent in various areas, for instance foreign affairs, justice, finance, and defense.<sup>1</sup>

The federal government (Council of Ministers), equally composed of Dutch-speakers and French-speakers, exercises the executive power. It implements the legislation and also participates in its elaboration, as it is entitled to suggest and amend legislation shaped by the Parliament.<sup>2</sup> Political coalition is the rule in the government, which composition reflects that of the Parliament. The Council of Ministers has not been represented by a unique political majority since 1925 because of proportional composition of the Federal Parliament and of the numerous political parties. The current Council of Ministers, presided by Charles Michel, is a right wing coalition between the Flemish Christian Democratic Party (*CD&V*), the French-speaking liberal Reformer Movement (*MR*), the nationalist and conservatist Neo-Flemish Alliance (*N-VA*), and the Flemish Liberals and Democrats (*Open VLD*).

Legislative power is exercised by the bicameral federal Parliament, composed of the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate. The Chamber of Representatives (lower house) is currently composed of twelve different political parties, and divided between Dutch-speaking and French-speaking deputies in proportion to the Belgian population. The most influent ones are the French (*MR*) and Flemish (*N-VA* and *CD&V*) right-wing parties, and the French Socialist Party (*PS*) and its Flemish equal (*SP.A*).<sup>3</sup>

### b. Foreign Policy

Belgium's Foreign Policy is focused on three areas, according to the official website of the national Foreign Affairs Ministry: peace and security, human rights, and global solidarity. As Belgium is a small, multicultural, and central country surrounded by big states, most of its foreign policy is directed towards global and regional matters. In order to achieve these objectives and despite its former neutral status, Belgium is now part of many international organizations such as the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United Nations (UN), the Council of Europe (CoE), and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). It holds many international organizations' headquarters in Brussels, such as for the EU and NATO.

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<sup>1</sup> *Portail belgium.be*. Web. Accessed May 28, 2015. <http://www.belgium.be/fr/>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

### *European Union (EU)*

Belgium was one of the six founding members of what later became the EU and thus has always been actively campaigning for its development and deepening. As illustrated by the many EU institutions having their headquarters in Brussels<sup>4</sup>, European policy is essential for Belgium<sup>5</sup>. In the last country's *Activity Report* (2012), two fields of interest are emphasized as part of Belgium's foreign policy within the EU: the financial and economic situation (due to the effect of the 2008 crisis) and EU's foreign trade.

In this report, the Union's response to the financial and economic crisis is firstly analyzed, and the needs of strengthening the economic pillar of the **Economic and Monetary Union** and of creating a Banking Union are stressed. Secondly, the report mentions the 2014-2020 Multinational Financial Framework, for which Belgium took an important part in the negotiations. Belgium appears to give crucial importance to the European budget, as it stimulates growth and employment on the continent. Thirdly, Belgium's part in the EU's **Foreign Trade** negotiations illustrates the country's focus on the global role of the EU. It notably supported the creation and improvement of bilateral agreements with ASEAN countries and Canada. It also stressed the importance of close cooperation with international financial organizations such as the WTO. Finally are mentioned Belgium's great abilities at rapidly transposing EU laws in the national legislation, its difficulties to reduce the number of Commission infringement proceedings against the country, and its important role in many cases brought before the European legal institutions.<sup>6</sup>

### c. Peace & Security Policy

Peace and security is an important component of Belgium's foreign policy, in particular regarding conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and peacekeeping. With these priorities in mind, the country adopts a **comprehensive approach**, which requires multidimensional cooperation at the international level. Therefore, Belgium's part in multilateral coordination notably takes place within the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), UN, NATO, OSCE and Council of Europe.<sup>7</sup> The specific spheres of interest mentioned in the official website of the national Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation Ministry are: conflict prevention and peacebuilding, sanctions, peace and security in international organizations, terrorism, peace operations, and disarmament and non-proliferation.

Belgium is one of the strongest "believers" in the EU's CFSP, which it uses to combat issues related to its own security. In general, Belgium privileges the representation and defense of its interests in the EU's fora. It thus often operates via the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the EU Delegations worldwide for security matters, as explained by Sven Biscop in his *Letter from Brussels* for Carnegie Europe. In fact, Belgium has always been one of the most active countries in terms of European integration, especially concerning a common approach to foreign policy (e.g. notable roles of Paul-Henri Spaak, Etienne Davignon, and Leo

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<sup>4</sup> The European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of the EU, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, the European Data Protection Supervisor, and the European External Action Service have headquarters in Brussels.

<sup>5</sup> "Policy", *Kingdom of Belgium Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation*. Web. Accessed May 27, 2015. <http://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/policy/>

<sup>6</sup> Kingdom of Belgium Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, *Activity Report 2012*, Brussels, 2013, p. 37-41. Web. Accessed May 27, 2015.

[http://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/binaries/BuZa%20-%20Jaarverslag%202012%20-%20EN\\_tcm312-225945.pdf](http://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/binaries/BuZa%20-%20Jaarverslag%202012%20-%20EN_tcm312-225945.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> "Policy", *Kingdom of Belgium Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation*. Web. Accessed May 27, 2015. <http://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/policy/>

Tindemans). According to Biscop, Belgium is however underestimating its potential in the international sphere, by seeing itself as a small state and by confounding its national foreign policy with the EU's foreign policy. Belgium is in fact the ninth largest EU member by population and has exerted great influence on the European and international agendas. This great potential has been undermined by overshadowing and constant local political turmoil.<sup>8</sup>

### *European Union (EU)*

As a member of the EU, Belgium takes strong part in the CFSP and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The country has always been advocating stronger **cohesion** within the EU and powerful international influence, and promotes the greater stability of the region that the CFSP can create. It is in fact under Belgian presidency of the Council of the EU that were established the structures and procedures of the CSDP. With this regard, Belgium's view emphasizes the benefit of the **diversified security approach** of the EU (in comparison with NATO's). The country sees civilian resources (e.g. police and judges) as increasingly important when tackling crisis management.<sup>9</sup> In 2012, a CSDP helicopter-training program (GREEN BLADE) took place in Belgium<sup>10</sup>, and in 2014-2015, Belgium participated in about 2% of NATO's common-funded budgets and programs (civil and military combined).<sup>11</sup>

According to Sven Biscop's article *Belgium and the miracle of European defence* for the Egmont Institute, the country's strong belief in the CSDP is both a strength and a weakness. It is a strength because it provides scarce purpose for the development of the CFSP and CSDP and because it maintains the transatlantic alliance (CSDP being the European pillar of NATO). It is a weakness because its justification is not clear, which obscures the original purpose of such a development. He points out that Belgium has notably developed the concept of "**pooling and sharing**" and greatly supports the **autonomy** of the CSDP from NATO. Belgium participated in the air campaigns in Libya (EUBAM Libya) and Iraq (EUJUST LEX-Iraq), the naval campaign against piracy (Operation ATALANTA), and the training mission in Mali (EUTM-Mali).<sup>12</sup>

### *North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)*

Belgium is also one of the founding members of the Atlantic Alliance of 1949, which later became the *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*. Its **headquarters** are situated in Brussels, and its **military command** (SHAPE) is found in the Belgian city of Mons. The country has always been advocating this military alliance, and is one of its strongest supporters in Europe. The recent closer work of the EU with NATO (e.g. 2003 Berlin Plus Agreement) shows how the alliance matters for European security, and thus for Belgium.

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<sup>8</sup> Biscop, S. "Letter From Brussels", *Judy Dempsey's Strategic Europe*, Carnegie Europe, April 10, 2015. Web. Accessed November 9, 2015. <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=59735>

<sup>9</sup> "Policy", *Kingdom of Belgium Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation*. Web. Accessed May 27, 2015. <http://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/policy/>

<sup>10</sup> Council of the European Union, *2011 Comprehensive Annual Report on CSDP and CSDP-related training*, Brussels, November 2011, p. 14. Web. Accessed June 1, 2015. [http://eeas.europa.eu/csdp/documents/pdf/st17438\\_en11\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/csdp/documents/pdf/st17438_en11_en.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> "NATO Common-Funded Budgets & Programmes", *The North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, Web. Accessed September 22, 2015. [http://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2014\\_06/20140611\\_20140601\\_NATO\\_common\\_funded\\_budgets\\_2014-2015.pdf](http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2014_06/20140611_20140601_NATO_common_funded_budgets_2014-2015.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Biscop, S. "Belgium and the Miracle of European Defence" In Fiott, D. (ed.) *The Common Security and Defence Policy: National Perspectives*, Egmont Institute, No. 79, May 2015. Web. Accessed June 22, 2015. <http://www.egmontinstitute.be/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/ep79.pdf>

The country is currently involved in various NATO-led missions: in Afghanistan (ISAF), Libya (OUP), and Kosovo (KFOR)<sup>13</sup>. With regard to ISAF, Belgium contributed to the mission by providing airlift support to the coalition against the Taliban regime and Al Qaeda, providing specific security within airports and constant support for combat missions in the framework of operation “Guardian Falcon”. Belgian Armed Forces will continue being involved in Afghanistan in 2015 by providing 70 military personnel as part of the new Resolute Support Mission (RSM). In 2014, the country planned a deployment of air and ground forces in Poland, in the framework of the Readiness Action Plan (RAP), specifically the Enhanced Baltic Air Policing 2015.<sup>14</sup>

#### *United Nations (UN)*

Belgium is part of the UN since the founding of the organization in 1945, and today represents it through its national priorities including economic, environmental, developmental and humanitarian issues, human rights, peace and security, and development cooperation. It has been very active in those areas, notably as a member of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), and of the Human Rights Council (HRC) (2009-2012). It regularly contributes to UN funds and programs, as well as projects of organizations such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

In May 2015, Belgium announced a new contribution of € 18.75 million to the UN Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), covering the years 2015-2017. As of September 2015, the country was participating in three UN missions: in the Democratic Republic of the Congo<sup>15</sup> (MONUSCO) with one expert and one contingent, in Lebanon (UNIFIL) with one contingent, and in the Golan Heights (UNTSO) with two experts. Many UN offices are based in Brussels, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Labour Organization (for the European Union and the Benelux countries), and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.<sup>16</sup>

#### *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)*

Since 1973, Belgium has been a member of the OSCE (originally named the *Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe*) and is now permanently represented in the organization’s headquarters in Vienna. In 2014, Belgium spent €4.768.222 (3,4% of total share) for the OSCE’s unified budget, and had three nationals part of the OSCE staff.<sup>17</sup>

#### *Council of Europe (CoE)*

Since its creation in 1949, the Council of Europe counts Belgium among its members. The country greatly supports the work of this organization by encouraging and fighting for respect of European values and fundamental rights and freedoms. For the year 2015, Belgium’s

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<sup>13</sup> “Policy”, *Kingdom of Belgium Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation*. Web. Accessed May 27, 2015. <http://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/policy/>

<sup>14</sup> “Speech by Minister Reynders on the priorities of the Belgian diplomacy”, *Kingdom of Belgium Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation*, January 16, 2015. Web. Accessed June 1, 2015.

[http://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/Newsroom/news/press\\_releases/foreign\\_affairs/2015/01/ni\\_190115\\_speech\\_minister\\_reynders.jsp](http://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/Newsroom/news/press_releases/foreign_affairs/2015/01/ni_190115_speech_minister_reynders.jsp)

<sup>15</sup> The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is a former Belgian colony.

<sup>16</sup> “Permanent Mission of Belgium to the UN”, *Permanent Mission of Belgium to the United Nations in New York*. Web. Accessed May 29, 2015. <http://countries.diplomatie.belgium.be/en/newyorkun/>

<sup>17</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), *Annual Report 2014*, July 2015. Web. Accessed September 1, 2015. <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/169971?download=true>

contribution to the CoE was of € 7.075.121.<sup>18</sup> In August 1949, former Belgian Foreign Affairs Minister Paul-Henri Spaak chaired the first meeting of the Committee of Ministers of the organizations, which is the political decision-making body of the organization. From November 2014 to May 2015, Belgium chaired again the CoE's Committee of Ministers. It was Foreign Affairs Minister Didier Reynders who took this role.<sup>19</sup>

The priorities put forward by Belgium during its Chairmanship of the CoE Committee of Ministers included: to continue reforms of the CoE's organization according to the Secretary-General recommendations, to organize political consultations between the CoE and other international organizations, to emphasize the Member States' shared responsibility for the implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, to strengthen human rights protection, to promote the future of social rights and the role of culture and education in Europe, and to enhance the role of governance and local authorities.<sup>20</sup>

### *Strategic Culture*

Belgium builds its security strategy on the basis of the **ESS** and the prerogatives it established, as well as the **NATO Strategic Concept** defined in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The ESS adopted by the European Council in 2003 established a list of threats to tackle in priority: terrorism, proliferation of WMDs, regional conflicts, failing states, and organized crime. The need for a NATO Strategic Concept emerged in 2010 after a summit of the organization held in Lisbon.<sup>21</sup>

Belgium's good relations with the USA made it become a devoted NATO partner. Due to its traditional focus on commerce and industry, Belgium does not have a strong defense culture. The country rather focuses on strategic alliances, since its historical neutrality has come to a clear end. Belgium has become one of the first advocates of **Western common defense**, on which it highly depends. It has strongly supported the idea of military cooperation within the EU, and has been engaged in international operations under the auspices of the UN, NATO and EU since the 1990s.<sup>22</sup>

Belgium faced some difficulties with regard to the management of the necessary transformation of its Armed Forces, which had to switch from territorial to expeditionary operations. As pointed out by Alexander Mattelaer from the Institute for European Studies (IES), the country still faces issues with regards to management of its military. In his policy brief, the author suggests to opt for a "balanced force", invest in a broader range of assets, and clearly increase its defense expenditures, due to the unpredictable character of future threats. Moreover, due to its strong partnership with NATO, the country faces tensions with states not sharing the same status and more directed towards an exclusive EU defense. Also, Belgium's advocacy for a **EU military force** regularly faces opposition within the EU.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> "Belgium", *The Council of Europe*, 2015. Web. Accessed November 9, 2015.

<http://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/belgium>

<sup>19</sup> "Chairmanship of the Council of Europe", *Belgian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe*. Web. Accessed June 1, 2015. [http://countries.diplomatie.belgium.be/en/coe2015/chairmanship\\_coe/](http://countries.diplomatie.belgium.be/en/coe2015/chairmanship_coe/)

<sup>20</sup> "Priorities of the CM Chairmanship – Belgium", *The Council of Europe*, 2015. Web. Accessed November 9, 2015. <http://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/belgianchairmanship-priorities>

<sup>21</sup> "Policy", *Kingdom of Belgium Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation*. Web. Accessed May 27, 2015. <http://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/policy/>

<sup>22</sup> Delaunoy, D., "Euroatlantic Community and Strategic Culture: Analysis of the Strategic Culture and the Defence Policy of Belgium", *Charles University in Prague*, 2014, p. 5-7. Web. Accessed June 1, 2015.

[https://www.academia.edu/6212379/Analysis\\_of\\_the\\_Strategic\\_Culture\\_and\\_the\\_Defence\\_Policy\\_of\\_Belgium](https://www.academia.edu/6212379/Analysis_of_the_Strategic_Culture_and_the_Defence_Policy_of_Belgium)

<sup>23</sup> Mattelaer, A., "Strategic Insurance: The Future of the Belgian Armed Forces", *Institute for European Studies*, Issue 2014/04, May 2014? Web. Accessed May 29, 2015.

<http://www.ies.be/files/PB%202014:05%20Alexander%20M..pdf>

#### d. Economic Policy

##### *European Union (EU)*

Belgium has been closely following the European economic integration, throughout its different stages. Today, it advocates a stronger Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) by means of an intensified European integration, which is restrained by the current asymmetry between the monetary and the economic unions. In 2013, Belgium faced an unemployment rate of 8,4% and a consolidated gross debt of 104,4% of its GDP<sup>24</sup>, which indicates the modest economic conditions in the country, and explains its focus on the EMU. The country particularly seeks promotion of the **internal and external competitiveness** of EU member states (its main partners are Germany, France, and the Netherlands), needed within the current context of interdependence and for the improved political integration of EU member states.<sup>25</sup>

Those goals are part of the Lisbon Strategy (2000) and the Europe 2020 Strategy (2010), which focus on quantifiable targets to be achieved by 2020. Belgium also expects enhanced coordination of economic policies through the European Semester, a coordination cycle designed to allow greater convergence within the EU. The previous (Belgian) President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, suggested steps towards the **strengthening and completion of the EMU**, which were adopted as a roadmap based on the four pillars of the EMU, to be included in the European Semester. Belgium insists on the necessary inclusiveness of social aspects within the policy.<sup>26</sup>

According to the European Commission's 2015 report on Belgium, the country has slowly recovered from the economic crisis, with a GDP growth, unemployment, and public debt expected to quickly reach more satisfactory levels, despite slow growth and inflation. However, constant underutilization of labor and a low aggregate employment result from the structural issues of the national labor market (e.g. labor taxation, financial disincentives). Indeed, the tax burden towards labor is notably high in Belgium, which clearly discourages job creation in the country. Moreover, competition in several key service sectors remains low (e.g. energy, transportation). The country committed to the implementation of structural reforms on these matters.<sup>27</sup>

##### *Economic Diplomacy & Foreign Trade*

Economic diplomacy is an important part of the country's foreign policy, as it promotes Belgian economic interests abroad. Representatives of the country often participate to international forums (e.g. the World Economic Forum), arrange bilateral visits, and take multilateral action in international organizations. For instance, economic agreements in the fields of social security and double taxation are regularly established, as well as bilateral investment agreements. Also, marketing and export policy are since 2001 a competence of the Belgian Regions, which allows a closer involvement of national companies in foreign trade promotion.

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<sup>24</sup> "Economic Indicators for Belgium", *National Bank of Belgium*, No. 2015-18, April 2015. Web. Accessed June 1, 2015. <https://www.nbb.be/doc/dq/e/dq3/histo/iee1518.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> "Policy", *Kingdom of Belgium Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation*. Web. Accessed May 27, 2015. <http://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/policy/>

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> European Commission, "Country Report Belgium 2015", *Commission Staff Working Document*, Brussels, March 2015, p. 1-2. Web. Accessed May 27, 2015. [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2015/cr2015\\_belgium\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2015/cr2015_belgium_en.pdf)

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in its 2015 survey of Belgium, notes the country's return to economic growth and role in improving external competitiveness, as well as continuing good levels of well-being measures. The *Country Overview* however points out the still fragile state of the recovery, threatened by low employment rates, eroded cost competitiveness, and very high public debt. The OECD suggests securing fiscal sustainability while promoting employment and competitiveness, improving the labor market integration of immigrants (which constitute almost a fifth of the working-age population but have low wages and employment rates), and maintaining an efficient and equitable housing market.<sup>28</sup>

The BENELUX (Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg) political and trade union has been a remarkable model of integration since 1944. It is a great example of the country's long-standing focus on **bilateral economic agreements**. In addition, Belgian-Luxembourgish Chambers of Commerce allow developing and promoting bilateral trade between Belgium, Luxembourg, and third countries. Various Belgian Business Clubs exist worldwide, and offer the advantages of a more flexible structure than Chambers of Commerce and of a more specific scope of action. With regards to **sustainable development**, Belgium signed many initiatives such as the Kimberly Process, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and the UN Global Compact, which fight for sustainable foreign trade. Finally, Belgium ensures **international transport and traffic** is well managed, by means of international agreements concerning air, maritime, road and rail transport (more than 150 agreements in total).<sup>29</sup>

#### e. Other Diplomatic Priorities

##### *Priorities at the European Level*

In his speech on the priorities of Belgian diplomacy of January 2015, Foreign Affairs Minister Reynders mentioned the **fight against extremism and terrorism** as well as **security** as top priorities within the country and the EU. In order to address those concerns, he insists on the bilateral and multilateral work of European security forces. Events he refers to are the terrorist acts that took place in Paris and in the Jewish Museum of Brussels, as triggers to the need of a sincere, respectful, and deep dialogue with the Muslim world in order to avoid misunderstandings, develop a common narrative, and avoid radicalization.<sup>30</sup> Reynders' speech also emphasizes the need for an improved national educational system, which should adopt a more European approach and promote values such as religious and racial tolerance. Indeed, Belgium does not only focus on European projects at the security level, but also on social and economic European projects, in order to restore confidence in the EU, allow it to grow, and improve the global conditions in every EU country.

In his January 2015 speech, Reynders suggested revising the EU-Russia relationship with regard to the conflict in Ukraine, in order to keep the dialogue open with such an important partner as **Russia**. He says European fundamental values such as protection of human rights,

<sup>28</sup> Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *OECD Economic Surveys: Belgium 2015 – Overview*, OECD Publishing, Paris, February 2015. Web. Accessed November 9, 2015. [http://www.oecd.org/eco/surveys/Overview\\_Belgium\\_2015\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/eco/surveys/Overview_Belgium_2015_Eng.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> Policy", *Kingdom of Belgium Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation*. Web. Accessed May 27, 2015. <http://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/policy/>

<sup>30</sup> "Speech by Minister Reynders on the priorities of the Belgian diplomacy", *Kingdom of Belgium Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation*, January 16, 2015. Web. Accessed June 1, 2015.

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rule of law, and freedom of expression and opinion need to be reaffirmed. With that in mind, greater cooperation between European institutions (EU, OSCE, Council of Europe) and firmness will be necessary. Reynders points out the various privileged positions the country had (e.g. when chairman of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers) and resulting initiatives towards those goals.<sup>31</sup> Belgium has also had a leading role in supporting the opening of Chapters 23 and 24 of the **Turkey** Progress Report, in the context of the EU accession negotiations.<sup>32</sup>

### *Priorities at the Global Level*

Foreign Affairs Minister Reynders continued his speech by discussing Belgium's priorities at the global level, mentioning the **UN Development Goals** as an important vehicle for common action. Secondly, he referred to the issues in the **Middle East**, particularly regarding global involvement, democracy, governance, corruption, and inequalities. He mentioned Tunisia as a progressing and encouraging example, and Syria and Iraq as the cause of expanding disorder. He also exposed the country's stance concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, favoring a two-state solution, but also referring to need to revive the peace process, for which the EU must play an active role.

Thirdly, **Africa** was approached as a sphere of interest for the country (especially former colonies, such as the DRC). Reynders advocated cooperation at the international level, including within the EU, in order to address security, stability, development, health, economical, and political issues that could affect the European continent. He encouraged Belgian investment abroad, disarmament of rebels in the DRC, and peace building assistance. Fourthly, Reynders spoke of the country's commitment to **NATO**, of an increasing importance for Belgium acknowledging the current security challenges. He insisted on Belgian contribution to collective security, despite national restrictions. With that in mind, he mentioned several Belgian contributions to NATO-led operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Finally, Reynders approached economic diplomacy as a core element of the country's diplomacy. He insisted on the necessary further **globalization of trade** to grow the national economy. Economic missions to be led in Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and the West Coast of Canada were mentioned as examples of useful bilateral instruments. In addition, Reynders advocated a reinforced economic cooperation with Belgium's direct neighbors, and enhanced international economic cooperation of the EU, especially with ASEAN countries.<sup>33</sup>

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**Language Revision** *Joseph Aumuller, University of Denver.*

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<sup>31</sup> "Speech by Minister Reynders on the priorities of the Belgian diplomacy", *Kingdom of Belgium Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation*, January 16, 2015. Web. Accessed June 1, 2015.

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<sup>32</sup> "Belgium", *European Foreign Policy Scorecard 2015*, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2015. Web. Accessed November 9, 2015. <http://www.ecfr.eu/scorecard/2014/countries/belgium>

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

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