



# THE PARLIAMENT OF THE FLEMINGS IN BRUSSELS

ASSEMBLY OF THE FLEMISH COMMUNITY COMMISSION



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# WELCOME!

Brussels is the beating heart of both Belgium and Europe. It is a place where dozens of nationalities feel at home as well as being an international attraction. But, more than this, Brussels is the link between the Flemish and French communities. This is where the two major linguistic groups converge.

For this reason, the political structure of Brussels is an exercise in equilibrium. Brussels forms an individual region, with a parliament and a government serving all the inhabitants of Brussels. However, Brussels also has two language-related bodies:

- the Flemish Community Commission for Dutch-speaking residents and
- the French Community Commission for French-speaking residents.

Each community commission has its own executive and regional parliament.

This publication contains all you need to know about the **Assembly of the Flemish Community Commission**, or the separate parliament for Flemings in Brussels.

The Flemish Community Commission is the political hub of a wide range of Dutch-language amenities in Brussels: schools and libraries, sports clubs and playgrounds, childcare and care for the elderly, theatres and concerts.

The Flemish Community Commission takes an open attitude towards Brussels because, in a multicultural city, building bridges is important. We therefore open our doors to anyone who is sympathetic towards the Dutch language.

Take a look through this booklet and you will see that the Flemish Community Commission is an essential ingredient of the bubbling Brussels cocktail!

# Who holds which powers?

In Belgium, decision-making authority is divided between the federal state and the communities and regions.

- The federal government deals with the general rules that apply to all inhabitants of the country.
- The communities and regions have been given a broad range of powers. Their decisions apply only to inhabitants of the area in question.

## FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

**Federal Parliament** | *laws*

House: 150

Senate: 71

Federal Government:

max. 15 ministers + optional number of state secretaries.

### Important powers

- Foreign affairs
- Defence
- Justice
- Monetary policy
- Social security
- Public security

## COMMUNITIES

**Flemish Community** | *decrees*

Flemish Parliament: 124

Flemish Government:

max. 11 ministers

**French Community** | *decrees*

Parliament of the French

Community: 94

Government of the French

Community: max. 8 ministers

**German-speaking Community** | *decrees*

Parliament of the German-speaking  
Community: 25

Government of the German-speaking  
Community: max. 5 ministers

### Important powers

- Culture
- Education
- Welfare and Health

## REGIONS

**Flemish Region** | *decrees*

Flemish Parliament: 124

Flemish Government:

max. 11 ministers

**Walloon Region** | *decrees*

Walloon Parliament: 75

Walloon Government:

max. 9 ministers

**Brussels-Capital Region** | *ordinances*

Brussels Regional Parliament: 89

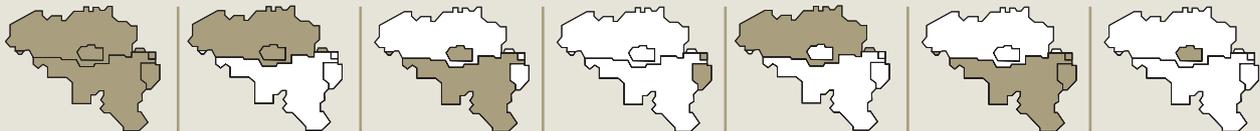
Brussels Regional Government:

5 ministers + 3 state secretaries

### Important powers

- Economy
- Energy
- Housing
- Infrastructure
- Agriculture
- Environment
- Mobility
- Public transport
- Town and country planning
- Employment

In all these areas, the regions and communities also pursue their own foreign policy. They can therefore reach agreements with other (federal) states, independently of the federal government.



# A LITTLE POLITICAL HISTORY

Belgium is a jigsaw country. It consists of three regions and three communities. When you put all the pieces of the jigsaw together, they make up the federal state. In order to understand the particular structure of Belgium, it is impossible to avoid its political history. Two major cultural communities co-exist in Belgium: Flemings in the north and Walloons in the south, plus a small German-speaking community. The drive for more autonomy for the regions led to far-reaching reforms. Belgium evolved from a unitary state into a federal state.

## 1830 – 1970: UNITARY BELGIUM

Until 1970, Belgium was a unitary state, with 1 parliament and 1 government. French had long been the official working language. From the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, however, Flemings began to work towards the recognition of Dutch as a second, fully-fledged language. Tensions between the Dutch-language north and the francophone south increased further. Slowly but surely, the realisation grew that Flanders and Wallonia needed the space to make their own decisions. The political world began to make substantial changes to the existing structures. The state was reformed step-by-step.

## 1970: DIVIDED BELGIUM

The first state reform plotted the outlines of the new Belgium. The constitution established that Belgium consists of 3 communities and 3 regions. In a nutshell, it boils down to a division by linguistic group (the communities) and a division by territory (the regions).

### LANGUAGE

- Flemish Community
- French Community
- German-speaking Community

### TERRITORY

- Flemish Region
- Walloon Region
- Brussels-Capital Region

In 1970 Flanders and Wallonia gained their first form of autonomy and were able to determine their own cultural policies.

## 1980: TOWARDS SELF-GOVERNMENT

The state reform of 1980 went yet another step further. The Belgian government continued to be responsible for important matters, but the communities and regions acquired a far-reaching form of self-government. Flanders, Wallonia and the small German-speaking Community had their own governments from this point onwards.

# Communities and regions: what is the difference?

Belgium has two types of state: communities and regions.

- A **community** is a group of people who speak the same language.
- A **region** is a well-defined territory.

## LANGUAGE

- Flemish Community
- French Community
- German-speaking Community

## TERRITORY

- Flemish Region
- Walloon Region
- Brussels-Capital Region

The communities and the regions each have their own government and parliament.

The major exception to this rule is **Flanders**. The Flemish government chose to combine the powers of the Flemish Community and those of the Flemish Region. As a result, Flanders has only 1 government and 1 parliament.

Bilingual **Brussels** also occupies a special position in the Belgian federal structure.

It is indeed a separate region, but not a separate community.

- The Dutch-speaking inhabitants of the Brussels-Capital Region belong to the Flemish Community;
- The French-speaking inhabitants of the Brussels-Capital Region belong to the French Community.

In Brussels, therefore, the Flemish and French Communities converge. The French-speaking inhabitants form the majority, with the Dutch-speaking inhabitants making up a much smaller group. In Belgium, it is precisely the reverse: the Dutch-speaking form the majority and the French-speaking the minority.



Nonetheless, one major problem continued to flummox the state reformers – Brussels. Flemings and Walloons could not agree on the exact demarcation of the territory of Brussels. Moreover, the bilingual nature of the capital caused linguistic problems. It was a complex knot which the political world could not immediately unravel. Belgium looked like a jigsaw with a missing piece.

#### **1989: THE BRUSSELS PIECE OF THE JIGSAW**

The die was cast. The Brussels-Capital Region was born. This third region also acquired its own parliament and a separate government. In 1989, the people of Brussels went to the ballot box to elect their own members of parliament. The Brussels Regional Parliament comprised 64 francophones and 11 Dutch-speaking members of parliament after these first elections.

#### **1993: THE FEDERAL STATE**

In 1993, Belgium assumed its present form. The country is now officially a federal state, as stipulated in Article 1 of the constitution: *“Belgium is a Federal State made up of communities and regions.”*

The range of powers of the communities and regions was again extended.

Another dramatic change was that each parliament now consisted of directly elected members. The federal parliament and the regional parliaments now each had their own members of parliament.

#### **2001: THE FINISHING TOUCHES**

Two more important agreements were reached in order to complete the picture.

The first ensures that the regions can impose their own taxes.

The second establishes greater representation for the Flemings in Brussels. The Brussels Regional Parliament now has 89 members of parliament; 17 of them must be Dutch-speaking.

#### **THE FUTURE: A NEVER-ENDING STORY?**

So is the jigsaw complete? Who knows, because Belgium remains a country on the move. To be continued....



# BRUSSELS: THE ODD-MAN-OUT

Brussels remains the odd-man-out within the brand-new state structure. It is the only bilingual region, where both Dutch and French are spoken. So you could say that the Brussels-Capital Region is a reflection of Belgium, but in miniature.

## THE BRUSSELS-CAPITAL REGION

The Brussels-Capital Region – just like the other regions in Belgium – has its own government and its own parliament.

**The Brussels-Capital Government** has 8 members: 5 French-speaking and 3 Dutch-speaking. It is led by a minister-president. There are also 2 French-speaking and 2 Dutch-speaking ministers. The government also includes 3 state secretaries: 2 French-speaking, 1 Dutch-speaking.

**The Brussels Regional Parliament** has 89 members of parliament: 72 French-speaking and 17 Dutch-speaking. Together, they deal with the powers of the **region** (economy, energy, housing, infrastructure, agriculture, environment, public transport, town and country planning, employment).

The Brussels-Capital Region is at the same time responsible for the fire department, medical services and domestic refuse collection and disposal.

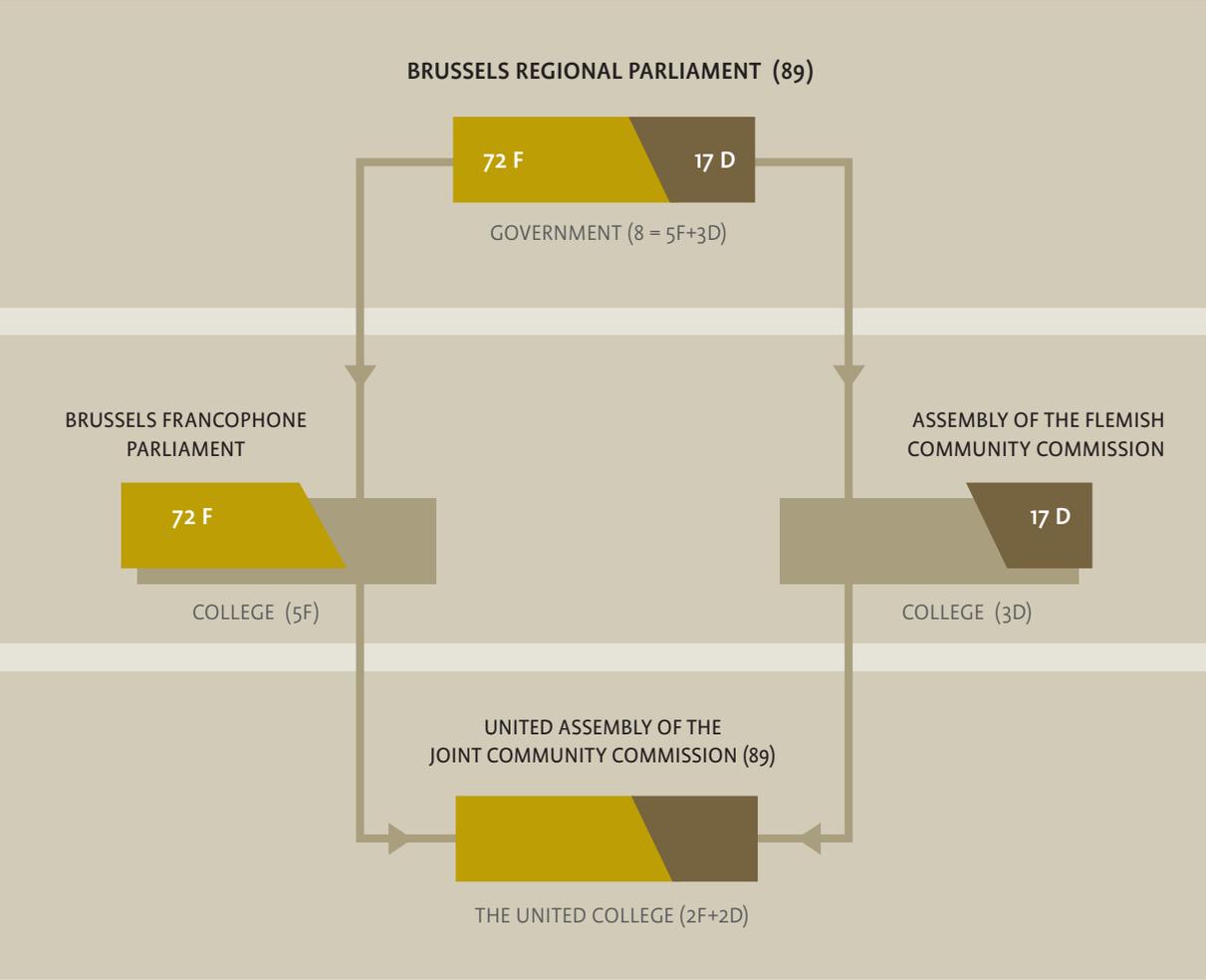
The decisions relating to all these areas apply to all residents of Brussels because, whether they speak French or Dutch, they all share the same tube and put their domestic waste into similar refusebags.

## THE COMMUNITY COMMISSIONS

Things are different when it comes to matters where language plays an important role. Brussels needs Dutch and French-language schools, Dutch and French-language theatres and Dutch and French-language childcare. For this reason, the Brussels administration therefore has two separate decision-making bodies when it comes to the powers of the **communities**: the community commissions.

- On the Dutch side, the **Flemish Community Commission** is responsible;
- The French equivalent is the **French Community Commission**.

The community commissions are responsible for culture, education, welfare and health in Dutch and in French. As is the case with every authority in Belgium, they consist of a legislative body (the Assembly) and an executive body (the College).



F: French speaking  
D: Dutch speaking

#### THE FLEMISH COMMUNITY COMMISSION

The 17 Dutch-speaking members of parliament together form the **Assembly of the Flemish Community Commission**, or the mini-parliament for Flemings in Brussels. The Flemish Community Commission also has a mini-government, the **College of the Flemish Community Commission**, which consists of 3 Dutch-speaking members of the Brussels government.

#### THE FRENCH COMMUNITY COMMISSION

Exactly the same arrangement exists for French speakers. The 72 francophone members of parliament together form the **Brussels Francophone Parliament** or the parliament of the French Community in Brussels. The **Brussels Francophone Government** consists of the 5 French-speaking members of the Brussels government.

#### THE JOINT COMMUNITY COMMISSION

In order to complete the picture for Brussels, we must include the **Joint Community Commission**. This commission is competent for all community institutions which can be accessed by residents of the Brussels-Capital Region in either language: public hospitals, for example.

The Joint Community Commission consists of a legislative body, the **United Assembly**. This has the same 89 members of parliament as the Brussels Regional Parliament. Executive power is exercised by the **United College**. This consists of the 2 Dutch-speaking and the 2 French-speaking ministers from the Brussels government. The 3 state secretaries are not included. The United College is chaired by the minister-president of the Brussels government in a purely advisory capacity.

### CULTURE

- Major cultural centres and cultural events
- Small-scale cultural meeting places
- Public libraries
- Playground operation
- Sport
- Youth work
- Cultural heritage
- Socio-cultural associations
- Promotion of Dutch

### EDUCATION

- Promotion and support for all Dutch-speaking educational establishments in Brussels
- Pupil, teacher, parent and school guidance
- Linguistic proficiency projects to remedy language deficiency
- Organising own education, focusing on specific target groups
- Innovative IT support

### WELFARE AND HEALTH

- General welfare, focusing on youth and seniors
- Home care
- Childcare
- Care for the handicapped
- Health promotion and prevention
- Urban policy: combating social deprivation and poverty and improving living conditions in the city.



# The Assembly of the Flemish Community Commission

## POWER AND TASK

The Flemish Community Commission in the Brussels-Capital Region is competent for matters of culture, education, welfare and health. In the first instance, it targets Flemish residents of Brussels, but is anyway open to all residents and non-residents of Brussels who are looking for a connection with the Flemish Community by making use of its services.

At legislative level, the Assembly fulfils this task and, at executive level, it is implemented by the College. For application of the political decisions in this field, the College relies on its own administration.

The policy of the Flemish Community Commission is established in a policy agreement. This agreement outlines the strategic policy objectives for a legislative period and the corresponding resources.

The Flemish Parliament and Flemish Government oversee the operation of the Flemish Community Commission.



## The link with Flanders



The Assembly of the Flemish Community Commission maintains close links with Flanders.

- The Flemish Parliament includes 6 members of parliament who are directly elected by the residents of Brussels. These six members consult the Assembly on a regular basis. This means that policies for Flemings in Brussels and for the population of Flanders can be aligned.
- The Flemish Government has a minister for Brussels who supervises the Flemish Community Commission in Brussels and can attend College Meetings in an advisory capacity.

The link with Flanders can be clearly seen on the coat of arms and the flag of the Flemish Community Commission. The Flemish Lion and the Brussels Iris are depicted side by side.



## Who votes for what?

Laws are laws, although the laws in Belgium have different names. Only the Federal Parliament votes for actual **laws**. The communities and regions enact **decrees**. Laws or decrees? They are of equal value. The exception to the rule is the Brussels Regional Parliament, where laws are known by yet another name – **ordinances**. Since Brussels is the capital and economic hub of Belgium, ordinances are subject to oversight by the federal authority.

Within Brussels, the community commissions can take their own decisions. In this case, they are known as **regulations**. Regulations are a step below laws, decrees and ordinances.

# Structure

## ASSEMBLY

The Assembly forms the legislative pillar and takes the final decisions. It approves the annual budget, exercises permanent inspection of the policy of the Board and votes on “laws”, known as regulations. Every two weeks, the Assembly meets in the building of the Brussels Regional Parliament, always on a Friday. The proceedings of the plenary session are recorded in an Integral Report. The plenary meeting is open to the public.

A legislative session lasts 5 years. A parliamentary session year runs from October to October and starts 2 days later than the Brussels Regional Parliament, which always starts on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of October.

## POLITICAL GROUPS

Members of parliament of the Assembly of the Flemish Community Commission, elected from the same electoral list, can join together to form a political group.

## CHAIRMAN, BUREAU AND EXTENDED BUREAU

At the beginning of every session year, the Assembly chooses a Chairman who leads the meetings of the Assembly, the Bureau and the Extended Bureau. The chairman is the official representative of the Assembly.

The chairman is assisted by the Bureau, which is elected annually and serves as “executive board” of the Assembly. The Bureau is responsible for the finances and the management of the Assembly. It also appoints the staff of the Assembly and oversees the operation of the registry. The Bureau becomes an “Extended Bureau” at the point when the group chairs participate in the meetings. The Extended Bureau fixes the agenda for the plenary sessions of the Assembly and for the Committee meetings.

# What does the Assembly vote on?

## DRAFT OR PROPOSED REGULATION

A regulation is a legal text which is applicable to the Flemish Community in the Brussels-Capital Region. This legal text is binding once it has been approved by the Assembly, ratified by the College and published in the Belgian Official Gazette.

If the College takes the initiative for a regulation, it is known as a draft regulation. If the initiative is taken by one or more members of parliament, it is then known as a proposed regulation.

## PROPOSED RESOLUTION

A resolution is a recommendation by the Assembly to the College or other policy-making bodies. This could be the Flemish Government, the Brussels Government, the Federal government or the chairs of other parliaments, depending on the content of the resolution. A proposed resolution is drafted by one or more members of parliament.

## POLICY STATEMENT, POLICY DOCUMENT AND POLICY PLAN

Policy statements, policy documents and policy plans are documents by the College which the Assembly discusses and on which it votes.

## DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

A discussion document broaches subjects, within the context of the Flemish community affairs, which affect the Flemish Community in the Brussels-Capital Region. The initiative is always taken by a member of parliament. A discussion document is not voted on, but it can form the basis for new legislative work.

## COMMITTEES

The activities of the Assembly are prepared in committees. The number of committees, their composition, powers and name are determined by the Assembly. Discussions of drafts or proposed regulations take place initially within a committee, unless they are a matter of urgency.

A committee is composed of a limited number of members of parliament, appointed on the principle of equal representation of the political groups, and deals with the subjects that are within its competence.

The drafts approved by a committee form the basic text for discussion in the plenary session. Each text can be changed using amendments.

In order to familiarise itself thoroughly with a given topic, a committee can hold a hearing or consult other committees.

## COLLEGE

The Dutch-speaking members of the Brussels-Capital Government form the College of the Flemish Community Commission. The College decides by consensus.

The minister of the Flemish Government who is responsible for Brussels affairs attends the College meetings in an advisory capacity, as Brussels member of the Flemish government.

The powers of the Flemish Community Commission (culture, education, welfare and health) are allocated by College decision.

The major policy options and financial resources are established in policy statements, policy letters and budgets. The College submits all these documents for discussion and approval by the Assembly. Policy is actually conducted by College decisions.

## PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE AND PRACTICES

The Standing Orders define the rules of the game for the operation of the Assembly and the committees and define the powers of the Chairman, the Bureau and the Extended Bureau. Furthermore, they stipulate the path taken by drafts or proposed regulations, proposed resolutions, motions, policy statements, policy documents and discussion documents before they are approved.

The members of parliament have several means at their disposal for controlling the everyday policy of the College: written questions, oral questions, requests for explanation, topical questions, interpellations and motions of recommendation and censure.



# Finances

In order to realize its policy, the Flemish Community Commission needs sufficient funds.

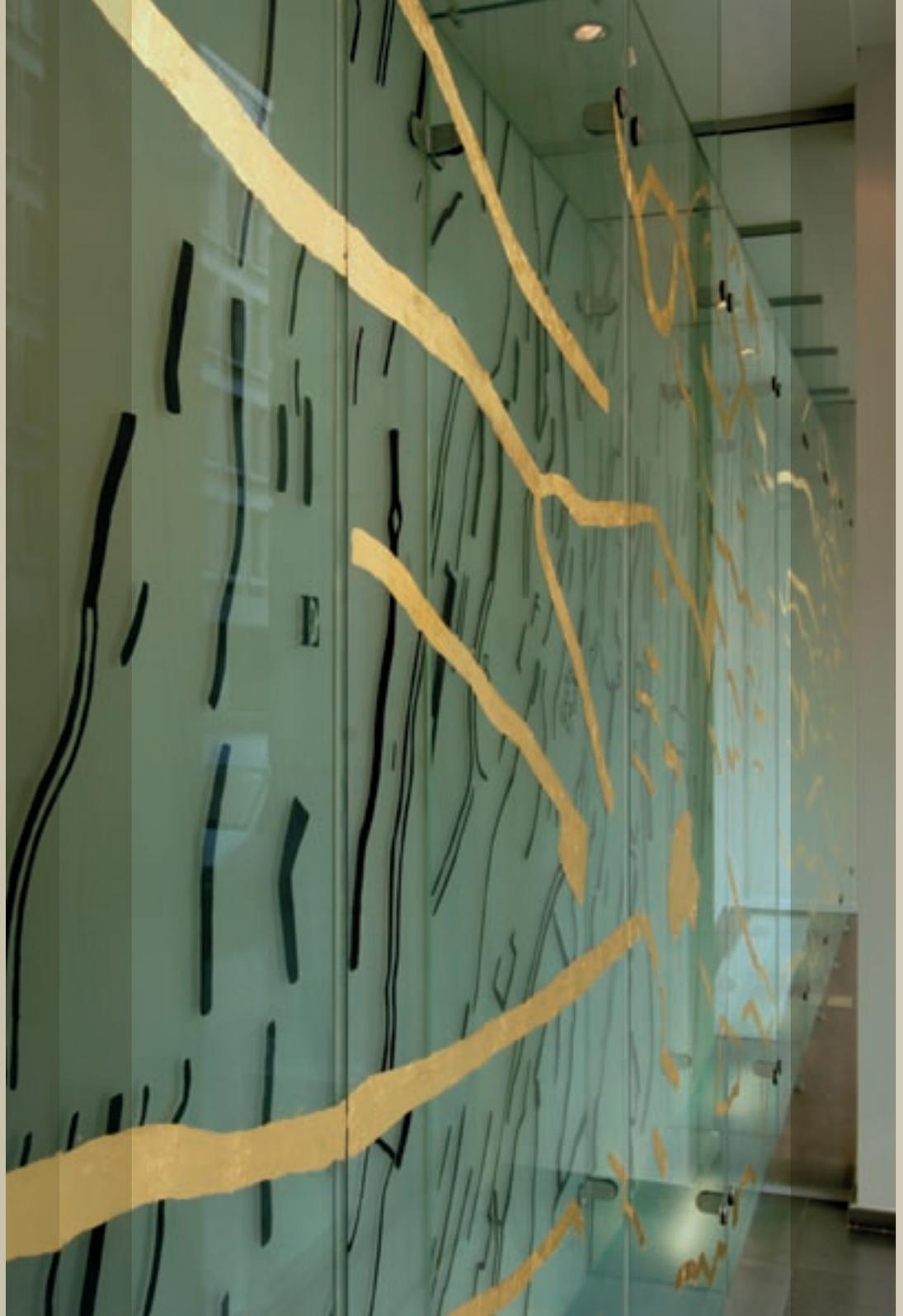
## THE INCOME STRUCTURE :

- funds from the Brussels-Capital Region;
- funds from the Flemish Community;
- funds from the Federal Government;
- other funds.

A detailed estimate of the probable income and expenditure for the coming year is set out in the budget. The budget forms the legal basis for collecting and spending money.

The Flemish Government has drawn up the rules for this budget and must therefore approve it. Every year, the College prepares the draft budget. The Assembly has the final word about the budget and approves it.





# The Assembly building

In early December 2005, the Assembly of the Flemish Community Commission officially took up residence in its own building. The Assembly is housed in the historic heart of the city of Brussels, a stone's throw from the Grote Markt and the Manneken Pis. Two unique historical premises in "Beaux Arts" style have been restored to their former glory, joined together and given a new, modern extension.

The Assembly building, with a total surface area of almost 1,600 m<sup>2</sup>, houses the bureaux of the chairman and the vice-chair, the offices of the group chairs and their staff and of the registry staff. It also includes reception and meeting rooms, as well as a library with reading and consulting facilities.

The Assembly holds its plenary sessions and committee meetings in the adjacent building of the Brussels Regional Parliament.

The Assembly of the Flemish Community Commission has devoted a great deal of attention to integrating art into its house. For instance, artist Philip Aguirre y Otegui, a Fleming of Basque descent, has created three works of art especially for the building: a life-sized bronze diptych ("the handshake"), an enormous mural ("Brussels") and an original glass partition in gold leaf and Chinese ink ("Landscape") forming the front window of the building.

Furthermore, the Assembly has now assembled its own art collection in its home, consisting of drawings, paintings and sculpture by Pol Mara, Bruno Dyckmans, GAL (Gerard Alsteens), André Coppens, Jo De Smet, Liliane Versluys, Patrick Crombé and others.

In addition, the Assembly exhibits works of art from the famous Dexia collection. This includes works by Paul Maas, Charles Dehoy, Fernand Wéry, Hilde Van Sumere, Jörg Madlener, Gaston De Mey and Cornelis Beniti.

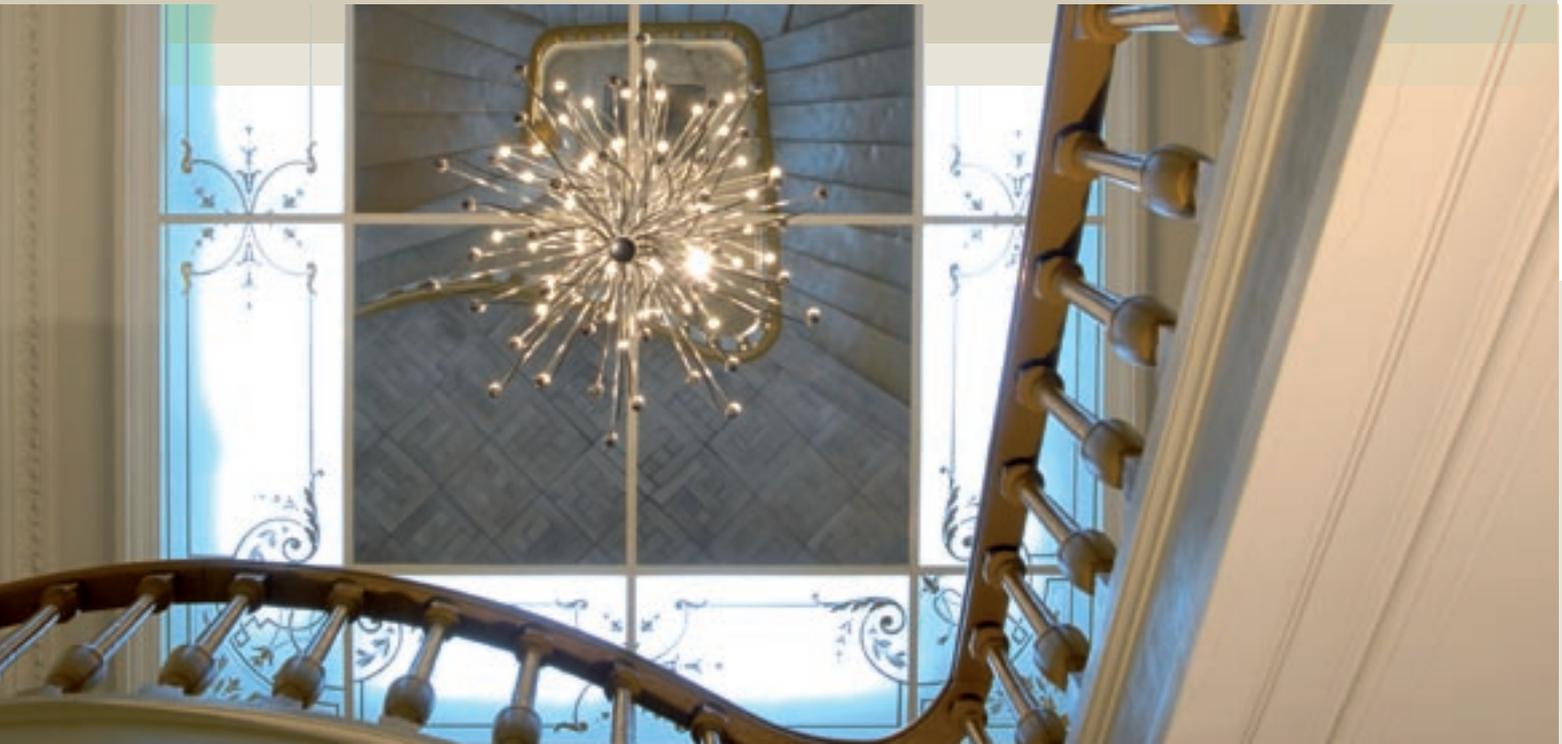
The architecture and works of art can be admired during individual or group visits to the Assembly building. The Assembly also runs tailor-made educational and training programmes for schools, associations and organisations.

# The Registry

The operation of the Assembly of the Flemish Community Commission is supported by the staff of the Registry. The head of the Registry is the Registrar, the leading civil servant of the parliamentary administration of the Assembly.

The Registrar attends the meetings of the Assembly, is responsible for the minutes of the meetings and, together with the Chairman, signs all Assembly decisions. He takes part in all meetings of the Bureau and of the Extended Bureau, of which he is an ex officio member. He is responsible for preparing and implementing the decisions of the management bodies. As leading civil servant, he is also responsible for the management of the Assembly as a business and for services to the Flemish Brussels members of parliament.

The legislative department deals with the core tasks of the Assembly: plenary sessions and committees. The treasury department is responsible for finances, personnel matters and building management. Other support services are also in place: education, public relations, IT, reception and logistics.



# Where to find the Assembly of the Flemish Community Commission

The Assembly building is within walking distance of the Grote Markt, the Brussels Stock Exchange and Central Station in the centre of Brussels.



## VISIT OUR BUILDING

Emphasis on architecture or on political structure? We provide a tour that is tailor-made to each group, involving an enjoyable presentation of what the Assembly of the Flemish Community Commission has to offer. You will come away having learned a thing or two!

You can also look inside the adjacent Brussels Regional Parliament. The beautiful interior and the hemicycle are certainly worth a visit.

For more information or to visit:

Raad van de Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie  
Lombardstraat 61 - 67  
1000 Brussels

Tel.: +32 2 213 71 00

Fax: +32 2 213 71 01

[info@raadvgc.irisnet.be](mailto:info@raadvgc.irisnet.be)

[www.raadvvc.be](http://www.raadvvc.be)





**Colophon**

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**Editor-in-chief**

Daniël Buyle

**Final Editing**

Patricia Coppens

**Editorial staff:**

Bart Van Walleghem,  
Hilde Visser

**Secretariat:**

Krista Kerckhoven

**Photography:**

Guido Jan Bral  
Luc Daelemans  
Lander Loeckx  
Toon Grobet  
Paul van den Akker  
Marcel Vanhulst

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