

# ***NATIONAL REPORT***



COUNTRY:  
***BELGIUM***

AUTHOR OF THE REPORT:  
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Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

# 1. SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL SPORT SYSTEM/ARCHITECTURE

The sport system in Belgium is that of a federal state where sport, considered as a personal matter, has been allocated to the Flemish-speaking, French-speaking and German-speaking Communities.

The Communities, their Sport Ministers and their Sport Administrations (ADEPS, DG Sport and Sport Vlaanderen) are responsible for sport policies at grassroots and elite levels. They subsidise the Community sport federations, which means that every national sport federation is divided into two sub-federations (as German-speaking sports people are members of the French-speaking sub-federation).

The Regions are responsible for sport facilities, namely Flanders, Wallonia and the Brussels Region.

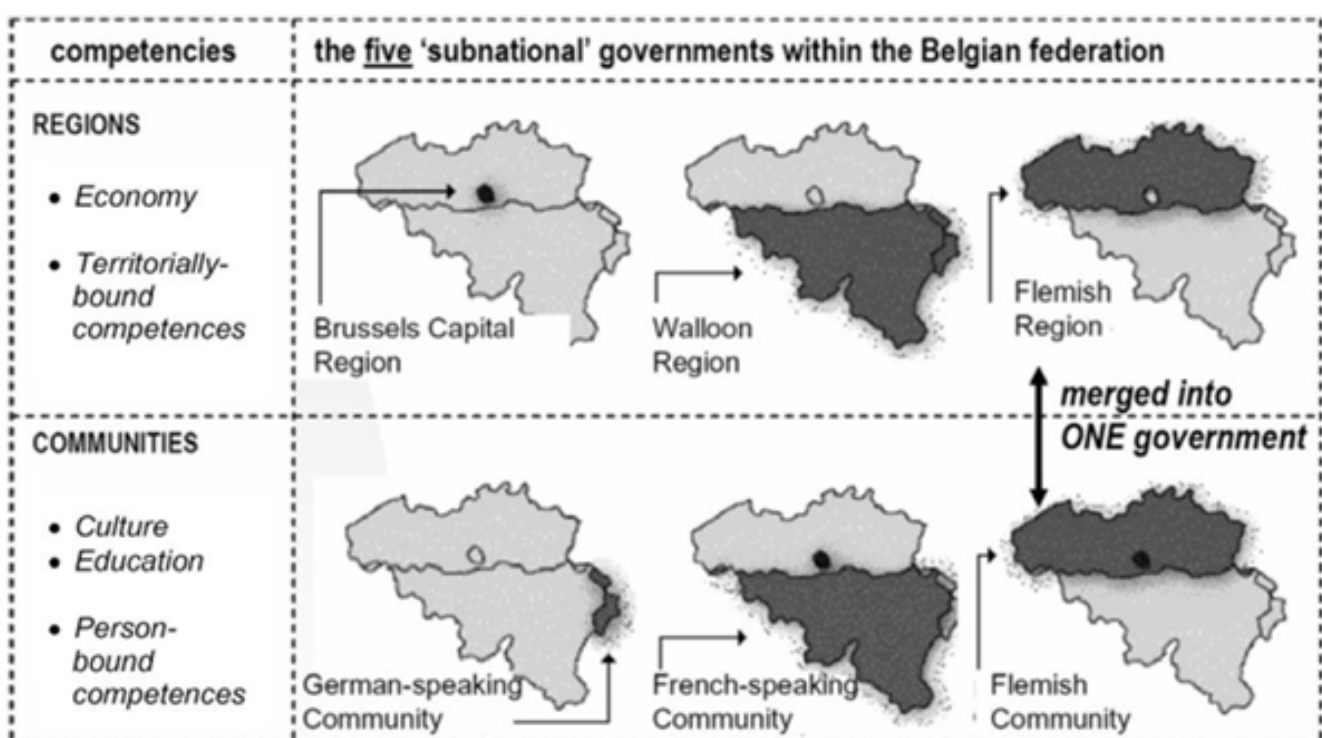


Fig 1 – The Belgian Solution - ©Crikemans

The Flemish-speaking Community and Flanders Region united in one structure in the 1970s. This allowed an integration of sport policies and sport infrastructure development.

This was not done for the other Communities and Regions, resulting in complex sport strategies and financing.

The Belgian Olympic and Inter-Federal Committee's members are the national sports federations.

## **2. TO WHAT EXTENT IS THERE A SPORT DIPLOMACY STRATEGY?**

As sport is a competency of the Communities (sport activities) and Regions (sport facilities), specific sport diplomacy strategies are developed at these levels. They are formalised when it comes to their international notoriety and non-formalised when taken by sports federations or sport actors.

At Belgian level, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through the Belgian ambassadors and their representations, acts as a facilitator for formalised and non-formalised sport diplomacy initiatives of the Communities, Regions and sports federations.

Considering the above and the role of facilitator played by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Belgian ambassadors and their representations, sport diplomacy initiatives are supported by other Ministries such as Defence, Economy and Employment, based on a subsidiarity principle between federal state, Communities and Regions.

Sport diplomacy initiatives pursue two main objectives in Belgium: the first objective relates to public authorities at federal, community and regional levels supporting sports federations and private organisers in their candidacies to host major sports events. Examples are the World Road Cycling Championships in Flanders in 2021 and the European Cyclocross Championships 2023 in the French-speaking Community.

The second objective relates to notoriety sport diplomacy initiatives where public authorities at Community level will support – for example – Cycling Team Vlaanderen<sup>1</sup> (Flemish-speaking Community) and Equipe cycliste Wallonie – Bruxelles<sup>2</sup> (French-speaking Community). Both are professional cycling teams promoting the image of their Community in Belgium and abroad.

It is worth noting that the Belgian National Lottery (an emanation of the Federal Ministry of Finances) supports the Communities and Regions through subsidies and sponsorship in their international branding initiatives.

One specificity of the French-speaking Community is that it is a member of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) under which the CONFES<sup>3</sup> is in charge of the “Jeux de la Francophonie”.

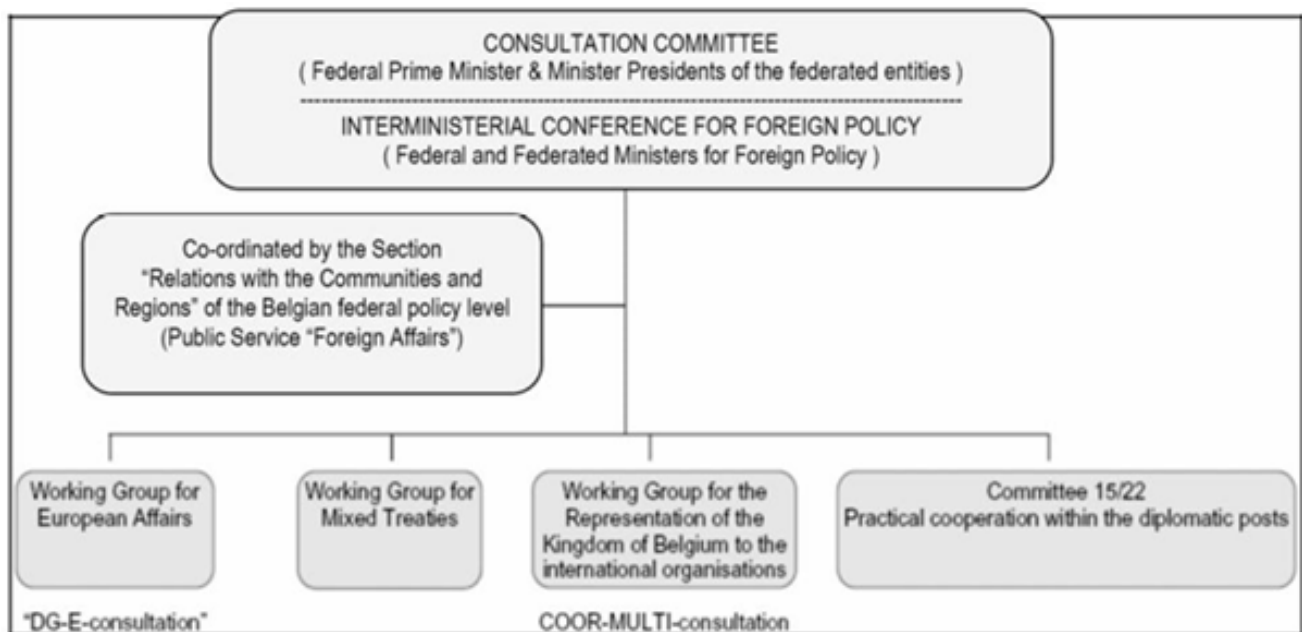
<sup>1</sup><https://www.sportvlaanderen-baloise.be/>, since 1994

<sup>2</sup><https://www.wbca.be/>, since 2011

<sup>3</sup><https://e-confes.org/>

### 3. WHAT IS THE LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT OF SPORT DIPLOMACY GOVERNANCE AND WHO ARE THE MAIN ACTORS?

If we focus on sport governance in Belgium, Figure 2 gives a macroscopic approach to the model of governance and coordination of Belgian diplomacy.



**Fig 2 - Macroscopic approach to the model of governance and coordination of Belgian diplomacy - ©Crikemans**

The Regions and Communities want to “further develop (their) international legal position and recognition” (Crikemans).

When it comes to sport (as this is a Community / Region matter), federations and private sport organisers refer to the sport administrations of their Communities, those being Sport Vlaanderen<sup>4</sup> (Flemish-speaking Community), ADEPS<sup>5</sup> (French-speaking Community) and DG Sport<sup>6</sup> (German-speaking Community). Through these administrations, they link with the Foreign Affairs Department of their Regions (as sub-state sport diplomacy is one of their geopolitical and functional priorities)<sup>7</sup> and with the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Political / governmental players, at federal (national) and regional levels, play a central role in sport diplomacy.

The Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the network of ambassadors and economic attachés, on one hand, Wallonie – Bruxelles International (WBI) and the Permanent Representation of Flanders and their economic, touristic and cultural (sport being included here) attachés, on the other, serve the interests of sport diplomacy.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.sport.vlaanderen/>

<sup>5</sup><http://www.sport-adepts.be/>

<sup>6</sup><https://ostbelgiensport.be/>

<sup>7</sup>Other sub-state diplomacy priorities are culture, economy, tourism, education and political relations.

Furthermore, the representations of the regions in multilateral organisations such as the Council of Europe, UNESCO, OSCE, Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, and United Nations sub-organisations, also interact with sport diplomacy.

Official diplomats provide support to national and regional sports organisations in their bi- or multi-lateral engagements when it comes to participating in / or organising international sports events. As such, they facilitate sport diplomacy initiatives. The recent example of the 2021 UCI Road World Championships in Flanders is particularly relevant.

*“Flanders has been at the head of the European peloton for a while now when it comes to recycling and reusing used goods. Thanks to EVENTFLANDERS, we can now also show that leading position to the world during an international top event in Flanders. Our far-reaching commitments and achievements on the ground have also further convinced the UCI to make their organization more sustainable, no longer approaching international top competitions as an end in themselves, but to use them as a means for a healthier living environment.”<sup>8</sup>*

Concerning city authorities and local institutions/politicians, they interact with sport diplomacy through the responsibilities they take in co-organising international sports events. The recent example of the 2021 UCI Road World Championships in Flanders and the implication of the cities of Knokke-Heist, Bruges and Leuven is particularly relevant.

*“Welcome to Flanders! The Time Trials are ridden from Knokke-Heist on the coast, to Bruges, one of the art cities in Flanders. The Road Races will start in Antwerp, one of those other art cities and city with the second largest port of Europe. The final of the Road Races will be in and around Leuven, art city and provincial capital of Flemish Brabant.”<sup>9</sup>*

Regarding the role of sports bodies, it is worth remembering that sport is a matter within the remit of the Communities (sport activities) / Regions (sport facilities). In this context, major sport event organisations and international sporting relations should be supported by Wallonie – Bruxelles International (WBI) and the Permanent Representation of Flanders, with the external help of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the network of ambassadors and attachés.

However, the Communities’ Sports Federations are typical consequences of the federalisation of the Belgian state in the 1970s. They have no international recognition. Consequently, the national umbrella bodies governing sport are the sole contact with international sport-governing bodies.

The role of the media is marginal in normal times. In times of crisis, such as the Russian – Ukrainian war or when it comes to participation in major international sports events such as the FIFA World Cup in Qatar, they will point out the strengths and weaknesses of sport diplomacy initiatives.

The role of the private sector is marginal in normal times. When it comes to supporting Belgian teams in their participation in major international sports events such as the FIFA World Cup in Qatar, their support or refusal to support can be seen as sport diplomacy initiatives.

On April 6, 2022, ING Bank, the main sponsor of the Belgian and Netherlands national teams announced its decision not to go to Qatar for the FIFA World Cup 2022, due to the breaches of workers’ rights in that country.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Quote of the Foreword of Mrs ZUHAL DEMIR, Flemish Minister of Tourism and Environment, in Deloitte, 11/2021, UCI Road World Championships Flanders 2021: Sustainability Report, [https://www.flanders2021.com/storage/media\\_documents/document\\_nl/79/sustainability\\_report.pdf](https://www.flanders2021.com/storage/media_documents/document_nl/79/sustainability_report.pdf)  
<sup>9</sup><https://www.flanders2021.com/en/visits>

<sup>10</sup>S.N. – Le Soir, 14/04/2022 – “ING, sponsor des Diables rouges, se distancie de la Coupe du monde au Qatar” – <https://www.lesoir.be/436256/article/2022-04-14/ing-sponsor-des-diables-rouges-se-distancie-de-la-coupe-du-monde-au-qatar>

However, athletes, in particular when they are well-known, are influencers. As such, in times of crisis, such as the Russian – Ukrainian war or when it comes to participation in major international sports events such as the FIFA World Cup in Qatar, their statements are real sport diplomacy initiatives. The initiative of tennis icon Kim Clijsters towards Ukrainian tennis players can be seen as such.<sup>11</sup>

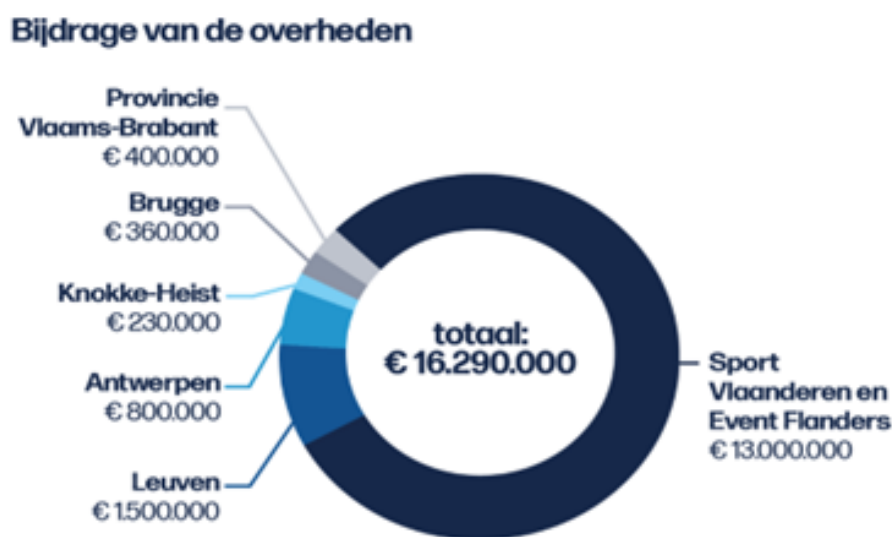
Being the former head of The Chair Henri de Baillet Latour and Jacques Rogge in Management of Sport Organizations at the Université catholique de Louvain, and co-rapporteur of the High-Level Group on Sport Diplomacy initiated by former EU Commissioner Navracsics, my role is one of researcher and advisor to the Sport Minister of the French-speaking Community and to several sport-governing bodies.

## 4. TOOLS OF SPORT DIPLOMACY

It is also difficult to put a figure on the public economic resources available for sport diplomacy activities as they come from different levels (national, regional, communities, and even local). To summarise, we could say they are *ad hoc*, considering the level of initiatives.

The level of national budget dedicated to sport diplomacy, and its allocation, cannot as such be identified in the national budget.

When referring to the UCI Road Racing World Championships 2021 in Flanders, the following figures show that 16,290,00 Euros were paid by public authorities; the Flemish Region paid 13,000,000 Euros, while the cities paid 3,290,000 Euros.



**Fig 3 - UCI Road Racing World Championships 2021 in Flanders.**  
Public authorities' budget dedicated to the initiative<sup>12</sup>

Two categories of sport diplomacy activities are implemented in Belgium: one relates to the organisation of mega sporting events such as the Football Euro 2002, the UCI Road Racing World Championships 2021 or the European Cycling Cross Country Championships 2023.

<sup>11</sup>[https://au.sports.yahoo.com/tennis-2022-kim-clijsters-gesture-for-displaced-ukraine-players-005113345.html?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAAIJDUI7rkWKUG4M3RvclvD0aNc\\_JbydXocIGIQnkiTAWQF-PnM5wbq8KCvAhLvkyqevM7iLBZD1tkmITHJ7mV0b1SXYBXeuvidjPynmEdbMbC5U1ZYiuKjOmbhYdv1Pf4kJBTUtJwdOpt-St\\_Nhg2v72ZG-zmgmlOu1W4kQLHmShM](https://au.sports.yahoo.com/tennis-2022-kim-clijsters-gesture-for-displaced-ukraine-players-005113345.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAIJDUI7rkWKUG4M3RvclvD0aNc_JbydXocIGIQnkiTAWQF-PnM5wbq8KCvAhLvkyqevM7iLBZD1tkmITHJ7mV0b1SXYBXeuvidjPynmEdbMbC5U1ZYiuKjOmbhYdv1Pf4kJBTUtJwdOpt-St_Nhg2v72ZG-zmgmlOu1W4kQLHmShM)

<sup>12</sup><https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2021/09/24/wk-wielrennen-een-goede-investering/>

The other one relates to grassroots sport diplomacy events. As an example, “the Brussels 20km race takes you on a journey through Brussels’ most beautiful monuments and parks”. 137 nationalities are represented among the participants.<sup>13</sup>

Some initiatives are developed in Belgium. Kraainem Football Club has initiated sustainable initiatives for refugees. An overview can be found on their website.<sup>14</sup>

## **5. SPORT DIPLOMACY’S FUTURE**

The major weakness / challenge of sport diplomacy activities and strategies in Belgium lies in the multiplicity of public (federal state, communities and regions) and sport (national and community federations) actors. The fragmentation of competencies increases the complexity in building positive sport diplomacy initiatives.

## **6. INTERVIEWS**

- Hr. Ambassador Raoul Delcorde;
- Hr. Ambassador Piet Steel;
- Pierre-Olivier Beckers-Vieujant, IOC Member and former President of the Belgian Olympic and Inter-Federal Committee;
- Jean-Michel Saive, President of the Belgian Olympic and Inter-Federal Committee;
- Prof. Dr Tanguy de Wilde d’Estmael, Institut de Sciences politiques Louvain-Europe de l’UCL, he heads the Chairs Baillet Latour EU-Russia and EU-Chin

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<sup>13</sup><https://www.20kmdebruxelles.be/en/>

<sup>14</sup><https://www.kraainemfootball.be/we-welcome-young-refugees/>



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