

**Nataliia Anoshyna,**  
Chargé d’Affaires of Ukraine  
in the Kingdom of Belgium (2022 – August 2025),  
Ph.D. in Law, Merited Lawyer of Ukraine,  
awarded the Order of the Crown (Belgium)

## **THE KINGDOM OF BELGIUM: UNIQUENESS AND FEATURES OF THE COUNTRY**

*The article appears as written by the author*

### **The history of Belgium’s establishment as an independent state.**

By decision of the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the Kingdom of the United Netherlands was formed, which included the modern territories of the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. The Belgians (mostly Catholics and French speakers) felt discriminated against by the Dutch authorities. This led to the «Belgian Revolution» of 1830, the main causes of which were religious differences, language and cultural issues, and the lack of political representation of the Belgians. The provisional government proclaimed Belgium’s independence on 4 October 1830. A parliament, the National Congress, was also elected, which began its work on 10 November 1830 and adopted the Belgian Constitution on 7 February 1831. The constitution became one of the most liberal constitutions of its time in Europe and played a significant role in the establishment of parliamentary democracy in Belgium. According to the Constitution of 1831, Belgium was proclaimed a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral Parliament: the Chamber of Representatives (lower house) and the Senate (upper house); the separation of powers into legislative, executive and judicial branches was established; broad civil liberties were guaranteed; the principle of equality of all citizens before the law was declared; the division into provinces and the existence of communes was established; and the motto of the state, which is still used today, was enshrined: «L’Union Fait la Force» (Unity is Strength).

The first King of Belgium (official title — The King of the Belgians to emphasize the popular monarchy) was the son of the noble German Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, who was sworn in on 21 July 1831 as Leopold I (every year on 21 July, Belgium celebrates a national holiday). Among the Belgian monarchs were Leopold II, Albert I, Leopold III, Baudouin I, and Albert II [1]. Since 21 July 2013, Philip has been the King of the Belgians. I would like to note that the form of address for the Belgian monarch is «Your Majesty» in Belgium («Sire» is also used as a verbal form of address) [2].

**The country's economic leap.** After gaining independence, Belgium became an economically powerful European state due to the rapid pace of industrialization. The growth was driven by progress in steel production and coal mining in the Wallonia region, as well as an increase in exports. At that time, Belgium ranked second in the world in steel production. In Flanders, light and chemical industries were actively developing. In terms of industrial production, Belgium ranked 12<sup>th</sup> in the world [3]. This period saw the growth of urban centers, the development of an extensive railway network and the emergence of a strong labor movement.

**Belgian investments in Ukraine.** It is worth remembering that at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Belgians were among the first investors in eastern and southern Ukraine, with Belgian capital being invested in enterprises in what are now the Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, Donetsk, Luhansk and Odesa regions [4]. More than 80 Belgian companies operated here — mines, mining, metallurgical, chemical and machine-building enterprises. In the 1890s, the Belgians built metallurgical plants in Mariupol and Yenakiieve, a shipbuilding plant in Mykolaiv, started soda production in Lysychansk, manufactured the first trams in Odesa, Simferopol, Kharkiv, and Dnipro, and laid the first tram lines in Kyiv.

I would like to mention separately Belgian investments in the oil industry of Galicia, which ranked fifth in terms of foreign investment in the oil production industry of the region, including the city of Boryslav in the Lviv region [3].

**Belgium's colonial past.** At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Belgium became a colonial empire. It was during the reign of Leopold II that Congo (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), known for its rich natural resources, including rubber, copper, ivory, and gold, was colonized. The population of the Congo at that time was brutally exploited

and forced into hard, exhausting labor; there were amputations, torture and murders. Exploitation caused the deaths of nearly 10 million people in Congo [5] (currently, historical studies provide different figures). This page in Belgian history is considered dark and has been repeatedly discussed in Parliament and society. It is worth noting that on 30 June 2020, on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the independence of the DR Congo, King Philippe sent a letter to the country's President Félix Tshisekedi, in which he expressed «deepest regret for the wounds of the past» [6]. This was the first time that a Belgian monarch acknowledged the cruelty of colonial rule. In addition, in June 2022, King Philippe (together with Queen Mathilde and Belgian dignitaries) made his first official six-day visit to the DRC since his accession to the throne in 2013. The visit resulted in the launch of a «new partnership between Belgium and the Democratic Republic of Congo, remembering the past and looking to the future» [7]. At the same time, it merits attention that in 2020–2022, the Belgian Parliament had a special commission on the colonial past, which was assigned to study the colonial history of the DR Congo, as well as two other Belgian colonies — Burundi and Rwanda, prepare a possible official apology, consider the issue of reparations and the return of cultural artefacts. However, unity in Parliament could not be achieved, and the decision on an official apology was not made. Many Belgians, especially those of African descent, criticize the slow pace of rethinking the colonial past. Nevertheless, Belgium has taken some symbolic steps. For example, the dismantling of monuments to Leopold II; the opening of the Museum of Africa, where historical documents and publications acknowledge the violence of colonialism and present African culture from a non-colonial perspective, and the ongoing process of returning artefacts to the DR Congo.

**The fate of Belgium during two world wars and the country's subsequent fundamental choice.** Despite its declared neutrality, Belgium was occupied twice by Germany during the First and Second World Wars. Both wars left a deep mark on the country's history and caused significant human and economic losses. The experience of occupation contributed to the strengthening of pro-European policy after 1945. In particular, in 1949 Belgium signed the North Atlantic Treaty and became one of the founding members of NATO. In 1951, Belgium was among the founders of the European Coal and Steel Community (along with France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Luxembourg), and in 1957 it signed the Treaties of Rome establishing the European Economic

Community and the European Atomic Energy Community. The corresponding steps laid the foundations for the creation of the European Union. The city of Brussels became the capital of the EU institutions and the headquarters of NATO.

**Belgium's transition from a Unitary to a Federal System.** A leading role in this process was played by six major state reforms, which gradually transformed the country into a federation. The first reform (1970) facilitated the creation of three cultural communities: the Dutch-speaking, the French-speaking and the German-speaking. The second reform (1980) led to the expansion of the powers of the cultural communities and the establishment of the Flemish and Walloon regions; both the regions and the communities received their own governments and parliaments. The third reform (1988–1989) was pivotal in the creation of the Brussels-Capital Region. The fourth reform (1993) officially transformed Belgium into a federal state. The fifth one (2011) significantly expanded the powers of the regions and communities. The sixth reform (2011–2014) granted additional powers to the regions and communities and included a reform of the Senate, which was stripped of its legislative competence [9].

It should be noted that all of the reforms mentioned were aimed at resolving linguistic, cultural and regional differences in the country, as well as finding a compromise for the coexistence of Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels and communities.

**Modern Belgium.** The Kingdom of Belgium is a constitutional parliamentary monarchy with a federal structure. It borders the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany and France. The total population is over 11 million. The official languages are Dutch, French and German [10].

The federation consists of three regions (Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels-Capital) and three communities based on cultural and linguistic characteristics: Flemish (comprising the population of Flanders and Dutch-speaking residents of the Brussels-Capital Region), French-speaking (comprising the population of Wallonia and French-speaking residents of Brussels-Capital) and German-speaking (including the German-speaking population of the Walloon region bordering Germany) [11].

Regions have broad powers in the areas of economy, social policy, transport, environment, foreign economic activity, infrastructure development, public construction, energy, employment, etc. Communities have exclusive competence in matters of language, culture, science,

education, social assistance, health care, youth and sports. Regions and communities have exclusive competence in matters of language, culture, science, education, social assistance, health care, youth and sports. Regions and communities have their own parliaments and governments. A distinctive feature is that the subjects of the federation are subjects of international relations and can conclude international treaties.

According to the Belgian Constitution, executive power belongs to the King, but de facto it is exercised by the Government, which is accountable to Parliament. King Philippe is the seventh King of the Belgians. In the political sphere, royal power is not exclusive and sole, but is carried out with the participation of ministers. The King's duties include interacting with representatives of Belgian society. The King and Queen, like other members of the royal family, represent Belgium at the international level (state visits, economic missions, international meetings, official events). They also interact with the public and support initiatives related to health care, children's rights, and social and humanitarian projects.

The King appoints the Prime Minister, ministers of the Federal Government and individual state secretaries (the current Government does not have state secretaries). The composition of the Government is subject to approval by Parliament. Members of Parliament who become government officials lose their status as MPs. When forming the Federal Government, the principle of balanced language representation is observed [12].

The Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium is Bart De Wever, who on 3 February 2025, together with 14 government ministers, was sworn in before King Philippe of the Belgians. This happened after almost eight months of negotiations, which led to the formation of a coalition known as «Arizona», uniting five political parties: «New Flemish Alliance», «Reformist Movement», «Les Engagés», «Vooruit», «Christian Democrats and Flemish» [13]. It is significant that Bart De Wever became the first Flemish nationalist to head the Belgian federal government. At the same time, Bart De Wever's policies are not currently attracting substantial criticism in the country. On the contrary, it is pointed that his leadership tends to seek balance and compromise in the management of the federation. I would like to remark that the first foreign visit of Mr. De Wever as the head of the Belgian Government was to Ukraine, demonstrating significant support and solidarity with our country during the period of confrontation with Russia's full-scale armed aggression.

Legislative power is exercised jointly by the King, the Chamber of Representatives, and the Senate. The Senate consists of 60 senators: fifty are delegated by the parliaments of the regions and communities, and ten co-opted members are elected by the senators themselves. The Chamber of Representatives is composed of 150 deputies elected through direct general elections for a five-year term. Federal and regional elections were held on 9 June 2024. The President of the Chamber of Representatives of Belgium is Peter De Roover (New Flemish Alliance party). The President of the Senate of Belgium is Vincent Blondel (Les Engagés).

**Interesting facts about Belgium.** In Flanders, the landscape is dominated by cities and ports. Wallonia is more hilly, especially in the south, where the wooded Ardennes mountains harmoniously combine nature and tourism. Belgium offers many different types of leisure activities: hiking in the mountains, along the picturesque North Sea coast, cycling, horse riding or rafting, golf, visiting museums, castles, international fairs and exhibitions, antique shops. Belgium hosts world-famous music festivals such as «Tomorrowland», «Rock Werchter», «Couleur Café» and «Dour» [14].

Belgians regularly engage in running, which has become one of the main types of physical activity and part of the modern lifestyle; they participate in half marathons and marathons. Among the most popular sports in Belgium is cycling, with legendary racers and numerous competitions. It is worth mentioning that Belgians use bicycles very often in their daily lives, which has led to the development of a separate infrastructure: bike lanes, parking spaces, and separate traffic lights. The Belgian national football team, known as the «Red Devils», includes players from leading international clubs, such as Kevin De Bruyne, Jérémy Doku and Romelu Lukaku. Other sports disciplines, including tennis, field hockey, and judo are also developing in Belgium, and the country hosts international competitions. The «Memorial Van Damme» is considered one of the most important athletics events in the world. Incidentally, well-known Ukrainian athletes Marina Bekh-Romanchuk, Iryna Geraschenko, Yulia Levchenko, and Yaroslava Mahuchikh participate in these competitions every year and win prizes. Finally, Belgium is well known to Formula 1 fans for its Grand Prix at the Spa-Francorchamps circuit, which is considered the most beautiful circuit in the world of F1 racing.



Belgium is a powerful center for comics and has the largest number of comic book authors in the world. They continue the traditions of the most famous Belgian authors Hergé («The Adventures of Tintin»), Morris («Lucky Luke»), Peyo («The Smurfs») and many others. The capital has a large number of murals dedicated to famous comic book characters and hosts an annual comic book festival.

Painting deserves special attention. Wonderful works of the «old school» of Flemish artists, including Pieter Bruegel, Jan Van Eyck, Peter Paul Rubens, as well as artists of a later period — Paul Delvaux and René Magritte — are now exhibited in museums around the world. Jan Van Eyck and his brother Hubert created the famous «Ghent Altarpiece», which is considered the first large oil painting to have gained extraordinary popularity.

Belgium is a country of jazz musicians and the birthplace of Adolphe Sax, inventor of the instrument named after him — the saxophone. In the 1950s, Belgium was the center of jazz in Europe. Belgians love jazz, and it is taught at royal conservatories. In addition, the country hosts many jazz festivals: «Brussels Jazz Weekend», «Gent Jazz Festival», «Jazz Middelheim» and others.

It is also a country of gourmets. One of Belgium's calling cards is chocolate, whose popularity is due to the unique taste of cocoa and cocoa butter. The first Belgian companies specializing in chocolate production appeared in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was in Belgium that the praline was invented. Annual per capita chocolate consumption in the country is approximately 6 kilograms, with total production exceeding 600 thousand tones and total exports surpassing 500 thousand tones. The number of chocolate and confectionery factories exceeds 300 [15]. By the way, some factories have shops where you can taste chocolate for free. But there are two more types of Belgian sweets that cannot be overlooked: waffles (Brussels and Liège, which differ in taste, size and shape) [16] and speculoos (spicy crispy cookies).

Belgium has many breweries that produce nearly 1,500 types of beer using various fermentation methods [17]. Belgian beer has unique and distinctive flavors: spicy, fruity, chocolate, caramel, vanilla, citrus, bitter, sour, winery and so on. Trappist beer deserves special mention. The distinctive feature of this beer is that it is brewed by monks in monasteries and is protected by a quality and origin label [18].

The country is famous for a dish that is iconic for Belgians — potato fries (known as «frietten» or «frites»). Belgians believe that they invented the recipe for fries at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, although this claim is debatable [19]. Belgium even has a French fry museum. In addition, Belgians produce over 300 types of cheese and consider themselves a «cheese nation» [14]. Similar to Trappist beer, cheese is also produced in monasteries. Belgian cheeses vary greatly in taste: creamy, nutty, spicy, savory, herbal, beer, wine, honey, salty, and many others.

The Belgian calendar is rich with a variety of festivals, carnivals, religious processions, and commemorative parades. Each locality preserves its own traditions and organizes its own celebrations. Examples include the satirical carnival in the city of Aalst, the Gilles carnival in the city of Binche, the parade of giants in the city of Ath, and numerous carnivals in Brussels, Mechelen, Mons, and elsewhere. Each year in the city of Bruges, on the Feast of the Ascension, the Procession of the Holy Blood takes place — a tradition that has been observed for over 700 years. The central relic is a glass vial containing the Holy Blood of Jesus Christ, encased in a silver reliquary and kept in the Basilica of the Holy Blood *in Bruges*.

**Scientific research.** Belgium is among the top 25 countries in terms of innovation (according to the Global Innovation Index) [20] and participates in numerous international scientific programs in the field of space research, environmental programs at the Princess Elisabeth Station in Antarctica, etc. The country has leading scientific institutions and state research centers. The main areas of research are nanotechnology, biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, medicine and vaccinology. Belgian scientists regularly receive prestigious awards. In particular, in 2013, Belgian physicist François Englert won the Nobel Prize in Physics for his work on the scalar boson together with British scientist Peter Higgs [14].

**Aside from the capital, some of the largest and most notable Belgian cities include:**

**Antwerp** is a city located in the Flanders region with a population of over 500,000. It is the second largest seaport in Europe (after Rotterdam) and a global center for diamond trading (the city is home to the so-called Diamond Quarter). Antwerp is one of the leading fashion centers, home to the prestigious Royal Academy of Fine Arts, a center for fashion education, as well as the Fashion Museum. The city



is known as the birthplace of the world-famous artist Rubens, whose works can be seen in the Rubens Museum (this building was once the artist's home) and in many of Antwerp's cathedrals. The city has a large number of museums, including contemporary art museums. Surprisingly, one of its architectural gems is the railway station in the form of a domed building resembling a cathedral. Antwerp Station is built in the Neo-Renaissance, Neo-Baroque and Art Nouveau styles with a significant amount of marble and stained glass, and is one of the most beautiful railway stations in Europe [21].

**Ghent** is one of the oldest cities in Belgium and the historical capital of Flanders. Ghent has a population of over 250,000. The city has several famous cathedrals. Among them is the Gothic St. Bavo's Cathedral, which dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century and houses many valuable works of art, including the Ghent Altarpiece from 1432. The city is also known for its large squares and markets, including the «Friday Market», which was the center of medieval city life. Ghent has many outstanding museums, such as the Museum of Fine Arts, which houses a priceless collection of paintings by Flemish masters of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries who lived and worked in the city. It is home to Ghent University, one of the oldest and most famous universities in Belgium, with over 40,000 students [22].

**Liège** is a city located in the Wallonia region with a population of almost 200,000 people. It is a historical center of metallurgy and coal mining. A citadel towers over the city, which once served as a fortress and now offers magnificent panoramic views of Liège and the Meuse River. The city's pedestrian zone is the largest in the Wallonia region [23].

**Bruges** is an extremely picturesque and cozy city with unique medieval architecture, located in West Flanders at the intersection of three canals, which is why it is often called the «Venice of the North». The population is approximately 120,000. Bruges is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and in 2002 it was the European Capital of Culture. Bruges once experienced significant prosperity as a center of global trade in the 12<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> centuries, owing to its proximity to the sea and its navigable canals. The city is home to numerous museums, the most notable of which include the Groeninge museum, an interactive museum on medieval Bruges, the Chocolate Museum and the Belgian Brewery Museum with a tasting room. Bruges was also the filming location for the famous Hollywood movie In Bruges. Outside the city lies the modern seaport of Zeebrugge [24].

**Namur** is the capital of the Wallonia region. Its population is approximately 110,000. Namur is located at the confluence of two rivers, the Meuse and the Sambre, which gives it a special picturesque charm. The city is known for its citadel, one of the largest fortresses in Europe. The symbol of Namur is a snail, which is associated with the unhurried and peaceful rhythm of life in the city. Every year, the city hosts a French-language film festival [25].

**Leuven** is located in Flanders and has a population of almost 105,000. It is home to Belgium's oldest Catholic university, Leuven Catholic University, founded in 1425. It is known worldwide as a youthful and innovative city. The city's town hall, built in the Gothic style with numerous statues and elaborate decor, attracts attention. Leuven is also home to Belgium's oldest botanical garden, dating back to 1738 [26].

**Mechelen** is located in the Flanders region and has a population of over 85,000. It is an important cultural center. The city is famous for its historic buildings, including St. Rumbold's Cathedral with its majestic bell tower (97 meters), which is included in the UNESCO World Heritage List, and Mechelen Town Hall, the first Renaissance buildings in Europe. Mechelen is considered the world capital of carillon art (playing bells). The Royal Carillon School, one of the oldest and most prestigious in the world, operates here. It is noteworthy that, as a sign of solidarity with our country, the National Anthem of Ukraine was performed on the carillons in the city. Mechelen has centuries-old brewing traditions and produces the legendary beer *Gouden Carolus*, recognized as one of the best in the world and the recipient of numerous international awards [27].

**Ostend** is a Belgian resort town that is extremely popular among both locals and tourists. It is located on the North Sea coast in West Flanders. The population is approximately 70,000. It has well-maintained free beaches with white sand. This is a city where you should try seafood, as it is all very fresh and there is a wide selection [28].

**Ypres** is a city in West Flanders known for its tragic history. Ypres was almost completely destroyed during the First World War, and it was here that chemical weapons were first used on a large scale in 1915. The city is home to many memorials and museums of military history, including the interactive museum «In Flanders Fields» about the horrors of war and the fate of soldiers [29].

**Kortrijk** is a historic city in West Flanders. In 1302, the Battle of the Golden Spurs took place near Kortrijk, in which the Flemish defeated

the French army, which became a symbol of the struggle for Flemish independence. Since medieval times, the city has been known for flax cultivation and textile production, and today it accommodates a textile museum [30].

**Dinant** is a picturesque town in the Wallonia region on the River Meuse, situated beneath high cliffs with a majestic citadel. Dinant is the birthplace of Adolphe Sax, the inventor of the saxophone, which has become the most prominent element of the city's design. The town is considered the most «Instagrammable» in Belgium [31].

**Spa** is a small picturesque town in the Wallonia region, known worldwide for its mineral waters and thermal resorts. Spa is famous for its natural springs containing carbon dioxide, iron and other minerals. The globally known term «spa», used worldwide to refer to health resorts and water treatments, originates from the name of this town. It is also home to one of the most famous motor racing circuits in the world Spa-Francorchamps, which hosts Formula 1 races [32].

**Durbuy** is one of the most enchanting towns in Belgium, located in the Wallonia region, featuring beautiful landscapes and remarkable architecture. It is often referred to as the smallest town in the world. Popular among tourists for the Durbuy Castle, the botanical park *Parc des Topiaries* (a garden of boxwood sculptures), and local delicacies, the town also boasts its own brewery producing unique varieties of beer.

**Bilateral Ukrainian-Belgian relations** have become extremely active since the start of Russia's full-scale armed aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022. This is evidenced by the intensive bilateral dialogue at the highest and high political levels, as well as by Belgium's unwavering support for our country in all international forums, including during the vote on UNGA resolutions on Ukraine, where Belgium consistently acts as a co-author.

**Political dialogue.** It is essential to note that since the beginning of the Russian invasion, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has made six visits to Belgium, during which he had audiences with King Philippe of the Belgians, met with the Belgian Prime Minister, and visited a Belgian military base with F-16 fighter jets [33] and a military hospital where Ukrainian defenders were treated [34]. At the same time, Belgian prime ministers visited Ukraine three times (twice by Alexander De Croo and once by B. De Wever). In addition, numerous meetings were held between the Head of State and the Prime Minister of Belgium in the context of multilateral events (summits, forums,

conferences, etc.). Belgium was represented at the level of the Prime Minister at the summits of the «Grain from Ukraine» initiative and the International Crimean Platform, the Bucha Summit, the Third International Conference on the Reconstruction of Ukraine, the Global Peace Summit (with accession to the joint communiqué), the plenary session «Support Ukraine», etc.

It is appropriate to mention the online address of the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, to the Federal Parliament of Belgium on 31 March 2022 [35], attended by the entire political leadership of the Kingdom and attracting unprecedented political and media attention. It should be emphasized that this was the first ever live address by a foreign head of state in the history of the Belgian Parliament. Prior to this speech, the Ukrainian National Anthem was played for the first time in the Chamber of Representatives. Belgian Prime Minister A. De Croo also gave a speech in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine during his visit to Kyiv (24 February 2024).

At the level of the Heads of Government of Ukraine and Belgium, ten meetings were took place — both bilateral and within the framework of international events, as well as two online meetings. The latter were held to discuss the consequences of Russia's destruction of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant, after which Belgium allocated €3.5 million in aid to Ukraine; and to sign an intergovernmental agreement on technical and financial cooperation, which resulted in the allocation of €150 million for the reconstruction of Ukraine. The foreign ministers of both countries held 15 meetings at both the bilateral and multilateral levels.

Active dialogue also took place at the parliamentary level. The Head of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Ruslan Stefanchuk, made two visits to Belgium, during which he met with the President of the Chamber of Representatives Eliane Thillieux, the President of the Belgian Senate Stephanie D'Hose, the President of the Parliament of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation Rudy Demotte, and also delivered a speech at a joint meeting of the committees of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives, and at the Parliament of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. The First Deputy Head of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Oleksandr Korniyenko, and Deputy Head of the Verkhovna Rada, Olena Kondratiuk, made working visits to Belgium. In addition, Ukraine was visited by Stephanie D'Hose, who delivered a speech in Parliament in support of our country, the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives Els Van Hoof, the Chair of the Belgian-Ukrainian

Inter-parliamentary Friendship Group Georges Dallemagne, as well as other deputies and senators of the Belgian Federal Parliament.

The leaders of both parliaments have met repeatedly at international forums. The Presidents of the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate of Belgium participated in the parliamentary summits of the International Crimean Platform (2023 and 2024) and the Bucha Summit (2025). The resolutions adopted are an indisputable confirmation of the Belgian Federal Parliament's full support for Ukraine. In particular, these include resolutions on the resolute condemnation and imposition of strict sanctions for the military invasion of the territory of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, and on the support of the Ukrainian people by the Kingdom of Belgium (8 March 2022); on the condemnation of the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine (17 March 2022); on the continuation of the international criminal investigation into acts of sexual violence committed in the context of the armed conflict in Ukraine, and on the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 «Women, Peace, Security» (19 May 2022); on combating impunity for war crimes in Ukraine (24 June 2022); on the recognition of the 1932–1933 Holodomor as an act of genocide against the Ukrainian people (9 March 2023); on the development of a European legal framework concerning states that support terrorism (8 June 2023); on the forced deportation of Ukrainian children to the Russian Federation (24 November 2023); and on supporting the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, condemning Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the war crimes committed by Russians, and calling on Russia to immediately cease hostilities (28 March 2025) [36; 37].

**Belgium's position on Ukraine's accession to the EU.** During its presidency of the Council of the EU (January – June 2024), Belgium provided our country with unprecedented support. Under the Belgian presidency, the EU decided to start negotiations on Ukraine's accession to the European Union during the first Intergovernmental Conference between Ukraine and the EU on 25 June 2024 in Luxembourg; the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> packages of sanctions against Russia were approved; the «Ukraine Facility» — an instrument to support Ukraine's economic development and recovery on its path to the EU, has been approved, with a total volume of €50 billion for 2024–2027; an EU — level decision was adopted on the use of frozen russian assets to support Ukraine's defense and reconstruction; and the first joint Ukraine — EU Defence Industries Forum was held.

**Belgium's position on Ukraine's accession to NATO.** In terms of supporting Ukraine on its path to NATO membership, the Kingdom has demonstrated clear solidarity by becoming a signatory to the Joint Declaration on Support for Ukraine (12 July 2023) [38] and signing the Declaration on Belgium's support for Ukraine's membership in the EU and NATO (26 November 2022) [39], as well as a joint declaration on support for Ukraine by Belgium and the Netherlands on its path to the EU and NATO and strengthening its military capabilities (4 May 2023) [40].

The Agreement on Security Cooperation and Long-Term Support between Ukraine and the Kingdom of Belgium [41], signed on 28 May 2024 in Brussels, deserves special attention. It clearly defines the main agreements for Ukraine: «Belgium will continue to support Ukraine for as long as necessary to restore its territorial integrity within internationally recognized borders»; «will continue to provide long-term military support to Ukraine» (the agreement is valid for 10 years); almost €1 billion in military support from Belgium to Ukraine in 2024; the fastest possible delivery of F-16 fighter jets to our country; cooperation in the defense industry, cybersecurity, humanitarian aid, economic cooperation, political support, sanctions, use of proceeds from frozen russian assets, support on the path to EU and NATO membership, and many other important provisions. A distinctive feature of the agreement is that it is solid, comprehensive, and reflects specific figures and deadlines.

**Military support.** Belgium was one of the first countries to start providing practical military assistance to Ukraine after the start of russian aggression. To date, the Kingdom has provided direct military assistance to our country in the amount of €1.27 billion, including funds for the purchase of weapons and ammunition and participation in coalitions (aviation, artillery, naval, armored vehicles, drones, IT, demining) [42]. Furthermore, in May 2025, the Belgian government approved a new aid package for Ukraine worth €1 billion [43]. The Kingdom is also training Ukrainian pilots to fly F-16 fighter jets and technicians to maintain these aircrafts [42]. Active cooperation between the two countries in the defense industry sector has begun, with two Defence Industries Forums held (December 2023 in Brussels and January 2024 in Kyiv), and a Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Ministry of Defence of Belgium, the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, and the Ministry for Strategic Industries of Ukraine [44]. The Belgian side also participated in the first and second International Defence



Industries Forums in Kyiv (September 2023 and October 2024). Severely wounded Ukrainian defenders have repeatedly undergone medical treatment and rehabilitation in Belgium.

**Energy support.** Since the start of Russia's massive shelling of Ukraine's energy infrastructure in October 2022, cooperation with Belgium on the provision of energy equipment to Ukraine has been significantly intensified. In 2022, Ukraine received more than 150 generators from Belgium (including through the Belgian Ministry of Defence) and nearly 100 generators from Belgian non-governmental organizations. In 2023, Belgium sent Ukraine electric generators worth €1.5 million. In 2024, the Kingdom allocated €9 million for the restoration of Ukraine's energy infrastructure through the United Nations Development Program.

**International legal cooperation.** In 2022, Belgium joined the countries that appealed to the International Criminal Court to investigate war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Russia on the territory of Ukraine; Ukraine's case against Russia regarding the application of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which is being considered by the UN International Court of Justice; Ukraine's interstate case against Russia, which is being considered by the European Court of Human Rights. In addition, Belgium supported the creation of a Special Tribunal for the crime of aggression against Ukraine. In 2023, the country joined the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children.

**Humanitarian aid.** From the first day of full-scale Russian aggression, Belgium has provided Ukraine with humanitarian aid worth more than €120 million, mainly through international organizations. The funds have been allocated for medical assistance, family reunification and information about the dangers of explosive remnants of war through the International Committee of the Red Cross; educational materials and psychosocial support for children, their families and teachers through the Norwegian Refugee Council; renovation of sanitary facilities and bomb shelters in schools through the United Nations Children's Fund, which also helps parents provide food for newborns and infants; combating sexual violence and ensuring women's rights through UN agencies and the Victims Support Fund; protecting the rights of children in armed conflicts through the United Nations Children's Fund; as well as for the Women's Fund for Peace and Humanitarian Assistance (a partnership between the United Nations and civil society) and the United Nations Group of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in

Conflict, etc. [42]. It is important to note that Belgium was the first to support the initiative of the President of Ukraine «Grain from Ukraine», providing a total amount of €20 million for the export of Ukrainian grain to African countries suffering from famine.

**Reconstruction of Ukraine.** The Belgian government has allocated €150 million to the Belgian development agency «Enabel» for the reconstruction of the Chernihiv and Kyiv regions. The agency has opened its representative office in Kyiv. The main focus is on energy, education (restoration, equipping shelters in educational institutions), healthcare (rebuilding hospitals, providing medical equipment, installing heating systems). The Belgian side is also participating in conferences on the reconstruction of Ukraine (February 2023, Poland; June 2023, Great Britain; June 2024, Germany; November 2024, Poland; July 2025, Italy). In addition, the Belgian investment company BIO provided €18 million to support the sustainability of the local economy (small and medium-sized businesses). The Kingdom has allocated €10 million through the International Organization for Migration for the reconstruction of hospitals; €10 million for the World Bank's Economic Resilience Action Program to support Ukraine's private sector; €100 million for insuring export operations with Ukraine through the Belgian export credit agency «Credendo» [42].

**Cultural cooperation** between the countries is developing extremely dynamically in the fields of art, cinema, music, education and science. Particular attention should be given to the opening, with the active assistance of the Embassy, of a Ukrainian installation in the renowned Belgian tourist park «Mini-Europe». The uniqueness of this event lies in the fact that the park features miniatures of EU member states only. No other country that is not a member of the European Union is represented by a miniature in «Mini-Europe». An exception was made only for Ukraine as a sign of solidarity between the park's management and our country in the confrontation with the Russian aggressor. The official opening ceremony of the Ukrainian miniature took place in July 2022, prior to the second Summit of First Ladies and Gentlemen, which was initiated by the First Lady of Ukraine, Olena Zelenska. The summit was attended by the spouse of the Prime Minister of Belgium, Annik Penders (online), which even the Belgians themselves considered a unique event, given Ms. Penders' low public profile. It should also be emphasized that dialogue between the First Lady of Ukraine Olena Zelenska and Queen Mathilde of the Belgians has been intensified.

An extremely important event was the launch of the first Ukrainian-language audio guide at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Belgium's most prestigious museum complex, with the participation of the President of the Belgian Senate, Valérie De Bue, the director of the museum, Kim Oosterlinck, and the Ukrainian community (September 2024). The First Lady of Ukraine, Olena Zelenska, addressed the participants of the event via video, under whose patronage the respective project is being implemented worldwide. In addition, the Embassy carried out another charitable initiative of Olena Zelenska — «*Ukrainian Books for Ukrainian Children*» — by opening, together with Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs Hadja Lahbib, a Ukrainian book corner at Belgium's main cultural center, BOZAR (March 2024).

Under the patronage of the Embassy, the Royal Museums of Fine Arts organized a unique exhibition entitled «In the Eye of the Storm. Modernism in Ukraine, 1900–1930s» (November 2023 – January 2024), which featured works by Alexander Bogomazov, Mykhailo Boychuk, Alexandra Exter, El Lissitzky, and Kazymyr Malevych. As a sign of solidarity with Ukraine, the museum's management decided to make admission to the exhibition free for Ukrainians.

An important musical event for Ukraine was the victory in 2024 of Ukrainian violinist Dmytro Udovychenko at the prestigious Belgian music competition for young violinists named after Queen Elisabeth. The Ukrainian musician received the main prize — the Queen Matilda of Belgium Award worth €25,000, tours in Belgium and abroad, as well as the right to use a 1708 Stradivarius violin for four years [45].

With the support of the Embassy, numerous screenings of Ukrainian films were held in Belgium, including «20 Days in Mariupol» by Mstyslav Chernov, «Peaceful-21» by Akhtem Seitablayev, «Peaceful People» by Oksana Karpovych, «Dovbush» by Oles Sanin, «Atlantis» and «Reflection» by Valentyn Vasyanovych, «Stop-Zemlia» by Kateryna Gornostai, «This Rain Will Never Stop» by Alina Gorlova, and «My Thoughts Are Silent» and «Luxembourg, Luxembourg» by Antonio Lukich. Notably, thanks to the active efforts of the Embassy, the leading documentary film festival DOCVILLE (Leuven) cancelled the screening of the russian propaganda film «russians at War».

In addition, the diplomatic mission organized numerous exhibitions of paintings, photographs, icons on ammunition boxes, children's drawings, festivals, concerts, master classes, campaigns, demonstrations, discussions, conferences, community events, and lectures for the Ukrainian and Belgian university communities.

In summary, it merits mention that Belgium is a country that fought for independence, became a constitutional monarchy, rapidly developed its economy, was one of the first to invest in Ukraine, had a period of colonial rule over certain African countries in its history, suffered occupation, abuse and significant destruction during the First and Second World Wars despite its neutral status and co-founded the EU and NATO. In order to find a compromise and resolve problematic aspects of coexistence between regions and communities, the state chose a federal system, which is considered the most complex in the world (particularly in terms of the distribution of powers) and is used as an example in lectures at leading universities. Belgium is a country that must be understood and perceived with all its peculiarities, uniqueness and originality. A guide on this journey could be an introduction to three regions, three communities, famous tourist cities and small cozy settlements, which, in fact, convey the whole flavor of the country and remain in your memory forever. The Kingdom is distinguished by its unique character, exceptional style, architecture, cultural diversity, traditions, exquisite gastronomic tastes, active lifestyle, and ability to find a balance between professional activities and private space.

Despite all the divisions caused by the structure of the state, Belgians are united by solidarity with those who need support and assistance. Thus, Belgium, which is more than 2,000 kilometers away from Ukraine, has become close to us and a true friend who is always on our country's side. At the same time, bringing bilateral dialogue to its current unprecedented level of intensity is evidence of daily active engagement at all levels — federal, regional, community, provincial and municipal. Only prioritizing national interests, defending Ukraine's position, urgently addressing our country's needs in the military, energy, humanitarian and financial spheres and reconstruction, unwavering optimism, moving forward despite all challenges, and most importantly, faith in Ukraine's victory, will yield results that may be easy to see but are achieved through hard work. Therefore, this rhythm, achievements for the benefit of Ukraine and active bilateral cooperation must remain an unchanging priority, because it is primarily about the fate of Ukraine, Europe and the entire democratic world, for whose values Ukrainians are paying the highest price — with their lives.

1. Blyth, D., Maclean, A. and Watson, R. (2006) *The Belgian House of Representatives: from Revolution to Federalism*. Brussels: Kamer van volksvertegenwoordigers
2. The Belgian Monarchy (no date) *The King*. Available at: <https://www.monarchie.be/en/royal-family/the-king>

3. Гарцула Я. Бельгія така далека, така близька. Львів, 2017.
4. *Ukraine – Belgium: History of relationship. Late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries* (2012) [Exhibition]. Embassy of Ukraine in Belgium, Brussels. 23 March 2012.
5. Georgina, R. and Webster, E. (2020) 'Leopold II: Belgium "wakes up" to its bloody colonial past', *BBC News*, 13 June. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53017188>
6. Rankin, J. and Burke, J. (2020) 'Belgian king expresses "deepest regrets" for brutal colonial rule', *The Guardian*, 30 June. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/30/belgian-king-philippe-expresses-profound-regrets-for-brutal-colonial-rule>
7. 'Belgium's King Philippe begins historic six-day visit to DR Congo' (2022) *France 24*, 7 June. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20220607-belgium-s-king-philippe-begins-historic-six-day-visit-to-dr-congo>
8. Chini, M. (2022) 'Congo Committee: Belgium fails to reach agreement on official apology for colonialism', *The Brussels Times*, 20 December. Available at: <https://www.brusselstimes.com/339612/congo-committee-belgium-fails-to-reach-agreement-on-apology-for-colonialism>
9. Belgian Federal Government (no date) *Historical outline of the federalisation of Belgium*. Available at: [https://www.belgium.be/en/about\\_belgium/country/history/belgium\\_from\\_1830/formation\\_federal\\_state](https://www.belgium.be/en/about_belgium/country/history/belgium_from_1830/formation_federal_state)
10. Belgian Federal Government (no date) *Filing card Belgium*. Available at: [https://www.belgium.be/en/about\\_belgium/country/belgium\\_in\\_nutshell/filing\\_card\\_belgium](https://www.belgium.be/en/about_belgium/country/belgium_in_nutshell/filing_card_belgium)
11. European Committee of the Regions (no date) *Belgium*. Available at: <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/divisionpowers/Pages/Belgium-Introduction.aspx>
12. Legal Affairs and Parliamentary Documentation Department of the Belgian House of Representatives (2021) *The Belgian Constitution (English translation)*. Available at: [https://www.dekamer.be/kvvcr/pdf\\_sections/publications/constitution/grondwetuk.pdf](https://www.dekamer.be/kvvcr/pdf_sections/publications/constitution/grondwetuk.pdf)
13. Chini, M. (2025) 'Belgium in Brief: Ready, set, go for Belgium's new government', *The Brussels Times*, 3 February. Available at: <https://www.brusselstimes.com/1425572/belgium-in-brief-ready-set-go-for-belgiums-new-government>
14. Бельгія з першого погляду. URL: [https://www.belgium.be/sites/default/files/belgium\\_at\\_a\\_glance\\_ukr\\_web.pdf](https://www.belgium.be/sites/default/files/belgium_at_a_glance_ukr_web.pdf)
15. Bravo, G. (no date) *The history of Belgian chocolate*. Available at: <https://www.bravodiscovery.com/brussels/the-history-of-belgian-chocolate>
16. Visit Brussels (2022) *Everything you need to know about waffles in Brussels*. Available at: <https://www.visit.brussels/es/visitantes/comer-y-beber/everything-you-need-to-know-about-waffles-in-Brussels>
17. UNESCO (no date) *Beer culture in Belgium*. Available at: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/beer-culture-in-belgium-01062>
18. International Trappist Association (no date) *Beers*. Available at: <https://www.trappist.be/en/products/beers>
19. Alves, R. (2024) 'Fry me a river: The sizzling debate on the origin of (Belgian) Fries', *The Brussels Times*, 17 July. Available at: <https://www.brusselstimes.com/1140924/fry-me-a-river-the-sizzling-debate-on-the-origin-of-belgian-fries>
20. World Intellectual Property Organization (no date) *Belgium*. Available at: [https://www.wipo.int/directory/en/details.jsp?country\\_code=BE](https://www.wipo.int/directory/en/details.jsp?country_code=BE)
21. Sankovitch, T. A. and Van Roey, J. L. R. (2025) 'History of Antwerp', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Antwerp-Belgium/History>
22. Encyclopaedia Britannica (2025) *Ghent*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ghent>
23. *City of Liège* (no date). Available at: <https://www.liege.be/en>
24. Visit Bruges (no date) *Bruges' history*. Available at: <https://www.visitbruges.be/en/things-to-do/about-bruges/history>
25. *Ville de Namur* (no date). Available at: <https://www.namur.be/fr>
26. *Stad Leuven* (no date). Available at: <https://leuven.be>
27. *Stad Mechelen* (no date). Available at: <https://www.mechelen.be>
28. *Visit Ostend* (no date). Available at: <https://www.visitoostende.be/nl>
29. Visit Flanders (no date) *Ypres*. Available at: <https://www.visitflanders.com/en/flemish-destinations/ypres>
30. *Stad Kortrijk* (no date). Available at: <https://www.kortrijk.be>

31. Visit Ardenne (no date) *Dinant*. Available at: <https://www.visitardenne.com/en/best-ardennes/iconic-sites/dinant>
32. Ardennes-étape (no date) *Spa, the town of water and culture*. Available at: <https://en.ardennes-etape.be/experience/city/spa>
33. На аеродромі «Мелсбрук» Володимир Зеленський ознайомився з процесом підготовки до використання літаків F-16 в Україні // Офіційне інтернет-представництво Президента України. 28 травня 2024. URL: <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/na-aerodromi-melsbruk-volodimir-zelenskij-oznajomivsya-z-pro-91189>
34. Володимир Зеленський відвідав українських воїнів, які лікуються в Бельгії // Офіційне інтернет-представництво Президента України. 17 жовтня 2024. URL: <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/volodimir-zelenskij-vidvidav-ukrayinskih-voyiniv-yakilikeyu-93909>
35. Промова Президента України Володимира Зеленського у Федеральному парламенті Бельгії // Офіційне інтернет-представництво Президента України. 31 березня 2022. URL: <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/promova-prezidenta-ukrayini-volodimira-zelenskogo-u-federaln-74005>
36. *La Chambre des représentants* (no date). Available at: <https://www.dekamer.be/kvvcr/index.cfm?language=fr>
37. *Sénat de Belgique* (no date). Available at: [https://www.senate.be/www/?MIval=index\\_senate&MENUID=10000&LANG=fr](https://www.senate.be/www/?MIval=index_senate&MENUID=10000&LANG=fr)
38. Спільна декларація про підтримку України // Офіційне інтернет-представництво Президента України. 12 липня 2023. URL: <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/spilna-deklaraciya-pro-pidtrimku-ukrayini-84277>
39. Президент України та Прем'єр-міністр Бельгії обговорили реалізацію ініціативи Grain from Ukraine та підписали декларацію щодо підтримки членства нашої держави в ЄС і НАТО // Офіційне інтернет-представництво Президента України. 26 листопада 2022. URL: <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/prezident-ukrayini-ta-premyer-ministr-belgiyi-obgovorili-rea-79445>
40. Спільна декларація України, Королівства Бельгія та Королівства Нідерланди з нагоди візиту Президента України Володимира Зеленського до Нідерландів 4 травня 2023 року // Офіційне інтернет-представництво Президента України. 4 травня 2023. URL: <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/spilna-deklaraciya-ukrayini-korolivstva-belgiya-ta-korolivist-82657>
41. Угода про співробітництво у сфері безпеки та довгострокову підтримку між Україною та Королівством Бельгія // Офіційне інтернет-представництво Президента України. 28 травня 2024. URL: <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/ugoda-pro-spivrobitnictvo-u-sferi-bezpeki-ta-dovgostrokovu-p-91169>
42. Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (2025) *Belgium supports Ukraine*. Available at: <https://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/policy/policy-areas/highlighted/belgium-supports-ukraine>
43. 'Two-thirds of military aid to Ukraine flows back to Belgian companies' (2025) *Belga News Agency*, 16 May. Available at: <https://www.belganewsagency.eu/two-thirds-of-military-aid-to-ukraine-to-be-provided-through-belgian-companies>
44. Україна й Бельгія підписали 6 документів про співпрацю в оборонній промисловості // Урядовий портал. 26 січня 2024. URL: <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/ukraina-i-belhiia-pidpysaly-6-dokumentiv-pro-spivpratsiu-v-oboronnii-promyslovosti>
45. 'Dmytro Udovychenko wins the 2024 Queen Elisabeth Violin Competition' (2024) *The Strad*, 3 June. Available at: <https://www.thestrad.com/news/dmytro-udovychenko-wins-the-2024-queen-elisabeth-violin-competition/18123.article>