



commissioner
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europe & international



2018

Annual report

of the Brussels Commissioner
for Europe and International Organisations

“Turning Brussels, as the major workplace of European institutions and an increasingly important gathering ground for the abundant European civil society, into a city that all European citizens can embrace as at least somewhat their own is, in this respect, a priority challenge for institutions, urban planning and culture.”

PHILIPPE VAN PARIJS

Preface



This 2018 activity report of the Office of the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations (CEIO) marks the culmination of four years of joint work with all the stakeholders in this exciting challenge of developing the international function of our Region.

Regional, federal and particularly, European elections will be held in May 2019. A new challenge will begin for the CEIO and its team.

Many practical achievements can already be attributed to this innovative regional "tool" regarding the missions entrusted to it. The aim of these missions is to develop a genuine Brussels host region policy, both on a purely institutional level and on a more personal level, to welcome the many expats present in our Region and its communes.

Today, everything is in place to promote Brussels' international role, thanks to a team which has endeavoured to carry out actions aimed at changing attitudes, has acquired new practices in order to consolidate this major asset for our Region, and has ensured that it continues to develop in the future.

The international presence, in all its forms, involves handling numerous issues, often complex, in all areas of regional competences, from urban planning and the development of public spaces to mobility, security and the environment.

This requires adaptation to a new dynamic on the part of our administrations and public services, which are beginning to perceive the great advantages for Brussels of this international presence, in particular its influence on employment and economic development.

It also depends on the action of political representatives who are becoming aware, little by little, of this profound mutation affecting our Region and its communes. It is a mutation that demands changes in key policies in many areas.

In addition, it requires the hierarchies of the international institutions and organisations to acknowledge that their presence in Brussels has to respect the quality of life in the city and in the neighbourhoods where the institutions are situated. Most of them have understood the importance of heeding these citizens, for whose good their institutions were created!

This changing attitude is beginning to bear fruit for all Brussels citizens, helping us to appreciate the extraordinary opportunity of being part of this exciting project for Brussels. Let's put all our energy into this international role for Brussels as a shared future, and become avid supporters of this evolution.

Whatever the outcome of the upcoming regional, federal and European elections, everything must be done to ensure that the issue of the international role of our Region stays a vital part of the policies and priorities of our future governments.

The CEIO has shown that it is possible – with strong political support, of course – to reconcile the differences, and for our Region to be "the host of the world" and a pleasant multicultural living environment.

Brussels is no longer the small, rather provincial city it was when I was a young boy. It has become a big international capital, and it must do everything possible to deserve this role. This perhaps is our real challenge for tomorrow.

Alain HUTCHINSON

Commissioner of the Brussels Government



Overview 2018

1 BCRG-EU Summit meeting

67 political meetings

159 meetings

2040 files handled by the Expat Welcome Desk

44 cases handled by the Institutional Liaison desk

802 official letters to authorities

240 regional certificates

11 newsletter articles

19 publications and press articles

26 years of experience of the Expat Welcome Desk

5 seminars

16 information sessions

2000 official trainees of the EU institutions welcomed

5737 welcome packs distributed

66 855 visitors on our website

4323 people registered in our database

477 followers on Facebook

153 posts on Facebook

Oulook 2019



Expat Welcome Desk

- > **Working meeting** with the Immigration Office and the Brussels regional administration for Economy and Employment on the **introduction of the single permit** and the consequences for non-EU trainees in European institutions.
- > **Meeting with Brussels Region's Mayors and Aldermen responsible for civil registry, foreigners' desk and European affairs** following the formation of new local governments, in order to present CEIO activities.
- > **Working meeting with the European Parliament** concerning the **end of the current term of office**: termination of parliamentary assistant contracts and welcome of new European Parliament members.
- > **Training Day at the European Parliament for municipal officials** in order to expand their knowledge of administrative issues relating to EU officials in Brussels.
- > **Seminars on new topics**, notably the education system in Belgium and the single permit.

Institutional liaison

- > Establish a **long-term vision for the "host region policy"** together with the role of **Brussels as an international capital** and its competitive position on a global level.
- > Organise **study trips to other international "host cities"** which, like Brussels, have developed successfully as international hubs; **exchange best practices** with these cities, focussing particularly on innovative urban practices, know-how in hosting expats, as well as all kind of expertise linked to the presence of international organisations and its specific requirements.

Communication

- > Develop a **digital awareness campaign** "Think European, Vote European" in anticipation of the upcoming **2019 European elections**, aimed at encouraging European citizens living in Brussels to register to vote.
- > Enrich the **content of our website**, **translate** it into three languages (EN, NL and FR) and **rethink its visual identity**.
- > Intensify **social media** activity in order to improve direct real-time communication with our target audience and partners, and to increase our visibility.

Contents



Preface

Overview and outlook

A host region policy 11

- 1 The international community in Brussels 12
- 2 Mission of the CEIO 14
- 3 The CEIO as a privileged intermediary 16
- 4 Why a host region policy is more necessary than ever 18
- 5 The CEIO after 2018 19

Institutional liaison 21

- 1 Method 24
- 2 Working groups 28
- 3 Issues handled in 2018 31
- 4 Regional and local representations 36
- 5 Study on international employment in Brussels 37

Expat Welcome Desk 39

- 1 Method 43
- 2 Cases handled in 2018 46
- 3 Meetings and issues 50
- 4 Newsletter be expat be.brussels 56
- 5 Seminars 57
- 6 Information sessions 58

The CEIO 61

- 1 Communication 62
- 2 Team 66
- 3 Governing bodies 67

Conclusion 68



A host region policy

1 The international community in Brussels

1.1 Brussels, Capital of Europe

If Brussels is referred to as the Capital of Europe, it is mainly thanks to the presence of many organisations of the European Union and number of other international institutions:



1.2 International rankings

Brussels occupies a strategic position in international rankings:



1st city in the world in the number of **diplomats**

1st city in Europe for congresses,
2nd in the world

2nd city in Europe in number of **languages spoken**

3rd city in Europe in terms of **economic potential**

1.3 Economy and employment

The presence of all these international institutions is obviously of vital importance to the Brussels economy and employment.

This international presence generates about **121 000 jobs** (81 000 directly / 40 000 indirectly). This means that the sector is good for **16,7% of employment in Brussels** and guarantees an **Added Value** of about **5 billion euro** in the Brussels-Capital Region.

121 000 jobs,

i.e. **16,7%** of employment in Brussels,

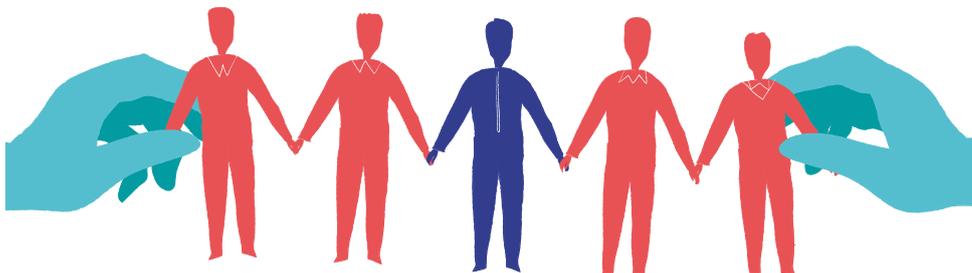
i.e. **5 billion euro**

Added Value in the Brussels-Capital Region.



1.4 Population

The impact of the international role of Brussels is more evident than ever in the composition of its population: **1 in 3 Brussels residents** has a **foreign nationality** and **1 in 5** is an **EU national**.



The publication “Brussels-Europe, the figures 2016¹” reveals in more detail these key figures on the international presence in Brussels.

¹ <http://www.commissioner.brussels/i-am-an-expat/news/item/625-brussels-europe-in-figures>

2. Mission of the CEIO

As headquarters for 6 European institutions, 14 EU organisations and 42 intergovernmental organisations, the Region has a heavy responsibility to successfully manage its **growing internationalisation**.

The **host region policy** could be defined as the policy relating to the **hosting of international and intergovernmental organisations** having their headquarters or a representation in the Brussels-Capital Region. One of the **missions** of the CEIO is therefore to act as a single point of contact for all the European institutions and international organisations present in Brussels thanks to an **institutional liaison desk** and an **Expat Welcome Desk**. This latter provides the international community with personalised administrative assistance. For this reason, the Brussels-Capital Region government has entrusted the Brussels Commissioner with a **political mandate**. The commissioner always acts in coordination with, and subject to the approval of, the Brussels authorities which it represents within the expanded framework of regional competences, while taking into account the harmonious development of the region and the needs of its citizens.





DEVELOP A HOST REGION POLICY within the framework of regional powers and in harmony with the development of the Region and the needs of its citizens.

FORMULATE POLICY ADVICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS to the government of the Brussels-Capital Region about any project with a potential impact on international organisations and the Brussels urban landscape.

ESTABLISH STRUCTURAL RELATIONS between the Brussels authorities (regional and local) and the international organisations, European institutions and diplomatic missions on Brussels territory.

ACT AS SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT for all European institutions and international organisations via the Institutional Liaison desk.

WELCOME THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY through the administrative assistance of the Expatriate Welcome Desk.

3 The CEIO as a privileged intermediary

Following the sixth reform of the state and transfer of a large number of competences, the Brussels-Capital Region has de facto become the major player in relations with European and international institutions on its territory. **The Region** has assumed **ultimate responsibility** in areas such as urban development, town planning, mobility, environment and security. This being so, the federal level – via the **Interministerial Committee for Host Nation Policy (CIPS/ICZ)** – is no longer the exclusive point of contact for European and international institutions. In all other matters, federal authorities continue to play a crucial role through CIPS/ICZ, while the communes are closely involved in many aspects of this policy as well.

The CEIO is active on several levels: local, regional, federal and European/international. It has built up a solid network of authorities and administrations at all levels. Our fundamental task is **to bring together all the parties involved in a specific project.** This requires a deep understanding of the political, administrative, and legal landscape in Brussels.



Meetings at the highest level between the Brussels government and the European institutions represent key opportunities and form the essence of the way the CEIO operates. These top-level meetings have become a forum which enables both the European institutions to give their feedback on sensitive projects relating to their presence, and Brussels authorities to clarify their vision and policies.



BCRG-EU Summit on the 4th December 2018

The CEIO also organises **discussions with representatives of other international governmental organisations in Brussels, diplomatic missions, regional representations and international associations.**

The relationship with the **communes** also plays a **crucial role** in matters such as **welcoming the international community** in Brussels and all **town planning projects**. The European quarter will see some major changes in the future and the reaction of the local authorities to this challenge will be an important factor in their success.

Lastly, collaboration with **visit.brussels Europe department** was intensified last year. This resulted in several concrete initiatives aimed at both strengthening the touristic attraction of the European quarter and providing expats with cultural and touristic information on the capital to maximise their participation in city life.

4 Why a host region policy is more necessary than ever

An explosive growth of the international community

Brussels is a city with one of the highest percentages of foreign nationals and is characterised by a particularly mobile population. The total population of the region increased by almost a quarter between 2000 and 2018 and has now reached 1.2 million inhabitants. During the same period, the group of **EU citizens** registered a spectacular 90% increase and now totals a record number of **276,000**, representing **23% of the population**.

An increase in the number of multinationals setting up

Brussels is one of the “**global cities**”, a group of cities which play a **vital role** in the **world economy** through their direct link with the international financial system and the world of multinational companies. Examples of the city’s growing importance in this context are multiplying. Recently, the fintech company TransferWise, a money transfer service headquartered in London, announced plans to open an office in Brussels. This is destined to become the European centre for transactions in the European Union now that the United Kingdom is preparing to leave the EU. The insurance company Lloyd’s of London was the first one to set up a branch in Belgium due to Brexit. After Lloyd’s, several other companies announced their arrival.

A growing importance as host city

On an institutional level, the region is also a candidate for the headquarters of several European agencies and international NGO offices. On 15th September 2018, the European Commission introduced a proposal to create a **European cybersecurity centre** in order to help member states fight against cyberattacks. The European Commission project is based on the principle that the headquarters of this European centre would be best situated in Brussels, Belgium. The preference for Brussels is not only based on impact analysis, since the Commission emphasises the “European” character of Brussels and the presence of so many stakeholders. A centre of this scope would encourage new investment in the region’s digital infrastructure and innovative technologies, and position **Brussels as digital capital**. At the region’s level, the CEIO is working closely on this development which is coordinated by the Brussels delegation within the Permanent Representation of Belgium.

5 The CEIO after 2018

In his speech on the fourth anniversary of the CEIO, Mr Klaus Welle, Secretary-General of the European Parliament, stressed that the European institutions today have a genuine point of contact and trusted partner in the Brussels region for all questions relating to their establishment in Brussels.

Looking to the future, we plan to further streamline our operations and commit ourselves to:

- **Continue to closely follow major developments** in the European Quarter and advise the government in this respect;
- **Assist and advise** European and international institutions in their development in the Brussels area;
- Expand the dialogue between the Brussels government and EU institutions into a **permanent high-level consultation forum**;
- **Continue to provide a quality administrative welcome service** for international employees;
- **Continue to build awareness amongst Brussels citizens** of the international dimension of their city, without compromising the quality of urban life and **encourage EU citizens** to integrate within the city and take full advantage of it.

Now that the Brussels host region policy is starting to take shape, it is also necessary to evolve from the daily management of the relationship between the institutions and the region, to a **long-term vision and strategic agenda**. This certainly also applies to attracting new international organisations.





Institutional liaison

The Brussels-Capital Region (BCR) recognises the **growing importance of the presence of European and international institutions**, particularly their influence on the regional economy, the creation of employment, professional and leisure tourism, the attractiveness of the Region, international recognition of the city and the cultural richness of its increasingly-diverse residents.

To find the right balance in a mixed living environment and guarantee the quality of life for its inhabitants, the **BCR assists and works with this international presence** through the Institutional Liaison desk of the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations (CEIO). It pays particular attention to the consequences of this presence on the dynamics of the territory, in terms of the environment, town planning, architectural heritage, mobility, tourism, as well as the development of public spaces (both their security and their conviviality).



Schuman rondabout, European quarter

Mission

The **Institutional Liaison desk** fulfils the role of intermediary between the Brussels public authorities and European and international organisations for every aspect relating to their presence in the Brussels region. Specifically, this means that we act as a **single point of contact** for all requests that fall within the jurisdiction of regional authorities, notably relating to town planning, security, mobility, environment, and the development of public space. In a wider perspective, our objective is to project a **positive image** of the Region, position the city as an **international capital** and thereby contest with international competition.

In these areas, the CEIO is the **single point of contact** for all organisations that have set up in Brussels. This includes the European institutions, which have thousands of employees and dozens of buildings concentrated in a few sites in Brussels, international organisations, embassies and diplomatic missions, and regional and local representations spread across the whole Region.

The objective is to break with the past – when the establishment of international organisations’ headquarters followed top-down, real-estate driven planning approaches, causing traumatism not yet disappeared in certain neighbourhoods – and move to a **strategy** which takes account of the needs of the different parties involved, including local residents, employees, commuters, cultural operators, tourists, shops, and new businesses developing in the area.

1. Method

HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL DIALOGUE

Once a year, the CEIO organises a political summit meeting that brings together the Brussels government (BCRG) and representatives of the European institutions at the highest level.

The latest edition of this **BCRG-EU Summit**, presided by the Brussels Commissioner, took place on 4th December 2018. It brought together BCR Ministers (Minister for External Relations, Minister for the Environment and the Office of Minister for Mobility) and representatives of six European institutions (European Parliament, Council of the European Union, European Commission, Committee of the Regions, European Economic and Social Committee, European External Action Service).

These meetings provide an opportunity to **review** the various projects planned by the European institutions in Brussels as well as large development projects that the BCR has undertaken to complete, particularly in the European quarter.



BCRG-EU Summit on the 4th December 2018, Brussels delegation

The **decisions** taken and the **directions** agreed during these meetings form the basis of the CEIO's daily work: setting up working groups, define new areas of collaboration between the EU institutions and regional and local administrations, and exchange information in order to find solutions to challenges when dealing with the planning of public space.

Since the end of 2017, the **minutes** of this meeting (written in three languages: EN, FR, NL) are systematically added to the agenda of the BCR government.

SETTING UP WORKING GROUPS

In order to treat specific questions as effectively as possible, the Institutional Liaison desk of the CEIO organises and coordinates working groups. These working groups enable key persons **to meet** on technical issues, conduct regular and **constructive dialogue**, and **build mutual confidence** amongst all those involved. Working groups are set up based on decisions taken in the BCRG-EU Summits.



AD HOC ASSISTANCE

The Institutional Liaison desk receives a certain number of *ad hoc* requests from international organisations on a variety of subjects (road works obstructing passage, malfunction of public equipment, poor maintenance of parks or public spaces, etc.). **Assisting** them in their dealings with local and regional authorities and helping all parties involved to **reach agreement** is an essential part of the desk's daily work.

"Over the past years, our cooperation with the Brussels Commissioner's office has been very fruitful, both on the more strategic, and also on the very practical level. As an example, it was the Commissioner who got the EU institutions as well as STIB and SNCB around a table to jointly redesign signage in the neuralgic Schuman metro and train stations. On the more strategic level, there are ongoing efforts to give people a better understanding of the EU institutions that operate in the Brussels area generally referred to as "the European Quarter". Here, the Commissioner's office acts as effective link between the EU institutions and the various Belgian authorities involved in these projects."

Inés HEMPEL

Head of Unit - DG COMM - Council of the European Union

DIALOGUE ON THE FUTURE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The Institutional Liaison desk pays particular attention to the development of the European quarter and stays in contact on this subject with all levels of authority involved in each project, notably the Region, the municipalities most concerned by the presence of institutions on their territory (City of Brussels, Ixelles and Etterbeek) and the federal government. In this respect, permanent contact is maintained with the Interministerial Committee for Host Nation Policy (CIPS/ICZ) and regular meetings are held with the City of Brussels' Mayor and Aldermen concerning building projects and mobility issues.

It is essential that this dialogue is maintained in order to ensure the quality of urban space in the future and thereby ensure the harmonious development of the European quarter, the Region and its inhabitants.

“The aim of the Brussels Academy is to share its knowledge of urban issues with all the inhabitants of Brussels sharing an interest in and concern for the future of this city, all under the motto of 'making the city together'. The Commissioner's Office is a steady partner in a range of activities and helps us to actively involve Europeans in the design of an inclusive Brussels metropolitan project.”

Jessica VAN DE VEN
Project Manager, Brussels Academy

PERMANENT EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION

An integral part of the desk's activities is to **listen** to and understand all entities that operate in the European quarter, **stimulate new areas of cooperation** between Brussels and international authorities, and particularly, **encourage the exchange of information** in order to overcome specific issues relating to the development of public space.

The CEIO gives presentations and organises information sessions about its services and related issues, as was the case when the CEIO met with the network of heads of administration of Permanent Representations in Brussels.

Our expertise

- Knowledge of the Belgian, European and international institutional system and context
- Expertise in the fields of town planning, mobility, security and the environment
- Project management and consultation methods
- Close contacts with Belgian ministry offices and administrations, and international organisations
- Dynamic multilingual, multi-skilled team

Our most important contacts

- Brussels Ministers
- Regional administrations and agencies
- Brussels Parliament
- Mayors and Aldermen in Brussels communes
- Town planning and mobility services of Brussels municipalities
- CIPS/ICZ and federal ministry offices and administrations
- Political and administrative heads in EU institutions and international organisations
- Embassies and diplomatic missions
- Regional and local representations



Jury of the Loi 130 architectural competition of the European Commission, 25th June 2018

2. Working groups

MOBILITY WORKING GROUP

The mobility working group, one of the first introduced when the CEIO was created, aims to analyse the mobility dynamics around European institutions in order to identify strengths, issues and needs. While ensuring personal privacy, a mapping of EU institution employees' place of residence was carried out. The study included mode-by-mode travel time and public transport service of the main EU institution buildings. The results will help EU institutions develop a better mobility policy based on the objective accessibility of their buildings. They will also help public transport operators to improve their service based on real demand, as well as allowing an evaluation of the accessibility of future sites considered for new offices.



COBRACE WORKING GROUP

Following the BCRG-EU Summit of October 2017, a working group on COBRACE (Brussels Code on Air, Climate and Energy Management) has been set up. Its objective is to study the **impact of the application of COBRACE** on the number of parking places within buildings of the European Commission whose environment permit is nearing its expiry date, so that the Commission can anticipate results and prepare the reorganisation of space. The group's work should also enable the European Commission to obtain more elements for planning its building and logistics strategy and give the Region a clearer vision of this programme, so that it can deal with the potential consequences on the areas in question. Preparatory meetings took place in the CEIO office during the first semester.



TOURISM WORKING GROUP

Coordinated in partnership with the “Europe” department of the regional tourism agency visit.brussels, the tourism working group brings together those responsible for visitor services in each European institution. This working group was formed to remedy the lack of cooperation both between EU and Brussels institutions, and among the EU institutions themselves in their efforts to promote the European quarter, an important tourist attraction in the Region. Thanks to this working group, printed and online publications of each institution now include information on the touristic interest of their neighbouring institutions. In order to intensify the mutual visibility of the tourism offer, the CEIO would like to organise the same kind of exchange between the websites of the Region and the European institutions.

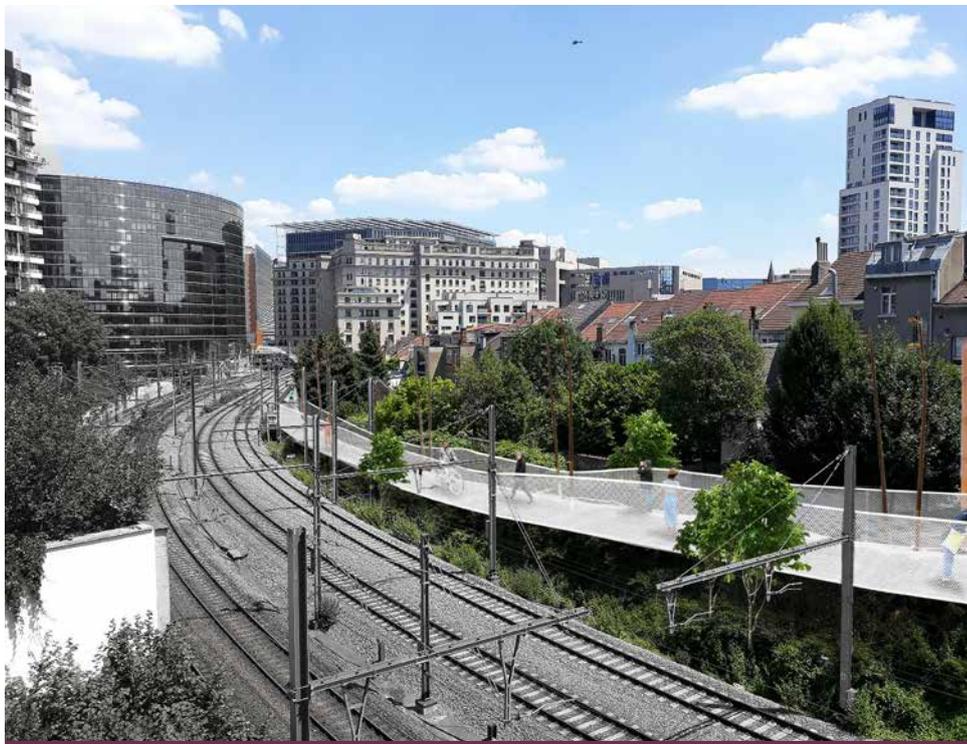
In addition, particular attention is paid to the promotion of tourism on institutional websites in other cities. The working group met in Strasbourg in December 2018 to compare experiences and encourage exchange of this subject. During this visit, a meeting was organised with the visitor services of the European Parliament and the Council of Europe. Other study visits will follow.

“The Office of the Brussels Commissioner for Europe has been valuable as a go-to point for navigating the complexity of the Belgian political setup. This expertise has been especially visible in the project to improve signage in the European Quarter where we are developing a wayfinding system to help citizens discover and navigate the area and to reinforce its European identity. We also greatly appreciate their role as facilitator in many projects such as European Quarter stakeholder events and the visit.brussels working group. Their work has helped identify synergies and cross-promote our work with various partners as well as contribute to the tourist value of the area, an important goal we all share.”

Nastja KLEMENCIC SCHMIDT
Head of Unit - DG COMM - European Parliament

LUXEMBOURG-SCHUMAN LIAISON WORKING GROUP

The suggestions of the European Parliament for improving the pedestrian-cyclist connection in the area, as well as the Region's interest in further promoting soft mobility, has led to the creation of a working group on establishing a liaison between **the two principal poles of the European institutions**: Place Luxembourg and Schuman Square. The agreement reached by the parties aims to continue discussions on this issue during 2019.



PRM¹ WORKING GROUP

Accessibility to certain institutional buildings, and mobility in the European quarter in general, poses several difficulties for disabled persons and their carers. The issue was therefore the subject of meetings in 2018 between the EU staff in charge of well-being and equal opportunity and the CEIO advisers. Specific workshops bringing together relevant regional personnel are planned in 2019.

¹ Persons with reduced mobility

3 Issues handled in 2018

Throughout the year, the CEIO followed up on major projects and resolved a range of concrete issues.

Some of these projects are quite extensive, both in terms of resources deployed and time committed. Their main thematic areas are as follows:

DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC SPACES

The Region has reiterated its intention to redevelop the European quarter in line with the vision outlined by the Masterplan of 2008, while making the quarter a priority in the Regional Sustainable Development Plan. The Region's wish to increase the functional mix and the quality of public space in the European quarter is illustrated in the specifications of the **Schuman roundabout redevelopment** project, which aims to create a real contemporary public space there. The project was initiated by the Minister for Mobility and developed by Brussels Mobility (as contracting authority for major renovations) in cooperation with Beliris (the federal counterpart) and the Minister-President's Office. The CEIO was present throughout the whole process of developing the project as member of the Advisory Committee (coordinated by the *Maitre architecte/Bouwmeester*, the Brussels "Master Architect") and participated in the meetings of the Support and Steering Committee.





The CEIO also participates in the Support and Steering Committee of the “**PAD Loi/RPA Wet**”, a zoning plan fixing both the regulatory and strategic framework for the area along rue de la Loi/Wetstraat. This part of the city concentrates and represents well the problems behind the lack of attractiveness of the area: a mono-functional space deserted in the evening, characterised by mediocre architecture and crossed by an urban motorway. Among the various projects aimed at increasing the conviviality of the area, the “PAD Loi/RPA Wet” aims to finally make possible the implementation of the “PuL/SpW” (“Projet Urbain Loi/Stadsproject Wet”) – the vision proposed by the Christian de Portzamparc urban planning agency. This vision advocates a mix of offices, shops, housing and community facilities, whose upward densification would allow the creation of new public spaces at ground level and whose alignment diversification would break the corridor aspect of rue de la Loi/Wetstraat.

SECURITY

The CEIO initiated the “Study of security in the European quarter”. On one hand, its aim is to objectify threats in public areas of the European quarter and on the other, to create guidelines for integrating security measures while maintaining a convivial urban environment. Perspective.brussels, the regional planning agency, entrusted this study to a team of experts in security and city planning who then consulted the various parties involved. Throughout the study, they regularly presented the results of their progress to the supervisory committee. At the end of this study in 2017, and with the backing of the CEIO, the results were submitted to the regional government in order to help define a strategy on the subject.

In 2018, an *ad hoc* working group met to outline a schedule of recommended actions and interventions according to their priority level. In the framework of this work, a “support guide for the design of public space” has also been drafted.

During 2018, the CEIO continued its supporting role in discussions on **improving the security of several institutional sites**, including areas around iconic EU buildings, national embassies and regional representations.

Since 2015, the CEIO has been involved with the **security of the interinstitutional tunnel** which links the main EU buildings situated around the Schuman roundabout. After numerous technical consultations with EU security services, Brussels Mobility and the SIAMU (fire and emergency services), a first security device has been installed at a strategic point in the tunnel and a second is planned in the first half of 2019.

As local authorities are responsible for providing security in public spaces, in a context increasingly complex and ever-changing, the CEIO believes it is crucial to exchange best practices with other cities which have developed expertise in the area. For this reason, the CEIO has proposed and supported Brussels' application in the **urban security partnership of the European Union's Urban Agenda**. This is a working group that will discuss with member states and the European institutions the role of cities in security policy and propose new legislative and budgetary frameworks. Work will begin in 2019. The CEIO will lend support to perspective.brussels and the BPS (Brussels Prevention & Security) as representatives for Brussels in this partnership.



ENVIRONNEMENT

Working closely with the Office of the Ministry for the Environment and its administration, the CEIO pays particular attention to the **application of COBRACE** in the EU buildings, in order to be better prepared for the renewal procedures of their environment permits.

In 2018, the CEIO was available to help those involved deal with issues relating to the **application of environmental permits for European Parliament buildings**, to ensure that the actual usage situation is compliant.

During 2018, the CEIO was also invited to intervene in numerous aspects linked to the **management and maintenance of green spaces** such as Leopold Park and Cinquantenaire Park. Whether for organising events, ensuring the quality of equipment or facilitating visitors' access, the CEIO on each occasion put the parties involved in contact with each other.

TOURISM, IMAGE AND CULTURE

The cooperation developed within the “tourism” working group has given rise to **unprecedented networking days** between institutional, cultural, touristic and business entities in the European quarter, two editions of which were held in 2018:

- the “European Quarter Networking Lunch” on 7th June 2018
- the “2nd European Quarter Networking Event” on 23rd Nov 2018



These days brought together a **range of stakeholders** working in the **cultural and touristic fields** in the European quarter, including public authorities, European institutions, associations of tourist guides, museums, theatres, shops, restaurants, and hotels. They all came to present and discuss their ideas for cooperation aimed at promoting the attractiveness and friendliness of the district.

The CEIO also took part in the **“Think Innovate Develop (TID) European Quarter”** project, launched by hub.brussels² in partnership with the European Quarter Fund, to support the needs of retail businesses and reflect on the identity of the European quarter.

In a similar way, the CEIO associated with visit.brussels and perspective.brussels to introduce a **study on the image and promotion of the European quarter**. The study aims to identify the resources and projects already deployed, and then to propose recommendations that could guide a real revitalisation strategy for this part of Brussels, which is not yet sufficiently known beyond its institutional activities. Recommendations are expected in the first half of 2019.

"As curators of the Belgian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of Architecture, whose theme was the European Quarter, we greatly appreciated the support of the office of the Commissioner for Europe in developing our project. The quality and commitment of all our contacts have enabled us to discover important aspects of our work and we are grateful to this dynamic team that works to improve the European Quarter and living environment of Brussels' inhabitants."

Léone DRAPEAUD

Traumnovelle, Architects' collective

Finally, the CEIO made the commitment to support the **"Eurotopie" project**, which represented Belgium at the 16th edition of the Venice Biennale of Architecture. The Belgian pavilion chose to examine the architecture of the European institutions in Brussels and to reflect on the construction of Europe and its meaning. The CEIO worked to ensure that the curator team had access to the appropriate resources and contacts to provide the necessary material for the project.

² Brussels agency supporting businesses.

4 Regional and local representations

Brussels is the **international capital for regional and local lobbying**. It has become the norm for regions in EU member states to establish a representation to the EU in Brussels.

However, these regional offices – be they private or public – do not have official status and do not generally function under any legal form. They therefore often face **administrative problems** when setting up. To remedy these problems, the region introduced **regional certification** in 1994. Although this does not give delegations official status, it does nevertheless indicate that the office in question is recognised by the BCR as an organisation representing an intra-national collectivity. In practice, the certificate often helps the representations to overcome practical issues. Every year it is accorded to **240 regional and local entities** and is signed by the regional Minister of External affairs, with the CEIO carrying out all the administrative work.

Regional representations have been created with very **specific objectives**, such as to obtain European funds, influence European policy, boost the geo-political visibility of their territory, as well as to join networks and the international community within the EU sphere. They are therefore seen as partners within the European political community with their core activities being the **collection, processing and filtering of information on EU policies and institutional developments of interest to their region**. The BCR does not have this type of representation to defend its interests with the EU, the Brussels delegation to the EU being integrated in the Permanent Representation of Belgium and its activity being aligned to the one of this latter.

In this context, **the CEIO recommends the creation of a unit to carry out these lobbying tasks for the BCR**. This would enable the region to participate actively in the development of European policies, rather than to influence proposals a posteriori, particularly in the fields of regional and social cohesion, research and development, the environment, transport and industrial and energy policy. In addition to **lobbying and regional "marketing"**, this unit would also be called upon to **identify the many funding opportunities** and provide Brussels and its local authorities with the best possible information on European issues, call for proposals, and investment funds.

5 Study on international employment in Brussels

In 2017, the Brussels Institute for Statistics and Analysis (BISA) requested the Research Institute for Work and Society (HIVA) of KULeuven (Catholic University of Leuven) to **study international employment in the Brussels-Capital Region**, specifically **international workers in European and international institutions**. The CEIO helped to ensure that all EU institutions participated in this research by facilitating the transfer of data from EU human resource services to the BISA, and by coordinating broad international participation in meetings.

Up until now, international workers have not been included in government statistics. Their impact on the activity, employment and unemployment rates of the Brussels-Capital Region has not therefore been clearly identified. The study, published in 2018, shows that **one salaried job in 14 in the Brussels region is occupied by an international worker**. The HIVA and BISA argue that: *“the new international employment statistics influence labour market indicators developed from government sources. At the present time, around 30 800 persons are thus classified as part of the inactive population in the official labour market statistics, whereas in reality they are employed by international institutions. The current employment rate is 49%. This figure increases to 53% when international workers are included, enabling this indicator to reflect the true situation.”*

“Our collaboration with the Commissioner for Europe's team is very regular and constructive. Its in-depth knowledge of the European institutions and the direct link it maintains with the regional and local authorities are a real asset for the urban governance of the European Quarter.”

Christophe SOIL

Director General - perspective.brussels, Brussels Planning Agency



Expat
Welcome
Desk



The Expat Welcome Desk (EWD) is an integral part of the host policy operated by the Office of the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations (CEIO).



To facilitate the settling in of the international community in Brussels by way of a personalised administrative assistance. The objective is to offer our visitors advice for any practical and legal problems that may occur during their arrival and throughout their stay, and to guide them through all type of administrative formalities (registration in the commune, marriage, legal cohabitation, tax return, etc.).



1. Free
2. Independent public service
3. Multilingual (EN, FR, NL)
4. One-stop shop
5. Direct link with administrations at the local, regional and federal level



- 4 **WAYS TO ASSIST**
 - > By phone: **+32 (0)2 430 66 00**
 - > By e-mail: **info@commissioner.brussels**
 - > Via our website: **www.commissioner.brussels**
 - > Ask for an appointment



Our target audience

- Staff of European institutions: officials, parliamentary assistants, seconded national experts, contracted staff and trainees
- MEP's
- Staff of international organisations
- Teachers at European schools
- Personnel of regional representations
- Diplomatic personnel
- Foreign lobbyists and journalists
- Foreign researchers and postdoctoral personnel
- Anyone wishing to set up professionally in Brussels
- Family members of all the above

Our privileged contacts

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR services of all European institutions • NATO human resources service • Office of the Secretary-General of the European Schools • Immigration and population services in the 19 Brussels communes • Mayors and Aldermen of the 19 Brussels communes • Brussels Ministry of Economy and Employment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal Interministerial Committee for the Host Nation Policy • Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs • Federal Public Service of Finances • The Immigration Service • The tenants' federation ("Syndicat des Locataires") • The regional tourism agency (visit.brussels) |
|--|--|

Our expertise

- More than 25 years of experience providing services to the international community in Brussels
- Global and deep knowledge of matters relating to European officials
- Expertise relating to privileges and immunities of the European Union
- Close contact with Belgian authorities and the European institutions
- Dynamic and multilingual team

Our multilingual team

2 OFFICES

- **Head office:** Avenue d'Auderghem 63, 1040 Brussels
- **European Parliament antenna:** ASP – Office 00H160

4 TEAM MEMBERS

- **Amélie BOVY**, Legal Adviser
- **Hélène JACUB**, Assistant at the Head office
- **Annick DE BLESER**, Assistant at the antenna in the European Parliament
- **Anaïs JOUZDANI**, Assistant at the antenna in the European Parliament

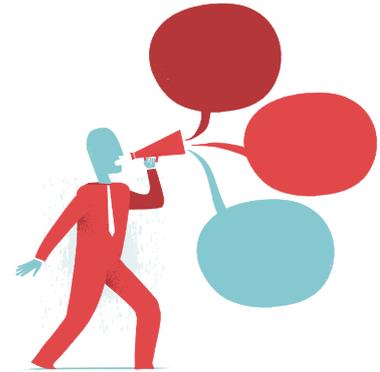
Our office in the European Parliament, completely renovated early 2018, positions us as a key partner for welcoming and helping its personnel: MEPs, officials, parliamentary assistants, contracted staff, trainees, etc. This proximity enables us to strengthen ties between the CEIO and the European Parliament.



1. Method

EWD INFORMS

The first mission of the EWD is to reply to all questions from expats relating to their arrival and stay in Brussels. The EWD offers its visitors personalised advice by e-mail and telephone, as well as through individual appointments. It is an independent service, free of charge, provided in three languages (EN, FR and NL). A variety of subjects are covered, mainly related to accommodation, registration and residence, taxes in general and income tax (further details in the “statistics” section).



Our priority is to be accessible and attentive to new arrivals in Brussels who are often lost in the complexity of Belgian administrative procedures and regulations. Our primary mission is to provide correct, clear and precise information, mainly in English, as quickly as possible.

The EWD also takes part in numerous information sessions within European and international institutions, during which it makes personalised interactive presentations for each target group (in collaboration with visit.brussels for cultural aspects).

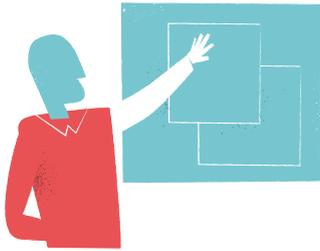
EWD ADVISES

The EWD analyses complex issues on a case-by-case basis, which often necessitates an hour's meeting with the visitor. In function of various factors relating to the person (such as nationality, the objective of their stay in Belgium, their family situation, etc.), the EWD carefully analyses the different options so that they can register in the commune, work, sign a rental lease, etc. In other words, our team provides a real consultancy service.

EWD PROVIDES SOLUTIONS

Expats sometimes face administrative difficulties relating to either their inability to understand French or Dutch, or the complexity of their particular situation (diplomat, EU-official, seconded national expert, partner of one of these persons, etc.). The misunderstanding of a letter from Belgian authorities, a lack of reaction in the time stipulated, failure to respond to a payment reminder... any of these events may obstruct administrative procedures, requiring the EWD to resolve the issue by contacting the relevant authority directly.



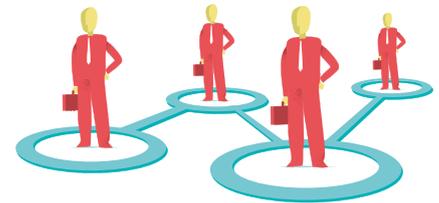


EWD ORGANISES

Throughout the year, the EWD organises seminars for its target audiences: officials and trainees in European institutions and international organisations, spouses of European officials, diplomats... in short, the international community in the widest sense. Seminar topics vary depending on the audience and the questions which we receive frequently. Certain seminars are led by the EWD while others are presented by specialists.

EWD BRINGS TOGETHER

The EWD frequently creates working meetings that bring together HR departments of EU institutions, the Immigration Office, the 19 Brussels communes, the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs (protocol directorate) and the Interministerial Committee for the Host Nation Policy (CIPS/ICZ). These meetings provide an opportunity to confront the different issues facing European officials during their arrival and residence in Brussels, and to put forward possible solutions.



EWD CREATES AWARENESS

The EWD brings to the attention of the regional, communal and federal authorities all the problems and inconsistencies identified in specific administrative procedures which affect European officials, so that remedies can be sought. Examples include the issue of European officials wishing to acquire Belgian nationality, the new rules on property tax reduction, and the erroneous sending of tax declarations to European officials who are considered non-resident for tax purposes.

EWD PROJECTS A POSITIVE IMAGE OF BRUSSELS

It is clear that a qualitative and personalised welcome of the growing international community in Brussels helps to reflect a positive image of the region. Persons who have received, during their stay in Brussels, the necessary help in an adequately short time frame, will remember the fact and become good ambassadors of our region abroad. This welcome service and administrative assistance offered by the EWD is particularly appreciated by expats and they roundly applaud this service by the Brussels government.

EWD COMMUNICATES

In order to make itself known to its target audiences and develop close relationships with Belgian public authorities, the EWD has to communicate clearly and frequently via targeted actions and communication supports.

In the recent years, communication has been intensified and channels have been diversified, notably via:



The European institutions: above all else, the EWD is known through the welcome service it provides to personnel of the various European institutions. They regularly refer their new arrivals to us when they are unable to help them, often for a review of rental contracts. Our desk is mentioned on the intranets of various institutions and also in their welcome leaflet.

Our website: many people contact us directly via our website. The chapter dedicated to the “Expat Welcome Desk” includes a great deal of information on the various administrative procedures to be followed when one arrives or resides in Belgium. It is a source of valuable information for our target group.

Our Facebook page: we regularly publish practical articles giving information to our target audiences.

Seminars and information sessions: we organise and/or participate in seminars and information sessions throughout the year, where we present our services to the international community.

The “Settle down guide” leaflet: it contains a large amount of information on the practical aspects of setting up home in Brussels and is included in the “welcome packs” distributed during information sessions. In 2018, 5737 welcome packs were distributed, in collaboration with visit.brussels.

The be expat be.brussels newsletter: we write a monthly article on a practical topic aimed at the international community in the visit.brussels newsletter (see point 4). This article is also available on our website (in the news section) and on our Facebook page.

Targeted digital campaigns: thanks to our exhaustive data base, we regularly send articles on a specific subject via the Sendinblue platform.

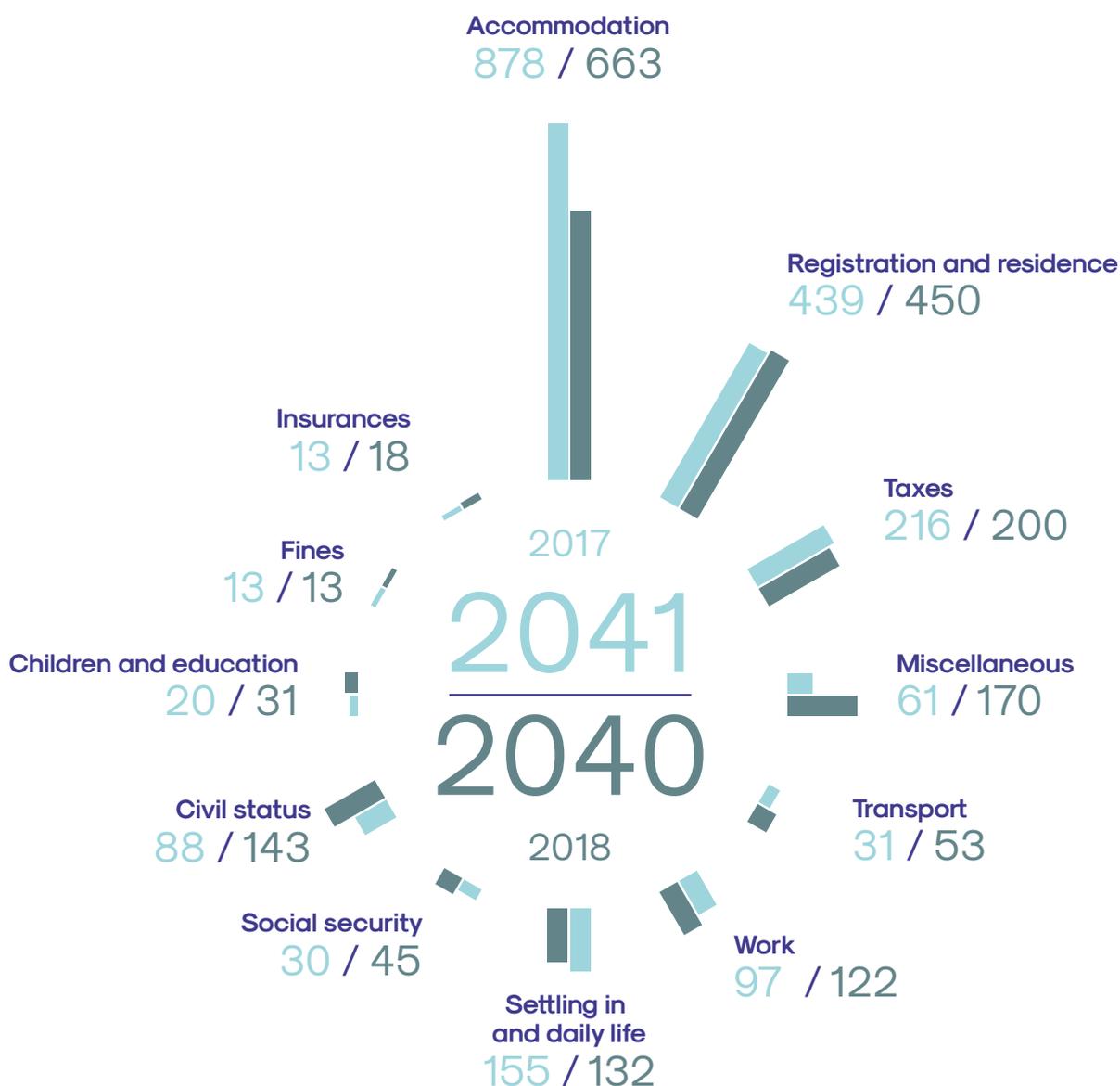
Belgian and international media: occasionally we publish articles in the media (Brussels Times, The Bulletin, Expat in Brussels guide, Newshound, etc.) in order to amplify our visibility.

Word of mouth: this remains an invaluable communication channel, not to be underestimated!

2. Cases handled in 2018

2.1 Statistics

Number of EWD cases by type, over two years (2017 and 2018):



Top 3 of the questions treated in 2018 compared to 2017

ACCOMMODATION



- 332 checking leases
- 165 disputes
- 69 accommodation search



- 360 checking leases
- 192 disputes
- 174 accommodation search

REGISTRATION AND RESIDENCE



- 305 registrations in the population register
- 48 visa requests
- 39 family reunification requests



- 317 registrations in the population register
- 52 visa requests
- 37 special identity card

TAXES



- 170 income tax
- 13 regional tax
- 9 second residence tax



- 198 income tax
- 8 second residence tax
- 5 car registration tax

2.2 Testimonials



JOHN (UK)

contacted us concerning Brexit and the procedure for a special identity card holder to apply for Belgian nationality.



“I am a UK national working for an EU Institution. My wife is Japanese. We were both here with special ID cards. Following the ludicrous BREXIT referendum decision, I was desperate to understand how this might affect us and also learn what steps I could take to obtain Belgian citizenship. The first question being, should my wife and I change to Belgian ID cards and, if so, how? The Expat Welcome Desk gave us invaluable advice and supported us through the steps of changing ID cards, ensuring we obtained the E+ cards on first application. I also had many questions on our status and what barriers there are to obtain Belgian citizenship. The EWD advised and updated us on developments and is always available to help when needed. Without the Expat Welcome Desk I would not know where I could turn to for such advice and so very much appreciate its existence and the free services provided. Thank you so much for this 5+ star service!”



CORNELIA (GERMANY)

wanted to be sure that if she had registered to vote in the Belgian communal elections of 14 October 2018, she could still vote in Germany in European elections. We confirmed to her that this was indeed the case, since the registration procedure for local elections is different and separate from registration for European elections.

“I would like to thank your organisation for all the information on the local elections. This is great news that is not well enough known among EP staff. I just signed up today!”



NISHANT (INDIA)

sent us his short-term rental contract to review. We pointed out to him in particular that his contract did not provide the possibility for him to declare domicile in the property, and therefore to register with the commune.

“I don't know how many times I have thanked you but I really mean it every single time. I didn't know about the domicile clause at all. Thank you so very much for such a quick reply and pointing out this anomaly. I want to, first of all, sincerely thank you for all the help, time and effort you have given to me. It is good to know that the Commissioner's office is under such safe hands and excellent minds like yours.”

STEFANIA (ITALY)

works in a Belgian company and wanted to know what the regulations are concerning the notice period in a fixed-term work contract.



“Thanks a lot! Very useful indications and links, thanks a lot for the help. I have already spread the word about your website to my expat friends in Brussels.”



SARAH (FRANCE)

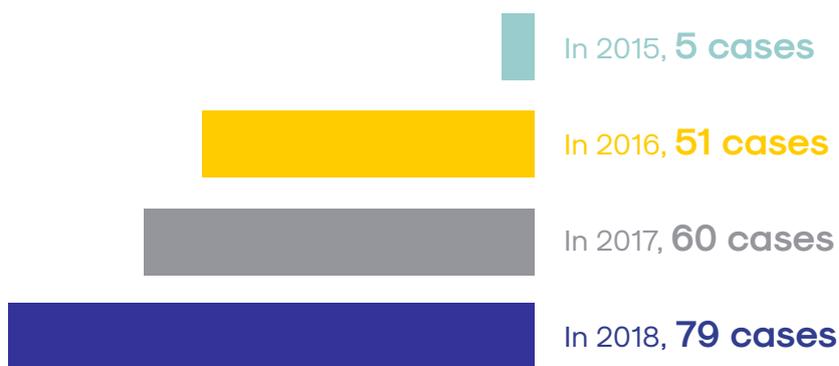
contacted us concerning the steps to be taken to obtain a work permit in order to hire a domestic childminder.

“I contacted the Welcome Desk just after our unexpected arrival in Brussels, in search of a carer for our sick child that would enable me to keep my job in the European institutions. I was impressed by the quality of understanding, availability and efficiency of the EWD which supported me personally – and patiently – through the numerous steps over a period of 8 months. The result: thanks to the Welcome Desk we have obtained a work permit for our foreign child carer and our unexpected stay in Brussels has started in the most favourable way possible. An excellent service that deserves to be known and recognised! “

3 Meetings and issues

3.1 Acquisition of Belgian nationality by European officials

Since the announcement of Brexit in 2016, we have noticed a marked increase in the number of questions we have handled relating to the acquisition of Belgian nationality.



The problems already described in our previous activity reports continue to arise, although they are mitigated by case law:



The special identity cards (SIC) issued by the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs are not recognised as legal residence as defined by nationality law, thus making it difficult for European officials to obtain Belgian nationality. Some communes go as far as treating applications from SIC-holders as invalid and unacceptable because the applicants do not meet the condition of legal residence in Belgium according to the current procedure. By refusing to even submit the applications to the prosecutor's office, the municipality offers the applicant no opportunity to appeal to the latter.

Following an important judgement passed on 29 March 2018 by the Brussels Court of Appeal, there has been a change in practice by the 19 Brussels communes: they no longer automatically refuse applications from persons holding SIC cards and agree to pass them on to the prosecutor's office.

This ruling considers article 4 of the royal decree of 14 January 2013 as being discriminatory in that it leads to different treatment, without justification, between Europeans who are residing legally with a valid residence permit which is included in the list of documents mentioned in article 4, and Europeans who are residing legally with a residence permit that is not mentioned in it. Thanks to this ruling, several nationality applications from European officials holding a SIC card (as well as their children) have been granted.



The work days of European officials do not qualify as work days subjected to Belgian social security, with the consequence that they do not therefore fulfil the criterion of economic participation imposed by the short (5 years) procedure for acquiring Belgian nationality.

However, on 8 May 2018 the Brussels Family Court judged that a certificate from the human resources office of the European Commission, indicating that the official had worked continuously for five years, was sufficient proof of the official's social integration and economic participation. This decision has not yet been confirmed by the Court of Appeal but is encouraging for European officials who wish to introduce an application for Belgian nationality on the basis of the short procedure.

3.2 Consequences of Brexit on “citizens’ rights”

In 2018, numerous British citizens contacted the CEIO to obtain precise information on the type of residence card they would receive after Brexit, if a work permit would be necessary, if having permanent residence would be beneficial, and so on. A definitive response to these questions is not yet possible. Nevertheless, the CEIO is involved at various levels with meetings on the subject of Brexit and, in particular, the part concerned with citizens’ rights.

The CEIO:

- **Supports the Brussels–Capital Region delegation to the EU in meetings organised at the federal level** by the Immigration Office and the Brexit coordinator of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs. These meetings focus particularly on the possibility of a “no deal” Brexit and the impact that the UK leaving (without a definitive or transitional agreement) could have on the BCR, its services and authorities, its enterprises and its British residents.
- **Also participates in “Brexit Platform” meetings** set up by the State Secretary for External Trade.

These working meetings enable us to both pass on specific residence questions from British citizens and to keep them informed of developments. A no-deal Brexit would signify that citizens’ rights would no longer be protected on a European level and would have to be dealt with by member states. Although there would be a desire to establish reciprocal agreements, incertitude still reigns on subjects such as healthcare, social security and pensions.



3.3 First-time exemption for European officials

Since 1 April 2018, the conditions for European officials obtaining VAT exemption when they first take up their post have changed. These officials **no longer have to be holders of the SIC card to receive VAT exemption on a range of goods** for a period of 12 months during their first two years of residence.

The head of protocol at the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs has set up a listing system with the Federal Public Service of Finance and the different EU institutions, enabling European officials to register in the commune (card E+) while conserving their VAT exemption when they first take up their post.

The increase of applications for Belgian nationality following the announcement of Brexit has already highlighted the shortcomings of the SIC card, through the Belgian authorities' refusal to recognise the SIC card as legal residence in terms of nationality law. This change in practice regarding VAT exemption further strengthens the notion that the SIC card has lost most of its value, except from a symbolic point of view and the delay of treatment (obtaining the card in a month without having to go to the town hall).

A meeting was organised on this subject at CEIO on 17 December 2018 with the heads of the welcome offices of the EU institutions and representatives from the municipalities of Etterbeek, Woluwe-Saint-Lambert and City of Brussels. During this meeting, it was decided that it is important to inform municipal staff about these new regulations for first-time exemption, so that they might prepare for increased applications from EU officials in the municipal desks for foreigners. From now on, families of EU officials may not longer opt for a SIC card on their arrival in Brussels. Indeed, the president of the Intercommunal working group¹ (GTI 19) proposed to add this point to the agenda of the next GTI.

“Contacts between the GTI 19 and the CEIO are regular and courteous and usually concern the hosting of European officials. The CEIO handles the difficulties and questions raised by the latter on a daily basis and the GTI 19 can act if necessary to provide further details depending on the issues of their stay. The CEIO has close contacts with the personnel departments of the various EU institutions and can therefore act as a link with the local authorities to facilitate contacts. We always seek amicable solutions when difficulties arise in specific cases.”

Dominique VAEYE
Chair of the GTI 19

¹ Group gathering, once a month, the directors of the “civil registry” and “foreigners” desks of the 19 Brussels communes.

3.4 City of Brussels antenna in the European Parliament

In place since 2015 and open to officials of all the EU institutions, the City of Brussels desk in our office at the European Parliament has proved highly successful. Once a week, **a commune official is outsourced to the EP** in order to enable European officials to register and carry out certain **administrative procedures** (residence certificates, order and collection of identity cards, etc.) without having to go to the foreigner's service which, in the case of the City of Brussels, can be very overcrowded.

During our annual review meeting, on 17 December 2018, with the welcome offices of various European institutions, it was underlined that the service provided had functioned well in 2018, particularly in the case of the many SIC cards exchanged for E+ cards. Although there are no plans to expand the range of services offered, a second civil servant from the City of Brussels will be trained to assist the current municipal officer and act as stand-in during periods of absence. In addition, the project could be widened to include other Brussels municipalities.



3.5 Reduction of property tax: new criterion applicable

Following the last tax reform, the criterion to be taken into account for obtaining a **reduction in property tax** is newly defined as the “number of children eligible for family allowances” and no longer the “number of dependent children”. However, in Brussels the majority of the international community working here do not come under the jurisdiction of the Belgian social security system (European and international officials, seconded national experts, members of the diplomatic corps, regional and local representations, etc.). Some of these own their home in Brussels and are parents of children living under the same roof, but do not receive Belgian family allowances because they receive them from either an European or international institution or from their home country.

In September 2018, several European officials were asked to pay property tax without the reduction that they enjoyed before. The EWD was contacted in this regard by the HR services of the European Parliament and European Commission.

The CEIO wrote to the BCR Minister for Finance and Budget who confirmed that article 257 § 4 of the income tax law did not specify that family allowances should necessarily be Belgian in order to trigger the reduction. Children eligible for family allowances under European law could therefore be taken into account.

Unfortunately, Brussels Taxation does not have the necessary data on families of European officials benefiting from Community family allowances, unlike the situation of children included in the databases of Belgian family allowance funds.

Two meetings were then organised (on 8 November and 17 December 2018) with Brussels Taxation and the heads of personnel services of the European Parliament and European Commission in order to find a practical solution to this problem. The authorities were anxious to deal with the situation rapidly and efficiently: a contact person was appointed in Brussels Taxation to whom the institutions could send individual cases and – if necessary and/or possible – lists of the people concerned.

For the moment, cases are dealt with on an individual basis, either directly by the official concerned via the Brussels Taxation website or through the HR service which forwards the case to the Expat Welcome Desk so that necessary steps can be taken by Brussels Taxation.

5. Seminars

Depending on the demand we receive, the EWD organises seminars in English on various subjects for specific groups. These seminars are led by specialists called upon by the EWD to ensure that the subjects are prepared thoroughly. They are held in the CEIO premises, in the heart of the European quarter.



06/02/2018
“Regional & local representations - How to be present in Brussels”
47 PARTICIPANTS

05/06/2018
“How to fill in your annual tax return?”
53 PARTICIPANTS

12/10/2018
“How to acquire Belgian citizenship?”
102 PARTICIPANTS

23/10/2018
“Networking Meetings of Diplomatic Liaison Personnel in Brussels”
22 PARTICIPANTS

22/11/2018
“Lease contracts in Belgium: all you need to know”
66 PARTICIPANTS

6 Information sessions

Throughout the year, the EWD takes part in information sessions organised for the international community with interactive presentations for each target group (cultural matters are covered by visit.brussels and administrative matters by the EWD). Welcome packs containing our brochure “settle down guide” are also distributed by visit.brussels.

Welcome for European institutions trainees



10/01/2018 and 24/09/2018
Welcome of students from
the *University of Kent*



05/03/2018
Welcome for NATO trainees and
contracted agents



14/03/2018
Info Day at
the European
Commission

18/10/2018
*“Survival Kit Brussels : Useful recommendations for
life in Brussels”* for German seconded national experts



14/06/2018 and 19/06/2018
“Coffee morning” for European
officials’ spouses

26/09/2018
“Expat information fair” organised
by The Bulletin and ING



A host region policy

Institutional liaison

Expat Welcome Desk

The CEIO



The CEIO

1. Communication

With regard to communication our mission is twofold:

- **Strengthen our image as a valuable intermediary** with both Brussels authorities and international organisations
- **Support the daily work of the Expat Welcome Desk (EWD)** through targeted communication activities and related tools

Unlike for the former Brussels-Europe Liaison Office, which the Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations (CEIO) replaced in 2015, communication with the Brussels general public is not part of our missions. Nevertheless, this is difficult to disassociate from our principal objective which is to act as 'liaison' between the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR), its representatives and citizens, and the international organisations which are present here. To bridge the well-known gap between both, it is essential to sensitise all parties involved on the added value that they bring to one and another.

To this end the communication officer set out to pursue a clear strategy and a coherent visual identity for the organisation in 2018.

WORKING WITH DIGITAL MEDIA

CARRY OUT AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

IMPROVE OUR COMMUNICATION MATERIAL

ESTABLISH AND CONSOLIDATE PARTNERSHIPS

COMMUNICATION OF A CLEAR, POSITIVE AND TARGETED MESSAGE

PARTICIPATION IN AND ORGANISATION OF TARGETED EVENTS



1.1 Awareness campaign for the 2018 Local Elections

More than **276 000 EU** nationals live in the **19 Brussels communes**. They constitute almost a quarter of the electorate. However, their level of participation in communal elections is low. Since 2000, the year in which EU citizens were for the first time allowed to participate in **Belgian local elections**, the **voting rate has fluctuated around 13%**.

In order to increase their participation in the 2018 communal elections, the CEIO took the initiative to run an intensive **awareness campaign** amongst personnel of the European institutions and international organisations in Brussels. To carry this out, the CEIO used several different materials and communication channels.

- A **trilingual leaflet** [Think European Vote Local](#)
- A **poster** in A3 format [Think European Vote Local](#)
- A **roll-up** [Think European Vote Local](#) for special events
- A detailed chapter on our **website**



The objective was to provide clear, simple and visible information to the target audience via **various communication materials** in support of local, regional and international authorities.

For this campaign, the CEIO worked closely with the Brussels communes, the regional administration “Bruxelles Pouvoirs Locaux/Brussel Plaatselijke Besturen”, the European and international institutions, as well as volunteers from the international civil society in Brussels, led by the Migration Policy Group.

The main objective of the awareness campaign was to **inform Brussels foreign residents of their right to vote in communal elections** and the administrative procedures involved, notably registration in the commune. The CEIO played an active role in several **public events and debates**, on **information stands** in various European institutions, at an **awareness day** organised by European Commissioner Oettinger in **ten European Commission buildings**, and by organising an **afterwork** on the subject at the **Press Club Brussels Europe**.



The CEIO also contributed to the **European Public Communication Conference EuroPCom** (8–9 November) in Brussels, where it presented its awareness campaign “Think European Vote Local”. This conference is attended by over 1.000 communication professionals from European, national, regional and local authorities in the EU.

The campaign was a big success. More European citizens **registered on the electoral roll** than ever before! 49 406 people, representing **17.3% of the non-Belgian population** in Brussels, registered to vote. A record both in terms of numbers and percentage. **Amongst EU nationals, 16.8% registered** (37 232 people). Of these, 25 will take up seats in various communal councils. These figures, higher than in all previous communal elections, are the result of the heavy CEIO campaign and a number of citizen initiatives. Public and local authorities also made great efforts to reach the international community, proving a commitment that was lacking in the other regions. In Saint-Gilles, expats were informed in 26 languages. The Brussels-Capital Region sent a letter to foreigners in Brussels accompanied by a registration form, which was followed up by the majority of Brussels communes.

Evidence suggests that **the more a commune informed its citizens, the more registrations it obtained**. In those communes which communicated less, results were clearly inferior.

This success should not however prevent other initiatives in the future. There can be no doubt that boosting the democratic participation of European citizens in future communal elections will strengthen legitimacy. One of the **solutions for increasing the voting level** could be to offer new arrivals the opportunity to register on the electoral roll at the same time as they register as residents in the municipality.

1.2 Events

Two events organised by the CEIO marked our organisation's 2018 year. The attendance of both events reflects the confidence and recognition given to the Commissioner and his team after four years of working in collaboration with all the actors involved in the further development of the Brussels Region's international function.

Opening of our antenna at the EP 7th March 2018 (102 participants)

Our welcome office located in the Altiero Spinelli building of the European Parliament has been refurbished. Thanks to EP funding, a bright, renewed space enables the EWD to provide an efficient service to the people who work in the institution.



New Year's reception at the BIP 4th December 2018 (214 participants)

A reception was held at the BIP to celebrate the CEIO's four years of operation. This was an opportunity to gather all our key partners (Belgian and international) in a pleasant atmosphere in order to thank them for this successful cooperation.



2. Team

The dynamic and multilingual CEIO team fulfils **a liaison role** between Brussels public authorities and European and international institutions (and their employees) established in Brussels.

Management

Alain HUTCHINSON
Commissioner

Karin IMPENS
Deputy Director

Expat Welcome Desk

Amélie BOVY
Legal Adviser

Hélène JACUB
Assistant

Annick DE BLESER
Assistant at the EP

Anaïs JOUZDANI
Assistant at the EP

Institutional Liaison desk

Edoardo GUGLIEMMETTI
Adviser Urban Development

Communication

Natacha BRIEVEN
Office Manager

Reception

Laurent GILARDENGHI
Reception Desk Assistant



3 □ Governing bodies

The General Assembly and Board are composed of representatives appointed by the Brussels-Capital Region government.

General Assembly

- Alain HUTCHINSON, President
- Haroun ATILA
- Valentin GRAAS
- Ief JANSSENS
- Julien JOST
- Gauthier LEJEUNE
- Frank LELON
- Julien MILQUET
- Nancy NGOMA
- Jeremy ONKELINX
- Laurent VAN DER ELST
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Brussels Parliament

In 2015 the Brussels Parliament created the **European Affairs Committee**, showing the importance that the Brussels Region attaches to the presence of international organisations on its territory. Once a year, the Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations presents the activities of the CEIO to this Committee and replies to numerous questions from the members of the Brussels parliament.

Conclusion

The role of the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations' (CEIO) as intermediary in the complex relationships between the region and the international institutions in the Brussels area is progressively taking shape and consolidating itself. In view of the complexity and technicality of the issues covered, our role is not always fully understood or recognised. In addition to the minimum legal obligations stipulated in the hosting agreements negotiated at federal level, CEIO's activity not only brings significant added value to the host nation policy but also helps draw the region's European and international institutions closer together.

In 2018, the CEIO continued to focus on improving the quality of the hosting policy and conditions for international organisations setting up in our region. Despite the complexity of the decision-making process, which often hinders an effective and rapid solution, progress has been made on most issues.

In addition, the CEIO plays a significant role in the recruitment of new international organisations that could provide a major boost to the innovation climate in the region, particularly in the newer sectors which attract other knowledge institutions in their wake. This recruitment policy today reflects a good inter-federal coordination, led by the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs which recognises the CEIO's role in the process and views our Expat Welcome Desk as an essential element of a bid book.

The financial cost of the regional host policy is low. The achievements presented in this report have been able to be produced by a team of seven persons: three advisers and four assistants under the management of the Commissioner. The CEIO is a non-profit public organisation whose funds are budgeted annually by the Minister-President. This situation is inadequate and compromises the important mission entrusted to us. If the host region policy is to be developed further, it needs to be formally legitimised better than it is currently. We therefore recommend to the next government that the "host region policy" is formally added to the competences of the Minister-President.

Finally, our daily experience tells us that more attention must be given to mobilising the public behind the European project and the role of Brussels as capital of Europe. It is essential that Brussels citizens are proud of their region's status and that they become more aware of being an integral part of the big European project, whereas the dismantling of the European institutions in Brussels would be economically and politically damaging to the region. Furthermore, it is also high time that the European and international institutions demonstrate a much stronger emotional commitment to the region that hosts them. This can only come about by being more open and investing more in the city of which they are a part.



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At the initiative of the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region:



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