

**2017**  
Annual report  
of the Brussels Commissioner  
for Europe and International Organisations





*“While Paris makes you Parisian and London makes you Londonier,  
Brussels does not make you Bruxellois, it allows you to be yourself.  
Its inhabitants cultivate a warmth, which the climate lacks.”*

ERIC-EMMANUEL SCHMITT

# Preface

---





With this third annual report of the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations (CEIO), we are half way through the term of office. The creation of the CEIO at the end of 2014 was part of the efforts agreed by the government aimed at strengthening the image of the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR) as a host region. This was a logical step after six successive state reforms and the transfer of numerous responsibilities to the regional level. This report covers our concrete achievements during the past year and sets out prospects for the future.

2017 was a year of continuity and consolidation. Beyond specific concrete activities, our role as intermediary between the Brussels and European authorities enabled us to develop and add content to the “host region policy”.

Too often in the past, relations with European and international institutions have been considered a peripheral matter and our attitude towards their presence has been almost indifferent. This state of affairs is an incomprehensible contradiction when we consider how much we like to claim our status as “Capital of Europe”, a process started more than 50 years ago. The status of Brussels as headquarters of many different international organisations helps considerably to define the identity of the Region.

Belgians and also therefore the inhabitants of Brussels are very attached to Europe...but like a distant cousin. Someone that we don't often meet, and with whom we don't really have a close relationship. And yet the European Union is present here, works here and stamps its print on the world from our own backyard. The direct and indirect added-value of this international presence for Brussels' economy and employment is enormous and deserves a much deeper analysis than we have given to it up until now.

This mix of distance and indifference is a position which the Region can no longer allow in view of the international competition with which we are currently faced. It is high time that our political responsibility as international host city is given a stronger voice in the political debate and becomes an integral part of our regional policy making.

I therefore call on all Brussels players, political authorities, decision makers and administrations to remain blind no longer to the reality of Brussels as an international capital and the added value that this brings. But this status also creates duties and obligations, requires a specific political approach and is dependent on a certain level of ambition.

The Brussels name resounds throughout the world. And the world in turn has its eyes fixed on us!

**Alain HUTCHINSON**

*Commissioner of the Brussels Government*



# Overview 2017

**2** BCRG-EU Summit meetings

**85** political meetings

**144** meetings

**2041** files handled by the Expat Welcome Desk

**42** cases handled by the Institutional Liaison desk

**11** newsletter articles

**31** events and presentations

**28** press articles

**25** years of experience of the Expat Welcome Desk

**6** seminars

**15** information sessions

**2000** official European institution trainees

**792** official letters to the authorities

**235** regional certificates





# Outlook 2018



## Expat Welcome Desk

- > Organisation of seminars on new themes, including the status of regional representations and new regulations in the Brussels Housing Code.
- > Inauguration of our office in the European Parliament (EP) following its renovation.
- > Working meeting with the EP in order to anticipate the administrative problems of parliamentary assistants at the end of their contracts prior to the next European elections.
- > Development of new connections with international organisations.

## Institutional liaison

- > Establish a long-term vision of the Host Region Policy and maintain reflection on the role of Brussels as an international capital within a global competitive environment.
- > Organisation of an international symposium in Brussels with other host cities facing similar challenges.

## Communication

- > Run an awareness campaign for the 2018 local elections with the aim of encouraging the international community to vote (leaflets, posters, extensive information on our website, seminar, etc.).
- > Enrich the content of our website, translate it in three languages (EN, NL, FR) and redesign its visual identity, in line with the identity created in 2017.
- > Organise a meeting in order to take stock of the situation after four years of activity and thank our most important contacts for their confidence.

# Contents

---





Preface	5
Overview and outlook	6
<b>A host region policy</b>	<b>11</b>
1 The international community in Brussels	12
2 Mission of the CEIO	14
3 The CEIO as a privileged intermediary	16
<b>Institutional liaison</b>	<b>21</b>
1 Method	24
2 Working groups	28
3 Issues handled in 2017	30
4 Regional and local representations	33
<b>Expat Welcome Desk</b>	<b>35</b>
1 Method	38
2 Cases handled in 2017	40
3 Meetings and issues	46
4 Newsletter be expat be.brussels	51
5 Seminars	52
6 Information sessions	54
<b>The CEIO and Brexit</b>	<b>57</b>
1 Brexit and the Expat Welcome Desk	60
2 Brexit and the acquisition of Belgian nationality	61
3 The EWD as an integral part of the Belgian bid for EMA	64
<b>The CEIO</b>	<b>67</b>
1 Communication	68
2 Team	72
3 Governing bodies	73
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>74</b>





# A host region policy

# 1 The international community in Brussels

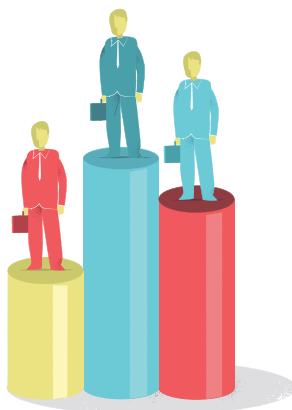
## 1.1 Brussels, Capital of Europe

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:



- 1<sup>st</sup> city in the world in the number of **diplomats**
- 1<sup>st</sup> city in Europe for **congresses** and 2<sup>nd</sup> in the world
- 2<sup>nd</sup> city in Europe in number of **languages spoken**
- 3<sup>rd</sup> 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,

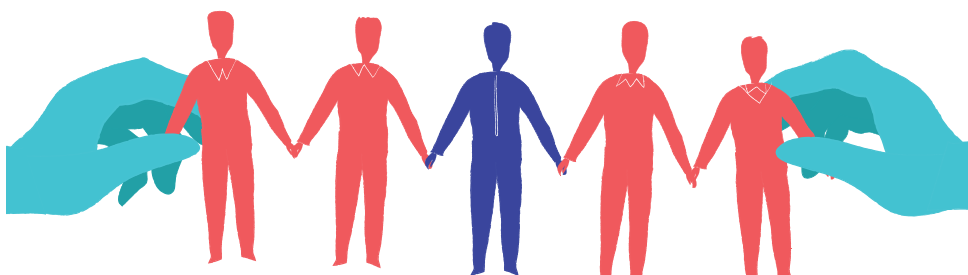
i.e. **5 billion euro**

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 2016<sup>1</sup>” reveals in more detail these key figures on the international presence in Brussels.

<sup>1</sup> <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. Indeed the presence of all these institutions has a major impact on Brussels' economy and society. The Brussels government accepted this responsibility without hesitation, and it led to the designation, at the end of 2014, of the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations (CEIO). The Commissioner was invested with a political mandate by the Brussels government, and he also relies on a constructive collaboration with the communes. The Commissioner therefore represents the Brussels authorities and acts on their behalf in a coordinated effort. With this initiative, the Brussels government launched the development of a clear and coherent host policy which, within the framework of its regional competences, will enable the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR) to position itself as a region with an international vocation. The mission of the CEIO is to develop a host region policy centred around the hosting of all international organisations on Brussels territory while respecting the harmonious development of the Region and its inhabitants.





### **ESTABLISH STRUCTURAL RELATIONS**

between the regional and local Brussels authorities and the international organisations, European institutions and diplomatic missions on Brussels territory.

### **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.

### **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 Expat Welcome Desk.



### 3 The CEIO as a privileged intermediary

The host region policy, which can be defined in general terms as the policy relating to the hosting of international governmental organisations having their headquarters or representation in the BCR, has long been an essentially federal matter. Following the sixth reform of the state and transfer of a large number of competences, BCR 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, quality public spaces 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. Taking a wider view, this shift leads us to think about the future role of each party and the mode of cooperation with federal authorities.



BCRG-EU Summit, Brussels on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2017

The CEIO is active on several levels: local, regional, federal and European/international. In all our work, we are faced with the fact that decision-making involves many different parties and levels of authority. Over the last couple of years, the CEIO has built up a solid network of authorities and administrations at all levels. Nevertheless, it is not always easy to identify who makes the final decision in a project or who can influence the decision when the power to decide is spread across several bodies. Our fundamental task is to bring together all the parties involved in a specific project. However, the complexity of the decision-making process in a multi-level political context often acts as a barrier to rapid and effective solutions.

Meetings at the highest level between the Brussels government and the European institutions represent key opportunities and form the essence of the way 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. This formula has the advantage of eliminating intermediary administrative layers and bringing together only those who are at the helm of their respective institutions. In spite of an often-difficult agenda, these meetings create a positive climate, take place in a constructive atmosphere and pave the way for further discussions with European administrations. All these projects share an aspect linked to security. On the European side, concerns about security weigh heavily on discussions whilst on the Brussels side, the priority is to activate a socio-cultural dynamic around the presence of the European Union institutions.

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

This working method implies an intensive agenda of meetings since regular and structured consultation is the only way to find solutions in many instances. The CEIO invites all parties involved in a particular project to sit together round the table. This is by no means straightforward since it can sometimes be difficult to identify the right participants and there are often a large number of parties involved. This requires a deep understanding of the political, administrative and legal landscape in Brussels. Combined with a good dose of emotional intelligence, these specific competencies can lead to successful discussions. When mutual misunderstanding and mistrust give way to a climate of confidence, points of view are more likely to converge and participants are more open to compromise. This is particularly noticeable on sensitive projects, whether they concern town planning or administrative issues.

On the subject of administrative questions, we have noticed that the level of service for international personnel can be problematic. With so many demands made on the under-staffed administrative services, they are not always able to respond satisfactorily. Moreover, legal issues are often extremely complex...even without additional linguistic barriers. The Expat Welcome Desk (EWD) of the CEIO is striving to develop a more structured working relationship with commune services in order to improve the exchange of relevant knowledge. It should be remembered that most international personnel do not fall under the status of privileged persons (e.g. Protocol on privileges and immunities of the EU), but under Belgian regulations.

The relationship with the communes also plays a crucial role in all town planning projects. The European quarter will see some major changes in the future and the reaction of the communes to this challenge will be an important factor in their success. To enable us to cut across divergent opinions and better appraise the situation – and if need be, play the role of mediator – it is vital that the communes contact the CEIO on projects which have a European dimension. Urban planning in the European quarter has a clear vision: the “Masterplan for the European Quarter” and the “Projet urbain Loi” (PUL) outline the direction to be followed by all urban developments and constitute the framework for the deployment of activities related to the European institutions. It is however extremely difficult to convert this vision into concrete developments because the Region, the communes and the institutions do not always share the same understanding. Projects which could represent major added value for the international image of the Region create controversy from the very start and progress only very slowly, when they are not actually at a halt. Development of the new coherent urban dynamic for this district, promised for so long, has failed to move through the administrations involved. Moreover, the technical nature of many of the individual projects is such that a global view of the whole project is often lost.

It is due to this particularly that development of the Schuman roundabout, which was planned by the political authorities a long time ago, has been delayed considerably. This despite the fact that the regional government reorganised itself over the last few years, both on a legislative level and in terms of its own organisation. Several services have been brought together under the Brussels Planning Agency ([perspective.brussels](http://perspective.brussels)) and the Urban Development Corporation ([sau-msi.brussels](http://sau-msi.brussels)), enabling it to develop and establish its own plans, while the Quality Chamber supervises the quality of all projects.

On a federal level, other than regular meetings with the CIPS/ICZ, the CEIO also has regular contact with the Protocol service of FPS of Foreign Affairs. Notably, the CEIO took part in a study on the different aspects of the Belgian Host Nation Policy that the French protocol service had passed to its Belgian counterpart.

Lastly, collaboration with the visit.brussels Europe department was intensified last year. This resulted in several concrete projects 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. The “Tourism” working group, of which all European institutions are part, is working to develop the touristic and cultural dimension, and increase the visitor-appeal of attractions in the neighbourhood.









# Institutional liaison

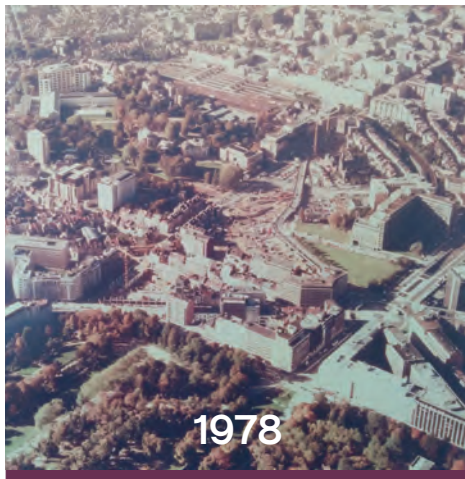
---



**T**he 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.

Seeking to encourage local equilibrium and guarantee a high 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 Region – from town planning, architectural heritage, the environment, mobility and tourism, to the development of public spaces (both their security and their conviviality).

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 a top-down property and development logic, causing traumatism from which certain neighbourhoods still carry the stigma – 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.

## Mission

The **Institutional Liaison desk** fulfils the role of “**go-between**”, an 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 play the role of a **single point of contact** for all requests that fall within the jurisdiction of regional competences, notably relating to town planning, security, mobility 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.

# 1. Method

## HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL DIALOGUE

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

The most recent editions of this **BCRG-EU Summit** presided over by the Brussels Commissioner took place on 24<sup>th</sup> January and 17<sup>th</sup> October 2017. They brought together BCR Ministers (Minister-President, Minister for Mobility, Minister for External Relations and Minister for the Environment) and representatives of the five European institutions (Commissioner, Vice Presidents, Secretary Generals and Director Generals).

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 17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 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 contact and information exchange aimed at overcoming barriers relating to the development 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 certain 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 specific technical projects, conduct regular and constructive dialogue, and build mutual confidence amongst all those involved. They are set up based on decisions taken in the BCRG-EU Summit.



## 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.





## DIALOGUE ON 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 communes 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 construction projects and mobility.

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.



## 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 in June 2017 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 cabinets 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, mobility and land development services of Brussels communes
- CIPS/ICZ and federal cabinets and administrations
- Political and administrative heads in European institutions
- Embassies and diplomatic missions
- Regional and local representations



BCRG-EU Summit on the 17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, European delegation

## 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 principal 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.



## 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 between the 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. It has also led to the first networking day (1<sup>st</sup> European Quarter Networking Event) involving institutional, cultural, touristic and commercial stakeholders in the European quarter.



## COBRACE WORKING GROUP

Following the most recent BCRG-EU Summit at the end of 2017, a new 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 it can anticipate results and prepare for the future. 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.



# 3 Issues handled in 2017

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 principal themes 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 quality of public space in the European quarter is illustrated in the specifications of the **Schuman roundabout development** 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 equivalent) and the Minister-President's cabinet. The CEIO was present throughout the whole process of developing the project as member of the Advisory Committee (coordinated by the BCR *Bouwmeester*) which expressed its preferences from the preliminary designs put forward by the different teams of architects and town planners.



After many months of negotiation (particularly on the procedure to be followed) and thanks to mediation from the CEIO, work was finally carried out in **Place Jean Rey** to lay cables to which the international media's **satellite transmission vehicles** could connect for coverage of European summits.



## ENVIRONNEMENT

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

The CEIO has also taken part in discussions aimed at changing a limited number of clauses in the **environment permits of European Parliament buildings**, so that the actual usage situation is reflected in the permit and the semi-public use of a car park becomes operable.

## TOURISM

In November 2017, as a result of the initiative of the CEIO and visit.brussels, both of which are a part of the tourism working group, the **1<sup>st</sup> European Quarter Networking Event** took place. The day brought together in the Cinquantenaire Museum a wide range of players active in the cultural and touristic field in the European quarter – including public authorities, representatives of the European institutions, guide associations, museums and theatres, shops, hotels and restaurants – where they presented and discussed projects which could promote the attractiveness and conviviality of the quarter. Following the success of this event, a **Networking Lunch** will be organised in spring 2018 to measure the progress of proposed projects and thereby strengthen the links between key players in the neighbourhood.

## SECURITY

The CEIO initiated the project **“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. The Brussels planning agency *perspective.brussels*, the regional authority responsible for development, 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 provided to the regional government in order to help define a strategy on the subject.



The CEIO also assisted in negotiations on **transforming the central section of Rue Wiertz into a pedestrian area**. While awaiting a final development proposal, a two-year test phase was agreed by the communes concerned (City of Brussels and Ixelles), the police service and the European Parliament administration. It is a complete pedestrian area with guaranteed passage for cyclists and persons with reduced mobility, in addition to emergency services and the police. In order to avoid any private use of the road, there is no right-of-way exception for the cars of officials or members of the Parliament.

Since 2015, the CEIO has also been involved with the **security of the interinstitutional tunnel** which links the major European institution buildings situated around the Schuman roundabout. After numerous technical consultations with European institute 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.

# 4 Regional and local representations

Brussels is a global centre of regional and local lobbying: almost all Europe's regions and many local authorities have established a representative office here. The regions' principal aims are to collect European Union policy information, to strengthen ties between the region and the EU, to build networks, to influence EU policies and to promote their own region. The European institutions and national permanent representations recognise them as separate entities in their own right.

In 1991, the Brussels-Capital Region created certification for regional and local representations established in Brussels. This regional certificate is issued by the regional Minister for External Relations. In the past, the management and attribution of these certificates was handled by the Brussels-Europe Liaison Office. Today the CEIO runs the service.

This certification serves as official confirmation of the presence of a regional representation in Brussels and is a means of assisting the given representation in its contacts with Brussels regional and local authorities, with certain service providers such as banks and telephone operators, and even with European institutions. Every year the Minister for External Relations issues this "facilitating" document to official delegates of cities, regions and international public networks that request it.

The regional certificate identifies each entity as an official representative of the given authority in Brussels but confers no legal or financial responsibility on the Brussels-Capital Region authority. Today 235 regional and local representations receive this certification every year.









# Expat Welcome Desk



**T**he 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).



# 1 MISSION

We offer a tailor-made administrative assistance to the international community settling in the Brussels-Capital Region. We provide support with any practical or legal problem that may arise at your arrival or during your stay.



## 5 REASONS FOR USING OUR SERVICES

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 YOU

- > By phone: **+32 (0)2 430 66 00**
- > By e-mail: **[info@commissioner.brussels](mailto:info@commissioner.brussels)**
- > Our website: **[www.commissioner.brussels](http://www.commissioner.brussels)**
- > Ask for an appointment

## 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 privileged contacts

- Personnel 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
- Mayor and aldermen of the 19 Brussels communes
- Brussels Economy and Employment
- Federal Interministerial Committee for the Host Region Policy
- FPS Foreign Affairs
- FPS Finances
- The Immigration Service
- The tenants federation ("Syndicat des Locataires")

## Our multilingual team

### 2 OFFICES

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

### 3 TEAM MEMBERS

- **Amélie BOVY**, legal adviser
- **Hélène JACUB**, assistant at Head office
- **Annick DE BLESER**, assistant at European Parliament

**Our presence in the European Parliament** 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 in the international community relating to their arrival and stay in Brussels. The EWD offers its visitors personalised advice by e-mail and telephone, as well as through direct meetings. 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 face of the complexity of administrative procedures and regulations in force in Belgium. Our principal mission is to provide correct, clear and precise information in an international language such as English, as quickly as possible.

The EWD also writes a monthly article on a practical subject for the international community. This article is published in the newsletter *be expat be.brussels* (see point 4) and is also available on our site in the “news” column.



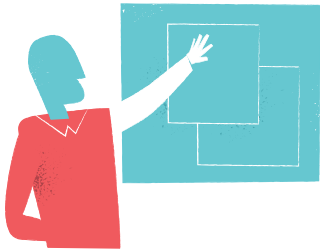
## EWD ADVISES

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 real consultancy work.

## 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, temporary seconded worker, 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 the flow of administrative procedures, requiring the EWD to resolve the issue by contacting the relevant authority directly.



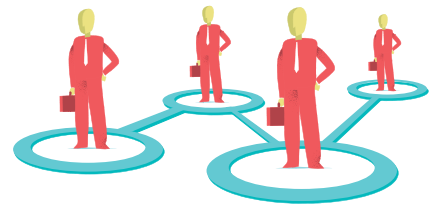


## EWD ORGANISES

Throughout the year, the EWD organises seminars and information sessions for specific groups such as trainees in European institutions or international organisations, partners of European officials, diplomats and the international community in general. Subjects of the seminars vary in function of the group and frequently asked questions we are confronted with. Some seminars are led by the EWD, others are presented by outside experts. Targeted information sessions in collaboration with visit.brussels are given in an interactive way by making use of digital tools.

## EWD BRINGS TOGETHER

The EWD frequently creates working meetings that bring together members of European institution personnel departments and the Immigration Office, the 19 Brussels communes, the FPS 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, obtaining D visas for non-EU trainees in European institutions, 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

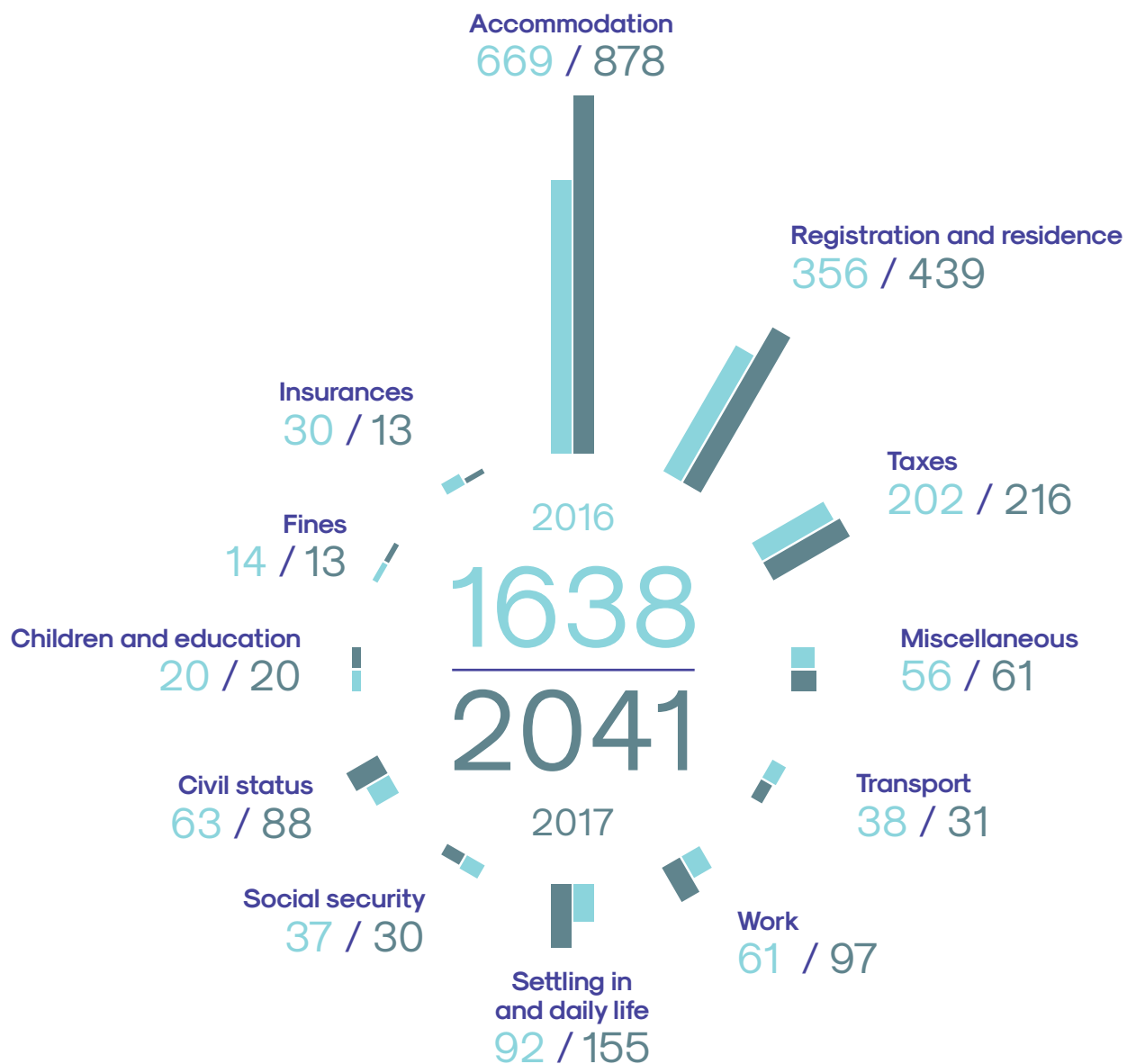
It is clear that a qualitative and personalised welcome of the growing international community in Brussels helps to give a positive image of the Region. Persons who have received the necessary help, in an adequately short time frame, during their stay in Brussels will remember the fact and become good 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 founded by the Brussels government.



## 2. Cases handled in 2017

### 2.1 Statistics

Number of EWD cases by type, over two years (2016 and 2017):



## Top 3 of the questions treated in 2017 compared to 2016

### ACCOMMODATION



- 360 checking leases
- 192 disputes
- 174 accommodation search



- 237 checking leases
- 183 disputes
- 112 breaking leases

### REGISTRATION AND RESIDENCE



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



- 242 registrations in the population register
- 31 visa requests
- 30 family reunification requests

### TAXES



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



- 150 income tax
- 31 regional tax
- 13 second residence tax

At the request of CIPS/ICZ, the EWD worked with Brussels Economy and Employment in order to accelerate procedures for obtaining several work permits requested by NATO for external contractors involved in the development of the new headquarters.

## 2.2 Practical cases

### ACCOMMODATION

*A trainee in the European Parliament contacts us because he is just about to sign a rental contract for the duration of his internship in Brussels. The property owner proposes that he signs a contract for 9 years but the trainee wonders if this type of contract is legal.*



Verifying rental contracts is an everyday task for the EWD, and one in which the team invests much time. The administrative assistant systematically checks the whole contract. Certain issues are anticipated and explained to the person beforehand, so that he or she can make an informed decision to sign the contract.

### REGISTRATION AND RESIDENCE

*A French national works in the European Commission and questions us on the steps to be taken in order to obtain a Belgian residence permit. When should he register? Which documents should he provide?*



Registration in the commune always appears to be complicated. Not only does the procedure take several months to complete, the processes and timetable also differ from one commune to another. Foreigners find this difficult to understand and it can place them in a delicate situation which slows down certain other steps such as opening a bank account, finding employment for a partner or registering with a healthcare organisation.

## TAXES

*A Spanish official in the Council of the European Union has received a tax return form from her local tax office. She is not sure what to do with this document.*



In tax matters, European institution personnel are subject to particular regulations detailed in the European Union Protocol on Privileges and Immunities. Officials who are domiciled for tax purposes in a member state other than Belgium are required to return their tax declaration to their local tax office (instead of the scanning centre) attaching the certificate for exemption of withholding tax issued by their institution. By doing this, they will then no more receive tax forms in future years.

## WORK

*A young American student is finishing his masters in France and has the opportunity for an end-of-course internship in a Belgian company after his studies. He contacts us to know if he needs a Belgian work permit.*



A non-European student who studies in an EU member state and who then takes a traineeship in Belgium as a mandatory part of his studies does not require a work permit.

## 2.3 Testimonials



**Julien**

*FROM FRANCE*

“The Expat Welcome Desk has always been very prompt and efficient in responding to questions relating to our integration into life in Belgium. While negotiating a lease we sought information about common rental arrangements and how to navigate the process. Additionally, in seeking advice related to establishing residency the experts were extremely helpful in getting our dossier finalized. They provide advice very professionally and were always very pleasant. Over all we highly recommend this service for new arrivals in Brussels.”



**Laura**

*FROM THE USA*

“As a third-country trainee for one of the EU institutions, the visa process was not only complicated but unfamiliar to the Consulate as well. After receiving conflicting and errant information, you clarified the process and were terrific throughout. The guidance you provided enabled me to correctly apply for, and obtain my visa, allowing me to start my traineeship! The help you are providing now is even more incredible; guiding me through the complex and often misunderstood process of obtaining work and residence permits after the end of my traineeship. The help is invaluable, not only on the administrative side but helping me to understand and accurately explain the process to potential employers and ensure I accurately navigate the process. I'm incredibly grateful for all your help. It's been an invaluable asset.”





## Zampia

FROM GREECE

“ I have used the Expat Welcome Desk on two occasions: in the field of property- and of personal income taxation. On both occasions, the welcome desk, has reacted rapidly and has provided me with either useful advice to understand the matter better or with hands-on assistance, taking direct contact with the Belgian authorities on my behalf. Being a European civil servant recently established in Brussels, I now consider the Expat Welcome Desk, my first point of contact with regard to all my private affairs with the public authorities in Brussels. ”



A host region policy

Institutional liaison

## Michele

FROM CROATIA

“ Thank you so much for your help and for calling me today to follow up. Although I've been here 3 years, dealing with an unfamiliar administrative system can be daunting. I'm so glad I found out about your office. You've truly been so supportive and everything an expat or new immigrant could dream of. ”



Expat Welcome Desk

The CEO and Brexit

## Anna

FROM THE UK

“ Many thanks for sending me details of the various options I have for improving my French language skills in preparation for applying for a Belgian national ID. I look forward to getting started with my studies soon! ”

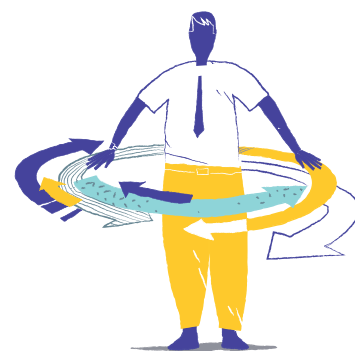
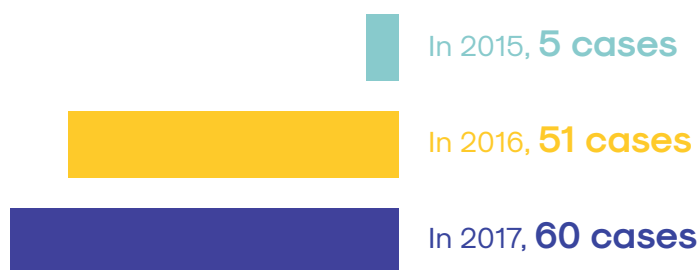


The CEO

## 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.



Throughout 2017, the CEIO was again contacted regularly by European officials, notably British, wishing to acquire Belgian nationality.

In effect, several problems continue to face European officials and their children who wish to obtain Belgian nationality:



**The special identity cards (SIC)** issued by FPS Foreign Affairs are not recognised as legal residence as defined by nationality law, thus making it impossible 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. By refusing to even submit the applications for arbitration, the commune offers the courts no opportunity to come to a different decision.



**The children of European officials** with SIC status are also affected by the issue. For the most part, these children have been born and educated in Belgium; they are totally integrated in our society and wish to stay living here. During their childhood, they had no opportunity to register for a commune card since their parents held a SIC.



**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 fulfill the criterion of economic participation included in the short (5 years) procedure for acquiring Belgian nationality.

Being aware of this situation since 2016, the CEIO was able throughout 2017 to contact various authorities involved with the issue:



**REGIONAL AND FEDERAL AUTHORITIES:** a letter was sent to the Minister of Justice outlining the problem of SIC recognition as legal residence for the obtainment of Belgian nationality. We also underlined to the Region the disparity between communes in the manner in which European officials' applications for Belgian nationality are treated.



**BRUSSELS COMMUNES:** during 2017, we noticed that certain Brussels communes have introduced a "clearance" system so that a request from a SIC holder can nevertheless be passed to the prosecutor's office.



**OTHER PARTIES INVOLVED:** we are also working closely with various experts on the subject (Objectif - a not-for-profit organisation, lawyers specialised in the field, etc.); they are following up closely legal developments favourable to the recognition of SIC as legal residence in terms of Belgian law.

In 2017, the CEIO made several presentations on the subject of acquiring Belgian nationality and the obstacles encountered:

- A meeting with British officials from the Committee of the Regions, **01/02/2017**.
- Two seminars given with the Brussels British Community Association (BBCA), **23/05/2017** and **25/10/2017**.
- Seminar organised by the CEIO in cooperation with the not-for-profit organisation Objectif, **28/06/2017**.
- A seminar organised by Fragomen, an international immigration consultancy, on the consequences of Brexit for British SIC holders, **01/09/2017**.



## 3.2 Meeting with GTI 19 (26/04/2017)

The GTI 19 (Inter-communal Working Group) is composed of managers of the population and foreigners desks of the 19 Brussels communes. It meets once a month to discuss various subjects and issues relating to civil status and the population service such as entry in the national register, communal elections, marriage and nationality.

Following a training day for commune staff organised by the CEIO in 2016, we thought it would be useful to meet with GTI 19 in order to remind them of our role and discuss several issues:

- the disparity between communes in the interpretation of applications for Belgian nationality from European officials;
- the future transfer to FPS Foreign Affairs of the management of registration of certain foreigners holding a SIC;
- the hosting of international professors, researchers and students.

## 3.3 Evaluation meeting on the decentralised City of Brussels office in the European Parliament (23/03/2017)

Since its introduction in 2015, the decentralised City of Brussels presence in our office at the European Parliament (EP) has been a big success. The idea is to redeploy a commune official in the EP from time to time in order to allow European officials to register and complete other administrative formalities, such as residence certification and the request and reception of identity cards, without having to actually visit the foreigners service which, in the case of the City of Brussels, suffers from excessive demand.

At the request of those responsible for the Welcome offices of the EU-institutions, a meeting was organised with the Population and civil registry director of the City of Brussels in order to assess the functioning of this decentralised presence in the EP. All participants underlined the importance of maintaining this service. Nevertheless, certain small improvements could be made, for example in the organisation of meetings, the addition of a contact point when the commune official is absent and an expansion of services offered. As suggested by the CEIO, this type of meeting will be held annually.





## 3.4 Meeting to launch a statistical study on international employment in the Brussels-Capital Region (09/03/2017)

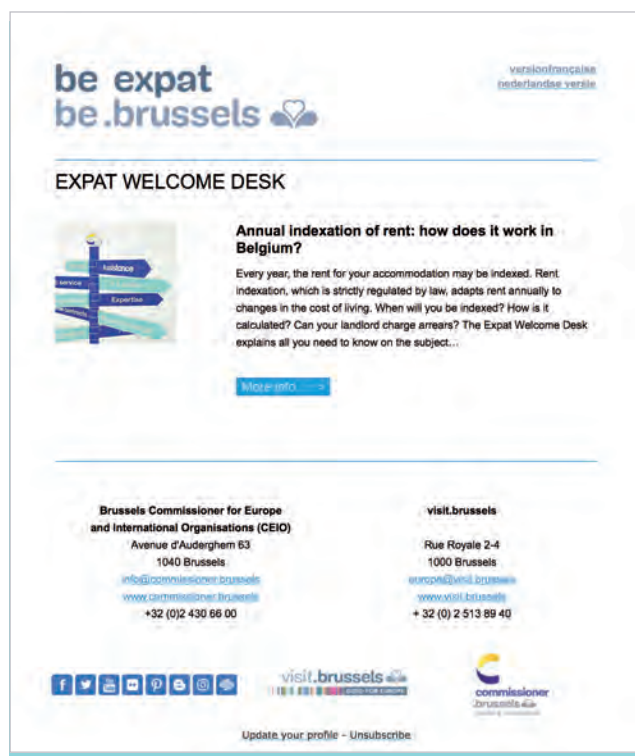
CEIO was contacted by the Brussels Institute for Statistics and Analysis ([perspective.brussels](http://perspective.brussels)) concerning a study whose objective is to improve employment statistics in the Brussels-Capital Region by mapping international employment, particularly that which is exempt from social security contributions. Since this segment of the population is not currently included in workforce statistics, although a large part of these workers is included in the national register, the statistics give a false picture of the labour market situation. These persons are in fact classified in the “inactive” category which leads to an overestimation of the unemployment rate in the Brussels-Capital Region.



The CEIO brought around the table the five European institutions which are the largest international employers of the Region, and several international organisations. It has organised an information session for all parties involved and taken steps to obtain their agreement in principle to take part in the study and to communicate the requested statistical information relating to the personnel they employ.

# 4. be expat be.brussels newsletter

The monthly trilingual (EN, FR, NL) newsletter **be expat be.brussels** by visit.brussels (the Brussels tourism bureau) provides an article every month by the EWD on administrative aspects of life in Brussels. This newsletter is dedicated to expats and sent to more than 12 500 people. European Parliament personnel and MEPs receive it directly via their intranet thanks to our presence there.



## Articles published by the EWD in 2017:

- New rules for sorting your garbage!
- Several changes come into effect in 2017!
- Buying a property: where to start?
- Legal guarantee: what are your rights?
- The 2017-2018 edition of "Expats in Brussels" guide!
- Belgian tax return: how does it work?
- How can you find a day care centre for your child?
- Rental charges: a sizeable expense when you rent an apartment!
- The registration of your car: a reminder of the rules!
- Reimbursement of healthcare costs: how does it work?
- Annual indexation of rent: how does it work?

## 5. Seminars

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

### Job Coaching

14/03/2017

This event was organised, for the first time, in cooperation with the German Embassy and the German Permanent Representation. In view of the interest of many diplomat spouses in searching for work during their partner's mission in Belgium, we organised an information session on employment, with an approach targeted to expats.

Dirk BREMKAMP, specialised in job coaching expats and himself expatriated in Brussels for many years, made a presentation on numerous aspects of the subject including the employment market in Belgium, work contracts, the status of self-employed workers, and how to find a job.



### Networking Meetings of Diplomatic Liaison Personnel in Brussels

10/05/2017 and 19/10/2017

An initiative of the German Embassy and the German Permanent Representation in conjunction with the CEIO, these meetings brought together family officers of different embassies whose role is to welcome new members of the staff and their families. Two meetings were organised in 2017 in CEIO offices covering such topics as VAT, mutual healthcare funds and rental deposits.

## How to fill in your annual tax return?

30/05/2017

As in 2016, the EWD organised a seminar on the subject “How to fill in your Belgian tax return”. Several aspects were covered including “What taxes are withheld from your salary?”, “What is section 281.10?” and “How to declare foreign income”. A brief presentation on the notion of “salary” (gross and net) and “advantages in kind” was also made.



## How to acquire Belgian citizenship?

23/06/2017

In view of the considerable increase in the number of questions handled by the EWD on the subject of acquiring Belgian nationality, we judged it necessary to organise a seminar on the subject, in cooperation with the not-for-profit organisation Objectif. The agenda included the different procedures leading to the attainment of Belgian nationality, general and specific conditions applicable, documents required to support an application, and the situation of European officials holding a SIC. Practical cases were also examined and numerous questions were raised and discussed.

## Access to Belgium healthcare and incapacity compensation

07/12/2017

For the first time, we organised a seminar with INAMI (National Institute for Sickness and Invalidity insurance) on the subject “Healthcare insurance and indemnities in the event of work incapacity”. Various aspects relevant to expats were covered including how to obtain insurance, the role of a mutual organisation, reimbursement of healthcare costs and European regulations.





## 6 Information sessions

Throughout the year, the EWD takes part in information sessions organised for the international community and produces customised interactive presentations for each target group (a cultural part by [visit.brussels](http://visit.brussels) and an administrative part by the EWD). Welcome packs containing our brochure “settle down guide” are also distributed by [visit.brussels](http://visit.brussels).

### Welcome for European institution trainees

Every year around 2,000 trainees come to Brussels to work in the various European institutions. The institutions organise two trainee welcome sessions a year (Feb/Mar and Sept/Oct) in which the EWD takes an active part.



### University of Kent 11/01/2017 and 20/09/2017

Two information sessions were given to students from the University of Kent in 2017.



## Welcome for NATO trainees

18/09/2017

For the first time, we were invited by NATO to welcome their trainees. The organisers wish to continue this project with future welcome sessions.

## Info Day at the European Commission

15/03/2017

Organised in the Berlaymont (Piazza) by the European Commission Welcome office, Info Day is dedicated to new arrivals. It features numerous stands presenting information such as internal Commission services (PMO, schools, etc.), expat associations, and several Brussels communes and administrations. At the request of the European Commission, the CEIO was responsible for inviting the 19 Brussels communes to the event.

## Coffee Morning for spouses of officials

23/06/2017, 27/06/2017, 05/12/2017

Once or twice a year, the European Parliament and European Commission organise information sessions for the spouses and partners of new officials and employees. The EWD is involved with these sessions which include regular topics relating to commune registration, the special identity card and the search for employment.



In 2017, the Office of the Secretary-General of European Schools expressed an interest in organising information sessions for its personnel in the future.



# The CEIO and Brexit

---





**O**n 23 June 2016, the United Kingdom (UK) decided by referendum to leave the European Union (EU). At the start of Brexit negotiations on 19 June 2017, the two parties agreed on a phased procedure, with initial discussions covering only the conditions of British withdrawal. At the end of this procedure, the UK will cease to be a member of the EU as from 29 March 2019.

On an institutional level, Brexit will have an impact on the European institutions. The number of British officials within European Union institutions will start to decline, although initially at a slow rate. Today the European Commission employs around 1125 British officials, representing 3.8% of its 30 000 staff. The European Parliament (EP) employs 289 British personnel<sup>1</sup>. The seats of the 73 elected British members of the EP will be redistributed between member states, the British European Commissioner will also disappear.

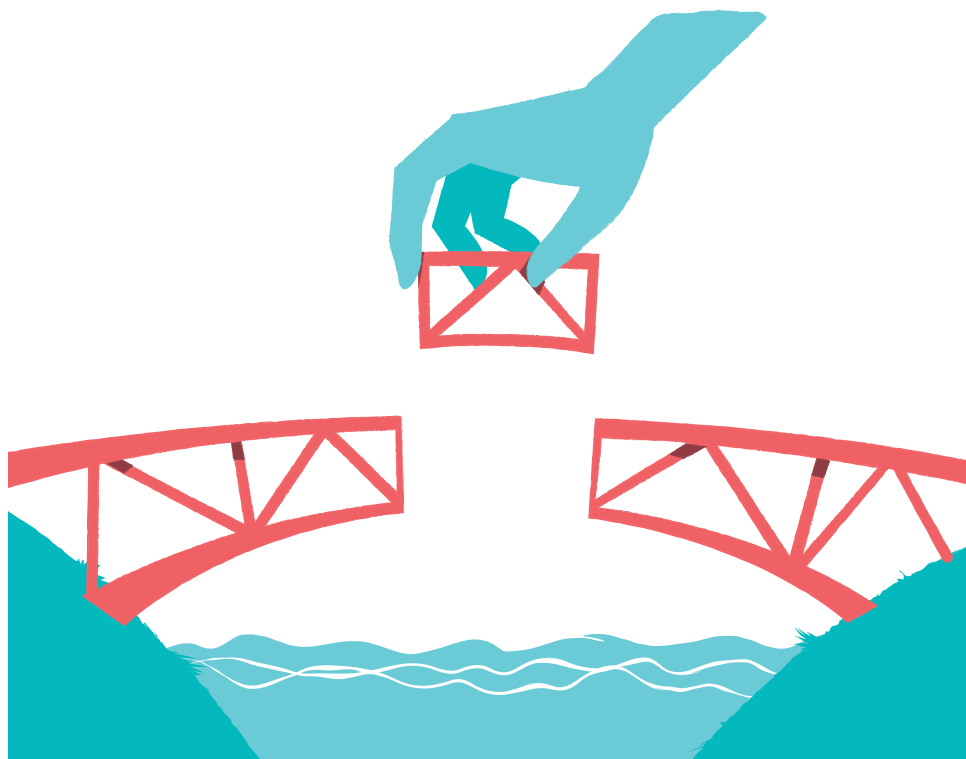
<sup>1</sup> 2015/16 figures.



The economic stakes for Belgium are considerable, particularly for Flanders where the majority of the 120 000 Belgian jobs dependent on commercial links with the UK are located. ING foresees a negative impact of 0.5% on GDP, equivalent to 2.1 billion euros, which will be above the European average.

For the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR), collateral economic damage will not be so significant and Brexit could even offer favourable opportunities. The Brussels government has summarised its political priorities in a concrete action plan focused on active prospection by Brussels Invest & Export and promotional campaigns in the UK.

Indeed, it is not unthinkable that British lobbyists in Brussels will develop and certain sectors such as insurance, banking and audio-visual sector might transfer their activities here. A hub project aimed at international associations has been set up in conjunction with the Association Bureau of visit.brussels and will start operation in the renovated Orangerie premises of our offices in 2018. This unique platform will enable British and other international start-ups to carry out their activities in the heart of the European quarter.



# 1. Brexit and the Expat Welcome Desk

The involvement of the Expat Welcome Desk (EWD) of the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations (CEIO) in the Brexit project concerns particularly expats and British officials living in the BCR.

It is unlikely that we will see an exodus of the 27 835 British expats living in Belgium, of which around 8500 live in the BCR. The EWD has noticed that British residents in Brussels are facing a period of uncertainty. What they want above all is to be able to continue to live and work in our region, where they have built their professional and family life. Although a priority of negotiations between the United Kingdom and the European Union is to find satisfactory solutions to the question of reciprocal citizens' rights, a large number of issues remain in the areas of healthcare, schooling, tax, pensions and rights of residence.

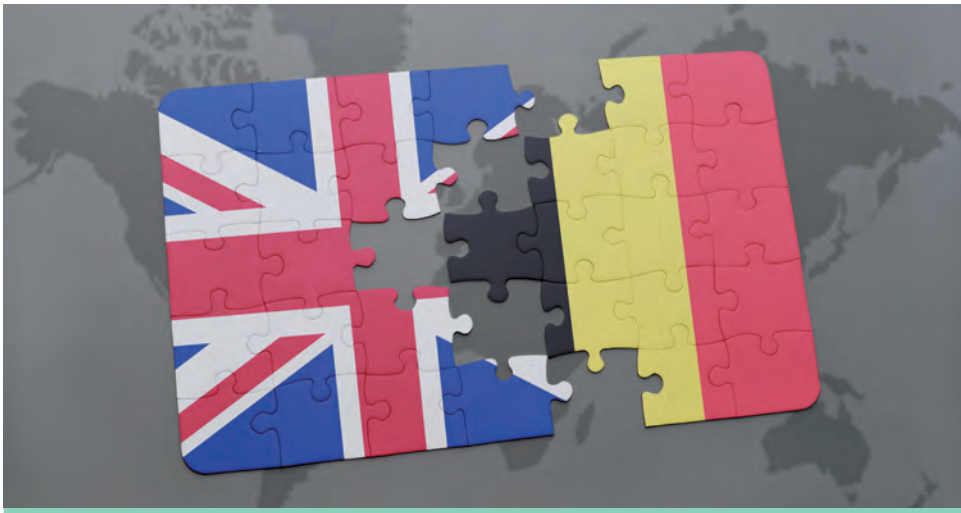
Last year, the EWD strived to answer a large number of individual questions on this subject. We were also often consulted about the acquisition of Belgian nationality. This is a promising area for British expats since Belgium accepts double nationality, unlike many other member states.



## 2. Brexit and the acquisition of Belgian nationality

Despite recent reform of the law on Belgian nationality which came into force on 1 January 2013, the acquisition of Belgian nationality remains a complex procedure involving several administrative levels. Depending on the method selected, this process requires that the applicant meets specific conditions of residence, economic participation and integration.

Since Brexit, the CEIO has been contacted several times by European institutions about the issue of British European officials (amongst others) acquiring Belgian nationality and the difficulty of acquiring this status under current Belgian regulations.



Many British nationals who are European officials are concerned that they will have to leave their institutions when the UK leaves the EU, and that they will then no longer be nationals of an EU member state. Since most of these Britons have lived here with their family for years, many of them consider to apply for Belgian nationality. However, Belgian law deprives them of this opportunity in the short term. The problem is due to the fact that the special identity card (SIC) issued by the Federal Public Service for Foreign Affairs to officials of the European institutions in Belgium, is not recognised as legal proof of residence in terms of the law of Belgian nationality, either for the short procedure (5 years) or for the long procedure (10 years).

**The law of 4 December 2012 reduces the large number of procedures for acquiring Belgian nationality to four:**

- 1/** *The declaration of nationality by a foreigner born in Belgium;*
- 2/** *The short procedure of declaration of nationality after five years of legal residence:*
  - *with social integration and economic participation;*
  - *with social integration for a foreigner who is married to a Belgian national, as long as the spouses have lived together in Belgium for at least three years or who is parent of a Belgian minor or non-emancipated minor;*
  - *for handicapped persons, those with reduced mobility or those having reached pensionable age.*
- 3/** *The long procedure of declaration of nationality after 10 years of legal residence;*
- 4/** *Naturalisation in exceptional cases when it can be justified that exceptional merits could make a particular contribution to the international standing of Belgium, for stateless persons.*

British officials of European institutions, and therefore all officials of the European Union, are in general only eligible for this procedure after 10 years of legal residence and on condition that they have a residence permit (E and E+ card) issued after registration in their commune of residence.

In view of their particular legal status, which is determined by the Staff Regulations and the Protocol of 8 April 1965 on the Privileges and Immunities, in application of which a special identity card is provided to European officials, their stay is not recognised by Belgian law as a stay of a sustainable nature. This regulation is obviously in contradiction with the reality since many European officials have worked here for decades and have even chosen to spend their retirement in Belgium.

The CEIO has already several times urged the relevant authorities to consider changing the law so that the period of residence with a special identity card can be taken into account in the procedure for acquiring Belgian nationality.

Moreover, a European official is bound, under the “short” procedure (requested after five years of legal residence – *art. 12bis, § 1er, 2°, of the Belgian nationality law*), to be able to provide proof of his/her social integration and economic participation through having worked for a certain period during the five years preceding the request. However, it appears that the law only takes account of work days subjected to the Belgian social security system, which excludes European officials even though they contribute to the Community budget and to the economic prosperity of our capital in general.

In 2017, the CEIO made several attempts to tackle this problem with the federal authorities involved. In addition, the Expat Welcome Desk intervened with several communes, acting as a filter at the start of the process, in view of the fact that it is not conducted in the same manner in all communes.

The EWD also took part in several seminars on this subject in 2017 (more info in the “Expat Welcome Desk” chapter).





### 3 The EWD as an integral part of the Belgian bid for EMA

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) is a decentralised body of the European Union which has been based in London for the last 20 years. Its principal mission is to advise the European Commission in connection with the approval of new medicines, facilitate the development of medicines and access to them, monitor the safety of medicines and provide information to healthcare professionals.

Following the UK's decision to leave the EU, it was decided to move this agency to another member state by March 2019 at the latest.

Nineteen member states came forward as candidates for the new EMA headquarters. Belgium was one of them, making a bid in which the federal government developed a strong common candidature with the country's three regions. Brussels Invest & Export was given the responsibility to represent the Brussels-Capital Region. The detailed proposal put the accent on the Expat Welcome Desk as the focal point for welcoming and taking care of the more-than-800 officials and their families. Accommodating the organisation and taking close care of personnel during the move was one of the fundamental elements of the bid.





Press conference "EMA TO BE", European Medicines Agency, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2017

The EWD took an active part in all the coordination meetings organised by the FPS of Foreign Affairs for this project, as well as at the Belgian bid presentation to an EMA delegation at Residence Palace on 31 May 2017.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2017, a press conference was held in "The One", located right in the heart of the European quarter, to officially announce the Belgian bid to host the EMA.

The European Commission's analysis confirmed the Belgian bid met most of the established criteria. The bid package was certainly part of the group of candidates which best responded to requirements in terms of accessibility, building proposals, the presence of hotels and international schools, and the hosting of expats. At the end of November 2017, the heads of state and government finally decided to transfer EMA headquarters to Amsterdam.





# The CEIO

# 1. Communication

With regard to communication our mission was twofold: to strengthen our image as a valuable intermediary with both Brussels and international organisations, and to support the daily work of the Expat Welcome Desk (EWD) through targeted communication activities and related tools. Unlike the Brussels-Europe Liaison Office, which the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations (CEIO) replaced in 2015, communication with the Brussels public in general is not one 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. Indeed, 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 achieve our missions it was necessary to improve our visibility with our target audiences by developing more suitable communication supports and channels. To achieve this in 2017, the communication officer defined a clear strategy and started building a coherent visual identity for our organisation.





## COMMUNICATION OF A CLEAR, POSITIVE AND TARGETED MESSAGE

For most people, the term “host region policy” is an abstract concept that is difficult to understand. It is therefore essential firstly to consistently communicate in a clear and targeted manner in order to sharpen this blurred message. Secondly, to improve BCR’s image as **host region**, it is fundamental that the CEIO vehicles a **positive image of Brussels** through its many communication channels such as events, brochures and publications. It is principally around these two directions that the CEIO tackled the task of rethinking its communication strategy throughout 2017.

## WORKING WITH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND MEDIA

After operating for two years, expanding the use of digital technologies in our communication became a priority. We have therefore continued to **enrich our website** as well as created a **Facebook page** in order to communicate more regularly and more directly with our target audience. Interactive platforms such as “Sendinblue” and “Prezi” allow us to improve the promotion of our events and the welcome of new arrivals.



This year, we also attempted to better connect with **Belgian and international media** in order to further raise our visibility. A **press conference** co-presided by the BCR Minister-President was organised to present the result of CEIO activities half way through the term of office.

## CREATION OF NEW COMMUNICATION SUPPORTS

To communicate better and more coherently on the scope of our activities and project a positive image of Brussels, the CEIO has changed its visual identity and created new communication supports.

Firstly we have revised our **general brochure**. This now has a clearer expression of the CEIO missions and makes a clear distinction between both support units: on one hand, the “institutional liaison” desk and on the other, the “administrative assistance” unit (Expat Welcome Desk).



To ensure an effective, personalised welcome to the growing international community in Brussels, we have also redesigned the **Expat Welcome Desk leaflet**. The idea was to group a maximum of information in a convivial and synoptic “settle down guide”. This leaflet aims to inform new arrivals about the ten steps to follow when setting up home in Brussels. For the creation of this leaflet, the EWD visual was completely revised in order to be more relevant and explicit for expats.

The other supports including roll-ups, digital visuals, publications, media advertisements and newsletter visual have also been adapted accordingly.



## ESTABLISH AND CONSOLIDATE PARTNERSHIPS

To reach our target audience more effectively, it proved essential to both consolidate existing partnerships and create new ones with partners whose missions are compatible with ours. Since its creation, the CEIO has maintained strong and stable relations with the **Europe department of visit.brussels**. This cooperation has led to several concrete projects, primarily aimed at strengthening the touristic attraction of the European quarter and the provision of information to expats concerning the cultural and touristic life of the capital (notably the “tourism” working group, the newsletter *be expat be.brussels* which dedicates a monthly article to the EWD, the organisation of the “1<sup>st</sup> European Quarter Networking Event”, etc.). We pursued our partnership with the **“Expats in Brussels” guide** who publishes every year a one-page advertisement on the Expat Welcome Desk. Furthermore, in 2017 the CEIO has established new partnerships, including with the **Brussels Times**, an international media much appreciated by the international community.



## PARTICIPATION IN AND ORGANISATION OF TARGETED EVENTS



by the City of Brussels and the Committee of the Regions). The CEIO also organised events helping to bring together the various actors in the European quarter, for example the “1<sup>st</sup> European Quarter Networking Event” in cooperation with visit.brussels and the preview showing of the film “Miss Sloane” on international lobbying at the White Cinema (Docks Bruxsel).

To strengthen our image as a valuable intermediary with both Brussels and international authorities, the CEIO was present at several key events, specifically the inauguration of the House of European History, the Open Doors Day of the European institutions, the Info Day of the European Commission and end-of-year reception for regional representations (organised

## 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*

### Institutional Liaison desk

**Edoardo GUGLIELMETTI**  
*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. They meet twice a year.

General Assembly	Board
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alain HUTCHINSON, President</li> <li>• Haroun ATILA</li> <li>• Jérôme DE MOT</li> <li>• Valentin GRAAS</li> <li>• Ief JANSSENS</li> <li>• Julien JOST</li> <li>• Frank LELON</li> <li>• Julien MILQUET</li> <li>• Jeremy ONKELINX</li> <li>• Laurent VAN DER ELST</li> <li>• Charles-Eric VILAIN XIII</li> <li>• Florence WAUTELET</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alain HUTCHINSON, President</li> <li>• Haroun ATILA</li> <li>• Jérôme DE MOT</li> <li>• Valentin GRAAS</li> <li>• Ief JANSSENS</li> <li>• Julien JOST</li> <li>• Frank LELON</li> <li>• Julien MILQUET</li> <li>• Laurent VAN DER ELST</li> <li>• Charles-Eric VILAIN XIII</li> <li>• Florence WAUTELET</li> </ul>

Brussels Parliament
<p>In 2015 the Brussels Parliament created the <b>European Affairs Committee</b>, 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 and replies to numerous questions from the members of parliament.</p>



# Conclusion

---

Despite the ambitious missions entrusted to it and the high expectations on its shoulders, the Office of the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations (CEIO) only has a small team and modest budget available. Nevertheless, we continue to set the benchmarks in this annual report for our future functioning, which will remain more than ever focused on our role as liaison, serving as the link between the European and international players in Brussels and all the various administrative levels involved in one way or another with their presence here. We also aim to create a climate of goodwill in terms of respective obligations, legislation, procedures and methods of working.

After operating for three years, it is clear that collaboration between the Brussels authorities and international organisations has improved and that the CEIO is succeeding, slowly but surely, in changing the perception that the Belgian and Brussels authorities do not in many cases appear eager enough to find solutions.

While the CEIO always acts in the general interest of the Region and its inhabitants, it also takes account of the international dimension of the Region which is one of the strongest drivers of our regional economy. The figures speak for themselves: international organisations based in the Region give considerable impetus to the regional economy and by their presence, increase the attractiveness of the Region to other international organisations, companies and institutions. The institutions host a very large number of visitors and participants at congresses and meetings, who stay in the capital's hotels and use our congress infrastructures. These organisations also rely on the local economy for services such as catering, cleaning and maintenance. The international sector is therefore a powerful motor for employment in the Region. Expats and other members of their staff live here, rent or buy accommodation and do their shopping here. They also invite their families and friends here, thereby further stimulating the horeca, tourism and culture sectors. This positive impact on the local economy can equally be seen in other cities where international organisations have established their headquarters. It is therefore essential to continue to improve our attractiveness as an international host region and strengthen our competitiveness. International organisations no longer choose their

headquarters for an indefinite period; they stay continually alert and scrutinise other location opportunities offering attractive characteristics and conditions.

The CEIO has certainly helped create more structured relationships between the international institutions and their host region, but there is still much that can be done – both on the Brussels and European side – to achieve a perfect understanding. This applies to both the institutions and local citizens. It is not unusual to meet Brussels residents who have never set foot in the European quarter, despite the fact that many attractions have been developed there in recent years and the area is definitely worth visiting. Strangely, it appears that our pro-European feelings take a negative turn when confronted by the physical presence of institutions in the city. On the other hand, many Europeans have never ventured beyond their neighbourhoods. These are the fractures on which we must work in the future.

On their side, the European and international institutions should become more aware of the great potential of this city. The distance they maintain does not make the task easier for those who are working to develop closer links. The creation of the CEIO is helping to turn around this situation and we can see that all the European institutions greatly appreciate being able to work with an intermediary appointed by the regional government. The challenge now is to consolidate and carry forward this relationship.

Lastly, we would like to thank all our interlocutors, both at a political and an administrative level who have helped us make Brussels an even better host region. Thanks to your commitment and active support, concrete progress has been made in so many areas and activities!



**Karin IMPENS**  
*Deputy Director*

**Alain HUTCHINSON**  
*Commissioner*





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



This report is published by:



Avenue d'Auderghem 63 Oudergemlaan, 1040 Brussels

T. : +32 (0)2 430 66 00

[info@commissioner.brussels](mailto:info@commissioner.brussels) - [www.commissioner.brussels](http://www.commissioner.brussels)

**Responsible editor:** Alain HUTCHINSON, Avenue d'Auderghem 63 Oudergemlaan, 1040 Brussels

**Photo credits:** © Anyaberkut (p. 56), © Brussel Mobiliteit/Bruxelles Mobilité (p. 30), © Delphotostock (p. 58),

© European Union 2017 – Source EP (p. 71), © European Union 2017 – Source EP Aurore BELOT (p. 68),

© Fabrice Debatty Images (pp. 1-14, pp. 19-22, pp. 28-29, p. 31, p. 34, pp. 53-54, p. 63, p. 66, pp. 72-75), © Hamza Faki Yesilordek (p. 16, p. 24, p. 27),

© Hurca.com (illustrations), © Jakub Jirsák (p. 53), © Jegas RA (p. 60), © Libois Corenthin (pp. 64-65), © Luzitanija (p. 61).





# BRUSSELS, YOUR HOST REGION!

