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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Accompanying the document

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ABSTRACT

The Government maintains the intention to transfer budgetary management powers for the administration of the justice system from the executive to the judiciary. Lawyers continue to call for additional safeguards to protect their independence and legal professional privilege. Some further steps have been taken to address structural resource deficiencies in the justice system, including a plan for additional financial resources. The Government invested in advancing the digitalisation of the justice system, despite challenges. Limited efforts have been made to improve the efficiency of justice, particularly to reduce the length of proceedings based on comprehensive statistical data.

A legislative proposal to create a new section with earmarked resources within the federal prosecution service for investigating serious financial and economic crimes was tabled in Parliament. Investigations continue in good cooperation between police and prosecution service. Police integrity measures are under consideration to address challenges in preventing corruption within the police. There is still a lack of monitoring and enforcement of existing integrity policies. Shortcomings in the system of asset and interest declarations as regards verification and transparency remain unaddressed. No steps have been taken on completing the reform of lobbying legislation as there is no political consensus on further measures. The Parliament is considering a limited update to their deontological code as regards gifts and benefits, while no steps have been made to address the gaps in rules on “revolving doors”. Whistleblower protection rules are being evaluated. Addressing high risks of corruption related to public procurement, risks at the local level and risks linked to organised crime remains a priority.

Despite challenges, media regulatory authorities have made progress in adapting their strategies, while maintaining a strong legal foundation for their independence. Public service media in Belgium continue to experience various challenges across the three communities including governance structures and budgetary pressures. No further steps have been made to improve access to public documents. Further steps are being taken to strengthen legal protections for journalists, in particular against SLAPPs.

Overall, stakeholders continue to have opportunities to engage with policy-making. The Government continues to work towards an A-status for a national human rights institution in Belgium. Limited further steps have been taken on ensuring compliance by public authorities with final rulings of national courts while supervision by the Council of Europe on structural issues identified by the European Court of Human Rights continues. Notwithstanding a high level of protection under the law, stakeholders continue to raise concerns regarding measures affecting civic space.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report, considering other developments that took place in the period of reference and in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, the Commission concludes the following:

- Some further progress has been made on the recommendation to address the structural resource deficiencies in the justice system, including a plan for additional financial resources. At the same time limited progress has been made to improve the efficiency of justice, in particular with a view to reducing the length of proceedings. As further work remains to be done it is recommended to Belgium to *continue ongoing efforts to address the structural resource deficiencies in the justice system and to step up ongoing efforts to improve the efficiency and digitalisation of justice, particularly with a view to reducing the length of proceedings, based on comprehensive statistical data.*
- No progress has been made on completing the legislative reform on lobbying, establishing a framework including a transparency register and a legislative footprint, covering both members of Parliament and Government. Since no steps have been taken to take this forward, it is recommended to Belgium to *resume work on a legislative reform to increase the transparency of lobbying for both members of Parliament and Government.*
- Limited progress has been made on strengthening the integrity framework by adopting rules on gifts and benefits for members of Parliament as there remains a lack of concrete guidance to members of Parliament on what type of gifts would be acceptable and no progress was made on adopting rules on revolving doors for members of Government and their private offices. As these gaps in integrity rules remain unaddressed, it is recommended to Belgium to *strengthen the integrity framework, including by adopting rules on gifts and benefits for members of Parliament and rules on revolving doors for members of Government and their private offices.*
- No further progress has been made on strengthening the framework for access to official documents, in particular by improving request and appeal processes, with relevant draft legislation still pending adoption and part of the existing legislative framework still awaiting implementation. It is thus recommended to Belgium to *continue efforts to strengthen the framework for access to official documents, in particular by improving request and appeal processes, by completing the legislative reform on this matter, taking into account European standards on access to official documents.*
- Limited progress has been made on ensuring compliance by public authorities with final rulings of national courts and the European Court of Human Rights. While Belgium continues to engage in the execution process, there are judgments remaining unimplemented and therefore, it is recommended to Belgium to *step up efforts to ensure compliance by public authorities with final rulings of national courts and the European Court of Human Rights.*

I. JUSTICE SYSTEM¹

Independence

The level of perceived judicial independence in Belgium continues to be high among the general public and is average among companies. Overall, 63 % of the general population and 54 % of companies perceive the level of independence of courts and judges to be ‘fairly or very good’ in 2026². The perceived judicial independence among the general public has slightly decreased in comparison with 2025 (64 %) and has slightly increased in comparison with 2022 (60 %). The perceived judicial independence among companies has significantly decreased in comparison with 2025 (72 %), as well as in comparison with 2022 (63 %).

The Government maintains its intention to transfer budgetary management powers for the administration of the justice system from the executive to the judiciary³. Before budgetary management powers are transferred to the judiciary, a proposal concerning the evaluation and disciplinary system of magistrates is to be presented to the Parliament⁴. For the evaluation system, several bodies⁵ have provided advisory opinions to the Government. Meanwhile, the government has also received the advice from the Interfederal Corps of the Inspectorate of Finance, a preparatory step before the proposal is sent to the Parliament⁶. For the disciplinary system, the advice of the aforementioned bodies is under review⁷. Once the transfer is completed, the Entity Cassation for the Court of Cassation, the College of Courts and Tribunals and the College of Public Prosecutors will be directly responsible for managing staff, budgets and policy⁸. Prior to the transfer, consideration will be given to how the framework for the allocation of court staff and magistrates can be improved, for instance based on regular workload measurements⁹. The High Council of Justice and Court of Cassation have pointed to some risks of the Government’s approach of linking efficiency and changes in the disciplinary system for magistrates¹⁰.

Lawyers continue to call for additional safeguards to protect their independence and legal professional privilege. As reported in the 2024 and 2025 Rule of Law Reports, directives prohibiting the recording of communications between lawyers and their clients have strengthened lawyer-client confidentiality¹¹. Bar Associations continue to call for

¹ An overview of the institutional framework for all four pillars can be found [here](#).

² Figures 48 and 50, 2026 EU Justice Scoreboard and Figures 51 and 53, 2024 EU Justice Scoreboard. The level of perceived judicial independence is categorised as follows: very low (below 30 % of respondents perceive judicial independence as fairly good and very good); low (between 30-39 %), average (between 40-59 %), high (between 60-75 %), very high (above 75 %).

³ Belgian Government (2026), written input, pp. 6-7, Minister of Justice (2026), p. 35-37.

⁴ Belgian Government (2026), additional written input. See also Minister of Justice (2026), p. 37.

⁵ High Council of Justice, the Advisory Council of the Magistrature, the Court of Cassation, the College of Courts and Tribunals and the College of Public Prosecutors, Belgian Government (2026), additional written input.

⁶ Belgian Government (2026), additional written input.

⁷ Belgian Government (2026), additional written input.

⁸ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 3. The autonomous management of human resources would include decisions on the transfer of magistrates and court staff.

⁹ Belgian Government (2026), written input, p. 6.

¹⁰ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 3; ENCJ (2026), p. 56; Court of Cassation (2026), additional written input, pp. 19-20. The Court of Cassation points to the risk of seeking to remedy the efficiency of the judiciary in general through the evaluation of individual judges. In addition, the Court of Cassation and the High Council of Justice consider, respectively, that a disciplinary system is not meant for correcting productivity or efficiency issues and it shows a distrust of judges.

¹¹ 2024 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 6, 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 3.

additional safeguards¹², indicating in particular that investigating judges who decide on whether lawyer-client communication is confidential, should be excluded from further dealing with the case file¹³. Bar Associations also questioned the use of videoconferencing in civil and criminal cases, for its possible negative impact on lawyer-client confidentiality¹⁴. At the same time, these stakeholders raised concerns about increased threats from organised crime on the judicial branch, as illustrated by the need for permanent police protection for several investigating judges¹⁵.

Quality

Some further progress has been made on the recommendation to address the structural resource deficiencies in the justice system, including a plan for additional financial resources¹⁶. On 29 January 2026, the Parliament adopted a law to make positions in the judiciary more attractive by aligning employment conditions more closely with those of civil servants outside the judiciary.¹⁷ In addition, the Government announced additional financial resources for the justice system. Concretely, a so-called leverage strategy aims at implementing legislative changes that should further improve the attractiveness of jobs in the judiciary¹⁸ by introducing, for example, a higher language allowance and better recognition of seniority built up outside the judiciary¹⁹. In addition, the plan includes organisational reforms by allowing more flexibility in deploying magistrates and other staff among courts. Pending the legislative implementation of the leverage strategy, the Minister of Justice has concluded mini-management agreements with the “Cassation entity” (Court of Cassation plus the Office of the general prosecutor), the College of Courts and Tribunals and the Public Prosecution Service²⁰. The precise allocation of additional financial resources to the different priorities still needs to be clarified, with part of the overall additional resources earmarked for improving prison conditions²¹. The Council of State faces a high workload due to an increase

¹² 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 3.

¹³ Bar associations (2026), written input, p. 11 (Flemish Bar Association, OVB), p. 12 (Francophone and Germanophone Bar Association, AVOCATS).

¹⁴ Law of 25 April 2024 on the organisation of hearings by videoconference in the context of legal proceedings. Pending implementing measures, the law is not yet applicable; Country visit Belgium, Bar Associations, Court of Cassation.

¹⁵ Bar associations (2026), written input, p. 10 (Flemish Bar Association, OVB), p. 12 (Francophone and Germanophone Bar Association, AVOCATS).

¹⁶ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 4. The 2025 Rule of Law Report recommended to Belgium to “Continue ongoing efforts to address the structural resource deficiencies in the justice system, taking into account European standards on resources for the justice system.” Some further progress was previously assessed on this recommendation in 2023, 2024 and 2025.

¹⁷ ENCJ (2026), p. 11; Chamber of Representatives (2026a); Chamber of Representatives (2026c). As to employment conditions, the Court of cassation and the High Council for Justice reiterated their concern related to the lowering of magistrates’ pensions, see 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, footnote 19. The Constitutional Court, Court of Cassation and Council of State expressed their concerns of the general increase in pension contributions and the effect on the judiciary (Constitutional Court, Court of Cassation and Council of State (2026)).

¹⁸ On the attractiveness of jobs in the judiciary, see 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 4. The Court of Cassation and High Council of Justice reported in this context on the salaries not being sufficiently attractive and to challenging working conditions in the judiciary. In Dutch the leverage strategy is referred to as “hefboomplan”, in French as “plan d’impulsion”.

¹⁹ Chamber of Representatives (2025b), p. 58.

²⁰ The mini-management agreements allow for additional resources to meet specific objectives reflected in the Government’s 2025 coalition agreement.

²¹ Bar associations and others (2026); Bar Associations (2026), written input, p. 15 (Francophone and Germanophone Bar Association, AVOCATS); Minister of Justice (2025).

in administrative cases²². Overall, some further progress has been made on the recommendation.

The Government invested in advancing the digitalisation of the justice system, despite challenges. Belgium has made investments in digitalisation initiatives within the judiciary, such as the creation of the digital judicial file, judicial case management, and electronic communication initiatives²³. At the same time, more investments are needed, for example for the further development of digital solutions for civil and administrative cases and for enhanced public online access to judgments²⁴, while the implementation and effectiveness of existing digital tools are criticised by different stakeholders²⁵. The Court of Cassation and criminal execution courts are the first pilot entities planned to use the new case management system JustCase²⁶; while, several stakeholders report some obstacles, which have also been acknowledged by the Ministry responsible²⁷. Electronic proceedings have been introduced at the Constitutional Court since 1 March 2026²⁸.

Efficiency

Limited progress has been made to improve the efficiency of justice, in particular with a view to reducing the length of proceedings based on comprehensive statistical data²⁹. The length of proceedings and the judicial backlog are long-standing problems³⁰. In September 2025, the Court of Audit published a report on the impact of length of proceedings on access to justice, noting an improved reporting on length of proceedings³¹. The estimated time needed to resolve civil and commercial cases at first instance courts remained at 246 days in 2024 (same in 2023³²). The estimated time to resolve administrative cases at first instance courts increased further (370 days in 2024, 360 days in 2023 and 288 days in 2022)³³. At the same time, the Court of Audit observed that some obstacles remain with regard to, among others, the data on processing times by courts of first instance and in criminal cases and the existence of geographical differences within the country³⁴. Aside from the collection of statistics, the Minister of Justice has established a working group composed

²² Council of State (2026), additional written input.

²³ Belgian Government (2026), written input, p. 8. In the process of advancing digitalisation, the Belgian Government takes into account the Court of Audit's recommendations from 2024 and involves all actors of the justice system.

²⁴ European Semester Country report 2026 for Belgium, Annex 7, p. 64.

²⁵ Chamber of Representatives (2026), p. 9; Chamber of Representatives (2026b), p. 6-9; Court of Cassation (2026), additional written input, pp. 22-23, Public Prosecution Service (2026), additional written input, p. 2, Bar Associations (2026), written input, pp. 13-15 (Flemish Bar Association, OVB), 14-16 (Francophone and Germanophone Bar Association, AVOCATS).

²⁶ Court of Cassation (2026), additional written input, p. 22.

²⁷ College of Courts and Tribunals (2025b); Avocats (2026); Chamber of Representatives (2026b), p. 7.

²⁸ Constitutional Court (2026), written input, p. 2., Royal Decree of 12 September 2024, Royal Decree of 28 July 2025.

²⁹ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 5. The 2025 Rule of Law Report recommended to Belgium to "Continue ongoing efforts to improve the efficiency of justice, particularly to reduce the length of proceedings based on comprehensive statistical data." Some further progress was previously assessed on this recommendation in 2025.

³⁰ Judgment of the ECHR, *Bell*, CE:ECHR:2008:1104JUD004482605; Judgment of the ECHR, *Van Den Kerkhof*, CE:ECHR:2023:0905JUD001363019; Decision of the ECHR, *Swissair International Finance III*, CE:ECHR:2025:1218DEC000129422.

³¹ Court of Audit (2025a).

³² No data are available for years before 2023.

³³ Figures 5 and 7, 2026 EU Justice Scoreboard.

³⁴ Court of Audit (2025a), p. 19, 54-55.

of six academic experts in judicial procedure, tasked with examining and proposing practical legislative measures that can be implemented swiftly to expedite judicial proceedings. In addition, the College of Courts and Tribunals has taken the initiative to manage and reduce the backlog in staged phases³⁵. As of 1 September 2025, courts and tribunals dealing with civil, social and commercial matters are obliged to have amicable settlement chambers in place³⁶. Such chambers are expected to help reduce the backlog³⁷. The bar associations refer to the risk that amicable settlements in the form of administrative fines³⁸ (so-called GAS or SAC fines), which allow for the imposition of a sanction without the involvement of a judge, offer fewer procedural guarantees, limit the right to appeal and therefore could prevent an effective access to justice³⁹. The Federal Institute for Human Rights (FIRM-IFDH) raised similar concerns with regard to the broader use of administrative fines⁴⁰. Several projects funded under the Recovery and Resilience Facility are expected to contribute to the further collection of statistics⁴¹. Overall, limited progress has been made on the recommendation.

II. ANTI-CORRUPTION FRAMEWORK

The perception among experts, citizens and business executives is that the level of corruption in the public sector remains relatively low. In the 2025 Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International, Belgium scores 69/100 and ranks 9th in the European Union and 21st globally⁴². The perception of the level of corruption has deteriorated⁴³ over the past five years. The 2026 Special Eurobarometer on Corruption shows that 69 % of respondents consider corruption widespread in their country (EU average 71 %) and 22 % of respondents feel personally affected by corruption in their daily lives (EU average 30 %). As regards businesses, 70 % of companies consider that corruption is widespread (EU average 65 %) and 46 % consider that corruption is a problem when doing business (EU average 37 %). Furthermore, 43 % of respondents find that there are enough successful prosecutions to deter people from corrupt practices (EU average 38 %), while 31 % of companies believe that people and businesses caught for bribing a senior official are appropriately punished (EU average 31 %)⁴⁴.

³⁵ Stage 1 and 2: inventory of the backlog and identification of the most urgent problems (first months of 2026). Stage 3: Identification and implementation of concrete actions (will start in 2026 at a later stage). See Belgian Government (2026), additional written input.

³⁶ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 5-6. Until 1 September 2025, amicable settlement chambers were not mandatory.

³⁷ Law of 19 December 2023 containing various provisions in civil and judicial matters.

³⁸ Despite the common label (“amicable settlements”), these are distinct mechanisms: the amicable settlement chambers operate within the judicial system (before a judge acting as conciliator or by referral to an independent mediator) and concern civil, social and commercial disputes, whereas the amicable settlement of administrative fines (GAS/SAC) is administrative in nature: a restorative form of institutional mediation, distinct from judicial dispute resolution in both framework and purpose.

³⁹ Bar Associations (2026), written input, p. 17 (Flemish Bar Association, OVB), 18 (Francophone and Germanophone Bar Association, AVOCATS), FIRM-IFDH (2025), p. 17. The FIRM-IFDH refers to the *Deweere v Belgium* case (Judgment of the ECHR, *Deweere v België*, CE:ECHR:1980:0227JUD000690375, para. 49) in which the ECHR concluded that opting for a settlement should be done without constraint. FIRM-IFDH (2026).

⁴¹ See Investment I-2.05 of the RRP of Belgium.

⁴² The level of perceived corruption is categorized as follows: low (above 79); relatively low (between 79-60), relatively high (between 59-50), high (below 50).

⁴³ In 2021 the score was 73, while, in 2025, the score is 69. The score significantly increases/decreases when it changes more than five points; improves/deteriorates (changes between 4-5 points); is relatively stable (changes from 1-3 points) in the last five years.

⁴⁴ Data from Special Eurobarometer 573 (2026) and Flash Eurobarometer 582 (2026).

A legislative proposal to create a new financial prosecution section with earmarked resources within the federal prosecution service for investigating serious financial and economic crimes was tabled in Parliament. In May 2026, the Government tabled in the House of Representatives a proposal to establish a new section in the federal prosecution services with exclusive competence to investigate persons responsible for serious financial and economic crime, organised social fraud, as well as bribery⁴⁵. The Public Prosecution Service reports that EUR 3.9 million has been allocated to create the section, as well as to transfer and train the necessary staff⁴⁶. As part of the set-up of the new financial prosecution service, the specialised Central Office for the Repression of Corruption of the Federal Police (CDBC-OCRC) will be strengthened with 15 additional investigators⁴⁷. While the scope of the corruption cases falling under the competence of the new section remains to be clarified, stakeholders have viewed the proposal positively⁴⁸.

Investigations continue in good cooperation between police and prosecution service. Good cooperation between the Central Office for the Repression of Corruption (CDBC-OCRC) of the Federal Police and the Public Prosecution Service continues, as well as work on several complex and high-level corruption cases⁴⁹. As noted in previous Rule of Law reports⁵⁰, the CDBC-OCRC is facing challenges in dealing with the high number of incoming cases and in setting priorities⁵¹. Allegations of information leaks in sensitive corruption investigations led to the indictment of a former head of the service⁵². The CDBC-OCRC is not structurally independent, but forms part of the overall Federal Police structure, which is seen by investigators as a vulnerability⁵³. In 2025, the Public Prosecution Service reported 445 incoming corruption cases⁵⁴, of which 19 were dismissed, while 19 cases led to an indictment (as of January 2026)⁵⁵. The EPPO has signalled nine corruption cases among its open cases (which consists of 9.1 % of its total open cases) in Belgium in 2025⁵⁶. The number of foreign bribery cases under investigation and prosecution continues to be limited⁵⁷. There are concerns regarding the low level of awareness within companies on the

⁴⁵ Public Prosecution Service (2026), additional written input. Currently, such matters are dealt with by the prosecution services at district level. Legislative proposal 56K1536001 concerning the founding of the financial prosecution service as a section financial crime within the federal public prosecution service. According to the proposal, the section would be led by a deputy federal prosecutor and consist of ten magistrates.

⁴⁶ Public Prosecution Service (2026), additional written input.

⁴⁷ Belgian Government (2026), written input, pp. 9-10 and Country visit Belgium, CDBC-OCRC.

⁴⁸ It is not clear if the section would cover all corruption offences beyond bribery (abuse of office, trading in influence, misappropriation) and if it would be responsible for all corruption cases or only certain or high-level cases. Public Prosecution Service (2026), additional written input and Country visit Belgium, Transparency International Belgium.

⁴⁹ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, pp. 6-7 and Country visit Belgium, CDBC-OCRC.

⁵⁰ 2024 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 13 and 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, pp. 6-7.

⁵¹ Country visit Belgium, CDBC-OCRC and Transparency International Belgium.

⁵² Country visit Belgium, CDBC-OCRC and Transparency International Belgium and 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 7. The case was also widely reported in the media. According to civil society, this situation could impact the trust of the public in the CDBC-OCRC (Country visit Belgium, Transparency International Belgium).

⁵³ Country visit Belgium, CDBC-OCRC.

⁵⁴ Out of which 10 concerned corruption in the private sector, 2 concerned foreign bribery, 110 cases related to bribery in the public sector and 120 related to abuse of function in the public sector.

⁵⁵ Others remain at various stages of the criminal procedure. Compared to 367 incoming cases in 2024 of which 90 were dismissed, while 7 cases led to an indictment. Public Prosecution Service (2026), additional written input.

⁵⁶ EPPO (2026a), p. 13.

⁵⁷ The Public Prosecution Service reported two cases of foreign bribery registered in 2025. Compared to one in 2022; one in 2023 and two in 2024. Public Prosecution Service (2026), additional written input.

risks of foreign bribery, the lack of investigations and low level of sanctions targeting legal persons⁵⁸.

Measures on police integrity are under consideration to address challenges in preventing corruption within the police. The 176 local police zones maintain disparate integrity policies and smaller police zones do not have an effective integrity policy in place⁵⁹. The government announced the merger of a number of police zones, with voluntary mergers to be encouraged elsewhere, which may create opportunities to improve integrity policy according to the authorities⁶⁰. The project to draft a Code of Conduct for the entire integrated police⁶¹ did not progress further⁶², although a new integrity policy for the Federal Police is being considered⁶³. Overall, the policy for police integrity is seen as insufficient by stakeholders⁶⁴. The police indicated they would conduct more in-depth research into the possible corruption of police officers and subversive criminality⁶⁵. Older plans to introduce screening and integrity checks during the entire career of a police officer have received renewed attention in Parliament, although the timing and content of such plans remain unclear.⁶⁶

There is still a lack of monitoring and enforcement of existing integrity policies concerning Ministers, their private offices and members of Parliament. Gaps remain in existing integrity policies⁶⁷, which do not follow a strategic approach and do not include monitoring or enforcement mechanisms⁶⁸. Following the Minister of Budget's intention to increase checks on the application of the Code of Conduct for federal public office holders, it has not been confirmed that this was carried out in practice⁶⁹. The Federal Deontological Commission provided a training to members of Parliament elected in 2024 about its role on

⁵⁸ Public Prosecution Service (2026), additional written input. As mentioned in the 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p 7, the OECD recommends a clear strategy on combating foreign bribery and sufficient resources for the investigative and prosecutorial bodies. There are no measures that promote self-investigation and self-reporting of companies.

⁵⁹ 2023 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, pp. 10-12.

⁶⁰ Belgian Government (2026), written input, p. 10. For example, the different police zones in the Brussels region are set to be merged into one zone.

⁶¹ The "integrated police" is the term used to describe the Federal Police and all local police zones taken together.

⁶² Federal Police (2026), See also GRECO (2022), recommendation xvi, paras 75-81 and 2022 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 10.

⁶³ Federal Police (2026).

⁶⁴ GRECO (2026a) and Country visit Belgium, Committee P. See also 2024 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, pp. 14-15.

⁶⁵ Federal Police (2026). Country visit Belgium, Transparency International Belgium.

⁶⁶ Belgian Government (2026), written input, p. 10 and Country visit Belgium, Committee P. See Chamber of Representatives (2024).

⁶⁷ The updated Code of Conduct for federal public office holders remains in place and since 2023 covers all staff members of the Federal Government (including the ministerial private offices). A specific Code of Conduct remains in force for Ministers, as these are not covered by the Code of Conduct for federal public office holders. 2024 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, pp. 15-16.

⁶⁸ As recommended multiple times by GRECO – a number of GRECO recommendations remain unimplemented. In particular see GRECO (2025a) as regards recommendation iii; and the original evaluation reports GRECO (2022a), recommendation iii and paras. 115-120 and GRECO (2022b), paras. 60-62. See also 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 8.

⁶⁹ Neither the Government nor any stakeholders could provide information confirming such checks had taken place. Belgian government (2026), additional written input. As noted in the 2025 Rule of Law report, such additional checks would be difficult in the absence of a coordination or sanctioning mechanism.

conflicts of interest and in providing ethics advice, while attendance remained limited⁷⁰. The Federal Deontological Commission continues to voice concerns that powers concerning integrity policy are dispersed across various bodies.⁷¹ As regards the federal civil service, the Integrity Bureau signals limited resources to carry out its tasks, including training of high-level officials⁷². As outlined in previous Rule of Law reports, Belgium remains without an overarching anti-corruption strategy or coordinating structure on anti-corruption policy at national level⁷³.

Identified shortcomings in the system of asset and interest declarations as regards verification and transparency remain unaddressed. As outlined in previous Rule of Law Report, the system of asset declarations does not ensure adequate verification and transparency⁷⁴. Civil society continued to call for reforming of the system, including a stronger focus on transparency and enforceable sanctions for non-compliance with declaration obligations⁷⁵. There are yet no plans by the Government or the Parliament to reform the system, despite previous declarations of intent⁷⁶. 99 % of those required to submit asset and interest declarations did so in time⁷⁷. Due to a lack of adequate verification, the correctness of these declarations remains solely the individual responsibility of the person declaring them⁷⁸.

There has been no progress on completing the reform of lobbying legislation as there is no political consensus on further steps⁷⁹. The previous Government had presented a draft reform in 2024 envisaging rules for contacts between lobbyists and members of the federal executive, which it had also consulted with stakeholders⁸⁰. The current Government reported that no political consensus exists on future legislative steps, neither on the basis of that draft legislation nor on other types of reform⁸¹. It remains unclear if the Parliament would undertake an initiative to revise the lobbying rules applicable to members of Parliament⁸². Civil society has continued to stress the need for more transparency in lobbying, in particular

⁷⁰ 5 out of 150 MPs attended. Federal Deontological Commission (2026) and Country visit Belgium, Federal Deontological Commission.

⁷¹ Federal Deontological Commission (2026); Country visit Belgium, Federal Deontological Commission. See also 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 8.

⁷² Country visit Belgium, Integrity Bureau; Integrity Bureau (2026), additional written input.

⁷³ 2024 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 12.

⁷⁴ As the Court of Audit receives the declarations in sealed envelopes and declarations are only accessible by investigating judges in the context of criminal investigations. See 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 8.

⁷⁵ Transparency International Belgium (2025).

⁷⁶ GRECO (2025a) and 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 8. An initiative by one opposition political party calling for a system of asset declarations in line with GRECO recommendations is reportedly under preparation but has not been filed yet.

⁷⁷ 5 980 persons out of 6 011 required to submit asset declaration, 10 972 out of 11 003 persons required to submit mandate declarations. As 2024 was an election year, the number of those required to submit declarations was higher than in past years. Court of Audit (2026).

⁷⁸ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 8.

⁷⁹ The 2025 Rule of Law Report recommended to Belgium to ‘complete the legislative reform on lobbying, establishing a framework including a transparency register and a legislative footprint, covering both members of Parliament and Government.’ No further progress was previously assessed on this recommendation in 2025; some progress in 2024 and no progress in 2023.

⁸⁰ Draft legislation foresaw a transparency register, managed by the Prime Minister’s Office, with registration obligations for lobbyists and all ministerial private offices. 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 9.

⁸¹ Belgian Government (2026), written input, p. 4 and Belgian Government (2026), additional written input.

⁸² Belgian Government (2026), written input, p. 4. See also 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 9.

as regards the registration of meetings⁸³. As no further steps have been taken by the Government and the Parliament, there has been no further progress on the recommendation.

There has been limited progress in relation to the rules on gifts and benefits for members of Parliament having regard to a planned clarification of the House's deontological code⁸⁴. Members of both the Senate and House of Representatives are covered by a general prohibition of receiving gifts in return for actions taken in the course of their mandate⁸⁵. Certain shortcomings identified in previous Rule of Law Reports remain⁸⁶, including the lack of concrete guidance to members of Parliament on what type of gifts would be acceptable (i.e. a monetary threshold)⁸⁷. Accepted gifts and their origin are not registered, and no information is publicly available. The Parliament has decided not to introduce a gifts register⁸⁸. A clarification of the code of conduct introducing an obligation to declare any professional travel of a member of Parliament sponsored by a third party was initiated but not yet finalised⁸⁹. There were no further steps to amend the code of conduct in the reporting period, and therefore limited progress has been made on this part of the recommendation.

There has been no progress on rules on 'revolving doors' as gaps in existing rules remain⁹⁰. No additional steps on 'revolving doors' have been taken following a 2024 non-binding 'circular' of the Minister of Public Administration that outlined existing measures on revolving doors⁹¹. The government reports no developments in this area⁹². Existing gaps – in particular the lack of rules on revolving doors for members of Government, their private offices and civil servants more broadly⁹³ – have not been addressed. In February 2026, the Federal Internal Audit Service completed a thematic audit on how some ministries and agencies within the Federal Public Service address the issue of revolving doors in public procurement procedures. Alongside good practices, the audit highlighted a number of recommendations, in particular as regards risk analysis and integrity policy⁹⁴. Therefore, no progress has been made on this part of the recommendation.

Whistleblower protection rules are being evaluated. An evaluation of national whistleblowing rules is ongoing.⁹⁵ The Federal Ombudsman⁹⁶, the Federal Human Rights

⁸³ Transparency International Belgium believes compulsory registration of meetings between representatives and politicians and declared interests, as well as transparency about the participation of Members in events organized by third parties could further improve transparency. Transparency International Belgium (2025).

⁸⁴ The 2025 Rule of Law Report recommended to Belgium to "Strengthen the integrity framework, including by adopting rules on gifts and benefits for members of Parliament [...]." Some progress was previously assessed in 2025, no progress in 2024 and some progress in 2023 on this recommendation.

⁸⁵ As outlined in their deontological code. 2022 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, pp. 12-13.

⁸⁶ 2022 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, pp. 12-13.

⁸⁷ See also GRECO (2025b), recommendation I which refers to stated intentions but a lack of results.

⁸⁸ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 9.

⁸⁹ Chamber of Representatives (2025a).

⁹⁰ The 2025 Rule of Law Report recommended to Belgium to 'Strengthen the integrity framework, including by adopting [...] rules on revolving doors for government and their private offices.'. Limited progress was previously assessed on this recommendation in 2025, no progress in 2024 and some progress in 2023.

⁹¹ This includes possible measures identified by the Federal Deontological Commission. 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 10.

⁹² Belgian Government (2026), written input, p. 4

⁹³ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 10.

⁹⁴ Federal Internal Audit Service (2026).

⁹⁵ Country visit Belgium, Integrity Bureau; Integrity Bureau (2026), additional written input.

⁹⁶ Country visit Belgium, Ombudsman.

Institute⁹⁷ and the Committee P⁹⁸ – who all have a role in the whistleblowing system - have adopted their own reports to feed into the overall exercise. Their initial conclusions point to the high complexity of the Belgian legislation, while valuing the fact that protection of whistleblowers has improved⁹⁹. The overall report, under responsibility of the Integrity Bureau, is expected in 2026¹⁰⁰. Legislative proposals applying whistleblower protection to employees working in the judiciary are awaiting comments from stakeholders before being submitted to Parliament¹⁰¹. In 2025, the Federal Ombudsman opened 766 files in relation to whistleblowing, most relating to the private sector. Out of these 766 files, 22 complaints were from the public sector and related to the category “Conflicts of interest, favoritism, and bias”¹⁰².

Addressing high risks of corruption related to public procurement, risks at the local level and risks linked to organised crime remains a priority. Businesses’ attitudes towards corruption in the EU show that 34 % of companies in Belgium (EU average 30 %) think that corruption has prevented them from winning a public tender in practice in the last three years¹⁰³. 64 % perceive the level of independence of the public procurement review body (Council of State) as very or fairly good, which has slightly decreased in comparison with 2025 (67 %)¹⁰⁴. The Single Market and Competitiveness Scoreboard on access to public procurement in Belgium reports 24 % of single bids for 2025 (EU average 27 %)¹⁰⁵. Public procurement remains an area at high risk of corruption¹⁰⁶, as illustrated by a recent audit that concluded that the transparency of procurement procedures in relation to hiring consultancies for governmental work has structural shortcomings¹⁰⁷. At regional and local level, measures were taken in Flanders to increase transparency of outside interests and side activities of mayors, aldermen and city councillors to prevent conflicts of interests, and to introduce the possibility for citizens to file a complaint¹⁰⁸. The authorities recognise that cases of corruption concerning public officials are often linked to organised crime and drug-related crimes¹⁰⁹. In response, the unauthorised access to databases by public officials to obtain specific data for criminal groups, in return for payments, is a focus area for law enforcement¹¹⁰.

⁹⁷ FIRM-IFDH (2026), written input, p. 22 and FIRM-IFDH (2026a)

⁹⁸ Committee P (2025).

⁹⁹ FIRM-IFDH (2026a).

¹⁰⁰ Notably, the Bureau signals resource challenges in finalising its work on this evaluation. Country visit Belgium, Integrity Bureau; Integrity Bureau (2026), additional written input.

¹⁰¹ FIRM-IFDH (2026b).

¹⁰² Belgian Government (2026), written input, p. 12. To note this data presents an incomplete picture as it concerns only the external reporting channel.

¹⁰³ Flash Eurobarometer 582 on Businesses’ attitudes towards corruption in the EU (2026).

¹⁰⁴ Figure 59, 2026 EU Justice Scoreboard.

¹⁰⁵ Single Market and Competitiveness Scoreboard (2025).

¹⁰⁶ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 14.

¹⁰⁷ Court of Audit (2025b).

¹⁰⁸ Flemish Minister of Home Affairs (2025).

¹⁰⁹ In an open letter, an investigative judge warned about “extensive mafia-like structures” linked to cocaine smuggling that had created a “parallel power” in and around the Antwerp port, with investigations leading to the arrest of port workers, customs officers, police officers, municipal staff and even prison officials, often for corruption-related conduct. College of Courts and Tribunals (2025a). See also 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 14.

¹¹⁰ The police indicated that the main targets of bribery by drugs-related organised crime groups are the police, customs, port and local officials. See also 2024 Rule of Law report, Belgium, p. 14.

III. MEDIA PLURALISM AND MEDIA FREEDOM

Media regulatory authorities in Belgium have continued making progress in adapting their strategies, while maintaining a strong legal foundation for their independence. In Flanders, the Flemish Regulator for the Media (VRM) continues to operate as an independent external agency with legal, financial, and operational guarantees¹¹¹. It will play a key role in overseeing the implementation and application of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)¹¹² and has been designated as a competent authority under the Digital Services Act (DSA). The VRM's staffing was increased in late 2023 to manage new tasks related to the DSA and other responsibilities, while no new funding has yet been allocated¹¹³. The VRM has requested additional resources as the current budget and staff are not sufficient to comply with its new tasks¹¹⁴. In the French Community, the Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (CSA) remains an independent body, playing a pivotal role in the preparation for EMFA implementation and application¹¹⁵. In view of alignment with EMFA, the CSA was designated as the competent authority by decree of 2 April 2026, which entered into force on 26 April 2026¹¹⁶. A budgetary decision by the government led to the freezing of indexation, raising budgetary concerns for the years to come¹¹⁷. Both the VRM and the CSA anticipate budgetary constraints resulting from the suspension of indexation and reductions in funding from other sources. As a consequence, CSA foresees the need to implement staff reductions in the coming years. The Medienrat of the German-speaking Community has undergone significant structural reinforcement¹¹⁸. In the French Community, overlaps in the mandates of the Conseil de déontologie journalistique (CDJ) and the CSA have led to legal and procedural tensions, prompting cases before the Council of State¹¹⁹. Overlap in the mandates risk reducing legal predictability and creating uncertainty as to which authority is competent for dealing with complaints. In Flanders the relationship between the Dutch-speaking Raad voor de Journalistiek (RvJ) and the VRM has not raised the same issues.

Public service media continue to experience various challenges in the three Communities, including in terms of governance structures and budgetary pressures. In Flanders, the Vlaamse Radio- en Televisieomroeporganisatie (VRT) has received additional resources under the 2024–2029 Media Policy Plan¹²⁰. The Flemish government has

¹¹¹ Decree of 27 March 2009 on Radio and Television Broadcasting.

¹¹² With a view to aligning with EMFA, the Flemish Community of Belgium has prepared a Draft Decree Amending the Decree of 27 March 2009 on Radio Broadcasting and Television for the Partial Implementation of Regulation (EU) 2024/900 of 13 March 2024 on the Transparency and Targeting of Political Advertising, the European Media Freedom Act, and the Artificial Intelligence Act, which is currently undergoing the legislative procedure.

¹¹³ Country visit Belgium, media regulators.

¹¹⁴ VRM (2026), additional written input, pp. 7-8.

¹¹⁵ Country visit Belgium, Government.

¹¹⁶ The Decree of 2 April 2026 amending the Decree of 4 February 2021 concerning audiovisual media services and video-sharing platform services (Belgian Official Gazette of 16 April 2026).

¹¹⁷ Country visit Belgium, media regulators.

¹¹⁸ Since September 2024, the staff of the Medienrat's office is paid directly by the Medienrat, ensuring the independence of the authority. The Medienrat has seen a substantial increase in funding and staffing. For 2026, the budget allocation to the Medienrat was increased again (+32 % compared to 2025) to employ adequate staff in times of rising wage costs. Belgian Government (2026), written input, p. 13.

¹¹⁹ Council of State, 15 April 2025, ECLI:BE:RVSC:2025:ARR.262.987, Country visit Belgium, media regulators. Following the Council of State judgment, the debate is still not fully settled as uncertainty regarding the division of competences has prompted another case before the Council of State.

¹²⁰ The Flemish government's 2024-2029 Policy Plan for media. In the 2025 budget year, the Flemish Government is allocating an additional subsidy of EUR 20 million to strengthen VRT. See Flemish Government (2025) and Flemish Government (2025a).

reaffirmed VRT's mandate, with an emphasis on journalistic independence, impartiality, and editorial autonomy. As a consequence of the new management agreement, VRT launched an "efficiency exercise" that is projected to lead to savings of EUR 16 million over the next five years. In addition to this commitment, the public broadcaster is required to implement further annual savings of EUR 644 000¹²¹. As part of the government's overall economic objective to reduce the debt of the French Community, the Radio-Télévision Belge de la Communauté Française (RTBF) will not receive indexation of its subsidy for four years in the period 2025-2028. On 17 July 2025, the Government concluded an addendum to the management agreement, which provides for a refocusing of public service missions partly to compensate for the non-indexation of public funding¹²². Additionally, on 28 November 2025 the government approved a draft decree reforming local public media, aiming to reduce the number of media outlets¹²³. In the German-speaking Community, the Belgischer Rundfunk (BRF) management contract for 2021-2024 has been extended twice, pending a newly negotiated multi-annual agreement. Although these extensions have secured continuity in the short term, they also contribute to a degree of legal and strategic uncertainty, since the contractual framework is no longer fully aligned with a clearly defined political and financial planning cycle¹²⁴. The government plans to change the BRF subsidy system, proposing a new framework for 2027-2030. While its Board remains politically composed, BRF is open to governance reform, including the possible introduction of independent directors, inspired by the VRT model¹²⁵. Several incidents have led to concerns about political influence on the public service media in the French community¹²⁶. Through a motion voted on 23 February 2026, the Parliament of the French Community has taken a clear position underlining editorial independence and all national and international standards that guarantee the freedom and independence of the media.¹²⁷ The Media Pluralism Monitor 2026 (MPM) still reports a low risk (22 %) for the political independence of public service media¹²⁸, up from an even lower level (17 %) in 2025¹²⁹.

There has been no further progress regarding procedural reforms to improve access to official documents¹³⁰. Shortcomings remain with regard to access to administrative documents, mainly in terms of its structure, procedure and enforceability¹³¹. Journalists still encounter obstacles in accessing information from the Public Prosecution Service or an Inspection Office due to protocol documents that need to be signed¹³². In particular, a 2019

¹²¹ Flemish Parliament (2026). Country visit Belgium, Public Service Media (RTBF, VRT and BRF).

¹²² Decree of the Government of the French Community of 11 July 2025, document number 53580..

¹²³ Belgian Government (2026), written input, p. 14, Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2026), written input, p.2.

¹²⁴ Country visit Belgium, Public Service Media (RTBF, VRT and BRF), BRF (2026), written input, p. 3.

¹²⁵ Country visit Belgium, Public Service Media (RTBF, VRT and BRF).

¹²⁶ Country visit Belgium, Government, Public Service Media (RTBF, VRT and BRF), Liga voor de Mensenrechten, Amnesty International, Ligue des droits humains, FIRM-IFDH, journalists associations and CDJ.

¹²⁷ Parliament of the French Community (2026).

¹²⁸ Media Pluralism Monitor (2026), p. 28.

¹²⁹ Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), p. 25.

¹³⁰ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 13-14. The 2025 Rule of Law Report recommended to Belgium to "Further continue efforts to strengthen the framework for access to official documents, in particular by improving request and appeal processes, taking into account European standards on access to official documents.". Some further progress was previously assessed in 2023, 2024 and 2025 on this recommendation.

¹³¹ Belgian government (2026), written input, p. 4.

¹³² Country visit Belgium, Public Service Media (RTBF, VRT and BRF), VRT (2026), additional written input.

internal circular of the Public Prosecution Service imposing conditions on media communication regarding judicial proceedings is still being applied, even though the College of Prosecutors have declared it no longer applicable¹³³. Furthermore, for Belgium as a whole there are three parallel publicity regimes and two non-binding appeal bodies (including the federal Commission for Access to Administrative Documents, CADA) which creates uncertainty and limits effectiveness¹³⁴. Given their non-binding nature, decisions issued by these bodies are often not followed by public authorities¹³⁵. While ratification proposals in view of the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (‘the Tromsø Convention’) have been adopted at federal level and by the Flemish Parliament (for the Flemish Community and Region) and the Parliaments of the French and German-speaking Communities, the publication of the federal law remains pending, and the Walloon Region has yet to adopt the necessary legislation¹³⁶. The draft law of 16 January 2025 on federal public government access to information is still pending in the Parliament¹³⁷, while part of the 2024 federal law amending the framework on administrative transparency still awaits implementation¹³⁸. As regards the draft law of January 2025, stakeholders still highlight some persistent shortcomings. Concerns exist about refusal grounds being phrased in a too general manner¹³⁹. On the same draft law, civil society continues to call for simplified procedures, the merger or reform of appeal bodies, and the empowerment of the federal CADA with binding authority, adequate resources, and systematic publication of decisions¹⁴⁰. Therefore, there was no further progress on the recommendation.

Further steps are being taken to strengthen legal protections for journalists, in particular against SLAPPs. Under the new Criminal Code, which will enter into force on 1 September 2026, journalists are qualified as professionals performing a societal function violence against whom may lead to harsher sentences¹⁴¹. With the entry into force of the new Criminal Code, defamation would no longer be punishable by a prison sentence¹⁴². Following an appeal filed by several organisations, on 29 January 2026 the Constitutional Court annulled Article 586 of the new Criminal Code, which criminalised the unauthorised receipt of state secrets, on the grounds that it constituted a disproportionate interference with press freedom and public-interest reporting¹⁴³. As a result, journalists can no longer be prosecuted for receiving a state secret. At the same time, other offences relating to the disclosure of state

¹³³ Such as mandatory agreements, prior authorisation, written consents, and extensive anonymisation requirements; OECD (2025), p. 28.

¹³⁴ Country visit Belgium, Federal Human Rights Institute.

¹³⁵ Cumuleo (2026), written input, pp. 1-2.

¹³⁶ The Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (CETS No. 205), also known as the Tromsø Convention, entered into force on 1 December 2020. The bill assenting the Tromsø Convention, was unanimously adopted on 14 March 2024 in the plenary session of the Chamber and submitted for Royal Assent. However, the law has still not been published in the Belgian Official Gazette. The file will be handled by the new cabinet of the Minister of Security and the Interior. 2025 Rule of Law Report Belgium, pp. 13-14; FIRM-IFDH (2026), written input, p. 29.

¹³⁷ Important innovations in this draft law are the binding decision-making powers as well as investigative and coercive powers for the commission for access to documents, an extension of the scope of access to government information, and the abolition of a previous exception. For more details on the state of play, see Chamber of Representatives (2025).

¹³⁸ Cumuleo (2026), written input, pp. 1-2; Country visit Belgium, Government.

¹³⁹ Country visit Belgium, the FIRM-IFDH; Cumuleo (2026), written input, pp. 1-2.

¹⁴⁰ FIRM-IFDH (2026), written input, pp. 28-29.

¹⁴¹ Article 79, 4° of the new criminal code.

¹⁴² Commission SLAPP Communication, para 7; Ministry of Justice (without date).

¹⁴³ Constitutional Court, case number 14/2026, 29 January 2026.

secrets remain applicable¹⁴⁴. Several stakeholders raised that this threat of a possible sanction leads to a chilling effect and, in addition, flagged that concerns remain due to the vagueness of the definition of ‘state secret’¹⁴⁵. The law on transposing the Anti-SLAPP Directive was approved in Parliament on 21 May 2026, it has been published in the Belgian official journal on 12 June 2026 and entered into force ten days later. The law covers both cross-border and domestic cases¹⁴⁶. Stakeholders report nevertheless that the climate for journalists remains worrisome¹⁴⁷. While initiatives like PersVeilig.be¹⁴⁸ offer support, stakeholders highlight concerns in relation to the tackling of online threats to journalists. Law enforcement authorities do not always have the necessary tools to identify the source of the threat¹⁴⁹. Since the 2025 Rule of Law Report, nine new alerts concerning Belgium have been registered on the Council of Europe’s Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists¹⁵⁰. The Media Freedom Rapid Response mechanism has identified 18 alerts in that same period, including harassment, spoofing, editorial interference, defamation, threats and physical assault¹⁵¹.

IV. OTHER INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES RELATED TO CHECKS AND BALANCES

Overall, stakeholders continue to have opportunities to engage with policymaking. The House of Representatives regularly organises hearings with experts, academics and civil society. In addition, over 90 % of parliamentary committee meetings are public¹⁵². The OECD considered that consultations and engagement could be further strengthened through the creation of a single online platform, compiling ongoing consultations and be easily accessed by the public¹⁵³. The Government and the federal Parliament continue to ask the Federal Human Rights Institute to provide advice on legislative initiatives¹⁵⁴.

More than half of companies surveyed in Belgium express confidence in the effectiveness of investment protection. 56 % of companies are very or fairly confident that investments are protected by law and courts, which has decreased in comparison with 2025 (60 %)¹⁵⁵. As regards authorities relevant for economic operators, 49 % of companies perceive the level of independence of the national competition authority (Belgian

¹⁴⁴ For example, the reproduction, disclosure, or transmission of a state secret to unauthorised persons with the intention to harm the State's essential interests remains a crime (Article 119 of the Criminal Code of 1867). Country visit Belgium, Country visit Belgium, Liga voor de Mensenrechten, Amnesty International, Ligue des droits humains; FIRM-IFDH (2026), written input, p. 30.

¹⁴⁵ Country visit Belgium, FIRM-IFDH, journalists associations and CDJ, Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2026), written input, pp. 13-14.

¹⁴⁶ FIRM-IFDH (2026b); However, the safeguards only apply to civil cases, excluding tax cases, customs cases, administrative cases, and state liability for acts in the exercise of public authority. Arbitration and criminal cases are also excluded.

¹⁴⁷ Country visit Belgium, Public Service Media (RTBF, VRT and BRF).

¹⁴⁸ Persveilig.be is a website where journalists can find an overview of available training courses and access a reporting center where they can report unsafe situations or incidents affecting their work, as well as discover tools that help them work safely.

¹⁴⁹ Country visit Belgium, Public Service Media (RTBF, VRT and BRF).

¹⁵⁰ Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists, Belgium. Out of 9 alerts, Belgium replied to all 7, with 2 replies expected in August.

¹⁵¹ European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, Media Freedom Rapid Response – Belgium.

¹⁵² Belgian government (2026), written input, p. 16.

¹⁵³ OECD (2025a), p. 134.

¹⁵⁴ Country visit Belgium, FIRM-IFDH.

¹⁵⁵ Figures 52 and 53, 2026 EU Justice Scoreboard. 22 % and only 18 % of the surveyed investors respectively perceive the quality, efficiency or independence of justice and frequent changes in legislation or concerns about the quality of the law-making process, as a reason for the lack of confidence in investment protection.

Competition Authority) as very or fairly good, a figure which has decreased in comparison with 2025 (53 %) ¹⁵⁶. The Council of State has jurisdiction in several business-related cases, including in cases related to public procurement, public concessions, public contracts and economic regulation. A number of judicial mechanisms to improve efficiency are available in these cases, including the possibility to apply interim measures, joint examination of similar cases and the consolidation of multiple appeals ¹⁵⁷.

The Government continues to work towards an A-status for a national human rights institution in Belgium. This institution will be established through a cooperation between FIRM-IFDH on the one hand and the Flemish Human Rights Institution (FLANHRI) on the other hand. The different stakeholders are analysing the steps necessary to be accredited with this A-status and to establish the required cooperation mechanisms between the Belgian human rights institutions¹⁵⁸. An A-status requires establishing a structure that is competent for human rights matters across federated entities as well as the federal level. Furthermore, the Human Rights League reiterated its call on the Belgian authorities to make sure that all human rights monitoring bodies comply with the Paris Principles on independence and effectiveness¹⁵⁹. Funding is not a primary concern for FIRM-IFDH as long as costs do not increase significantly¹⁶⁰.

There has been limited progress on the recommendation to ensure compliance by public authorities with final rulings of national courts, while supervision by the Council of Europe on structural issues identified by the European Court of Human Rights continues¹⁶¹. Compliance by the Government with final rulings of national courts and orders imposing periodic penalty payments¹⁶² remains an issue, despite, for example, the joint memorandum of the three highest courts (Constitutional Court, Court of Cassation and Council of State) of July 2024 requiring the Government to respect court judgments¹⁶³. The FIRM-IFDH launched an investigation into the non-implementation of court rulings issued against Belgian authorities¹⁶⁴. A judgment of the Constitutional Court of 26 February 2026 suspended the legislative provisions on the basis of which accommodation to persons who request international protection in Belgium after having obtained protection in another Member State is to be refused and made a preliminary reference to the Court of Justice¹⁶⁵. Following this ruling, in March 2026, the Minister for Asylum, Migration, Social Integration and Metropolitan Policy instructed not to award accommodation to this category of persons,

¹⁵⁶ Figure 60, 2026 EU Justice Scoreboard.

¹⁵⁷ Figures 66 and 67, 2026 EU Justice Scoreboard. The data presented reflects exclusively the mechanisms in place at the level of the highest administrative jurisdictions; the same or other mechanisms may be in place at lower instance administrative courts.

¹⁵⁸ Coalition Agreement (2025), p. 83, FIRM-IFDH (2025).

¹⁵⁹ Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2026), p. 97. UN General Assembly (1993).

¹⁶⁰ FIRM-IFDH has a coordinating role regarding the national prevention mechanism (Part of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture of the United Nations), which could have resource implications for the Central Monitoring Council for Prisons to carry out its tasks (Country visit Belgium, FIRM-IFDH).

¹⁶¹ The 2025 Rule of Law Report recommended to Belgium to 'Take measures to ensure compliance by public authorities with final rulings of national courts and the European Court of Human Rights'. In 2025, the Commission assessed limited progress on this recommendation.

¹⁶² FIRM-IFDH (2025a), p. 15-18; Amnesty International (2025), p. 20-22. Public Prosecution Service (2026), additional written input; College of Court and Tribunals (2026), p. 14; Federal Migration Centre Myria (2026), written input, p. 11.

¹⁶³ 2025 Rule of Law Report, Belgium, p. 16, Joint memorandum of the three highest courts of Belgium of 19 July 2024.

¹⁶⁴ 2025 Rule of Law report 2025, Belgium, p. 16, Country visit Belgium, FIRM-IFDH. The research is ongoing (see for example: Flemish Bar Association (2026)).

¹⁶⁵ Constitutional Court (2026), additional written input.

as there would be another legal ground in Belgian alien legislation for such refusals. The Council of State subsequently suspended the Minister's instruction¹⁶⁶. The Government remains under supervision by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on structural issues identified by the European Court of Human Rights¹⁶⁷. In certain individual cases, the Government has remedied the situation¹⁶⁸. Insofar as the underlying, more general, issues are concerned, the Government has engaged in the execution process underlying its commitment to remedy the violation found in judgments of the European Court of Human Rights without delay, as specified in the action plans which are periodically updated and sent to the Committee of Ministers¹⁶⁹. On 9 April 2026, the European Court of Human Rights found Belgium to have breached Articles 3, 6 and 34 of the Convention, *inter alia*, for not having implemented within a reasonable time both national court orders and interim measures ordered by the European Court of Human Rights requiring accommodation to be granted to applicants for international protection¹⁷⁰. Overall, there has been [no/limited] progress on the recommendation.

On 1 January 2026, Belgium had 19 leading judgments of the European Court of Human Rights pending implementation, an increase of 2 compared to the previous year¹⁷¹. At that time, Belgium's rate of leading judgments from the past 10 years that had been implemented was at 69 % (compared to 70 % in 2025; 31 % remained pending), and the average time that the judgments had been pending implementation was 5 years (compared to 4 years and 9 months in 2025)¹⁷². The oldest leading judgment, pending implementation for close to 17 years, concerns the excessive length of civil proceedings at first instance level¹⁷³. As regards the respect of payment deadlines, on 31 December 2025 there were 2 cases in

¹⁶⁶ The Council of State suspended the instruction considering that it should have been submitted to the Council for prior advice and noting that its implementation would place the concerned persons at an immediate risk of complete destitution and homelessness. For the [full judgment](#): Judgment of the Council of State of 27 March 2026, *l'association sans but lucratif Coordination et Initiatives pour et avec les Réfugiés et les Etrangers (CIRE) and others v Belgium*, No 266.219, Article 3 (p. 41). The Minister's instruction is reflected on page 11-13 of the judgment.

¹⁶⁷ For example with regard to Judgment of the ECHR, *Camara v Belgium*, CE:ECHR:2023:0718JUD004925522; Judgment of the ECHR, *Vasilescu v Belgium*, CE:ECHR:2014:1125JUD006468212; Judgment of the ECHR, *L.B. v Belgium*, CE:ECHR:2012:1002JUD002283108.

¹⁶⁸ In the *Bell* case no other measure is required. In the *Vandroemme* case, the payment of just satisfaction and the default interest is still pending. In the *Van den Kerkhof* case Belgium is urged to finalise the domestic proceedings as soon as possible. In the *Camara* case accommodation was granted to the applicant. According to the Belgian Government of the 2 286 interim measures issued by the European Court of Human Rights against Belgium, only 5 remain active as of January 2026.

¹⁶⁹ Country visit Belgium, Government. The action plans submitted by the Government and decisions by Committee of Ministers are presented in the regularly updated Factsheet 'Belgium - Overview of main issues before the Committee of Ministers - Ongoing Supervision', prepared by the department for the execution of judgments. In September 2025, in the context of the *Camara v. Belgium* judgment, the Committee of Ministers invited the Belgian Government to use, as soon as possible, all possible means to find a lasting solution to the reception crisis, so as to be able to enforce all judicial decisions.

¹⁷⁰ Judgment of the ECHR, *M.V. and Others v Belgium*, CE:ECHR:2026:0409JUD005283622. Another example is from March 2026. In the *L.B. group and W.D. v Belgium* judgments, the Committee of Ministers criticised the absence of measures taken by Belgium in individual cases and deplored the fact that the structural problem in prison psychiatric wings persists and even appears to have worsened since many internees do not receive appropriate care (Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers (2026)). The *Vasilescu v. Belgium* judgment is on the agenda of the 1563rd (Human Rights) meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (9-11 June 2026).

¹⁷¹ For an explanation of the supervision process, see the [website](#) of the Council of Europe.

¹⁷² All figures calculated by the European Implementation Network (EIN) and based on the number of cases that are considered pending at the annual cut-off date of 1 January 2026. EIN (2026), written input, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷³ Judgment of the ECHR, *Bell*, CE:ECHR:2008:1104JUD004482605, pending implementation since 2009.

total awaiting confirmation of payments (compared to 4 in 2024)¹⁷⁴. By 17 June 2026, the number of leading judgments pending implementation had increased to 20¹⁷⁵.

Notwithstanding a high level of protection under the law, stakeholders continue to raise concerns regarding measures that affect civic space. Civic space in Belgium continues to be rated as ‘narrowed’ by Civicus¹⁷⁶. Stakeholders continue to raise concerns regarding actions undertaken by public authorities negatively affecting civic space¹⁷⁷. In this light, and following an advice from the Council of State¹⁷⁸, the Government is revising a draft law allowing for the administrative prohibition of groups that are considered to pose a threat to national security or to the democratic and constitutional order. The Federal Human Rights Institute, in an own-initiative advice, has concluded that administrative fines, which are in principle intended for infringements of local regulations in the area of public order or nuisance, are used by municipalities to sanction persons making use of their freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and the right to protest¹⁷⁹. As regards funding, stakeholders have further pointed that certain fiscal and subsidy measures impact the sources of funding potentially available for CSOs¹⁸⁰.

¹⁷⁴ Council of Europe (2026), p. 162.

¹⁷⁵ Data according to the online database of the Council of Europe (HUDOC).

¹⁷⁶ Belgium’s score is 77/100. Ratings by Civicus are on a five-category scale defined as: open, narrowed, obstructed, repressed and closed.

¹⁷⁷ Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2026), p. 94; Right to Protest Coalition (undated).

¹⁷⁸ Belgian government (2026), written input; Council of State (2025). The advice of the Council of State focuses, among others, on potential interferences with fundamental rights and freedoms.

¹⁷⁹ FIRM-IFDH (2026).

¹⁸⁰ The tax deductibility of donations made to non-profit entities was reduced from 45 % to 30 % without transition period due to the pressing budgetary situation of the government. In addition, following a political agreement to cut subsidies by EUR 3.5 million, the Flemish government stopped or reduced subsidies for a few civil society organisations (Country visit Belgium, Liga voor de Mensenrechten, Amnesty International, Ligue des droits humains). The French Community made cuts on the budget for organisations close to political parties, such as youth organisations due to concerns around neutrality, good governance and fair management of public funds (Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2026), p. 95; Parliament of the French speaking community (2025), p. 37. The relevant decree was [published](#) on 9 January 2026.

Annex I: List of sources in alphabetical order*

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Annex II: Country visit to Belgium

The Commission services held online and in-person meetings in February and March 2026 with:

- Amnesty International Belgium
- Integrity Bureau
- Committee P
- Flemish, French and German-speaking Community Authorities for Media
- Constitutional Court
- Council of State
- Court of Cassation
- Federal Deontological Commission
- Federal Human Rights Institute
- Federal Ombudsman
- Federation of Belgian Enterprises (VBO-FEB)
- Flemish Association of Journalists (*Vlaamse Vereniging van Journalisten, VVJ*)
- Flemish Bar Association (*Orde van Vlaamse Balies*)
- Flemish Media Regulator (*Vlaamse Regulator voor de Media*)
- French- and German-speaking Order of the Belgian Bar (*l'Ordre des barreaux francophones et germanophone de Belgique*)
- High Council for Justice
- High Council for the Audiovisual (*Conseil Supérieur de l'audiovisuel, CSA*)
- Journalistic Ethics Council (*Le Conseil de déontologie journalistique*)
- Liga voor Mensenrechten
- Ligue des Droits Humains
- Media regulatory authority of the German-speaking Community (*Medienrat*)
- Federal Government
- Public Prosecution Service
- Public Service Media (*RTBF, VRT, BRF*)
- Transparency International Belgium

The Commission also met the following organisations in a number of horizontal meetings:

- Civil Liberties Union for Europe
- Civil Society Europe
- End FGM EU
- European Civic Forum
- European Partnership for Democracy
- Human Rights Watch
- ILGA-Europe
- International Federation for Human Rights
- Philea - Philanthropy Europe Association
- Transparency International EU