Doing Business in Belgium: 2014 Country Commercial Guide for U.S. Companies

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Chapter 1: Doing Business In Belgium

Market Overview Return to top

Belgium is a compact and diverse market, sitting on the cultural and linguistic border of Germanic and Latin Europe. It is composed of the francophone Wallonia region to the south, the Dutch speaking Flanders region in the north, and the bilingual capital region of Brussels. There is also a small enclave of German speakers. This diversity makes it an ideal market for many U.S. firms to test their products before expanding distribution throughout Europe. With a population of 11.1 million people in a territory comparable in size to the state of Maryland, it is densely populated. It enjoys one of the highest per capita incomes in Europe, with a relatively balanced income distribution, resulting in widely distributed purchasing power.

Belgium GDP was a total of $421.7 billion in 2013. Bilateral trade was worth over $51 billion for the year 2013. The U.S. ranks as Belgium's 5th principal trading partner; with Belgium ranked the 12th largest recipient of U.S. exports. Often referred to as "the capital of Europe", the Belgian capital of Brussels is home to the headquarters of the European Union (EU) and of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as well as hundreds of international institutions, associations and multinational corporations.

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Economic forecasts by the National Bank of Belgium predict Belgium's economy will grow 1.4% in 2014. Most analysts suggest that Belgium has weathered the European financial crisis relatively well. In 2013, the Belgian economy grew by 0.2%, which was slightly higher than the EU average growth of 0.1%. The unemployment rate of 8.5% remained below the EU-28 average of 10.6. Belgium's harmonized inflation from December 2012 to December 2013 was 1.2%, just under the Euro area average of 1.3%. Belgium's 10 year government bond rates continued to decline, dropping to 2.6% in December 2013. Belgium's 2013 deficit of 2.7% met the target of below 3% set by the European Commission but was above the stability pact target of 2.5%. Belgium's national debt was at 99.7% of GDP at the end of 2013, also below the target of 100%. The European Union, OECD and others have continued to call for additional structural reforms in Belgium to ensure it remains under its debt and deficit targets, and strengthens its competitiveness. Recommendations include labor market reform, simplification of the tax code and developing a strategy to lower energy costs.

Market Opportunities

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The leading Belgian sectors for U.S. exports and investments are: Defense and Aerospace, Chemicals and Plastic Materials, Energy and Renewable Energy, Environmental Technologies, Medical Devices, Safety and Security and Travel and Tourism. As the host of NATO and EU headquarters, and hundreds of other international organizations, Belgium also offers opportunities for specific projects.

Belgium's central location in the wealthiest region of Europe makes it an ideal gateway for exports to Europe. Within a radius of 300 miles, 140 million EU consumers can be reached representing 60% of Europe's purchasing power. This is coupled with excellent ports (including Antwerp, the second busiest port in Europe), airports, roads and canals, making Belgium a base of operations for distribution throughout Western Europe.

Belgium is also seen as a test market. Indeed, Belgium contains a few distinctly separate socio-demographic groups such as the Germanic Flemings and the Latin Walloons, governed by the same legal system. The Belgian economy largely reflects the overall European economy and consumer, a mini-Europe that is easier to enter than starting with larger European markets.

Moreover, Belgian productivity levels are the result of high investment in the quality of its labor force. Because of its location and history, the educational system in Belgium is highly oriented towards the instruction of foreign languages. U.S. companies contemplating the Belgian market will be encouraged by the large number of English speakers.

The Notional Interest Deduction (NID) of 2005 introduced an annual deduction on taxable income and is very attractive for foreign businesses as it reduces the taxable base. The American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham Belgium) has tracked the impact of NID on U.S. companies operating in Belgium. Changes to the NID have been debated by the federal government. See: http://www.amcham.be/Publications/PrioritiesforaProsperousBelgium/tabid/71/Default.aspx

Market Entry Strategy

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U.S. exporters can penetrate the Belgian market through importers/distributors, wholesalers or specialized retailers, depending on their products and their company size. Interested U.S. exporters will have to focus on innovation, quality and competitive pricing to successfully enter the market.

In support of U.S. commercial interests in Belgium, the U.S. Embassy in Brussels uses the combined resources of the various U.S. Government agencies to promote exports of U.S. goods and services. It also supplies information on trade and investment opportunities and serves as an advocate for U.S. firms. For specific requests, firms can contact the applicable Commercial Specialist at the U.S. Embassy in Brussels for counseling and market entry strategies tailored to their products and services (see: Export.gov - What can CS Belgium do for you?).

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Chapter 2: Political and Economic Environment

For background information on the political and economic environment of the country, please click on the link below to the U.S. Department of State Background Notes.

http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2874.htm

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Chapter 3: Selling U.S. Products and Services

Using an Agent or Distributor Return to top

Companies wishing to use distribution, franchising and agency arrangements need to ensure that the agreements they put into place are in accordance with EU and member state national laws. Council Directive 86/653/EEC establishes certain minimum standards of protection for self-employed commercial agents who sell or purchase goods on behalf of their principals. The Directive establishes the rights and obligations of the principal and its agents, the agent's remuneration and the conclusion and termination of an agency contract. It also establishes the notice to be given and indemnity or compensation to be paid to the agent. U.S. companies should be particularly aware that according to the Directive, parties may not derogate from certain requirements. Accordingly, the inclusion of a clause specifying an alternate body of law to be applied in the event of a dispute will likely be ruled invalid by European courts.

Key Link:
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31986L0653:EN:HTML

The European Commission's Directorate General for Competition enforces legislation concerned with the effects on competition in the internal market of "vertical agreements." U.S. small- and medium-sized companies (SMEs) are exempt from these regulations because their agreements likely would qualify as "agreements of minor importance," meaning they are considered incapable of affecting competition at the EU level but useful for cooperation between SMEs. Generally speaking, companies with fewer than 250 employees and an annual turnover of less than €50 million (approximately $68 million) are considered small- and medium-sized. The EU has indicated that agreements that affect less than 10% of a particular market are generally exempted (Commission Notice 2001/C 368/07).

Key Link:
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2001:368:0013:0015:EN:PDF

The EU also regulates payment delays. The new Directive 2011/7/EU, which replaced the current law in March 2013, covers all commercial transactions within the EU, whether in the public or private sector, primarily dealing with the consequences of late payment. Transactions with consumers, however, do not fall within the scope of this Directive. Directive 2011/7/EU entitles a seller who does not receive payment for goods and/or services within 30 days of the payment deadline to collect interest (at a rate of 8% above the European Central Bank rate) as well as 40 Euro as compensation for recovery of costs. For business-to-business transactions a 60-day period may be negotiated subject to conditions. The seller may also retain the title to goods until payment is completed and may claim full compensation for all recovery costs.

Key Link:
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:048:0001:0010:EN:PDF

Companies' agents and distributors can take advantage of the European Ombudsman when victim of inefficient management by an EU institution or body. Complaints can be made to the European Ombudsman only by businesses and other bodies with registered offices in the EU. The Ombudsman can act upon these complaints by investigating cases in which EU institutions fail to act in accordance with the law, fail to respect the principles of good administration, or violate fundamental rights. In addition, SOLVIT, a network of national centers, offers online assistance to citizens and businesses who encounter problems with transactions within the borders of the single market.

Key Links:
http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/home/en/default.htm
http://ec.europa.eu/solvit/site/about/index_en.htm

Establishing an Office

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U.S. companies wishing to start business activities in Belgium can choose to set up either a subsidiary or a branch. A subsidiary is incorporated under foreign law and the branch under Belgian law. The choice between a subsidiary and a branch often depends on the taxation structure in the foreign country from which the investment is made. Incorporation generally takes six weeks. No prior government authorization is required and there is no restriction on the transfer of capital into Belgium, with the exception of industries such as banking, insurance, pharmaceuticals, and broadcasting. When planning to open an office or set up a company in Belgium, U.S. companies should contact the foreign investment offices of the Belgian region where they will be located (Flanders , Wallonia, and Brussels). These offices will be able to provide support and advice on matters of tax, employment, location and accounting.

Legal Features

A subsidiary is a separate legal entity; thus, liability is limited to its own assets. However, a branch does not constitute a separate entity and has unlimited liability. The parent company is liable for all obligations and debts of the branch.

Setting up a Subsidiary

Subsidiaries are usually set up either as a public limited liability company (SA/NV) or a private limited liability company (SPRL/BVBA). The private limited liability company is generally suited for smaller companies. Steps for setting up public and private companies are relatively similar.

- Deposit initial capital (€62,000 for SA/NV; €19,000 for SPRL/BVBA) with a Belgian bank. A certificate indicating the amount of capital held in a blocked account will be issued by the bank.
- File signed financial plan with a notary. A financial plan shows how the initial capital covers the company's operations for the next two years.
- In the presence of a notary, sign the deed of incorporation and the by-laws.
- The notary will file the deed of incorporation with the local commercial court and submit the corporate charter for publication in the Belgian Official Gazette. (Cost is approximately €1,000-1,500 for notary, €207 for publication in the Belgian Official Gazette.) Upon registration, an official corporate registration number is issued.
- Register at the "one-stop shop for companies" (guichet d'entreprise / ondernemingsloket) to activate the corporate registration number and register with the Value Added Tax (VAT) administration. (Cost is €71 for registration fee and €61 for VAT registration)
- Register with social security administration for salaried workers (ONSS/RSZ).
- Within three months of incorporation, companies must register with the social insurance fund for self-employed persons and begin annual contributions to this fund.

Setting up a Branch

To open a branch office in Belgium, the following documents must be brought to a notary to be legalized and translated:

- Articles of incorporation and bylaws of the foreign incorporation with subsequent amendments.
- Minutes from the Board Meeting when it was decided by the parent company to open a branch office in Belgium.
- Minutes from the Board Meeting to appoint a legal representative along with a description of powers delegated to him.
- Consolidated annual accounts of the parent company.
- The translation of these documents must be done by an official translator in Belgium into French or Dutch, depending on the location in Belgium.
- The documents must be submitted to the local Court of Commerce and the annual accounts must be filed at the National Bank of Belgium.
- Register at the "one-stop shop for companies" (guichet d'entreprise / ondernemingsloket) to activate the corporate registration number and register with VAT administration.

- Publish the documents in the Belgian Official Gazette. (The costs will be the fee for the translation, registration fee, and publishing fee)
- Register with social security administration for salaried workers (ONSS/RSZ).
- Within three months of incorporation, branches must register with social insurance fund for self-employed persons and begin annual contributions to this fund.

A list of notaries in Belgium is available at http://www.notaire.be/index.php

In an effort to modernize and streamline the procedure of setting up a company or an office in Belgium, the Belgian Government established the "Crossroads Bank for Enterprises" (Banque Carrefour des Entreprises). It is a repository that assigns business entities a unique identification number that replaces the social security number, its register of commerce number, its VAT number, and the number granted by the national register of legal entities. Data are entered one time only and all government entities share this database. The database tracks relevant identification details, such as name, address, VAT number, and business type. For third parties (including the administration), this number serves as the main identification number of the branch. It must appear on all documents originating from the subsidiary or branch.

Franchising

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According to the Belgian Franchise Federation Belgium's franchising system represents 6% of the Belgian retail, about 100 franchisors, 3,500 franchisees, 30,000 jobs and a market of € 2.4 billion. This places Belgium, along with Denmark and Finland, among the European countries with the lowest number of franchise units per capita. The largest part of the franchise concepts are in Do It Yourself (DIY), distribution and confection. Over the past 10 years the franchising of services has grown slowly.

Belgium is one of the 5 EU Member States that in 2005 adopted a law on pre-contractual information in the framework of commercial partnership agreements. The franchisor is obliged to provide the prospective franchisee with the draft agreement and a separate document containing important contractual clauses. This document must sufficient details to allow the franchisee to accurately evaluate the contractual relationship. The required information must be given to the franchisee at least one month before entering into the franchising agreement.

In the long-standing market economies governed by Civil Codes, there is very limited franchise specific legislation. Franchising, which is not usually distinguished from general commercial activity in national economic statistics, is governed in each EU country by the many laws that usually govern mainstream commercial and distribution contracts. These include the general principles of contractual and civil law, specific commercial regulations, intellectual property rights protection laws, fiscal and social laws, etc. as well as national or European jurisprudence. http://www.eff-franchise.com/.

Since 1972, the European Franchise Federation has promoted its European Code of Ethics for Franchising. Its purpose is to promote a self-regulatory set of ethical standards by which the actors of the industry themselves define the means by which to protect its practice from behavior which could otherwise be detrimental to its image and ultimately to its business development. The EFF's Code of Ethics for Franchising has been recognized as an industry reference both by the European Commission, the European Court of Justice, and in franchise jurisprudence in countries like France and Germany.

Direct Marketing

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There is a wide-range of EU legislation that regulates the direct marketing sector in Belgium. Compliance requirements for marketing and sales to private consumers are strict. Companies need to provide consumers with clear and complete information prior to purchase and inform consumers on how they intend to collect and use customer data. The following gives a brief overview of the most important provisions derived from EU-wide rules on distance-selling and on-line commerce.

Processing Customer Data

The EU has strict laws governing the protection of personal data, including the use of such data in the context of direct marketing activities. For more information on these rules, please see the privacy section.

Distance Selling Rules

The EU's Directive on Distance Selling to Consumers (97/7/EC and amendments) sets out a number of obligations for companies doing business over a distance with consumers.

It can read like a set of onerous "do's" and "don'ts," but in many ways, it represents nothing more than a customer relations good practice guide with legal effect. Before a contract is concluded, direct marketers must provide clear information on their identity as well as their supplier, full details on prices including delivery costs, and the period for which an offer remains valid. Customers generally have the right to return goods without any required explanation within seven days, and retain the right to compensation for faulty goods thereafter. Similar in nature is the Doorstep Selling Directive (85/577/EEC) which is designed to protect consumers from sales occurring outside of a normal business premises (e.g., door-to-door sales) and essentially assure the fairness of resulting contracts.

In 2011, the EU overhauled its consumer protection legislation and merged several existing rules into a single rulebook - the "Consumer Rights Directive." The provisions of this Directive apply to contracts concluded after June 13, 2014, and will replace current EU rules on distance and doorstep sales. The Directive contains provisions on core information to be provided by traders prior to the conclusion of consumer contracts. It also regulates the right of withdrawal, includes rules on the costs for the use of means of payment and bans pre-ticked boxes. Companies are advised to consult the relevant sections of EU Member States' Country Commercial Guides and to contact the Commercial Service at the U.S. Mission to the European Union for more specific guidance.

In 2013, the EU adopted rules on Alternative Dispute Resolution which provide consumers the right to turn to quality alternative dispute resolution entities for all types of contractual disputes including purchases made online or offline, domestically or across borders. A specific Online Dispute Resolution Regulation will set up an EU-wide online platform to handle consumer disputes that arise from online transactions. The platform will be operational at the end of 2015.

Key Links:
Consumer Affairs Homepage:
http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/index_en.htm

Consumer Rights:
http://ec.europa.eu/justice/consumer-marketing/rights-contracts/directive/index_en.htm

Distance Selling of Financial Services
Financial services are the subject of a separate directive that came into force in June 2002 (2002/65/EC). This piece of legislation amended three prior existing Directives and is designed to ensure that consumers are appropriately protected with respect to financial transactions taking place where the consumer and the provider are not face-to-face. In addition to prohibiting certain abusive marketing practices, the Directive establishes criteria for the presentation of contract information. Given the special nature of financial markets, specifics are also laid out for contractual withdrawal.

Key Link:
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32002L0065:EN:NOT

Direct Marketing over the Internet
The e-commerce Directive (2000/31/EC) imposes certain specific requirements on the direct marketing business. Promotional offers must not mislead customers and the terms that must be met to qualify for them have to be easily accessible and clear. The Directive stipulates that marketing e-mails must be identified as such to the recipient and requires that companies targeting customers on-line must regularly consult national opt-out registers where they exist. When an order is placed, the service provider must acknowledge receipt quickly and by electronic means, although the Directive does not attribute any legal effect to the placing of an order or its acknowledgment. This is a matter for national law. Vendors of electronically supplied services (such as software, which the EU considers a service and not a good) must also collect value added tax (see Electronic Commerce section below).

Key Link: http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/e-commerce/index_en.htm

Joint Ventures/Licensing

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In addition to the Commercial Service, there are numerous banks, professional organizations, service companies, and financial organizations prepared to advise and assist parties considering joint ventures and licensing within Belgium. Belgium has a very sophisticated business community with many potential qualified joint venture and licensing partners.

Selling to the Government: Belgian, EU and NATO Tenders

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Selling to the Belgian Government and the EU

The Belgian Government generally follows EU procurement regulations. The public procurement market in the EU is currently regulated by three Directives and in 2014, the EU adopted new legislation in this area. New EU Directives were adopted for the general and utilities sectors as well as one on concession contracts:

- Directive 2004/18 on Coordination of Procedures for the Award of Public Works, Services and Supplies Contracts;
- Directive 2004/17 on Coordination of Procedures of Entities Operating in the Utilities Sector, which covers water, energy, transport and postal services; and
- Directive 2009/81 on Coordination of Procedures for the Award of Certain Works, Supply and Service Contracts by contracting authorities in the fields of defense and security.

There is a separate Directive addressing the procurement of defense and sensitive security equipment.

According to some estimates, the size of the EU public procurement market is thought to be between 340 billion euros and 440 billion euros. More details on the size of the EU public procurement market are available in "The Annual Public Procurement Implementation Review":
http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/publicprocurement/docs/implementation/20121011-staff-working-document_en.pdf

Remedy directives cover legal means for companies who face discriminatory public procurement practices.

The U.S. and the EC are signatories to the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Government Procurement Agreement (GPA), which grants access to most public supplies and services and some work contracts published by national procurement authorities of the countries that are parties to the Agreement. In practice, this means that U.S.-based companies are eligible to bid on supplies and services contracts from European public contracting authorities above the agreed thresholds:
http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/publicprocurement/rules/gpa-wto/index_en.htm

However, there are restrictions for U.S. suppliers in the EU utilities sector both in the EU Utilities Directive and in EU coverage of the GPA. The Utilities Directive allows EU contracting authorities to either: 1) reject non-EU bids where the proportion of goods originating in non-EU countries exceeds 50% of the total value of the goods constituting the tender; or 2) apply a 3% price difference to non-EU bids in order to give preference to the EU bid. These restrictions are applied when no reciprocal access for EU companies in the U.S. market is offered. Those restrictions, however, are waived for the electricity sector.

While authorities of EU member states have to apply EU Public Procurement Directive when procuring goods and services, the EU institutions follow different procurement rules, as explained in our reports on "Selling goods and services to the EU institutions – Update 2014" and "Tenders for Government Contracts in the EU":
http://export.gov/europeanunion/marketresearch/index.asp

Selling to NATO

NATO purchases anywhere between $2 to $4 billion worth of products and services each year. Most of this falls under NATO's Security and Investment Program or NSIP. It is the NATO common funding program. The Program finances the provisions and facilities needed to support NATO Strategic Commands. The investments cover communications and information systems, radar, military headquarters, airfields, fuel pipelines and storage, harbors, and navigational aids. It also includes Peace Support Operations such as NATO Stabilization Force (SFOR) and NATO Koso Force (KFOR) including communications, information systems, local headquarters facilities, power systems, and repairs to airfields, rail, and roads.

This budget is supplemented by NATO's Military Budget which covers the International Military Staff, the two NATO Strategic Commands and associated command, control and information systems, research and development agencies, procurement and logistics agencies, and the NATO Airborne Early Warning and Control Force.

Funded by the above budgets and other external sources, NATO procures goods and services mainly through two acquisition agencies: NATO Communications and Information Agency (NCI-A) and NATO Support Agency (NSPA). Over the past years, NATO has been overhauling and streamlining its acquisition agencies. Fourteen agencies, all accredited to procure, have been amalgamated into two main acquisition agencies: NCI-A and NSPA. The agencies account for over 80% of NATO procurement.

NCI-A, or NATO Computer Information Agency is the principal agency involved in the research and development, procurement and implementation of Consultation, Command and Control within NATO. NCI-A procures technology that can support the objectives of its NATO member nations, partner nations, and Crisis Response Operations in Afghanistan and Kosovo for example.

NSPA, located in Luxembourg, is the main logistics agency for NATO. It provides logistic services in support of weapon and equipment systems held in common by NATO nations, in order to promote materiel readiness, to improve the efficiency of logistic operations and to effect savings through consolidated procurement in the areas of supply, maintenance, calibration, procurement, transportation, technical support, engineering services and configuration management.

Both agencies procure goods and services through preferred suppliers and International Competitive Bidding (ICB) for larger projects NCI-A and NSPA's suppliers' lists are respectively known as the Basic Ordering Agreement (BOA) and the Source File. Procurement contracts, though smaller than ICBs, can reach up to $5 million. U.S. companies interested in being added to the BOA and/or Source File should contact Ira Bel ira.bel@trade.gov at the U.S. Commercial Service in Belgium for assistance. U.S. companies interested in tracking and bidding on ICBs should monitor Commerce's bulletin board recapping NATO opportunities: www.fbo.gov.

NATO is a "private club" and only buys from its member nations. This gives U.S. suppliers a distinct advantage. As the United States is under represented in maintenance and supply contracts, the NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency (NAMSA) will offer U.S. companies the opportunity to match the most competitive bid, providing the firm is within 10% of the lowest bid meeting minimum military requirements.

At the conclusion of the NATO Lisbon summit in November 2010, NATO is has reaffirmed and renewed its priorities. Also as the Soviet threat has disappeared NATO renewed its commitment to collective defense embodied in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty: the pledge to collectively defend and repel any aggressions committed upon any of its members. NATO also recognized, particularly after 9/11, that threats are increasingly unconventional in nature. Therefore NATO is now focusing on rapid deployability of smaller forces, cyber defense and the streamlining of its operations and management.

We expect NATO to focus on the purchase of information technology security software with a focus on information assurance and services, cybersecurity, auditing and business management services, and logistical solutions enhancing deployability.

www.fbo.gov

For NATO procurement specific videos, see:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCwlwTKyqEV1s-eLdyEq9O7A

Distribution and Sales Channels Return to top

Belgium has very well developed infrastructure and is regarded as an excellent transit and distribution center. It has the second most extensive canal network in Europe and benefits from modern road and rail networks. Antwerp is Europe's largest container port for U.S.-EU trade; Liege, located 90 kilometers east of Brussels, is the third largest European river port, and Liege Airport is also an important center for freight with 561,000 metric tons sent in 2013. Brussels Airport is located only 15 minutes from the center of Brussels is also among the busiest by cargo traffic in Europe, sending a little over 430,000 tons of freight in 2013**.**

The dense population and pattern of urban development means that for 91% of Belgian consumers, retail shops and department stores are accessible within a 10-mile radius of their homes. Compared to the U.S., or other European markets, the Belgian consumer has a relatively low ratio of square meters of retail space per capita. As a result, several major commercial centers or malls are being developed. These will offer U.S. retail brands and franchises with new, modern locations for their outlets.

The cultural, linguistic and economic differences of Belgium's three regions have a strong influence on how business is conducted. A good importer/distributor must be able to operate in all three areas. Belgian distributors tend to be small and specialized.

Selling Factors/Techniques Return to top

It is important to remember that Dutch, French, and (to a very limited extent) German language divisions define consumer characteristics in the Belgian market. At the industrial level, where price and technical factors are usually paramount, the language issue is not particularly significant. At the consumer level however, issues such as labeling and marketing strategies take on greater weight. In both instances, language can influence the personal relationships between buyers and sellers, so it is necessary to determine whether importers and distributors can service the entire Belgian market.

The prevailing Belgium law for labeling simply requires that consumers of the targeted market must be able to read the product information. Typically this has been Dutch in the northern half of Belgium (Flanders), French in the southern half of Belgium (Wallonia), and German in two small communities of German-speaking Belgians on the Belgium-German border. Generally both Dutch and French appear on all products sold in the Belgium market and should be the most prudent option for all newcomers.

Electronic Commerce

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As a result of early internet infrastructure development, e-commerce is freely accessible in Belgium. High levels of broadband and cable access for high-speed internet are readily available in Belgium. In 2013, Belgium ranked eighth -in broadband penetration rate in the European Union at 34.1%, with 78% of Belgians using the internet at least once a week. In 2012, 44% of Belgians accessed the internet via a mobile device; this is well above the EU average of 36%. Belgium's overall internet penetration is at 81.3% surpassing the European Union's 73%. The most popular activity is internet banking at 56%. However, only 45% of Belgian consumers have purchased goods or services online, ranking far behind Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden's 70%. Approximately 23% of Belgian companies are engaged in e-commerce, which is significantly higher than the EU average of 14%.

The need to tailor offerings according to local laws, culture, and in two languages (French and Dutch), combined with a small population, make Belgium a somewhat more difficult market for those entering the EU e-commerce division. However, in February 2008, eBay introduced a system to allow users in Belgium to register using an electronic identity card instead of a credit card. Using this government-issued electronic identity card, known as eID, provides greater proof of identity and security in exchange of electronic data. Such increased security provides for greater trust in the e-commerce market and may offer a boost in attractiveness.

Although in the past the Belgian government has lagged in providing online public services, it is catching up and now offers tax filings online. In addition, the Belgian government is updating its electronic procurement structure and public tenders can now be submitted online. It is expected to soon launch its completed online-procurement system for purchasing goods from approved suppliers. In 2012, 50% of Belgian citizens made use of the internet for eGovernment services and 29% sent in online forms. These rates are above EU averages of 44% and 22% respectively.

For information on electronic commerce in the EU please consult the Commerce Department's Country Commercial Guide on the European Union: EU Country Commercial Guide, chapter 3 "Selling U.S. Products and Services", section on "Electronic Commerce".

Alternatively, search the Commerce Department's Market Research Library, available from: http://www.export.gov/mrktresearch/index.asp under Country and Industry Market Reports.

Trade Promotion and Advertising

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General Legislation

Laws against misleading advertisements differ widely from member state to member state within the EU. To respond to this imperfection in the internal market, the Commission adopted a directive, in force since October 1986, to establish minimum and objective criteria regarding truth in advertising. The Directive was amended in October 1997 to include comparative advertising. Under the Directive, misleading advertising is defined as any "advertising which in any way, including its presentation, deceives or is likely to deceive the persons to whom it is addressed or whom it reaches and which, by reason of its deceptive nature, is likely to affect their economic behavior or which for those reasons, injures or is likely to injure a competitor." Member states can authorize even more extensive protection under their national laws.

Comparative advertising, subject to certain conditions, is defined as "advertising which explicitly or by implication identifies a competitor or goods or services by a competitor." Member states can, and in some cases have, restricted misleading or comparative advertising.

The EU's Audiovisual Media Services Directive regulates broadcasting activities in the EU. Since 2009, the rules allowing for U.S.-style product placement on television and the three-hour/day maximum of advertising have been lifted. However, a 12-minute/hour maximum remains. Child programming is subject to a code of conduct that includes a limit of junk food advertising to children. Following the adoption of the 1999 Council Directive on the Sale of Consumer Goods and Associated Guarantees, product specifications as advertised are considered as legally binding on the seller. For additional information on Council Directive 1999/44/EC on the Sale of Consumer Goods and Associated Guarantees, see the legal warranties and after-sales service section below. This Directive, however, will be incorporated into the Consumer Rights Directive mentioned above by June 2014.

The EU adopted Directive 2005/29/EC concerning fair business practices in a further attempt to tighten up consumer protection rules. These rules outlaw several aggressive or deceptive marketing practices such as pyramid schemes, "liquidation sales" when a shop is not closing down, and artificially high prices as the basis for discounts in addition to other potentially misleading advertising practices. Certain rules on advertising to children are also set out.

Key Link:
http://ec.europa.eu/comm/consumers/cons_int/safe_shop/fair_bus_pract/index_en.htm
http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/reg/avms/index_en.htm

Medicines

The advertising of medicinal products for human use is regulated by Council Directive 2001/83/EC as amended by Directive 2004/27/EC. Generally speaking, the advertising of medicinal products is forbidden if market authorization has not yet been granted or if the product in question is a prescription drug. Mentioning therapeutic indications where self-medication is not suitable is not permitted, nor is the distribution of free samples to the general public. The text of the advertisement should be compatible with the characteristics listed on the product label, and should encourage rational use of the product. The advertising of medicinal products destined for professionals should contain essential characteristics of the product as well as its classification. Inducements to prescribe or supply a particular medicinal product are prohibited and the supply of free samples is restricted.

The Commission presented a new proposal for a framework for information to patients on medicines in 2008 which would allow industry to produce non-promotional information about its medicines while complying with strictly defined rules and would be subject to an effective system of control and quality assurance. The debate on the framework however is currently blocked in the member states and therefore, current varying systems at national level are in force.

Key Link:
http://ec.europa.eu/health/human-use/information-to-patient/index_en.htm

Nutrition & Health Claims

On July 1, 2007, a regulation on nutrition and health claims entered into force. Regulation 1924/2006 sets EU-wide conditions for the use of nutrition claims such as "low fat" or "high in vitamin C" and health claims such as "helps lower cholesterol." The regulation applies to any food or drink product produced for human consumption that is marketed in the EU. Only foods that fit a certain nutrient profile (below certain salt, sugar and/or fat levels) are allowed to carry claims. Nutrition and health claims are only allowed on food labels if they are included in one of the EU's positive lists. Food products carrying claims must comply with the provisions of nutritional labeling Directive 90/496/EC and its amended version Directive 1169/2011.

In December 2012, a list of approved functional health claims went into effect. The list includes generic claims for substances other than botanicals which will be evaluated at a later date. Disease risk reduction claims and claims referring to the health and development of children require an authorization on a case-by-case basis, following the submission of a scientific dossier to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). Health claims based on new scientific data will have to be submitted to EFSA for evaluation but a simplified authorization procedure has been established.

The development of nutrient profiles, originally scheduled for January 2009, has been delayed. Nutrition claims can fail one criterion, i.e. if only one nutrient (salt, sugar or fat) exceeds the limit of the profile, a claim can still be made provided the high level of that particular nutrient is clearly marked on the label. For example, a yogurt can make a low-fat claim even if it has high sugar content but only if the label clearly states "high sugar content." A European Union Register of nutrition claims has been established and is updated regularly. Health claims cannot fail any criteria.

Detailed information on the EU's Nutrition and Health Claims policy can be found on the USEU/FAS website at http://www.usda-eu.org/trade-with-the-eu/eu-import-rules/nutrition-health-claims/ and in the EU-28 "Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards (FAIRS) Report.

Key Link: http://ec.europa.eu/nuhclaims/

Food Information to Consumers
In 2011, the EU adopted a new regulation on the provision of food information to consumers (1169/2011). The new EU labeling requirements will apply from December 13, 2014 except for the mandatory nutrition declaration which will apply from December 13, 2016.

Detailed information on the EU's new food labeling rules can be found on the USEU/FAS website at http://www.usda-eu.org/trade-with-the-eu/eu-import-rules/eu-labeling-requirements/ and in the EU-28 "Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards (FAIRS) Report.

Key link: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:304:0018:0063:EN:PDF

Food Supplements
Directive 2002/46/EC harmonizes the rules on labeling of food supplements and introduces specific rules on vitamins and minerals in food supplements. Ingredients other than vitamins and minerals are still regulated by member states.

Regulation 1925/2006, applicable as of July 1, 2007, harmonizes rules on the addition of vitamins and minerals to foods. The regulation lists the vitamins and minerals that may be added to foods. This list was most recently revised in November 2009. A positive list of substances other than vitamins and minerals has not been established yet, although it is being developed. Until then, member state laws will govern the use of these substances.

Key Link: http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/labellingnutrition/supplements/index_en.htm

Tobacco
The EU Tobacco Advertising Directive bans tobacco advertising in printed media, radio, and internet as well as the sponsorship of cross-border events or activities. Advertising in cinemas and on billboards or merchandising is allowed, though these are banned in many member states. Tobacco advertising on television has been banned in the EU since the early 1990s and is governed by the Audiovisual Media Services Directive. A revised Tobacco Products Directive has been adopted and must now be transposed into national legislation by member states by 2016. The new legislation will include bigger, double-sided health pictorial warnings on cigarette packages and possibility for plain packaging along with health warnings, tracking systems.

Key link: http://ec.europa.eu/health/tobacco/products/

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Belgium is a highly competitive market in which the Belgian importer is looking for the best quality at the lowest price. American products and technology are highly regarded but do not command higher prices than comparable products. It is important to remember that while Belgium is a significant market in its own right, it is also the country of entry for many imports originating from many countries, with final destinations all throughout Europe. This characteristic gives Belgian buyers access to a wide range of products at competitive prices.

U.S. companies are advised to quote prices on a Cost Insurance Freight (CIF) basis, surface or airfreight. This is standard practice for most exporters, since it facilitates price comparison between EU suppliers. Import duties are usually quoted on a delivered to warehouse basis.

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Conscious of the discrepancies among member states in product labeling, language use, legal guarantee, and liability, the redress of which inevitably frustrates consumers in cross-border shopping, the EU institutions have launched a number of initiatives aimed at harmonizing national legislation. Suppliers within and outside the EU should be aware of existing and upcoming legislation affecting sales, service, and customer support.

Product Liability

Under the 1985 Directive on liability of defective products, amended in 1999, the producer is liable for damage caused by a defect in his product. The victim must prove the existence of the defect and a causal link between defect and injury (bodily as well as material). A reduction of liability of the manufacturer is granted in cases of negligence on the part of the victim.

Key link:
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/single-market-goods/product-liability/

Product Safety

The 1992 General Product Safety Directive introduces a general safety requirement at the EU level to ensure that manufacturers only place safe products on the market. It was revised in 2001 to include an obligation on the producer and distributor to notify the Commission in case of a problem with a given product, provisions for its recall, the creation of a European Product Safety Network, and a ban on exports of products to third countries that are not deemed safe in the EU. The legislation is still undergoing review.

Key link: http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/safety/prod_legis/index_en.htm

Legal Warranties and After-sales Service

Under the 1999 Directive on the Sale of Consumer Goods and Associated Guarantees, professional sellers are required to provide a minimum two-year warranty on all consumer goods sold to consumers (natural persons acting for purposes outside their trade, businesses or professions), as defined by the Directive. The remedies available to consumers in case of non-compliance are:

- Repair of the good(s);
- Replacement of the good(s);
- A price reduction; or
- Rescission of the sales contract.

As of June 2014, Directive 1999/44/EC will be incorporated into the new Consumer Rights Directive previously mentioned.

Key link: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:01999L0044-20111212&qid=1395670475658&from=EN

Other issues pertaining to consumers' rights and protection, such as the New Approach Directives, CE marking, quality control and data protection are dealt with in Chapter 5 of this report.

Protecting Your Intellectual Property

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Protecting Your Intellectual Property in Belgium

Several general principles are important for effective management of intellectual property ("IP") rights in Belgium. First, it is important to have an overall strategy to protect your IP. Second, IP is protected differently in Belgium than in the U.S. Third, rights must be registered and enforced in Belgium, under local laws. Your U.S. trademark and patent registrations will not protect you in Belgium. There is no such thing as an "international copyright" that will automatically protect an author's writings throughout the entire world. Protection against unauthorized use in a particular country depends on the national laws of that country. However, most countries do offer copyright protection to foreign works under certain conditions, and these conditions have been greatly simplified by international copyright treaties and conventions.

Registration of patents and trademarks is on a first-in-time, first-in-right basis, so you should consider applying for trademark and patent protection even before selling your products or services in the Belgian market. It is vital that companies understand that intellectual property is primarily a private right and that the U.S. government generally cannot enforce rights for private individuals in Belgium. It is the responsibility of the rights' holders to register, protect, and enforce their rights where relevant, retaining their own counsel and advisors. Companies may wish to seek advice from local attorneys or IP consultants who are experts in Belgian law. The U.S. Commercial Service in Belgium can provide a list of local lawyers upon request.

While the U.S. Government stands ready to assist, there is little we can do if the rights holders have not taken these fundamental steps necessary to securing and enforcing their IP in a timely fashion. Moreover, in many countries, rights holders who delay enforcing their rights on a mistaken belief that the USG can provide a political resolution to a legal problem may find that their rights have been eroded or abrogated due to legal doctrines such as statutes of limitations, laches, estoppel, or unreasonable delay in prosecuting a law suit. In no instance should U.S. Government advice be seen as a substitute for the obligation of a rights holder to promptly pursue its case.

It is always advisable to conduct due diligence on potential partners. Negotiate from the position of your partner and give your partner clear incentives to honor the contract. A good partner is an important ally in protecting IP rights. Consider carefully, however, whether to permit your partner to register your IP rights on your behalf. Doing so may create a risk that your partner will list itself as the IP owner and fail to transfer the rights should the partnership end. Keep an eye on your cost structure and reduce the margins (and the incentive) of would-be bad actors. Projects and sales in Belgium require constant attention. Work with legal counsel familiar with Belgian laws to create a solid contract that includes non-compete clauses, and confidentiality/non-disclosure provisions.

It is also recommended that small and medium-size companies understand the importance of working together with trade associations and organizations to support efforts to protect IP and stop counterfeiting. There are a number of these organizations, both Belgian or U.S.-based. These include:

- The U.S. Chamber and local American Chambers of Commerce
- National Association of Manufacturers (NAM)
- International Intellectual Property Alliance (IIPA)
- International Trademark Association (INTA)
- The Coalition Against Counterfeiting and Piracy
- International Anti-Counterfeiting Coalition (IACC)
- Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA)
- Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO)

IP Resources

A wealth of information on protecting IP is freely available to U.S. rights holders. Some excellent resources for companies regarding intellectual property include the following:

- For information about patent, trademark, or copyright issues -- including enforcement issues in the US and other countries -- call the STOP! Hotline: **1-866-999-HALT** or register at **www.StopFakes.gov**.

- For more information about registering trademarks and patents (both in the U.S. as well as in foreign countries), contact the US Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) at: **1-800-786-9199**.

- For more information about registering for copyright protection in the US, contact the US Copyright Office at: **1-202-707-5959**.

- For more information about how to evaluate, protect, and enforce intellectual property rights and how these rights may be important for businesses, a free online training program is available at www.stopfakes.gov.

- For US small and medium-size companies, the Department of Commerce offers a "SME IP Advisory Program" available through the American Bar Association that provides one hour of free IP legal advice for companies with concerns in Angola, Argentina, Brazil, China, Colombia, Egypt, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, Mozambique, Nigeria, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey and Vietnam. For details and to register, visit: http://www.stopfakes.gov/business-tools/international-ip-advisory-program

- For information on obtaining and enforcing intellectual property rights and market-specific IP Toolkits visit: **www.StopFakes.gov** This site is linked to the USPTO website for registering trademarks and patents (both in the U.S. as well as in foreign countries), the U.S. Customs & Border Protection website to record registered trademarks and copyrighted works (to assist customs in blocking imports of IP-infringing products) and allows you to register for Webinars on protecting IP.

- The U.S. Commerce Department has positioned IP attachés in key markets around the world. For contact information, please see: http://www.uspto.gov/ip/global/attache/Attache_Contacts_2012-08.doc

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To assist companies to conduct due diligence prior to entering into a financial or other agreement, the Commercial Service recommends that the U.S. firm contact a company that offers commercial information reports. CS Belgium also offers a service known as the International Company Profile report. For more information contact us at office.brussels@trade.gov

Local Professional Services Return to top

Local service providers focusing on EU law, consulting, and business development can be viewed on the website maintained by the Commercial Service at the U.S. Mission to the European Union at:
http://export.gov/europeanunion/businessserviceproviders/index.asp.

For information on professional services located within each of the EU member states, please see EU member state Country Commercial Guides which can be found at the following website EU Member States' Country Commercial Guides.

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EU websites:
Coordination of the laws of the member states relating to self-employed commercial agents (Council Directive 86/653/EEC):
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31986L0653:EN:HTML

Agreements of Minor importance which do not appreciably restrict Competition under Article 81(1) of the Treaty establishing the European Community:
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2001:368:0013:0015:EN:PDF

Directive on Late Payment:
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:048:0001:0010:EN:PDF

European Ombudsman:
http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/home/en/default.htm

EU's General Data Protection Directive (95/46/EC):
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:1995:281:0031:0050:EN:PDF

Safe Harbor:
http://export.gov/safeharbor/eu/eg_main_018476.asp

Information on contracts for transferring data outside the EU:
http://ec.europa.eu/justice/data-protection/document/international-transfers/transfer/index_en.htm

EU Data Protection Homepage:
http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/fsj/privacy/index_en.htm

Distance Selling Rules:
http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/cons_int/safe_shop/dist_sell/index_en.htm

Distance Selling of Financial Services:
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2002:271:0016:0024:EN:PDF

E-commerce Directive (2000/31/EC):
http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/e-commerce/index_en.htm

VAT on Electronic Service:
http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/taxation/vat/how_vat_works/e-services/index_en.htm

The Unfair Commercial Practices Directive:
http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/rights /

Information to Patients - Major developments:
http://ec.europa.eu/health/human-use/information-to-patient/legislative-developments_en.htm

Nutrition and health claims made on foods - Regulation 1924/2006
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2007:012:0003:0018:EN:PDF

Regulation on Food Information to Consumers:
Regulation 1169/2011

EU-27 FAIRS EU Country Report on Food and Labeling requirements:
http://www.usda-eu.org/trade-with-the-eu/eu-import-rules/fairs-reports/

Guidance document on how companies can apply for health claim authorizations:

Summary document from EFSA
http://www.efsa.europa.eu/cs/BlobServer/Scientific_Opinion/nda_op_ej530_guidance_summary_en.pdf?ssbinary=true

Health & Nutrition Claims
http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/labellingnutrition/claims/index_en.htm

Tobacco
http://ec.europa.eu/health/tobacco/policy/index_en.htm

Product Liability:
http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/consumers/consumer_safety/l32012_en.htm

Product Safety
http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/safety/prod_legis/index_en.htm

Legal Warranties and After-Sales Service:
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:01999L0044-20111212&qid=1395670475658&from=EN

Copyright: http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/copyright/documents/documents_en.htm

Harmonization of certain aspects of Copyright and related rights in the Information Society - Copyright Directive (2001/29/EC):
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32001L0029:EN:HTML

Industrial Property
http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/indprop/index_en.htm

Trademark
http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/indprop/tm/index_en.htm

European Patent Office (EPO)
http://www.european-patent-office.org/

Office for Harmonization in the Internal Market (OHIM)
http:/oami.europa.eu/

World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Madrid
http://www.wipo.int/madrid/en

U.S. websites:

IPR Toolkit: http://www.stopfakes.gov/sites/default/files/europeanunion_toolkit.pdf

EU Public Procurement:
http://export.gov/europeanunion/marketresearch/eufundingandgovernmentprocurementsectors/index.asp

Local Professional Services:
http://export.gov/europeanunion/businessserviceproviders/index.asp

Belgian websites

Euro Info Centers
http://www.enterprise-europe-network.ec.europa.eu/index_en.htm

AmCham EU
http://www.amchameu.eu/

Invest in Flanders
http://www.investinflanders.be/

Invest in Wallonia
http://www.investinwallonia.be/ofi-belgium/accueil.php

Invest in Brussels
http://www.investinbrussels.com/en/

Creating Subsidiaries and Branches
http://www.diplobel.us/tradeinvestment/investingbelgium.asp

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Chapter 4: Leading Sectors for U.S. Export and Investment

Commercial Sectors

Defense and Aerospace

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Belgium's aerospace market is a blend of civil and military. The Belgian defense sector, now some distance from the great recession, has announced its intent to purchase additional equipment. Its F-16s are soon to be replaced with new next generation aircraft. Belgium's vibrant aerospace industry, serving both the military and civilian markets, is looking for new technologies such as composites and manufacturing technologies that will help it maintain its competitive edge.

The Belgian defense industry is fully privatized and centered on the manufacturing of components, subassemblies and small arms rather than full weapon systems and platforms. As a small nation, Belgium cannot maintain a large defense industry based on internal requirements. Instead, the Belgian defense industry relies on the export of components and subcontractor work on major defense programs. Procurement methods and procedures for the Belgian Ministry of Defense (MOD) are similar to those used the U.S. Department of Defense. There is a central procurement office for high value items. Belgium is host to the NATO headquarters and the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), both of which offer significant procurement opportunities for large and small U.S. companies.

Belgium's defense force has an air, sea and land component in addition to a medical branch. As the defense force is small, it often cooperates with The Netherlands and Luxembourg when procuring high-dollar equipment and for operations and exercises. Belgian defense's area of expertise is demining, particularly at sea.

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Belgium's defense, as elsewhere around Europe, is aging, with the average soldier being 43 years old. Furthermore, due to the recession, Belgium's defense has been reduced to 32,000 people from 40,000 in 2006. This has limited the deployability of Belgium's armed forces and kept Belgium's presence in Afghanistan and Lebanon to 500 people.

Belgium is also developing a "BEST" soldier or future soldier program integrating the latest technologies for the deployed. This includes improved and smart textiles; enhanced, integrated and scalable communication; personal optics and global positioning. For more information on Belgium's BEST soldier, please visit www.mil.be.

In addition to FN Herstal, the well-known Belgian small arms manufacturer, Belgium has a vibrant aerospace and defense industry, with many SMEs producing components for various aircraft and offering various Maintenance Repair and Overhaul (MRO) services. The companies are highly capable and seek new cutting-edge technologies to maintain their competitive edge, particularly in light of relatively high energy and labor costs in Belgium. They focus on advanced, small-batch production capabilities in both metallurgy and composite materials.

When selling to Belgium, many U.S. SMEs opt to work with a defense consultant. There are a handful of Belgian defense consultants that have segmented the market vertically. These consultants have a gentleman's agreement whereby they respect each other's market segment. The in-country Commercial Section maintains good contacts with these Belgian defense consultants.

Most of the consultants are retired military. They maintain good contacts within the Belgian defense and will often work with the relevant officer drawing up the procurement specifications. When the RFP is released, the consultant will cut all formal and informal ties with the Belgian defense and advise the company they represent on how to submit a successful and competitive bid. This is a common practice in Belgium.

Belgian defense consultants are typically compensated by a commission - the percentage varying depending on the size of the contract. However, for larger contracts that take several years to see through, a retainer may be negotiated. Larger companies should also consider setting up a- global or regional office in Belgium (ie. Europe, Middle East, Africa). Many large U.S. defense companies have elected to do so due to Belgium hosting several EU and NATO institutions and the EDA (European Defense Association). Locating in Belgium gives better access to these institutions.

U.S. companies seeking to sell military equipment to Belgium are advised to contact the Office of Defense Cooperation (ODC) and the U.S. Commercial Service. Together, these offices are well versed in the Belgian military environment and procurement procedures.

The Belgian Ministry of Defense (MOD) has set aside $300 million per year for procurement. However, due to the recession and like elsewhere in Europe, the Belgian Ministry of Defense has tightened its defense spending and has over the past years limited its procurement to essential maintenance repair and overhaul in addition to ammunition resupply. In 2013-14 a similar amount was set aside but not spent. In 2014, we expect the MOD to purchase anti-tank missiles, hand weapons, hardware for its NH-90 helicopters, AIV ammunition, satellite terminals and observation baskets for F-16s.

Belgium currently has twenty Agusta A-109s and three Sikorsky Sea Kings. Nearing the end of their service life, they are slated to be replaced by 2018 with NH-90s. Belgium's vibrant aerospace industry hosts a high number per capita of specialized engineering and manufacturing companies. Many of these parts and services are destined for the helicopter industry and supply manufacturers worldwide including Agusta, Europcopter, Bell Helicopters (Textron) and Sikorsky (UTC).

Web Resources Return to top

www.fbo.gov
www.mil.be
https://enot.publicprocurement.be/changeLanguage.do?language=en-GB

Chemicals and Plastics Materials

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With a turnover of $44.7 billion in 2013, up $2 billion from 2012, the chemical industry in Belgium accounts for one-fifth of total turnover in Belgium's total manufacturing sector and one sixth of the European chemical industry. Direct employment in the chemical and life sciences industry totals 88,700 jobs and 145,000 indirect jobs, or 17.4% of all employment in the entire manufacturing sector. In addition, the chemical and life sciences industry generates about 150,000 indirect jobs in other sectors of the Belgian economy. The Belgian chemical industry accounts for more than 6% of the total European turnover in this sector, even though Belgium's share of the total EU population is only 2.2%. Belgium also accounts for 10% of European plastic production and 5% of plastic transformation with over one ton produced per capita.
The chemicals and plastic industry has recovered, though not to pre-2008 numbers. The industry currently breaks down as follows: 30.7% primary chemical manufacturing; 28% plastic production; 15.2% pharmaceuticals; 8.2% specialized chemical production; 6% soaps, detergents and cosmetics; 6% varnishes, paints and inks; 3.1% rubber; 1.5% agrochemicals; 1.3% other.

The port of Antwerp plays a crucial role in this industry. It is the largest and most diversified petrochemical complex in Europe. Seven of the ten largest chemical companies in the world have one or more production sites within the Antwerp petrochemical cluster. Nowhere in the world are more chemical substances produced than in the Antwerp port area. Thanks to the Antwerp Integrated Model, there is a degree of integration between the various producing companies that is not found anywhere else.

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The Belgian long-term outlook for plastics and resins is favorable, due to Belgium's central location in Europe and its port of Antwerp, which is the world's second largest chemical cluster after Houston, TX. The Antwerp area has a large concentration of chemical and petroleum industries, which provide raw materials for the plastics and resins industries. In addition, the increasing use of plastics in automobiles and in insulation materials for the construction industry is favorable to the sector's growth.

Belgium hosts 254 plastics and rubber converting SME companies (with 23,000 employees and $12 billion turnover), and 57 plastics and rubber producers and trading companies. The main markets are: automotive (21.2%), packaging (21%), compounds and recycling (19.2%) and construction (14.8%). Flanders region accounts for 74% of the plastics and rubber converting industry turnover.

Belgium exports of plastics and rubber amounted to $21.6 billion in 2013, representing 9.1% of total Belgian exports (up 11.6% from 2012). Around 83% of plastics and 88% of rubber industry exports go to other EU countries. Imports into Belgium of plastics and rubber amounted to $13.8 billion in 2007 (up 9.7% from 2012).

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The recession had a significant impact on the Belgian chemical sector. Although turnover dipped in 2009-10 the industry recovered fairly well and even experienced mild growth. Best prospects are forecast to be in green and clean technologies as well as higher-end, tailored compounding.

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http://www.essenscia.be/

Essenscia is a multisectoral umbrella organization that represents the numerous sectors of activities in the field of chemicals and the life sciences. It includes nearly 800 companies representing more than 95% of the overall turnover in the sector. Essencia represents and defends the interests of the industry sector at the Belgian and European levels.

The three regional sections, Essenscia Bruxelles, Essenscia Vlaanderen and Essenscia Wallonie, reflect the reality of the Belgian institutions, with federal, regional and community areas of competence. Each section of Essenscia, act as representative for companies of the region.

Port of Antwerp Petrochemical Cluster:
http://www.portofantwerp.com/portal/page/portal/POA_EN/Focus%20op%20de%20haven/Petrochemische%20cluster

NBB, NIS, Eurostat.

Energy & Renewable Energy

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Currently, several factors influence the rapidly changing Belgian energy market: the continuing EU-wide process of deregulation and liberalization, the discussion on whether or not to phase out of nuclear energy, the evolving financial incentives to develop renewable energy sources, and the changing structure of the country's energy distribution among others. U.S. companies wanting to export to the Belgian energy market must be aware of and take into account these uncertain or changing factors, which will determine the potential for exports of relevant goods and services to this market.

Except for some limited renewable energy potential, Belgium has no natural energy sources. The country imports all its coal, natural gas and petroleum requirements for its energy needs, which amount to almost 42,000 ktoe (kilo-ton oil equivalent, or about 489 TWh). The bulk of consumption is for residential (31%), industry (30%) and transportation (23%). Because of various policies (among others, energy security and environmental considerations) there has been a slight shift in energy sources. Between 2007 and 2010, energy sourced from petroleum and solid combustibles decreased (from 40.7% to 39.2% and 13.9% to 7.8%, respectively), while energy sourced from natural gas, nuclear and renewables grew (from 22.3% to 25.4%, 20.8% to 21.4% and 1.6% to 5.0%, respectively).

Regarding electricity production, Belgium has an installed capacity of 104.600 GWh, produces 88.800 GWh and imports a further 6.000 GWh. Of the national electricity production, 54% comes from nuclear energy, 39% from fossil fuel power plants, 5.4% from renewable energy sources and 1.5% from hydraulic pumping stations.

On the national level, energy policies in Belgium are guided by strategic and socio-economic interests. As with most other European countries, strategic interests concern the security of supply and source diversification, especially in view of recent disruptions of gas deliveries by Russia to the EU. Economic interests are largely the result of breaking up former national monopolies on energy production, transit and delivery as enforced by EU legislation. Social interests include environmental considerations including EU directives stemming from the Kyoto Protocol, and job retention and creation.

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Several trends are still shaping the Belgian energy market, yielding opportunities for U.S. firms.

1) **Electricity market**

a) Market liberalization:

Deregulation has been set in place on a policy level, but this has not yet led to a satisfactory level of competition. The federal and regional governments will most likely continue to create incentives to improve the efficiency of market forces on the industry. While the various government bodies have persistently warned of a shortage of Belgian electricity production capacity, industry itself seems reluctant to invest in relevant infrastructure at the moment. Key factors highlighted for this are the fear of a low electricity price in the long run (Belgium's electricity prices for residential and industrial users are at the EU-27 average), limited cross-border network capacity impairing exports of excess production, uncertainties with respect to environmental policies, the potential re-instatement of the civil nuclear electricity program and the monopolistic behavior of the incumbent utility Electrabel. U.S. firms can therefore expect opportunities in those areas improving some of these bottlenecks.

b) Production facilities:

The Belgian Electricity and Gas Regulation Commission (CREG) has highlighted the need for investments in power generation infrastructure in Belgium because of a perceived future shortage of electricity production. It also notes that investments are taking place in other EU countries with similar energy pricing levels, including by GDF/Suez, owner of the dominant provider Electrabel. Therefore, the lack of investments in Belgium cannot be based solely on economic factors, and investments with associated opportunities for U.S. firms, equipment providers and subcontractors alike, could appear in the near future.

The deregulation and opening of the energy market has allowed companies with no specific tradition in electricity production to invest in their own electricity generation plants. An example is BASF, which has commissioned a 400 MW plant to feed its own production processes.

c) Nuclear energy:

Currently, Belgium plans to decommission all its nuclear reactors between 2015 and 2025. However, with 54% of Belgium's electricity coming from the seven ageing nuclear reactors, it is possible that the decision to phase out nuclear energy entirely be reconsidered. Should the federal government decide to allow for a continuation of nuclear, there would be opportunities for U.S. companies selling equipment, providing services for revamping and maintaining the country's nuclear reactors, or working on new production plants.

d) Emissions-controlling measures and renewable energies:

Belgium is committed to lowering its CO^2 output under the EU's adherence to the Kyoto Protocol. Several studies made specifically for the Belgian market have shown that a wide approach will be needed to attain the national emissions-reduction targets. These comprise a mixture of consumption reduction, green/ renewable technologies and investments in cleaner, more efficient production facilities.

Many power plants in Belgium consume a mixture of coal and natural gas, and are highly polluting. Some parties suggest their replacement with more modern versions, which would serve the purpose of capacity expansion as well as lowering the country's output of CO^2 and other pollutants.

In this context, CREG submitted a proposal for an indicative power generation program in 2005-2014, stating that the capacities to be invested in the period 2005-2014 that amount to 1,729 MW in renewable energy sources and 1,749 MW in qualitative co-generation. In this same proposal, by 2014, decisions are recommended on investments in eight units using combined steam and gas cycles (CCGT plants) of 400 MW and four gas turbines with open cycles (GT) of 80 MW.

Further investments come from large industrial sites that focus on co-generation. For example, ExxonMobil has just commissioned co-generation facilities at its Antwerp refinery that generate 125 MW of power, reducing an estimated 200,000 tons of CO^2. Given the importance of the petrochemical industry, the second largest industrial sector in Belgium with its many processing sites, similar investments can be expected from other companies.

Finally, many smaller businesses are investing in renewable energies given the advantages of using electricity from their own sources (i.e. not subject to a volatile market) and the generous incentives proposed by the government, often allowing for very short return on investments. Distribution centers and other businesses with large surface areas that allow the installation of wind turbines and/or photovoltaic (solar) cells are driving this market.

e) Maintenance and provision of spare parts:

Despite the current economic crisis, maintenance and repairs to facilities are still needed, in particular in the secondary (transforming) sector that is well represented in Belgium. Opportunities for small equipment manufacturers specializing in process control and similar equipment can find a market in Belgium, especially when working through an effective, well established distributor.

2) Gas Market

Natural gas is seen as a key source in Belgium’s future energy basket. First, because it is relatively clean. Second, because at least one key provider of gas in Belgium is a reliable partner (Norway), while new suppliers are appearing (Qatar and Libya), promoting the diversity of supply.

Expansion of the country’s import and transit capacities are therefore anticipated for the near future. The planned expansion of Belgium’s import capacity from 3.84 million m^3(n)/hour today to 5.44 million m^3(n)/hour by 2013 can present opportunities for U.S. firms active in provision of hardware (including measurement devices) as well as service providers (flow management systems, for example).

Further expansion of liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals is a clear possibility given the numerous LNG terminals being developed, or that have recently been commissioned in northwestern Europe. The CEO of GDF/Suez, owner of Belgium’s largest utility Electrabel, has indicated that the group intends to create a European gas hub in the Zeebrugge harbor. Furthermore, the owner of Zeebrugge’s current LNG facilities, Fluxys is developing a second LNG terminal jetty in the port of Zeebrugge, specifically aimed at allowing regasification ships to moor. This could provide opportunities for equipment providers and EPC contractors alike, as has been the case for a large U.S. firm for an LNG terminal in the United Kingdom.

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CREG – Committee for Regulation of Gas and Electricity
http://www.creg.be

VREG - Flemish Regulation Authority for the Electricity and Gas Markets
http://www.ort.be/vreg/vreg/index.htm

CWAPE - Wallonia Energy Commission
http://www.cwape.be

BRUGEL – Brussels Region Commission for Gas and Electricity
www.brugel.be

FEBEG – Federation of Belgian Electricity and Gas companies
www.febeg.be

Inter-Regies
http://www.inter-regies.be

APERe (Association for the promotion of renewable energies)
http://www.apere.org

Cogen Europe - The European Association for the Promotion of Cogeneration
http://www.cogen.org

Environmental Technologies

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The Belgian environmental market (public and private sectors) is estimated at approximately $5 billion divided among wastewater treatment, waste management, soil remediation, air pollution control and environmental consultancy. The market has not grown significantly since the last market report for this sector was published in 2008.

The ecological footprint of the average Belgian is 4.9 global hectares, 2.7 times the available space per person (1.8 ha). Of this amount, 0.95 ha comes from food production, 1.25 ha comes from accommodation, 0.95 ha comes from transportation and 1.75 ha comes from various waste streams—e.g., goods and services, health care, and household consumption.

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Water and Waste Water

The Belgian water treatment market is comprised of industrial and residential wastewater and drinking water treatment, and includes both equipment and services.The three regions of Belgium-- Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels—have implemented major infrastructure projects and made considerable investments aimed at the treatment of virtually all wastewater. While the Belgian water treatment market is very developed with limited opportunities expansion, water and wastewater treatment equipment and supplies dominated the nearly $500 million of U.S. environmental exports to Belgium in 2010. The best prospects for American companies are in equipment and supplies. It is recommended to approach the Belgian market through partnerships, strategic alliances and joint ventures with local firms.

The EU implemented the European Water Framework Directive in December of 2000 to protect public health and water sources. The general objective of the directive is to have surface and groundwater in a “good state” by the end of 2015. All member countries must comply with this directive.

Waste & Recycling

The Belgium environmental market is primarily engineering and service-oriented. Most companies provide environmental services in waste integrated management, wastewater treatment and soil remediation. The Belgian environmental market is changing currently, with the reorganization of the public waste sector, new entrants from Asia, and industrial operators restructuring their operations. Household waste is managed by the public sector through regional and municipal authorities. The industrial waste market is managed by the private sector. However, pressures are now in play to privatize the household waste sector.

Soil Remediation

Soil may become polluted from a number of sources: industrial activity, agriculture, leaking fuel storage tanks, transport accidents, and more. All three regions undertake a similar approach to remediating soil issues. These steps include maintenance of a property registry of contaminated sites. The first step is a thorough investigation which can then be used to next determine the extent to which remediation may be necessary. The final stage is actual remediation activities. Property transfer laws have a significant impact on remediation. Soil investigations are mandatory upon property transfer. In the case where the private parties cannot agree to undertake remediation, local authorities reserve the right to step in to perform the necessary work.

The three regions and the federal government have analyzed financing and soil remediation needs of petrol stations. In Flanders alone, OVAM estimates that there may be as many as 3,000 cases that need to be effectively and efficiently dealt with. In March 2004, a fund called BOFAS npo was created to handle the financing for petrol station clean up. Please visit their website, www.bofas.be, to learn more about the fund, to see how to register as a service provider and for up to date information on tenders.

Technologies that do not require “dig and dump” and/or incineration may offer opportunities for soil remediation concerns due to limited landfill and incineration capacity.

Indoor & Outdoor Air Pollution

Two air quality areas are receiving significant attention in Belgium: particulates and indoor air quality.

Particulates. As noted, the largest improvement with this category will come from attacking the largest source—diesel automobile engines. Technologies that can burn diesel more thoroughly, efficiently and effectively should see improving market opportunities in Belgium with the passage of the new EU Ambient Air Quality Directive. As the EU is heavily committed to biodiesel and biofuels, member states have begun to address this issue. However, these alternate fuels are not without their own set of unique implications, such as increased NOX emissions from corn and rapeseed derived biofuels.

Indoor Air Quality. To date, the EU has not developed any specific directives for indoor air quality, but issues related to indoor health are now receiving much attention. Like most Europeans, Belgian citizens spend a significant amount of time indoors. Safety from typical indoor pollutants—benzene, radon, formaldehyde, household cleaning solvents, etc—will need attention. As the U.S. has been a leader in indoor air quality, U.S. companies should see an advantage in serving this market with sensors, monitoring devices, and ventilation and filter systems.

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The following are Best Prospects for U.S. exports to Belgium

- Gas analyzers, gas separation equipment and gas meters
- Dust collection and purification devices

- Air emission monitors and analytical devices
- Alarm and emission warning devices
- Filtering and purification devices
- Gas sample preparation equipment
- Effective diesel fuel strategies, equipment, and technologies

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IFEST (Belgian environment show)
www.ifest.be

BEST ENVIRONMENT (regional environment show)
www.bestenvironnement.be

Belgian Minsitry of Social Affairs, Public Health and Environment
FPS Health

OVAM – Flanders Regional Waste Management Agency
EFBWW

Wallonia Ministry of Environment, Waste Management Agency)
http://environnement.wallonie.be/

Institut Bruxellois pour la Gestion de l'Environnement - I.B.G.E.-B.I.M. (Environmental administration for the Brussels region)
www.ibgebim.be

Green Building

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Before considering the green building market, it is important to have a broad understanding of the general construction market in Belgium. The construction market is one of Belgium's largest industry sectors, employing nearly 200,000 workers with an annual turnover of $32 billion. The building sector activity has shown enormous growth in the past ten years. Despite the recent upsurge in growth, the construction market in Belgium is quite mature, and general growth in this sector, with the exception of renovation, fell in 2008 and 2010, not exceeding a growth of 1%

In recent years, green technology and sustainable development has seen an increased interest and attention across Europe. Ambitious goals have been set by national governments to improve energy efficiency in buildings and the need for environmental conservation has been growing in popularity among the general population. Green building is becoming more appealing as it reduces energy consumption, creates jobs, decreases the impact on the environment, and improves sustainability. There is a strong need for green building in Belgium, as its energy efficiency is one of the lowest in Europe. The average residential energy consumption was among the highest in Europe and was 72% higher than the EU-25 average. Such large consumption is due to the old age of buildings, higher percentage of single family homes, and relatively few energy efficiency features.

Strong public opinion for change is backed by government action, such as the EU striving to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 20-30% by 2020. The EU is working as a whole to establish a common energy policy that will result in renewable energy accounting for 20% of the total energy by 2020. In 2008, the EU's energy consumption from renewable sources was less than 10%, a proportion which must double in order to achieve its goal. Belgium must increase its renewable energy consumption, which was around 6% in 2012, to 13% in order to comply with the EU expectations.

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Belgium's residential and commercial buildings account for 35% of primary energy demand. Of this primary energy demand, residential buildings are responsible for 73%, with commercial buildings accounting for the remaining 27%. Energy in buildings is consumed primarily in heating, cooling, and lighting. Demand for energy efficient products such as heating ventilation, air conditioning, and lighting have grown due to government initiatives and regulations. In addition, demand is expected to rise further should the federal tax incentives continue.

As the economic situation continues to be uncertain, Belgians are increasingly investing in real estate and renovation of aging buildings. About 80% of Belgian homes were built before 1980 and are environmentally inefficient. These homes are in need of renovation with new insulation materials, windows, and heating systems.

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The active expansion of the renovation sector has been the most important trend in residential construction in recent years. In 2008, 63% more residential renovation projects were started than was the case in 1998. In contrast, there was a 15% decline in 2008 in the number of new housing construction projects compared to 2007. Residential renovation projects increases demand for energy efficient products and construction materials. Several new EU Directives, aimed to reduce energy and pollution, have resulted in a strong demand for economic water systems, double glazing, and an increased interest in solar panels, heating systems, and green roofs/rainwater usage. Energy-efficient construction materials are also tax deductible—a feature which creates further incentives for green construction.

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While there is no association specific to green building in Belgium, many of the construction associations have green building divisions.

The Belgian Association of Producers of Materials for Construction (PMC)
http://www.bmpmc.be

The Belgian Federation of Building Traders (FEMA) / Federation for Construction Material Negotiators (FEPROMA)
http://www.fema.be/

The Confederation of the Construction Industry
http://www.confederationconstruction.be

European Association of Builders' Merchant Associations (UFEMAT)
http://www.ufemat.eu

European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW)
http://www.efbww.org/

Medical Devices

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Belgium produces less than 10% of its overall medical equipment. This leaves the market open for heavy competition among suppliers from the U.S., Germany, France and U.K. The U.S. has a 20% share of total medical equipment imports into Belgium. U.S. suppliers are particular dominant in sectors of diagnostic imaging apparatus, orthopedic and implantable products and medical and surgical instruments.

The Belgian market for medical equipment and supplies is estimated at $2.2 billion. Over the past 5 years, this sector has seen an annual growth of approximately 3-4 %. The Belgian Social Security System, which includes the Health Care System, is considered among the most extensive and efficient in Europe. It covers nearly 100% of the population of 11 million inhabitants.

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Belgium's healthcare system is currently facing several challenges. Belgium's aging population and the better health expectations will have an important impact on healthcare expenditures in the coming years. The GOB is therefore looking at various cost-saving measures. Innovative technologies and equipment offering cost savings will have a strong market potential. Orthopedic products, homecare products, obesity and diabetes products are as a consequence in high demand. Furthermore, there is a trend towards treating chronic diseases with new technologies allowing patients to stay home and minimizing the impact on their quality of life. Medical software, telemedicine and e-health are also sectors with a strong market potential.

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Belgium is an effective starting point for marketing medical equipment to the rest of Europe due to its geographical location, its effective healthcare system, and its relatively open attitude regarding procurement. Belgium serves as a distribution center for many multinationals.

In order to enter the medical equipment market in Belgium, American suppliers should be familiar with the EU directives concerning the registration, marketing and health/safety standards required throughout Europe as well as regulations specific to Belgium. It is therefore advisable to work with a local partner/distributor.

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Belgian Ministry of Health
http://www.fagg-afmps.be/en/human_use/health_products/medical_devices_accessories/

The Belgian Association of manufacturers and importers of medical devices http://www.unamec.be

CE Mark
http://export.gov/europeanunion/eustandardsandcertification/index.asp

EU Medical Devices Legislation
http://ec.europa.eu/health/medical-devices/regulatory-framework/index_en.htm

REACH Directive
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/chemicals/reach/index_en.htm

WEEE and RoHS Directives
http://export.gov/europeanunion/weeerohs/weeeinformation/index.asp

Safety & Security

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Although Belgium is a very safe country, the presence of several international organizations and embassies have increased the demand for sophisticated security equipment and guarding services. Interest has been rising due to continued threats that have increased security awareness, and a strong emphasis has been placed on counter-terrorism, homeland security, transportation, and critical infrastructure protection. On the private consumer market the Belgian authorities are promoting private security through supportive measures for home protection equipment and services.

Over the years Belgian authorities developed an extensive legislative framework on safety, mainly to protect workers and employees from safety risks. This legislation is bundled in the General Regulations on Labor Protection at Work (ARAB). Later on Belgium also applied the EU Directive on personal protective equipment. In terms of security, the law from January 13, 2014 ("Wet tot wijziging van de wet van 10 april 1990 tot regeling van de private en bijzondere veiligheid") defines the scope of the market for security firms. The responsibilities of the police and the private security are clearly divided. Private security firms have taken over some of the non-essential responsibilities from police forces.

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Safety and Security Equipment

Due to the above mentioned development of safety regulations and the strong industry clusters such as the petro-chemical cluster, the food industry, the heavy metal industry, the building and construction industry and the pharmaceutical research centers, the Belgian market for safety equipment is strong and has been steadily growing. The Belgian market for safety equipment is largely an import market, where approximately 90% of the equipment is imported from neighboring countries. Safety apparel is often manufactured in Belgium while safety related equipment is imported from other countries, including the U.S.

The market for intrusion detection and burglar alarm systems is quite competitive. In addition to the other rapid technical changes and developments in this sector, the switch from analog systems to digital systems also provides an opportunity in this market.
For the electronic access control systems and door/entrance solutions the prolonged recession is expected to be a catalyst for growth as the financial pinch can result in increased instances of theft, break-ins, shop-lifting and white-collar offences.
Information technology security is seen as a growing market. The awareness of the risks coming along with the worldwide web is rising, which is an opportunity in this growing market.

Large players are companies such as ALTRAN, AMPER, ASD, ATOS ORIGIN, AVIO, BAE SYSTEMS, CEA, CONCEPTIVITY, CORTE, D'APPOLONIA, DCNS, EADS, ENGINEERING, EDISOFT, FOI, FRAUNHOFER, G4S, HAI, IBM, INDRA, IVECO, KEMEA, L-3 COMMUNICATIONS UK, MORPHO, MULTIX, RAPISCAN, RAYTHEON,

SELEX SI, SIEMENS, SMITHS DETECTION, SAAB, STM, TELETRON, THALES, TNO, VITEC

Safety and Security Services

The three most common safety and security services in Belgium are surveillance, investigation and consultation. Combined, more than 800 companies offer security services, of which 28 are authorized to offer alarm central services and more than 1000 private detectives are authorized to work in Belgium. Currently, around 200 companies are authorized to carry out guarding services. Due to the strict regulations, the strong presence of the major existing companies, and the decreased perception of risk, little probability of success is expected for new U.S. companies wanting to offer these services on the Belgian market

According to the he BVBO (The Belgian Federation for Security Companies) the yearly consolidated revenue in safety and security services accounts for around 600 million euro. In general profitability is under pressure due to the economic crisis resulting in price erosion which in turn corrodes investments in human capital and thus quality. The valuables transport sector seems to escape this decrease in profitability. Nevertheless growth was accounted for in the banking sector (+12%), wholesale distribution (+12%) and in the transport sector (air and sea transport, ports and railway stations) with 15%.

The market in government procurement, telecommunication and industry remained stable while the market for event monitoring decreased with 11%. The tendency towards an increased outsourcing from safety and guarding will continue and further growth is possible through a stronger cooperation between public and private security. According to UNIZO (the largest Belgian association for one-person companies to medium-sized enterprises) small and medium sized companies invested significantly more in security en video surveillance. The three largest companies dominating the market for safety and security services with a market share of 90% are SECURITAS, SERIS and G4S.

Market Entry Return to top

U.S. exporters can penetrate the Belgian market through importers/distributors, wholesalers or specialized retailers, depending on their products and their company size. Interested U.S. exporters will have to focus on innovation, quality and competitive pricing to successfully penetrate the market.

Trade Events

Infosecurity.be / Brussels Expo
Location: Brussels Expo – Trade Show and Seminars on IT Security
Date: 2015, March 25 and 26.
URL: http://www.infosecurity.be/en/Bezoeker.aspx
Description: This trade fair offers ICT professionals an overview of the latest security technologies, products and services.

SECURA 2015
Location: Brussels

Date: March 25-27, 2015
URL: http://www.easyfairs.com/en/events_216/secura-brussels2015_52836/secura-brussels-2015_52837/
Description: This trade fair gives a varied, current and full overview of innovative products, services and solutions for the prevention of industrial accidents, theft and burglary as well as predictive technologies critical for risk management.

INFOPOL 2015
Location: Kortrijk
Date: May 2015
URL: http://www.kortrijkxpo.com/en/calendar/calendar/?tx_pxbeurzen_pi1%5Bbn%5D=25
Description: International biannual trade fair for the equipment for police, surveillance and security services

Travel & Tourism (from Belgium to the U.S.)

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The United States is still one of the top long-haul destinations for Belgian travelers – 265,875 Belgians visited the U.S. in 2013 which is an increase of 2.2% versus 2012. Belgians are the 26th most frequent foreign travelers to the U.S. The outlook for 2014 remains optimistic but will depend on the ongoing economic uncertainties.

The U.S. remains the third most popular Belgian tourist destination, after France and Spain. Belgians generally have a high level of disposable income to spend on luxury items and leisure activities such as travel. Of the five to six weeks of paid vacation that are standard for most Belgian workers, two of these are usually spent on long-haul travel. The average Belgian tourist in the United States stays for 13 days and spends $2,500 (not including airfare), making Belgians some of the biggest spenders out of all the visitors to the U.S. Many Belgian travelers take a ski vacation each winter and a “sun” vacation each summer, and the U.S. tourist industry could benefit from catering to this annual cycle. Belgian tourism to the U.S. is recovering, particularly while the euro is still stronger than the dollar.

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Extensive business and cultural ties between Belgium and the United States, as well as Belgian’s interest in the American “way of life,” shopping opportunities, natural parks, big cities, and attractions provide an excellent basis for market promotion of the U.S. tourism industry.

Opportunities for package deals combining flights, hotels, car rentals, and vacation destinations are often attractive to Belgian visitors, and are particularly popular with the middle-income population. Since around half of the Belgian visitors to the U.S. are leisure travelers, the potential fly-and-drive market accounts for roughly 50% of the total Belgian market. Business travelers may combine a short vacation with their business trips and may thus find fly-and-drive combinations best suited to their needs as well. Approximately 45% of Belgian tourists in the U.S. rent vehicles to travel between cities, as opposed to 8% that use the interstate and inter-city rail system and 5% that use the interstate and inter-city bus system.

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Visit USA Committee/Marketing and Promotion Bureau for Belgium and Luxembourg
http://www.visitusa.org

Trade Promotion Opportunities

BT Expo – December 10-11, 2014
www.btexpo.com
Trade Show for tourism and MICE professionals.

Brussels Holiday Fair – February 5 -9, 2015

This is the best consumer show in Belgium! During this annual fair, over 110,000 visitors meet and each day exhibitors promote Belgian and foreign vacations, tourism, and leisure time. The success is so big, that up to 65% of the visitors book their holidays after their visit to the fair.
Visit USA is offering brochure distribution or mini booth.
info@visitusa.org

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Chapter 5: Trade Regulations, Customs and Standards

Import Tariffs Return to top

The Integrated Tariff of the Community, referred to as TARIC (Tarif Intégré de la Communauté), is designed to show the various rules which apply to specific products being imported into the customs territory of the EU or, in some cases, exported from it. To determine if a license is required for a particular product, check the TARIC.
The TARIC can be searched by country of origin, Harmonized System (HS) Code, and product description on the interactive website of the Directorate-General for Taxation and the Customs Union. The online TARIC is updated daily.

Key Link:
http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/customs/customs_duties/tariff_aspects/customs_tariff/index_en.htm

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For information on existing trade barriers, please see the National Trade Estimate Report on Foreign Trade Barriers, published by USTR and available through the following website:
http://www.ustr.gov/sites/default/files/2013%20NTE%20European%20Union%20Final.pdf

Information on agricultural trade barriers can be found at the following website:
http://www.usda-eu.org/

To report existing or new trade barriers and get assistance in removing them, contact either the Trade Compliance Center at http://www.trade.gov/tcc or the U.S. Mission to the European Union at http://export.gov/europeanunion/

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The TARIC (Tarif Intégré de la Communauté), described above, is available to help determine if a license is required for a particular product.

Many EU member states maintain their own list of goods subject to import licensing. For example, Germany's "Import List" (Einfuhrliste) includes goods for which licenses are required, their code numbers, any applicable restrictions, and the agency that will issue the relevant license. The Import List also indicates whether the license is required under German or EU law.

For information relevant to member state import licenses, please consult the relevant member state Country Commercial Guide: EU Member States' Country Commercial Guides or conduct a search on the Commerce Department's Market Research Library, available from: http://www.export.gov/mrktresearch/index.asp.

Import Documentation

The Single Administrative Document

The official model for written declarations to customs is the Single Administrative Document (SAD). Goods brought into the EU customs territory are, from the time of their entry, subject to customs supervision until customs formalities are completed. Goods are covered by a Summary Declaration which is filed once the items have been presented to customs officials. The customs authorities may, however, allow a period for filing the Declaration which cannot be extended beyond the first working day following the day on which the goods are presented to customs.

The Summary Declaration is filed by:

- the person who brought the goods into the customs territory of the Community or by any person who assumes responsibility for carriage of the goods following such entry; or
- the person in whose name the person referred to above acted.

The Summary Declaration can be made on a form provided by the customs authorities. However, customs authorities may also allow the use of any commercial or official document that contains the specific information required to identify the goods. The SAD serves as the EU importer's declaration. It encompasses both customs duties and VAT and is valid in all EU member states. The declaration is made by whoever is clearing the goods, normally the importer of record or his/her agent.

European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries including Norway, Iceland, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein also use the SAD. Information on import/export forms is contained in Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2454/93, which lays down provisions for the implementation of the Community Customs Code (Articles 205 through 221). Articles 222 through 224 provide for computerized customs declarations and Articles 225 through 229 provide for oral declarations.

More information on the SAD can be found at:
http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/customs/procedural_aspects/general/sad/index_en.htm

Regulation (EC) No 450/2008 laying down the Community Customs Code (so-called the "Modernized Customs Code") aimed at the adaptation of customs legislation and at introducing the electronic environment for customs and trade. This Regulation entered into force on June 24, 2008 and was due to be applicable once its implementing provisions were in force by June 2013. However, the Modernized Customs Code was recast as a Union Customs Code (UCC) before it became applicable. The Union Customs Code (UCC) Regulation entered into force in October 2013 and repealed the MCC Regulation; its substantive provisions will apply only on May 1st 2016. Until this time, the Community Customs Code and its implementing provisions continue to apply.

http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/customs/customs_code/union_customs_code/index_en.htm

EORI

Since July 1, 2009, all companies established outside of the EU are required to have an Economic Operator Registration and Identification (EORI) number if they wish to lodge a customs declaration or an Entry/Exit Summary declaration. All U.S. companies should use this number for their customs clearances. If a U.S. company wishes to apply for AEO status or apply for simplifications in customs procedures within the EU, it must first obtain an EORI number. Companies should request an EORI number from the authorities of the first EU member state to which they export. Once a company has received an EORI number, it can use it for exports to any of the 28 EU member states. There is no single format for the EORI number.

More information about the EORI number can be found at http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/dds2/eos/eori_home.jsp?Lang=en

U.S. - EU Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA)

Since 1997, the U.S. and the EU have had an agreement on customs cooperation and mutual assistance in customs matters. For additional information, please see http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/customs/policy_issues/international_customs_agreements/usa/index_en.htm

In 2012, the U.S. and the EU signed a new Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) aimed at matching procedures to associate one another's customs identification numbers. The MCC introduced the Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) program (known as the "security amendment"). This is similar to the U.S.' voluntary Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT) program in which participants receive certification as a "trusted" trader. AEO certification issued by a national customs authority is recognized by all member state's customs agencies. An AEO is entitled to two different types of authorization: "customs simplification" or "security and safety." The former allows for an AEO to benefit from simplifications related to customs legislation, while the latter allows for facilitation through security and safety procedures. Shipping to a trader with AEO status could facilitate an exporter's trade as its benefits include expedited processing of shipments, reduced theft/losses, reduced data requirements, lower inspection costs, and enhanced loyalty and recognition.

The U.S. and the EU recognize each other's security certified operators and will take the respective membership status of certified trusted traders favorably into account to the extent possible. The favorable treatment provided by mutual recognition will result in lower costs, simplified procedures and greater predictability for transatlantic business

activities. The newly signed arrangement officially recognizes the compatibility of AEO and C-TPAT programs, thereby facilitating faster and more secure trade between U.S. and EU operators. The agreement is being implemented in two phases. The first commenced in July 2012 with the U.S. customs authorities placing shipments coming from EU AEO members into a lower risk category. The second phase took place in early 2013, with the EU re-classifying shipments coming from C-TPAT members into a lower risk category. The U.S. customs identification numbers (MID) are therefore recognized by customs authorities in the EU, as per Implementing Regulation 58/2013 (which amends EU Regulation 2454/93 cited above):
http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/resources/documents/customs/procedural_aspects/general/implementing_regulation_58_2013_en.pdf

Additional information on the MRA can be found at:
http://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/national-media-release/2013-02-08-050000/eu-us-fully-implement-mutual-recognition-decision

Batteries
EU battery rules changed in September 2006 following the publication of the Directive on batteries and accumulators and waste batteries and accumulators (Directive 2006/66). This Directive replaces the original Battery Directive of 1991 (Directive 91/157). The 2006 Directive applies to all batteries and accumulators placed on the EU market including automotive, industrial and portable batteries. It aims to protect the environment by restricting the sale of batteries and accumulators that contain mercury or cadmium (with an exemption for emergency and alarm systems, medical equipment and cordless power tools) and by promoting a high level of collection and recycling. It places the responsibility on producers to finance the costs associated with the collection, treatment, and recycling of used batteries and accumulators. The Directive also includes provisions on the labeling of batteries and their removability from equipment. In 2012, the European Commission published a FAQ document to assist interested parties in interpreting its provisions. For more information, see our market research report:
http://www.buyusainfo.net/docs/x_4062262.pdf

REACH
REACH, "Registration, Evaluation and Authorization and Restriction of Chemicals", is the system for controlling chemicals in the EU and it came into force in 2007 (Regulation 1907/2006). Virtually every industrial sector, from automobiles to textiles, is affected by this policy. REACH requires chemicals produced or imported into the EU in volumes above 1 metric ton per year to be registered with a central database handled by the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA). Information on a chemical's properties, its uses and safe ways of handling are part of the registration process. The next registration deadline is **May 31, 2018**. U.S. companies without a presence in Europe cannot register directly and must have their chemicals registered through their importer or EU-based 'Only Representative of non-EU manufacturer'. A list of Only Representatives (ORs) can be found on the website of the U.S. Mission to the EU:
http://export.gov/europeanunion/reachclp/index.asp

U.S. companies exporting chemical products to the European Union must update their Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) to be REACH compliant. For more information, see the guidance on the compilation of safety data sheets:
http://echa.europa.eu/documents/10162/17235/sds_en.pdf

U.S. exporters to the EU should carefully consider the REACH ‘Candidate List’ of Substances of Very High Concern (SVHCs) and the ‘Authorization List’. Substances on the Candidate List are subject to communication requirements prior to their export to the EU. Companies seeking to export products containing substances on the ‘Authorization List’ will require an authorization. The Candidate List can be found at: http://echa.europa.eu/web/guest/candidate-list-table. The Authorization List is available at http://echa.europa.eu/addressing-chemicals-of-concern/authorisation/recommendation-for-inclusion-in-the-authorisation-list/authorisation-list

WEEE Directive
EU rules on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE), while not requiring specific customs or import paperwork, may entail a financial obligation for U.S. exporters. The Directive requires U.S. exporters to register relevant products with a national WEEE authority or arrange for this to be done by a local partner. The WEEE Directive was revised on July 4, 2012 and the scope of products covered was expanded to include all electrical and electronic equipment. This revised scope will apply from August 14, 2018 with a phase-in period that has already begun. U.S. exporters seeking more information on the WEEE Directive should visit: http://export.gov/europeanunion/weeerohs/index.asp

RoHS
The ROHS Directive imposes restrictions on the use of certain chemicals in electrical and electronic equipment. It does not require specific customs or import paperwork however; manufacturers must self-certify that their products are compliant. The Directive was revised in 2011 and entered into force on January 2, 2013. One important change with immediate effect is that RoHS is now a CE Marking Directive. The revised Directive expands the scope of products covered during a transition period which ends on July 22, 2019. Once this transition period ends, the Directive will apply to medical devices, monitoring and control equipment in addition to all other electrical and electronic equipment. U.S. exporters seeking more information on the RoHS Directive should visit: http://export.gov/europeanunion/weeerohs/index.asp

Cosmetics Regulation
On November 30, 2009, the EU adopted a new regulation on cosmetic products which has applied since July 11, 2013. The law introduces an EU-wide system for the notification of cosmetic products and a requirement that companies without a physical presence in the EU appoint an EU-based responsible person.

In addition, on March 11, 2013, the EU imposed a ban on the placement on the market of cosmetics products that contain ingredients that have been subject to animal testing. This ban does not apply retroactively but does capture new ingredients. Of note, in March 2013, the Commission published a Communication stating that this ban would not apply to ingredients where safety data was obtained from testing required under other EU legislation that did not have a cosmetic purpose. For more information on animal testing, see: http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/sectors/cosmetics/animal-testing

For more general information, see: http://export.gov/europeanunion/accessingeumarketsinkeyindustrysectors/eg_eu_044318.asp

Agricultural Documentation

Phytosanitary Certificates: Phytosanitary certificates are required for most fresh fruits, vegetables, and other plant materials.

Sanitary Certificates: For commodities composed of animal products or by-products, EU countries require that shipments be accompanied by a certificate issued by the competent authority of the exporting country. This applies regardless of whether the product is for human consumption, for pharmaceutical use, or strictly for non-human use (e.g., veterinary biologicals, animal feeds, fertilizers, research). The vast majority of these certificates are uniform throughout the EU, but the harmonization process is not complete. During this transition period, certain member state import requirements continue to apply. In addition to the legally required EU health certificates, a number of other certificates are used in international trade. These certificates, which may also be harmonized in EU legislation, certify origin for customs purposes and certain quality attributes. Up-to-date information on harmonized import requirements can be found at the following website: http://www.usda-eu.org/trade-with-the-eu/eu-import-rules/certification/fairs-export-certificate-report/.

Sanitary Certificates (Fisheries)
In April 2006, the European Union declared the U.S. seafood inspection system as equivalent to the European one. Consequently, a specific public health certificate must accompany U.S. seafood shipments. The U.S. fishery product sanitary certificate is a combination of Commission Decision 2006/199/EC for the public health attestation and of Regulation 1012/2012 for the general template and animal health attestation. Unlike for fishery products, the U.S. shellfish sanitation system is not equivalent to that of the EU's. The EU and the U.S. are currently negotiating a veterinary equivalency agreement on shellfish. In the meantime, the EU still has a ban in place (since July 1, 2010), that prohibits the import of U.S. bivalve mollusks, in whatever form, into EU territory. This ban does not apply to wild roe-off scallops.

Since June 2009, the only U.S. competent authority for issuing sanitary certificates for fishery and aquaculture products is the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA-NMFS).

In addition to sanitary certificates, all third countries wishing to export fishery products to the EU are requested to provide a catch certificate. This catch certificate certifies that the products in question have been caught legally.

For detailed information on import documentation for seafood, please contact the NOAA Fisheries office at the U.S. Mission to the EU (stephane.vrignaud@trade.gov) or visit the following NOAA dedicated web site: http://www.seafood.nmfs.noaa.gov/EU_Export.html

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The U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) is responsible for implementing and enforcing the Export Administration Regulations (EAR), which regulate the export and re-export of some commercial items, including "production" and "development" technology.

The items that BIS regulates are often referred to as “dual use” since they have both commercial and military applications. Further information on export controls is available at: http://www.bis.doc.gov/licensing/exportingbasics.htm

BIS has developed a list of "red flags," or warning signs, intended to discover possible violations of the EAR. These are posted at: http://www.bis.doc.gov/enforcement/redflags.htm

Also, BIS has "Know Your Customer" guidance at: http://www.bis.doc.gov/Enforcement/knowcust.htm

If there is reason to believe a violation is taking place or has occurred, report it to the Department of Commerce by calling the 24-hour hotline at 1(800) 424-2980, or via the confidential lead page at: https://www.bis.doc.gov/forms/eeleadsntips.html

The EAR does not control all goods, services, and technologies. Other U.S. government agencies regulate more specialized exports. For example, the U.S. Department of State has authority over defense articles and services. A list of other agencies involved in export control can be found on the BIS web.

It is important to note that in August 2009, the President directed a broad-based interagency review of the U.S. export control system, with the goal of strengthening national security and the competitiveness of key U.S. manufacturing and technology sectors by focusing on current threats, as well as adapting to the changing economic and technological landscape. As a result, the Administration launched the Export Control Reform Initiative (ECR Initiative) which is designed to enhance U.S. national security and strengthen the United States’ ability to counter threats such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The Administration is implementing the reform in three phases. Phases I and II reconcile various definitions, regulations, and policies for export controls, all the while building toward Phase III, which will create a single control list, single licensing agency, unified information technology system, and enforcement coordination center.

For additional information on ECR see: http://export.gov/ecr/index.asp

BIS provides a variety of training sessions to U.S. exporters throughout the year. These sessions range from one to two day seminars and focus on the basics of exporting as well as more advanced topics. A list of upcoming seminars can be found at: https://www.bis.doc.gov/seminarsandtraining/index.htm

For further details about the Bureau of Industry and Security and its programs, please visit the BIS website at: http://www.bis.doc.gov/

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For information on this topic please consult the Commerce Department’s Country Commercial Guides on EU member states: EU Member States' Country Commercial Guides

Alternatively, search the Commerce Department's Market Research Library, available from: http://www.export.gov/mrktresearch/index.asp under Country and Industry Market Reports.

Labeling and Marking Requirements

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An overview of EU mandatory and voluntary labeling and marking requirements has been compiled in a market research report that is available at: http://buyusainfo.net/docs/x_366090.pdf

Prohibited and Restricted Imports

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The TARIC is designed to show various rules applying to specific products being imported into the customs territory of the EU or, in some cases, when exported from it. To determine if a product is prohibited or subject to restriction, check the TARIC for the following codes:

CITES Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species
PROHI Import Suspension
RSTR Import Restriction

For information on how to access the TARIC, see the Import Requirements and Documentation Section above.

Key Link:
http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/customs/customs_duties/tariff_aspects/customs_tariff/index_en.htm

Customs Regulations and Contact Information

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The following provides information on the major regulatory efforts of the EC Taxation and Customs Union Directorate:

Electronic Customs Initiative – This initiative deals with EU Customs modernization developments to improve and facilitate trade in the EU member states. The electronic customs initiative is based on the following three pieces of legislation:

- The Security and Safety Amendment to the Customs Code, which provides for full computerization of all procedures related to security and safety;
- The Decision on the paperless environment for customs and trade (Electronic Customs Decision) which sets the basic framework and major deadlines for the electronic customs projects;
- The Modernized Community Customs Code (recast as Union Customs Code) which provides for the completion of the computerization of customs.

Key Link:
http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/customs/policy_issues/electronic_customs_initiative/electronic_customs_legislation/index_en.htm

Homepage of Customs and Taxation Union Directorate (TAXUD) Website
Key Link: http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/customs/index_en.htm

Customs Valuation – Most customs duties and value added tax (VAT) are expressed as a %age of the value of goods being declared for importation. Thus, it is necessary to dispose of a standard set of rules for establishing the goods' value, which will then serve for calculating the customs duty.

Given the magnitude of EU imports every year, it is important that the value of such commerce is accurately measured for the purposes of:

- economic and commercial policy analysis;
- application of commercial policy measures;
- proper collection of import duties and taxes; and
- import and export statistics.

These objectives are met using a single instrument - the rules on customs value.
The EU applies an internationally accepted concept of 'customs value'.

The value of imported goods is one of the three 'elements of taxation' that provides the basis for assessment of the customs debt, which is the technical term for the amount of duty that has to be paid, the other ones being the origin of the goods and the customs tariff.

Key Link:
http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/customs/customs_duties/declared_goods/index_en.htm

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Products tested and certified in the United States to American standards are likely to have to be retested and re-certified to EU requirements as a result of the EU's different approach to the protection of the health and safety of consumers and the environment. Where products are not regulated by specific EU technical legislation, they are always subject to the EU's General Product Safety Directive as well as to possible additional national requirements.

European Union legislation and standards created under the New Approach are harmonized across the member states and European Economic Area countries to allow for the free flow of goods. A feature of the New Approach is CE marking. For a list of new approach legislation, go to http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newapproach/nando/index.cfm?fuseaction=directive.main.

The concept of new approach legislation is likely to disappear as the New Legislative Framework (NLF), which entered into force in January 2010, was put in place to serve as a blueprint for existing and future CE marking legislation. Since 2010/2011 existing legislation has been reviewed to bring them in line with the NLF concepts.

While harmonization of EU legislation can facilitate access to the EU Single Market, manufacturers should be aware that regulations (mandatory) and technical standards (voluntary) might also function as barriers to trade if U.S. standards are different from those of the European Union.

Agricultural Standards

The establishment of harmonized EU rules and standards in the food sector has been ongoing for several decades, but it took until January 2002 for the publication of a general food law establishing the general principles of EU food law. This Regulation introduced mandatory traceability throughout the feed and food chain as of Jan 1, 2005. For specific information on agricultural standards, please refer to the Foreign Agricultural Service's website at: http://www.usda-eu.org

There are also export guides to import regulations and standards available on the Foreign Agricultural Service's website: http://www.usda-eu.org/trade-with-the-eu/eu-import-rules/certification/fairs-export-certificate-report/

Standards Organizations

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EU standards setting is a process based on consensus initiated by industry or mandated by the European Commission and carried out by independent standards bodies, acting at the national, European or international level. There is strong encouragement for non-governmental organizations, such as environmental and consumer groups, to actively participate in European standardization.

Many standards in the EU are adopted from international standards bodies such as the International Standards Organization (ISO). The drafting of specific EU standards is handled by three European standards organizations:

1. CENELEC, European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization (http://www.cenelec.eu/)

2. ETSI, European Telecommunications Standards Institute (http://www.etsi.org/)

3. CEN, European Committee for Standardization, handling all other standards (http://www.cen.eu/cen/pages/default.aspx)

Standards are created or modified by experts in Technical Committees or Working Groups. The members of CEN and CENELEC are the national standards bodies of the member states, which have "mirror committees" that monitor and participate in ongoing European standardization. CEN and CENELEC standards are sold by the individual member states standards bodies. ETSI is different in that it allows direct participation in its technical committees from non-EU companies that have interests in Europe and gives away some of its individual standards at no charge on its website. In addition to the three standards developing organizations, the European Commission plays an important role in standardization through its funding of the participation in the standardization process of small- and medium-sized companies and non-governmental organizations, such as environmental and consumer groups. The Commission also provides money to the standards bodies when it mandates standards development to the European Standards Organization for harmonized standards that will be linked to EU technical legislation. Mandates – or requests for standards - can be checked on line at: http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/european-standards/standardisation-requests/index_en.htm

Given the EU's vigorous promotion of its regulatory and standards system as well as its generous funding for its development, the EU's standards regime is wide and deep - extending well beyond the EU's political borders to include affiliate members (countries which are hopeful of becoming full members in the future) such as Albania, Belarus, Israel, and Morocco among others. Another category, called "partner standardization body" includes the standards organization of Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan and Australia, which are not likely to become a CEN member or affiliate for political and geographical reasons.

To know what CEN and CENELEC have in the pipeline for future standardization, it is best to visit their websites. Other than their respective annual work plans, CEN's "what we do" page provides an overview of standards activities by subject. Both CEN and CENELEC offer the possibility to search their respective database. ETSI's portal (http://portal.etsi.org/Portal_Common/home.asp) leads to ongoing activities.

The European Standardization system and strategy was reviewed in 2011 and 2012. The new standards regulation 1025, adopted in November 2012, clarifies the relationship between regulations and standards and confirms the role of the three European standards bodies in developing EN harmonized standards. The emphasis is also on referencing international standards where possible. For information, communication and technology (ICT) products, the importance of interoperability standards has been recognized. Through a newly established mechanism, a "Platform Committee" reporting to the European Commission will decide which deliverables from fora and consortia might be acceptable for public procurement specifications. The European standards bodies have been encouraged to improve efficiency in terms of delivery and to look for ways to include more societal stakeholders in European standardization.

Key Link: http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/european-standards/standardisation-policy/index_en.htm

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Conformity Assessment is a mandatory step for the manufacturer in the process of complying with specific EU legislation. The purpose of conformity assessment is to ensure consistency of compliance during all stages, from design to production, to facilitate acceptance of the final product. EU product legislation gives manufacturers some choice regarding conformity assessment, depending on the level of risk involved in the use of their product. These range from self-certification, type examination and production quality control system, to full quality assurance system. Conformity assessment bodies in individual member states are listed in NANDO, the European Commission's website.

Key Link: http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newapproach/nando/

To promote market acceptance of the final product, there are a number of voluntary conformity assessment programs. CEN's certification system is known as the Keymark. Neither CENELEC nor ETSI offer conformity assessment services.

Product Certification Return to top

To sell products in the EU market of 28 member states as well as in Norway, Liechtenstein and Iceland, U.S. exporters are required to apply CE marking whenever their product is covered by specific product legislation. CE marking product legislation offers manufacturers a number of choices and requires decisions to determine which safety/health concerns need to be addressed, which conformity assessment module is best suited to the manufacturing process, and whether or not to use EU-wide harmonized standards. There is no easy way for U.S. exporters to understand and go through the process of CE marking, but hopefully this section provides some background and clarification.

Products manufactured to standards adopted by CEN, CENELEC or ETSI, and referenced in the Official Journal as harmonized standards, are presumed to conform to the requirements of EU Directives. The manufacturer then applies the CE marking and issues a declaration of conformity. With these, the product will be allowed to circulate freely within the EU. A manufacturer can choose not to use the harmonized EU standards, but then must demonstrate that the product meets the essential safety and performance requirements. Trade barriers occur when design, rather than performance, standards are developed by the relevant European standardization organization, and when U.S. companies do not have access to the standardization process through a European presence.

The CE marking addresses itself primarily to the national control authorities of the member states, and its use simplifies the task of essential market surveillance of regulated products. As market surveillance was found lacking, the EU adopted the New Legislative Framework, which went into force in 2010. As mentioned before, this framework is like a blueprint for all CE marking legislation, harmonizing definitions, responsibilities, European accreditation and market surveillance.

The CE marking is not intended to include detailed technical information on the product, but there must be enough information to enable the inspector to trace the product back to the manufacturer or the local contact established in the EU. This detailed information should not appear next to the CE marking, but rather on the declaration of conformity (which the manufacturer or authorized agent must be able to provide at any time, together with the product's technical file), or the documents accompanying the product.

Accreditation Return to top

Independent test and certification laboratories, known as notified bodies, have been officially accredited by competent national authorities to test and certify to EU requirements.

"European Accreditation" (http://www.european-accreditation.org) is an organization representing nationally recognized accreditation bodies. Membership is open to nationally recognized accreditation bodies in countries in the European geographical area that can demonstrate that they operate an accreditation system compatible to appropriate EN and ISO/IEC standards.

Publication of Technical Regulations Return to top

The Official Journal is the official publication of the European Union. It is published daily on the internet and consists of two series covering adopted legislation as well as case law, studies by committees, and more (http://eur-lex.europa.eu/JOIndex.do?ihmlang=en). It lists the standards reference numbers linked to legislation (http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/european-standards/harmonised-standards/index_en.htm).

National technical Regulations are published on the Commission’s website http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/tris/index_en.htm to allow other countries and interested parties to comment.

NIST Notify U.S. Service
Member countries of the World Trade Organization (WTO) are required under the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement) to report to the WTO all proposed technical regulations that could affect trade with other Member countries. **Notify U.S.** is a free, web-based e-mail subscription service that offers an opportunity to review and comment on proposed foreign technical regulations that can affect your access to international markets. Register online at Internet URL: http://www.nist.gov/notifyus/

Labeling and Marking Return to top

Manufacturers should be mindful that, in addition to the EU’s mandatory and voluntary schemes, national voluntary labeling schemes might still apply. These schemes may be highly appreciated by consumers, and thus, become unavoidable for marketing purposes.

Manufacturers are advised to take note that all labels require metric units although dual labeling is also acceptable. The use of language on labels has been the subject of a Commission Communication, which encourages multilingual information, while preserving the right of member states to require the use of the language of the country of consumption.

The EU has mandated that certain products be sold in standardized quantities. Council Directive 2007/45/EC harmonizes packaging of wine and spirits throughout the EU. Existing national sizes will be abolished with a few exceptions for domestic producers. Key Link: http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/legal-metrology-and-prepack/prepacked-products/index_en.htm

The Eco-label
The EU eco-label is a voluntary label which U.S. exporters can display on products that meet high standards of environmental awareness. The eco-label is intended to be a marketing tool to encourage consumers to purchase environmentally-friendly products. The criteria for displaying the eco-label are strict, covering the entire lifespan of the product from its manufacture, use, and disposal. These criteria are reviewed every three to five years to take into account advances in manufacturing procedures. There are currently 13 different product groups, and more than 17000 licenses have been awarded.

Applications to display the eco-label should be directed to the competent body of the member state in which the product is sold. The application fee will be somewhere between €275 and €1600 depending on the tests required to verify if the product is eligible, and an annual fee for the use of the logo (typically between $480 to $2000), with a 20% reduction for companies registered under the EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) or certified under the international standard ISO 14001. Discounts are available for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

Key Links:
Eco-label Home Page

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Sylvia.Mohr@trade.gov

National Institute of Standards & Technology
Mr. George W. Arnold
Director
Standards Coordination Office
100 Bureau Dr.
Mail Stop 2100
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20899
Tel: (301) 975-5627
Website: http://ts.nist.gov/Standards/Global/about.cfm

CEN – European Committee for Standardization

Avenue Marnix 17
B – 1000 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: 32.2.550.08.11
Fax: 32.2.550.08.19
Website: http://www.cen.eu

CENELEC – European Committee for Electro technical Standardization
Avenue Marnix 17
B – 1000 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: 32.2.519.68.71
Fax: 32.2.519.69.19
Website: http://www.cenelec.eu

ETSI - European Telecommunications Standards Institute
Route des Lucioles 650
F – 06921 Sophia Antipolis Cedex, France
Tel: 33.4.92.94.42.00
Fax: 33.4.93.65.47.16
Website: http://www.etsi.org

SBS – Small Business Standards

4, Rue Jacques de Lalaing
B-1040 Brussels
Tel: +32.2.285.07.27
Website: under development (http://www.ueapme.com/spip.php?rubrique220)

ANEC - European Association for the Co-ordination of Consumer Representation in Standardization
Avenue de Tervuren 32, Box 27
B – 1040 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: 32.2.743.24.70
Fax: 32.2.706.54.30
Website: http:/www.anec.org

ECOS – European Environmental Citizens Organization for Standardization
Rue d'Edimbourg 26
B – 1050 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: 32.2.894.46.55
Fax: 32.2.894.46.10
Website: http://www.ecostandard.org

EOTA – European Organization for Technical Assessment (for construction products)
Avenue des Arts 40
B – 1040 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: 32.2.502.69.00
Fax: 32.2.502.38.14
Website: http://www.eota.be/

Trade Agreements

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For a list of trade agreements with the EU and its member states, as well as concise explanations, please see http://tcc.export.gov/Trade_Agreements/index.asp

Web Resources

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EU websites:

Online customs tariff database (TARIC):
http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/customs/customs_duties/tariff_aspects/customs_tariff/index_en.htm

The Modernized Community Customs Code MCCC):
http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/customs/do0001_en.htm

ECHA: http://echa.europa.eu

Taxation and Customs Union:
http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/customs/index_en.htm

Security and Safety Amendment to the Customs Code - Regulation (EC) 648/2005:
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2005:117:0013:0019:en:PDF

Electronic Customs Initiative: Decision N° 70/2008/EC
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2008:023:0021:0026:EN:PDF

Modernized Community Customs Code Regulation (EC) 450/2008):
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2008:145:0001:0064:EN:PDF

Legislation related to the Electronic Customs Initiative:
http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/customs/policy_issues/electronic_customs_initiative/electronic_customs_legislation/index_en.htm

Export Help Desk
http://exporthelp.europa.eu/thdapp/index_en.html

International Level:

What is Customs Valuation?
http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/customs/customs_duties/declared_goods/european/index_en.htm

Customs and Security: Two communications and a proposal for amending the Community Customs Code:
http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/customs/policy_issues/customs_security/index_en.htm

Establishing the Community Customs Code: Regulation (EC) n° 648/2005 of 13 April 2005
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2005:117:0013:0019:en:PDF

Pre Arrival/Pre Departure Declarations:
http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/customs/procedural_aspects/general/prearrival_predeparture/index_en.htm

AEO: Authorized Economic Operator:
http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/customs/policy_issues/customs_security/aeo/index_en.htm

Contact Information at National Customs Authorities:
http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/taxation/personal_tax/savings_tax/contact_points/index_en.htm

New Approach Legislation:
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newapproach/nando/index.cfm?fuseaction=directive.main

Cenelec, European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization:
http://www.cenelec.eu/

ETSI, European Telecommunications Standards Institute:
http://www.etsi.org/

CEN, European Committee for Standardization, handling all other standards:
http://www.cen.eu/cen/Pages/default.aspx

Standardisation – Mandates:
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/european-standards/standardisation-requests/index_en.htm

ETSI – Portal – E-Standardisation :
http://portal.etsi.org/Portal_Common/home.asp

CEN – Sector:
http://www.cen.eu/work/areas/Pages/default.aspx

CEN - Standard Search:
http://esearch.cen.eu/esearch/

Nando (New Approach Notified and Designated Organizations) Information System:
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newapproach/nando/

Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs):
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newapproach/nando/index.cfm?fuseaction=mra.main

European Co-operation for Accreditation:
http://www.european-accreditation.org/home

Eur-Lex – Access to European Union Law:
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/index.htm

Standards Reference Numbers linked to Legislation:
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/european-standards/harmonised-standards/index_en.htm

What's New:
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/news/index_en.htm

National technical Regulations:
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/tris/index_en.htm

NIST - Notify U.S.:
http://www.nist.gov/notifyus/

Metrology, Pre-Packaging – Pack Size:
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/legal-metrology-and-prepack/prepacked-products/index_en.htm

European Union Eco-label Homepage:
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel/

U.S. websites:
National Trade Estimate Report on Foreign Trade Barriers:
http://www.ustr.gov/about-us/press-office/reports-and-publications/2012-1

Agricultural Trade Barriers:
http://www.usda-eu.org/

Trade Compliance Center:
http://tcc.export.gov/

U.S. Mission to the European Union:
http://useu.usmission.gov/

The New EU Battery Directive:
http://www.buyusainfo.net/docs/x_8086174.pdf

The Latest on REACH:
http://export.gov/europeanunion/reachclp/index.asp

WEEE and RoHS in the EU:
http://export.gov/europeanunion/weeerohs/index.asp

Overview of EU Certificates:
http://www.usda-eu.org/trade-with-the-eu/eu-import-rules/certification/fairs-export-certificate-report/

Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition:
http://www.fda.gov/Food/default.htm

EU Marking, Labeling and Packaging – An Overview
http://buyusainfo.net/docs/x_366090.pdf

The European Union Eco-Label:
http://buyusainfo.net/docs/x_4284752.pdf

Trade Agreements:
http://tcc.export.gov/Trade_Agreements/index.asp

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Chapter 6: Investment Climate

Openness to Foreign Investment

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Belgium has traditionally maintained an open economy, highly dependent on international trade for its well-being. Since WWII, foreign investment has played a vital role in the Belgian economy, providing technology and employment. Though the federal government regulates important elements of foreign direct investment such as salaries and labor conditions, it is primarily the responsibility of the regions to attract FDI. Flanders Investment and Trade (FIT), Wallonia Foreign Trade and Investment Agency (AWEX) and Brussels Invest and Export, attract FDI to Flanders, Wallonia and the Brussels Capital Region, respectively. Foreign corporations account for about one-third of the top 3,000 corporations in Belgium. According to Graydon, a Belgian company specializing in commercial and marketing information, there are currently more than one million companies registered in Belgium, of which 74,000 new companies were registered in 2013.

Industrial Strategy
The regional investment promotion agencies have focused their industrial strategy on key sectors including aerospace and defense; agribusiness, automotive and ground transportation; architecture and engineering; chemicals, petrochemicals, plastics and composites; environmental technologies; food processing and packaging; health technologies; information and communication; and services.

TABLE 1: The following chart summarizes several internationally well-regarded indices and rankings.

Measure	Year	Rank or value	Website Address
TI Corruption Perceptions index	2013	15 of 177	http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2013/results/
Heritage Foundation's Economic Freedom index	2013	35 of 177	http://www.heritage.org/index/ranking
World Bank's Doing Business Report "Ease of Doing Business"	2013	36 of 189	http//doingbusiness.org/rankings
Global Innovation Index	2013	21 of 142	http://www.globalinnovationindex.org/content.aspx?page=gii-full-report-2013#pdfopener
World Bank GNP per capita	2013	$43,834	http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.CD

Conversion and Transfer Policies Return to top

Payments and transfers within Belgium and with foreign countries require no prior authorization. Transactions may be executed in euros as well as in other currencies.

On May 1, 1998, Belgium was one of the 11 European Union (EU) member states that agreed to form a currency union (European monetary union), with the Euro as its single currency. On January 1, 1999, exchange rates were irrevocably fixed among Eurozone currencies, with 1 Euro equal to 40.3399 Belgian Francs (BF). Euro coins and bank notes were introduced in early 2002. Old BF notes can only be exchanged for Euros at National Bank of Belgium offices. Old BF coins were no longer convertible as of January 1, 2005.

Belgium has no debt-to-equity requirements. Dividends may be remitted freely except in cases in which distribution would reduce net assets to less than paid-up capital. No further withholding tax or other tax is due on repatriation of the original investment or on the profits of a branch, either during its operations or upon the closing thereof.

Expropriation and Compensation Return to top

There are no outstanding expropriation or nationalization cases in Belgium with U.S. investors. There is no pattern of discrimination against foreign investment in Belgium.

When the Belgian government uses its eminent domain powers to acquire property compulsorily for a public purpose, adequate compensation is paid to the property owners. Recourse to the courts is available if necessary. The only expropriations that occurred during the last decade were related to infrastructure projects such as port expansion, roads, and railroads. In the future, expropriations to reserve space for nuclear waste storage are still expected, but the sites will not be near areas of existing economic activity. The government of Belgium has decreed that all nuclear power plants will be closed by 2025.

In 2013, the region of Wallonia considered acquiring an industrial site that was being abandoned by a foreign investor in order to mitigate job-loss and invest in redevelopment. This was not acted upon by year's end.

Dispute Settlement

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Belgium's legal system is independent of the government and is a means for resolving commercial disputes or protecting property rights. As in many countries, the Belgian courts labor under a growing caseload, and backlogs cause delays. There are several levels of appeal.

Bankruptcy
Belgian bankruptcy law is governed by the Bankruptcy Act of 1997 and is under the jurisdiction of the commercial courts. The commercial court appoints a judge-auditor to preside over the bankruptcy proceeding and whose primary task is to supervise the management and liquidation of the bankrupt estate, in particular with respect to the claims of the employees. Belgian bankruptcy law recognizes several classes of preferred or secured creditors. A person who has been declared bankrupt may now start a new business unless the person is found guilty of certain criminal offences that are directly related to the bankruptcy. The Business Continuity Act of 2009 provides the possibility for companies in financial difficulty to enter into a judicial reorganization. These proceedings are to some extent similar to Chapter 11 as the aim is to facilitate business recovery.

International Arbitration
Belgium is a member of the International Center for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) and regularly includes provision for ICSID arbitration in investment agreements. The government accepts binding international arbitration of disputes between foreign investors and the state; a recent example was the international arbitration between the Belgian and the Dutch governments regarding a railway line dispute, the so-called "Iron Rhine."

Duration of Dispute Resolution
The court system is regionalized and the duration of investment and commercial dispute proceedings can vary. There is anecdotal evidence that court disputes can take months or years to resolve. The delays are generally attributed to a shortage of judges to rule on cases resulting in long queues for hearing dates.

Performance Requirements and Incentives

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Since the law of August 1980 on regional devolution in Belgium, investment incentives and subsidies have been the responsibility of Belgian's three regions: Brussels, Flanders, and Wallonia. Nonetheless, most tax measures remain under the control of the federal government as do the parameters (social security, wage agreements) that

govern general salary and benefit levels. In general, all regional and national incentives are available to foreign and domestic investors alike. Belgian investment incentive programs at all levels of government are limited by EU regulations and thus are kept in line with those of the other EU member states. The European Commission has tended to discourage certain investment incentives in the belief that they distort the single market, impair structural change, and threaten EU convergence, as well as social and economic cohesion. Belgium thus has seen its number of underdeveloped areas, into which the EU allowed certain investment subsidies, further curtailed.
Under the Belgian constitution, attracting foreign direct investment is the responsibility of the Belgian regions (Brussels-Capital, Flanders, and Wallonia) through the regional investment agencies – Flanders Investment and Trade (FIT), Wallonia Foreign Investment and Trade (AWEX), and the Brussels Invest and Export. In their investment policies, the regions emphasize innovation promotion, research and development, energy savings, environmental cleanliness, exports, and most of all, employment. The agencies have staff specializing on specific regions of the world, including the United States, and have representation offices in different countries. In addition, the Finance Ministry established a foreign investment tax unit in 2000 to provide assistance and to make the tax administration more "user friendly" to foreign investors.

In 2005, the Belgian Federal Finance Ministry proposed a new investment incentive program in the form of a notional interest rate deduction. This was adopted by Parliament, and as of January 1, 2006, the new tax law permits a corporation established in Belgium, foreign or domestic, to deduct from its taxable profits a %age of its adjusted net assets linked to the rate of the Belgian long-term state bond. The law permits all companies operating in Belgium to deduct the "notional" interest rate that would have be paid on their locally invested capital had it been borrowed at a rate of interest equal to the current rate the Belgian government pays on its 10-year bonds. This amount is deducted from profits, thus lowering the sum on which Belgian corporate taxes (currently 33.99%) are calculated. In 2011, the notional interest was set at 3.8 % for corporations. The applicable interest rate is adjusted annually, but will never be allowed to vary more than one % (100 basis points) in one year nor exceed 6.5 %. For 2013, the Belgian Federal government set the notional interest rate at 3 % for large corporations and 3.5 % for SMEs. For 2014, the rate is 2.74 % for large corporations and 3.24% for SMEs and for 2015 the rate will be 2.63 % for large corporations and 3.13 % for SMEs.

Research and Development
Belgium has made an effort to encourage companies to carry out R&D activities within the country. At both the federal and regional government levels, there are incentives in place to mitigate the cost of employing researchers. These are offered as tax allowances or as direct stipends. Regional governments offer incentives on the cost of creating patents as well as some exemptions on income generated from the sales of goods subjected to proprietary patents. There are also ways in which a company can deduct a %age of what it invests in R&D and energy-saving improvements from its taxable base. More information on incentives by region is available at: www.investinbrussels.com (Brussels), www.flandersinvestmentandtrade.com (Flanders), and www.investinwallonia.be (Wallonia).

Performance Requirements
Performance requirements in Belgium usually relate to the number of jobs created. There are no known cases where export targets or local purchase requirements were

imposed, with the exception of military offset programs, which were reintroduced under Prime Minister Verhofstadt in 2006. While the government reserves the right to reclaim incentives if the investor fails to meet his employment commitments, enforcement is rare. However, in 2012, with the announced closure of an automotive plant in Flanders, the issue of reclaiming government commitments has surfaced. The Flanders region is in negotiations with the company to reclaim training subsidies that had been provided to the company.

Right to Private Ownership and Establishment Return to top

Both domestic and foreign private entities have the right to establish business enterprises. This right is well established in Belgium's constitution and in law. The right to acquire or sell interests in business enterprises is similarly protected by law.

No restrictions in Belgium apply specifically to foreign investors. Foreign interests may enter into joint ventures and partnerships on the same basis as domestic parties, except for certain professions, such as doctors, lawyers, accountants and architects. Additional verification (to confirm equivalence of education and training) exist in these professions because they are subject to liability claims. All investors, Belgian or foreign, must obtain special permission to open department stores, provide transportation and security services, cut and polish diamonds, or sell firearms and ammunition. Food safety regulations require all organizations in Belgium involved in food production (packaging, wholesale, and retail) to obtain a permit from the Belgian Federal Food Administration. There is competitive equality between public and private enterprises with respect to market access, credit, and other business operations, such as licenses and supplies; however, public enterprises such as the Belgian railroads are often exempt from VAT.

Protection of Property Rights Return to top

Property rights in Belgium are well protected by law. The courts are independent and considered effective in enforcing property rights. Belgium generally meets very high standards in the protection of intellectual property rights. Rights granted under American patent, trademark, or copyright law can only be enforced in the United States, its territories, and possessions. The European Union has taken a number of initiatives to promote intellectual property protection, but in cases of non-implementation, national laws continue to apply. Despite legal protection of intellectual property, Belgium experiences the commercial and private infringement – particularly internet music piracy and illegal copying of software – common to most EU states.
All intellectual property rights (IPR) are administered and enforced by the Belgian Office of Intellectual Property in the Ministry for Economic Affairs (http://economie.fgov.be/en/entreprises/Intellectual_property/Aspects_institutionnels_et_pratiques/OPRI/). The Office of Intellectual Property, Directorate General Regulation and Market Organisation (ORPI) administers intellectual property in Belgium. The Directeur général/Director General: is Mr. Emmanuel Pieters. This office manages and provides Belgian intellectual property titles, informs the public about IPR, drafts legislation and advises Belgian authorities with regard to national and international issues. Enforcement of IPR is in the hands of the Belgian Ministry of Justice. For additional information about treaty obligations and points of contact at local IP offices, please see WIPO's country profiles at http://www.wipo.int/directory/en/. The Embassy's point of contact for public inquiries on property rights in Belgium is listed in section 19.

A list of English-speaking attorneys in Belgium can be found at this link: http://photos.state.gov/libraries/belgium/8548/cons/Lawyer%20list%202012%20update%20december_001.pdf The United States Embassy at Brussels, Belgium assumes no responsibility or liability for the professional ability or reputation of, or the quality of services provided by, the persons or firms on the list.

Transparency of Regulatory System Return to top

The Belgian government has adopted a generally transparent competition policy and effective laws foster competition. Tax, labor, health, safety, and other laws and policies have been implemented to avoid distortions or impediments to the efficient mobilization and allocation of investment, comparable to those in other EU member states. Nevertheless, foreign and domestic investors in some sectors face stringent regulations designed to protect small- and medium-sized enterprises. Many companies in Belgium also try to limit their number of employees to 49, the threshold above which certain employee committees must be set up, such as for safety and trade union interests.

Recognizing the need to streamline administrative procedures in many areas, the federal government in 2004 set up a special task force to simplify official procedures. It also agreed to streamline laws regarding the telecommunications sector into one comprehensive volume after new entrants in this sector had complained about a lack of transparency. It also beefed up its Competition Policy Authority with a number of renowned academic experts and additional resources. The American Chamber of Commerce has called attention to the adverse impact of cumbersome procedures and unnecessary red tape on foreign investors; although, foreign companies do not necessarily suffer more from this than Belgian firms.

In 2012, the government and the pharmaceutical sector negotiated an agreement to lower the government's healthcare costs. In exchange for the government agreeing to an accelerated approval process for new medicines, the pharmaceutical sector agreed to price decreases and price ceilings on certain types of medicine, requesting government reimbursements based on actual quantities of medicine used (i.e. reimbursing for fractions of medication rather than entire box or pouch), paying taxes on marketing activities and decreasing the volume of prescriptions.

Efficient Capital Markets and Portfolio Investment Return to top

Belgium has in place policies to facilitate the free flow of financial resources. Credit is allocated at market rates and is available to foreign and domestic investors without discrimination. Belgium is fully served by the international banking community and is implementing all relevant EU financial directives.

Because the Belgian economy is directed toward international trade, more than half of its banking activities involve foreign countries. Belgium's major banks are represented in the financial and commercial centers of dozens of countries by subsidiaries, branch offices, and representative offices.

Belgium is one of the countries with the highest number of banks per capita in the world. The banking system is considered sound but was particularly hard hit by the financial crisis that began in the fall of 2008, when federal and regional governments had to step in with lending and guarantees for the three largest banks. Following a review of the 2008 financial crisis, the Belgian government decided in 2012 to shift the authority of bank supervision from the Financial Market Supervision Authority (FMSA) to the National Bank of Belgium (NBB).

Bank balance sheets have decreased in volume overall, from close to 1.6 trillion euros in 2007 to just over 1 trillion euros in 2013, according to the National Bank of Belgium, and in the risky derivative markets in particular. Meanwhile, the Belgian banking sector posted a profit of 3.5 billion euros in the first nine months of 2013, significantly higher than the previous two years (1.6 billion euros in 2012 and 400 million in 2011), but less than the 5.6 billion euros posted in 2010.

The country's banks use modern, automated systems for domestic and international transactions. The Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications (SWIFT) has its headquarters in Brussels. Euroclear, a clearing entity for transactions in stocks and other securities, is also located in Brussels.

Belgium also has a well-established stock market. In fact, the first stock market ever was organized in Bruges in the 14th century. At the end of 2000, the Brussels stock market merged with the Paris and Amsterdam bourses into Euronext, a Pan-European stock-trading platform. In 2006, Euronext and NY Stock Exchange shareholders voted to merge the two exchanges. On Euronext, a company may increase its capital either by capitalizing reserves or by issuing new shares. An increase in capital requires a legal registration procedure. New shares may be offered either to the public or to existing shareholders. Public notice is not required if the offer is to existing shareholders, who may subscribe to the new shares directly. An issue of bonds to the public is subject to the same requirements as a public issue of shares: the company's capital must be entirely paid up, and existing shareholders must be given preferential subscription rights.

In Belgium, there are many cases of cross-shareholding and stable shareholder arrangements but never with the express intent to keep out foreign investors. Likewise, anti-takeover defenses are designed to protect against all potential hostile takeovers, not only foreign hostile takeovers.

Competition from State Owned Enterprises Return to top

Belgium does not have any State Owned Enterprises (SOE) that exercise delegated government powers. Private enterprises are allowed to compete with public enterprises under the same terms and conditions, but since the EU started to liberalize network industries such as electricity, gas, water, telecoms and railways, there have been regular complaints in Belgium about unfair competition from the historical incumbents, i.e. the former state monopolists. Complaints have ranged from lower salaries (railways) to lower VAT rates (gas and electricity) and a regulator who was judge and party at the same time (telecom). Although these complaints have now largely subsided, one often finds these former monopolies as market leaders in their sector, mainly because they were able to charge high admission costs for access to a network which they themselves had already written off a long time ago. Corporate governance at the boards of these historical monopolies is still deficient. Board seats are occupied by representatives of the governing political parties in proportion to their representation in Parliament. However, not all board members report directly to cabinet ministers.

Sovereign Wealth Funds

Belgium has a sovereign wealth fund (SWF) in the form of the Federal Participation Company, a quasi-independent entity created in 2004 and now mainly used as a vehicle to manage the banking assets which were taken on board during the 2008 banking crisis. The SWF has a board whose members reflect the composition of the governing coalition and are regularly audited by the "Court des Comptes" or national auditor. Due to the origins of the fund, the majority of the funds are invested domestically. Its role is to allow public entities to recoup their investments and support Belgian banks. The SWF is required by law to publish an annual report and is subject to the same domestic and international accounting standards and rules. The SWF routinely fulfills all legal obligations.

Corporate Social Responsibility

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There is a general awareness of corporate social responsibility among producers and consumers. Boards of directors are encouraged to pay attention to corporate social responsibility in the 2009 Belgian Code on corporate governance.

Political Violence

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Belgium is a peaceful, democratic nation comprised of federal, regional, and municipal political units: the Belgian federal government, the regional governments of Flanders, Wallonia, and the Brussels capital region, and 589 communes (municipalities). Political divisions do exist between the Flemish and Walloons, but they are addressed in democratic institutions and resolved through compromise.

Corruption

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Belgian anti-bribery legislation was revised completely in March 1999, when the competence of Belgian courts was extended to extraterritorial bribery. Bribing foreign officials is a criminal offense in Belgium. Belgium has been a signatory to the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention since 1999, and is a participating member of the OECD Working Group on Bribery. In the Working Group's Phase 3 review of Belgium, it called on Belgium to address the lack of resources available for fighting foreign bribery.

Under Article 3 of the Belgian criminal code, jurisdiction is established over offenses committed within Belgian territory by Belgian or foreign nationals. Act 99/808 added Article 10 related to the code of criminal procedure. This Article provides for jurisdiction in certain cases over persons (foreign as well as Belgian nationals) who commit bribery offenses outside the territory of Belgium. Various limitations apply, however. For example, if the bribe recipient exercises a public function in an EU member state, Belgian prosecution may not proceed without the formal consent of the other state.

Under the 1999 Belgian law, the definition of corruption was extended considerably. It is considered passive bribery if a government official or employer requests or accepts a benefit for him or herself or for somebody else in exchange for behaving in a certain way. Active bribery is defined as the proposal of a promise or benefit in exchange for undertaking a specific action. Until 1999, Belgian anti-corruption law did not cover attempts at passive bribery. The most controversial innovation of the 1999 law was the introduction of the concept of 'private corruption,' i.e. corruption among private individuals. Corruption by public officials carries heavy fines and/or imprisonment between 5 and 10 years. Private individuals face similar fines and slightly shorter prison terms (between six months and two years). The current law not only holds individuals accountable, but also the company for which they work. Contrary to earlier legislation, payment of bribes to secure or maintain public procurement or administrative authorization through bribery in foreign countries is no longer tax deductible. Recent court cases in Belgium suggest that corruption is most serious in government procurement and public works contracting. American companies have not, however, identified corruption as a barrier to investment.

The responsibility for enforcing corruption laws is shared by the Ministry of Justice through investigating magistrates of the courts, and the Ministry of the Interior through the Belgian federal police, which has jurisdiction in all criminal cases. A special unit, the Central Service for Combating Corruption, has been created for enforcement purposes but continues to lack the necessary staff.

Bilateral Investment Agreements

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Belgium has no specific investment agreement with the United States; investment-related issues are covered in the 1951 Treaty of Friendship, Enterprise and Navigation. Belgium has bilateral investment treaties in force with Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chile, China, Croatia, Cyprus, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, El Salvador, Philippines, Gabon, Georgia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Yemen, Cameroon, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Korea, Lebanon, Lithuania, Macedonia, Morocco, Mexico, Moldavia, Mongolia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Paraguay, Romania, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Sri-Lanka, Thailand, Czech Republic, Tunisia, Uruguay, Russia, Venezuela, and Vietnam. Additionally, Belgium and Luxembourg have jointly signed (as The Belgium Luxembourg Economic Union – BLEU) as-yet-unimplemented agreements with Cuba, Liberia, Mauritania, and Thailand. Belgium and Luxembourg also have joint investment treaties with Poland and Russia, but these are not BLEU agreements. All these agreements provide for mutual protection of investments.

OPIC and Other Investment Insurance Programs

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Belgium, as a developed country, does not qualify for OPIC programs. No other countries operate investment insurance programs in Belgium.

Labor

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In 2012, there were noteworthy changes to the Belgian labor law though many of the main structural conditions remain in place. The retirement age was increased from 60 to 62. Unemployment benefits now decrease over time as an incentive for the unemployed to regain employment. Historically, unemployment benefits were constant and some unemployed lived off the benefits indefinitely. Finally, during the 2013-2014 budget negotiations, a “wage-freeze” was agreed upon, but indexation would remain. In effect, the cost of labor would therefore continue to rise based on the automatic wage indexation calculations.

Wage increases are negotiated by sector within the parameters set by automatic wage indexation and the 1996 Law on Competitiveness. The purpose of automatic wage indexation is to establish a bottom margin that protects employees against inflation: for every increase in CPI above 2 %, wages must be increased by (at least) 2 % as well. The top margin is determined by the competitiveness law, which requires the Central Economic Council (CCE) to study wage projections in neighboring countries and make a recommendation on the maximum margin that will ensure Belgian competitiveness. The CCE is made up of civil society organizations (primarily representatives from employer and employee organizations). Its mission is to promote a socio-economic compromise in Belgium by providing informed recommendations to the government. The CCE’s projected increases in neighboring countries have been higher than their real increases, however. As Belgium’s margin is influenced by the projections, Belgium’s wages have increased more rapidly than its neighbors.

The Belgian labor force is generally well trained, highly motivated and very productive. Workers have an excellent command of foreign languages, particularly in Flanders. There is a low unemployment rate among skilled workers, such as local managers. Enlargement of the EU in May 2004 and January 2007 facilitated the entry of skilled workers into Belgium from new member states. However, registration procedures were required until mid-2009 for entrants from some new EU member states. Non-EU nationals must apply for work permits before they can be employed. Minimum wages vary according to the age and responsibility level of the employee and are adjusted for the cost of living.

Belgian workers are highly unionized and usually enjoy good salaries and benefits. Wage increases are negotiated centrally and are automatically indexed to changes in cost of living. Belgian wage and social security contributions, along with those in Germany, are among the highest in Western Europe. At the end of 2013, Belgium’s harmonized unemployment figure stood at 8.5 %, below the EU28 average of 10.8 % (OECD). High wage levels and pockets of high unemployment coexist, reflecting both strong productivity in new technology sector investments and weak skills of Belgium's long-term unemployed, whose overall education level is significantly lower than that of the general population. As a consequence of high wage costs, employers have tended to invest more in capital than in labor. At the same time, a shortage exists of workers with training in computer hardware and software, automation and marketing, increasing wage pressures in these sectors.

Belgian's comprehensive social security package is composed of five major elements: family allowance, unemployment insurance, retirement, medical benefits and a sick leave program that guarantees salary in event of illness. Currently, average employer payments to the social security system stand at 35 % of salary while employee contributions comprise 13 %. In addition, many private companies offer supplemental programs for medical benefits and retirement.
Belgian labor unions, while maintaining a national superstructure, are, in effect, divided along linguistic lines. The two main confederations, the Confederation of Christian Unions and the General Labor Federation of Belgium, maintain close relationships with the Christian Democratic and Socialist political parties, respectively. They exert a strong

influence in the country, politically and socially. A national bargaining process covers inter-professional agreements that the trade union confederations negotiate biennially with the government and the employers' associations. In addition to these negotiations, bargaining on wages and working conditions takes place in the various industrial sectors and at the plant level. About 51 % of employees from the public service and private sector are labor union members. A cause for concern in labor negotiation tactics is isolated cases where union members in Wallonia have resorted to physically forcing management to stay in their offices until an agreement can be reached.

Foreign firms, which generally pay well, usually enjoy harmonious labor relations. Nonetheless, problems can occur, particularly in connection with the shutting down or restructuring of operations. Many strikes are one-day symbolic actions but occasionally industrial actions last longer. Labor actions did not appear to affect foreign (including U.S.) firms any more than Belgian firms in recent years.

Firing a Belgian employee can be very expensive. An employee may be dismissed immediately for cause, such as embezzlement or other illegal activity, but when a reduction in force occurs, the procedure is far more complicated. In 2013, Belgium passed legislation to harmonize severance procedures for white-collar and blue-collar workers, though its implementation will be phased in overtime. Belgium is a strict adherent to ILO labor conventions.

In those instances where the employer and employee cannot agree on the amount of severance pay or indemnity, the case is referred to the commercial courts for a decision. To avoid these complications, some firms consider including a "trial period" (of up to one year) in any employer-employee contract.

Belgium was one of the first countries in the EU to harmonize its legislation with the EU Works Council Directive of December 1994. Its flexible approach to the consultation and information requirements specified in the Directive compares favorably with that of other EU member states.

Foreign-Trade Zones/Free Ports

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There are no foreign trade zones or free ports as such in Belgium. However, the country utilizes the concept of customs warehouses. A customs warehouse is a warehouse approved by the customs authorities where imported goods may be stored without payment of customs duties and VAT. Only non-EU goods can be placed under a customs warehouse regime. In principle, non-EU goods of any kind may be admitted, regardless of their nature, quantity, and country of origin or destination. Individuals and companies wishing to operate a customs warehouse must be established in the EU and obtain authorization from the customs authorities. Authorization may be obtained by filing a written request and by demonstrating an economic need for the warehouse.

Foreign Direct Investment Statistics

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TABLE 2: Key Macroeconomic data, U.S. FDI in host country/economy

	Host Country Statistical source*		USG or international statistical source		USG or international Source of data (Source of Data: BEA; IMF; Eurostat; UNCTAD, Other)
Economic Data	Year	Amount	Year	Amount	
Host Country Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ($ *Millions)*	2012	$484.6 billion	2012	$483.3 billion	http://www.worldbank.org/en/country
Foreign Direct Investment	Host Country Statistical source*		USG or international statistical source		USG or international Source of data: BEA; IMF; Eurostat; UNCTAD, Other
U.S. FDI in partner country ($*Millions, stock positions)*	2012	$35.3 billion	2012	$53.8 billion	Bureau of Economic Analysis
Host country's FDI in the United States ($ *Millions, stock positions)*	2012	$127 billion	2012	$88.7 billion	Bureau of Economic Analysis
Total inbound U.S. stock of FDI as % host GDP (***calculate)***	2012	7.3%	2012	11.1%	

* Host Country Source: National Bank of Belgium. The National Bank of Belgium looks at foreign direct investment from a national income account perspective. Belgium makes no distinction as to the nationality of the parent of investing companies, rather refers to the individual investing company's geographic location.

TABLE 3: Sources and Destination of FDI

Direct Investment from/in Counterpart Economy Data, Belgium 2012					
From Top Five Sources/To Top Five Destinations *($ Millions)*					
Inward Direct Investment (flow)			**Outward Direct Investment (flow)**		
Total Inward	499,076	100%	Total Outward	470,203	100%
Luxembourg	249,569	50%	Luxembourg	121,917	26%
France	146,978	29%	Netherlands	108,981	23%
Netherlands	102,520	21%	Ireland	47,217	10%
Brazil	30,535	6%	France	38,160	8%

Germany	14,241	3%	United States	33,749	7%
"0" reflects amounts rounded to +/- $500,000.					

Source: International Monetary Fund, http://cdis.imf.org

Comment: while Belgium's neighbors continue to be the main investors and recipients of Belgian FDI, the role of Luxembourg in these statistics is mainly related to its role as a financial center and tax haven, not because of its overall economic activities.

TABLE 4: Sources of Portfolio Investment

Portfolio Investment Assets, Belgium June 2013								
Top Five Partners ($ Millions)								
Total			**Equity Securities**			**Total Debt Securities**		
World	657,404	100%	World	237,388	100%	World	420,016	100%
Luxembourg	153,275	23%	Luxembourg	131,805	56%	France	91,440	22%
France	126,790	19%	France	35,351	15%	Netherlands	75,544	18%
Netherlands	82,463	13%	United States	15,569	7%	Italy	31,003	7%
Germany	42,490	6%	Germany	11,913	5%	Germany	30,577	7%
United States	36,957	6%	United Kingdom	7,393	3%	Ireland	29,142	7%

Source: International Monetary Fund, http://cpis.imf.org

Web Resources

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Foreign Investment Offices:
Invest in Wallonia www.investinwallonia.be/ofi-belgium/accueil.php
Flanders Investment & Trade (FIT): www.investinflanders.com
Brussels Enterprise Agency (BEA): www.abe-bao.be/mystart.aspx

Belgium Trade and Industry Associations:
The Belgium Foreign Trade Agency: http://www.abh-ace.be/en/
Union Wallonne des Entreprises (Wallonian Enterprise Association): www.uwe.be
AGORIA (The Multisector Federation for the Technology Industry): www.agoria.be
Federation of Enterprises in Belgium (FEB): www.vbo-feb.be
Belgium Bioindustries Association (BBA): www.bba-bio.be
Federation of Automotive Industry (FEBIAC): www.febiac.be
Essenscia - Belgian Federation for Chemistry and Life Sciences Industries: www.essenscia.be/EN/page.aspx/879
Federation Petroliere Belge: www.petrolfed.be
Federation of Textile Industry (Fedustria): www.febeltex.be

Export counseling:
The Ag Exporter Assistance: www.fas.usda.gov/agx/exporter_assistance.asp
Foreign Buyer Lists: www.fas.usda.gov/agx/buying/foreignbuyers.htm

Other resources:

American Chamber of Commerce Belgium: www.amcham.be
American Chamber of Commerce EU: www.amchameu.eu
Belgium Chambers of Commerce and Industry: www.cci.be/Default.aspx?lc=en
Brussels Chamber of Commerce: www.ccib.be
Visit USA Marketing and Promotion Bureau: www.visitusa.org

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Chapter 7: Trade and Project Financing

How Do I Get Paid (Methods of Payment)

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Belgian importers are relatively small and tend to press for the most lenient credit terms possible, since they have fewer sources of inexpensive capital. Belgian importers are also accustomed to being offered flexible payment terms, particularly from neighboring trading partners such as France, Germany, the Netherlands, the U.K., Switzerland, and, to a lesser extent, Italy. Extended payment terms of 30, 60, 90 and even 120 days are not unusual, though the most common payment term is 30 days. Belgian businesses however, like many European ones, routinely delay payment beyond the agreed upon terms. In Belgium, 43 % of all payments are not made by their anticipated due date, although 80 % of these are paid within the 30 days following the original deadline. In short, 91 % of all payments by Belgian businesses are made within 60 days. This is a better record than Italy's or the U.K.'s, and on par with France and the Netherlands.

Since the use of credit is widespread, offering more flexible credit terms can be an important factor in winning sales contracts in Belgium. U.S. firms should consider this option, provided they are able and willing to offer such terms, and have done a full credit check on the Belgian company. Even then however, it is advisable to try several shipments on a secured credit basis before moving to more lenient terms. There are several local credit reporting agencies available, including Dun & Bradstreet and Graydon.

Import duties and value added tax (VAT) are applied to the CIF (Cost Insurance Freight) value of goods. The rate of import duties is the same rate as applied by all EU countries. Since products coming from other EU member states enter Belgium duty free, U.S. products often start off with an average 5-6 % price disadvantage. By offering favorable credit terms, U.S. suppliers can help their importers offset a portion of that disadvantage.

How Does the Banking System Operate

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The Belgian banking system has long been known to be a sophisticated and liberal banking system. Standardized customer account numbers for all financial intermediaries are widely used, and internet and phone banking are well developed. There are no restrictions on the free movement of capital and regulatory requirements are minimal. There is a particularly wide and flexible range of loan products offered to companies, with no discrimination as to the nationality of the investor. There are also many options available when it comes to raising risk capital. Thanks to an efficient branch network, there is a large number of Belgian and foreign banks servicing the country. Due to the sheer volume of international business carried out in Belgium, more than half of all banking transactions are international financial transactions. The majority of Belgian banks also have an extensive international network based on strategically located branches in the main financial markets around the world. A number of the 106 banks located in Belgium feature prominently in the top 100 international banks. The combined assets of the three main banks (Fortis, ING and KB Group) amount to $370 billion.

All credit institutions (banks and savings banks) operate under the same legal framework and are monitored by the same supervisory authorities. The Banking, Finance and Insurance Commission (BFAC) supervises the activities of financial institutions, including banks, investment funds, stock brokers, finance companies and holding companies. As a result of the deregulation of the banking sector in 1993, credit institutions have been able to offer all financial services, as defined by European legislation. The BFAC supervises the financial sector in close coordination with the National Bank of Belgium (Belgium's central bank).

Domestic and foreign banks in Belgium are represented by the Belgian Bankers' Association (BBA). Since June 2003, the BBA has been part of the recently created professional organization that represents the whole Belgian financial sector (banks, investment funds, leasing companies, stock brokers, asset managers and companies offering credit to the household sector), called Febelfin.

The four main Belgian banks are ING, Dexia Bank, BNP Paribas-Fortis and KBC. A full range of financial services is offered, with special account facilities for non-Belgian nationals. Banking services are also available from the Post Office. Banking hours are normally 9.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

The main bankcard used in Belgium is the Mister Cash-Bancontact debit card, issued along with a PIN number upon opening a bank account in Belgium. In order to open an account, proof of identity, such as a passport, is required. The Bancontact card can be used to withdraw cash at ATMs, and to pay for almost anything in Belgium, from a newspaper, parking meter, gasoline, or a loaf of bread from the bakery. Credit options are also available on application. All bank ATMs in Belgium accept the Bancontact card; some accept MasterCard, Visa and other credit and debit cards. The major credit cards are generally accepted in stores, restaurants, and hotels.

Foreign-Exchange Controls Return to top

There are no foreign exchange limitations on the transfer of capital or profits in Belgium, except in exceptional situations (e.g., as with UN sanctions).

U.S. Banks and Local Correspondent Banks Return to top

Citibank has 208 branches in Belgium. The following banks have correspondent U.S. banking arrangements:

BNP Paribas Fortis Bank
Website: https://www.bnpparibasfortis.be/portal/start.asp

Fortis is an international financial services provider active in the fields of insurance, banking and investment, and ranks as one of the World's largest financial institutions. In its home market, the Benelux countries, Fortis occupies a leading position and offers a broad range of financial services to individuals, companies and the public sector.

The bank has offices in New York, Stanford, Dallas, and Boston.

As the deterioration in credit market conditions impacted the solvency of Fortis, the governments of Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands invested EUR 11.2 billion in the group in September 2008. Later, the French bank BNP Paribas announced the acquisition of Fortis, which would make it the largest holder of retail deposit in the 15-member euro area. This acquisition was negotiated with the Belgian authorities in order to prevent the bank from collapsing and triggering a breakdown in the financial system. Since May 12, 2009, Fortis bank has been controlled by BNP Paribas.

KBC
Website: http://www.kbc.be

KBC focuses on five key areas: retail and private bank insurance, corporate services, asset management, market activities, and Central Europe. The KBC Group also has a key position in Central Europe, its second home market. In Brussels, Flanders and the German-speaking area, the bank is active under the name KBC; in Wallonia it uses the name of its subsidiary, CBC.

The KBC Group also has branches in New York, Atlanta and Los Angeles.

ING
Website: http://www.ing.com

ING is the number one financial services company in the Benelux home market. It offers its clients in these markets a wide range of retail-banking, insurance and asset management services. In wholesale banking activities, ING operates worldwide, but maintains a primary focus on the Benelux countries. In the United States, ING is a top-5 provider of retirement services and life insurance.

ING's operations in the U.S. are based in Atlanta, but the bank has a network of approximately 10,000 associates in cities around the country such as Hartford, Minneapolis, Denver, Des Moines and Phoenix.

Dexia Bank / Belfius
Website: http://www.dexia.be

Dexia N.V./S.A., also referred to as the Dexia Group, is a Belgian-French financial institution active in public finance, providing retail and commercial banking services to individuals and SMEs, asset management, and insurance. The company has about 35,200 members of staff and core shareholders' equity of €19.2 billion as of December 2010, and provides governments and local public finance operators with banking and other financial services. In 2008, the bank received bailouts for €6 billion from the Belgian federal government, and it has become the first casualty of the 2011 European sovereign debt crisis. At the end of 2011, negotiations were taking place for its breakup.

2008 Crisis and Sovereign Debt Crisis

On 29 September 2008 Dexia came under pressure during the crisis in the banking sector. Other banks and financial institutions refused to provide further credit to Dexia because of potential losses at its U.S. subsidiary FSA and from a multi-billion loan to troubled German bank Depfa. The price of the Dexia share, having peaked above €20 in the previous years, but gradually fallen to around €10, dropped in one day to €6.62.

Dexia was quickly forced to apply for a bailout by the Belgian and French State, worth €6.4 billion of invested capital. Since Dexia had a New York banking office they were eligible for various bailouts from the US Federal Reserve. At its peak Dexia had borrowed $58.5 billion in total.

In February 2009 the bank announced net losses of 3.3 billion euros (approximately $4.2 billions) for 2008. The Dexia 2008 annual report mentions among others losses of €1.6 billion from selling FSA, €600 million on portfolios and €800 million on counterparties (including Lehman Brothers, Icelandic banks, and Washington Mutual)

In 2010 Dexia initiated a major reorganization and downsizing, some acquisitions were undone and by the middle of 2010 the State Guarantee was abandoned. In total Dexia will be downsized by one third by 2014.

Dexia posted a €4 billion loss for the second quarter of 2011, the biggest in its history, after writing down the value of its Greek debt. On 4 October its shares fell 22% to €1.01 in Brussels, cutting its market value to €1.96 billion. Discussions were taking place about a possible breakup, with a plan to place its "legacy" division into a bad bank with government guarantees.

In October 2011, it was announced that the Belgian banking arm will be purchased for €4 billion by the Belgian federal government. Parts of its French operations are likely to be purchased by Caisse des dépôts et consignations and La Banque Postale - the bank subsidiary of the French postal services. The remaining troubled assets, including a €95 billion bond portfolio would remain in a "bad bank" that would receive funding guarantees of up to €90 billion provided by the governments of Belgium (60.5%), France (36.5%) and Luxembourg (3%).

On March 1, 2012, Dexia Banque changed its name to Belfius

Project Financing Return to top

EU financial assistance programs provide a wide array of grants, loans, loan guarantees and co-financing for feasibility studies and projects in a number of key sectors (e.g., environmental, transportation, energy, telecommunications, tourism, public health). A number of centralized financing programs are also generating procurement and other opportunities directly with EU institutions.

The EU supports economic development projects within its member states, as well as EU-wide "economic integration" projects that cross both internal and external EU borders. In addition, the EU provides assistance to candidate and neighbor countries. The EU provides project financing through grants from the EU budget and loans from the European Investment Bank. Grants from the EU Structural and Investment Funds program are distributed through the member states' national and regional authorities. Projects in non-EU countries are managed through the Directorate-Generals Enlargement, Development and Cooperation (EuropeAid), Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO).

EU Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)

EU Structural Funds, including the European Regional Development Fund, were created in 1975 to assist economically depressed regions of the European Union that required industrial restructuring. For the period of 2014 – 2020, the EU has earmarked 352 billion euros for projects under the EU's cohesion policy. In addition to funding economic development projects proposed by member states or local authorities, EU Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) also support specialized projects promoting EU environmental and socioeconomic objectives. Member states negotiate regional and "sectoral" programs with EC officials. For information on approved programs that will result in future project proposals, please visit: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index_en.cfm

For projects financed through ESIF, member state regional authorities are the key decision-makers. They assess the needs of their country, investigate projects, evaluate bids, and award contracts. To become familiar with available financial support programs in the member states, it is advisable for would-be contractors to develop a sound understanding of the country's cohesion policy indicators.

Tenders issued by member states' public contracting authorities for projects supported by EU grants are subject to EU public procurement legislation. All ESIF projects are co-financed by national authorities and many may also qualify for a loan from the European Investment Bank and EU research funds under Horizon 2020, in addition to private sector contribution. For more information on these programs, please see the market research section on the website of the U.S. Mission to the EU:
http://export.gov/europeanunion/marketresearch/index.asp

The Cohesion Fund

The Cohesion Fund is another instrument of the EU's cohesion policy. Its 63 billion euro (2014-2020) budget will fund projects in two areas: Trans-European Network projects in transport infrastructure and environmental projects, including areas related to sustainable development and energy for projects with environmental benefits.

The fund will support projects in Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

These projects are, in principle, co-financed by national authorities, the European Investment Bank, and the private sector:
Key Link: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/thefunds/cohesion/index_en.cfm

Other EU Grants for Member States

Another set of sector-specific grants offer assistance to EU member states in the fields of science, technology, communications, energy, security, environmental protection, education, training and research. Tenders related to these grants are posted on the various websites of the directorates-generals of the European Commission. Conditions for participation are strict and participation is usually restricted to EU firms or tied to EU content. Information pertaining to each of these programs can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/grants/index_en.htm

External Assistance Grants
"Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid" is the Directorate–General (DG) responsible for implementing EU development policies through programs and projects across the world. Its website offers extensive information on the range of grant programs, the kind of projects that are eligible, as well as manuals to help interested parties understand the relevant contract law. However, participation in these calls for tender is reserved for enterprises located in the EU member states or in the beneficiary countries and requires that the products used to respond to these projects are manufactured in the EU or in the aid recipient country. Consultants of U.S. nationality employed by a European firm are allowed to participate. European subsidiaries of U.S. firms are eligible to participate in these calls for tender.
For more information: http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/index_en.htm

The EU also provides specific Pre-Accession financial assistance to the accession candidate countries that seek to join the EU through the "Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance" (IPA). Also, the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI) will provide assistance to countries that are the Southern Mediterranean and Eastern neighbors of the EU.

IPA II is the second EU program of support for political and economic reforms, preparing the beneficiaries for the rights and obligations that come with EU membership that are linked to the adoption of the *acquis communautaire* (the body of European Union law that must be adopted by candidate countries as a precondition to accession). These programs are intended to help build up the administrative and institutional capacities of these countries and to finance investments designed to aid them in complying with EU law. IPA II finances projects in: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey. The budget of IPA II for 2014-20 is 11.7 billion euros. For more information, see: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/instruments/overview/index_en.htm#ipa2

The European Neighborhood Policy program (ENPI) covers the EU's neighbors to the east and along the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean (i.e. Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, the occupied Palestinian territory, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine). The ENI budget is 15.4 billion euros for 2014-2020. Additional information can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/index_en.htm

Loans from the European Investment Bank
Headquartered in Luxembourg, the European Investment Bank (EIB) is the financing arm of the European Union. Since its creation in 1958, the EIB has been a key player in building Europe. As a non-profit banking institution, the EIB assesses reviews and monitors projects, and offers cost-competitive, long-term lending. Best known for its project financial and economic analysis, the EIB makes loans to both private and public

borrowers for projects supporting four key areas: innovation and skills, access to finance for smaller businesses, climate action, and strategic infrastructure.

While the EIB mostly funds projects within the EU, it lends outside the EU as well (e.g., in Southeastern Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Pacific and Caribbean states). In 2013, the EIB loaned 75 billion euros for projects, an increase of 37% over 2012. The EIB also plays a key role in supporting EU enlargement with loans used to finance improvements in infrastructure, research and industrial manufacturing to help those countries prepare for eventual EU membership.

The EIB presents attractive financing options for projects that contribute to the European objectives cited above, as EIB lending rates are lower than most other commercial rates. Projects financed by the EIB must contribute to the socioeconomic objectives set out by the EU, such as fostering the development of less favored regions, improving European transport and environment infrastructure, supporting the activities of SMEs, assisting urban renewal and the development of a low-carbon economy, and generally promoting growth and competitiveness in the EU. The EIB website displays lists of projects to be considered for approval. As such, the EIB website is a source of intelligence on upcoming tenders related to EIB-financed projects:
http://www.eib.org/projects/pipeline/index.htm

For more information, see our report on the EIB:
http://export.gov/europeanunion/marketresearch/index.asp

Web Resources

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EU websites:

The EU regional policies, the EU Structural and Cohesion Funds:
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index_en.htm

EU Grants and Loans index: http://ec.europa.eu/grants/index_en.htm

EuropeAid Co-operation Office: http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/index_en.htm

EU tenders Database: http://ted.europa.eu/TED/main/HomePage.do

The European Investment Bank: http://www.eib.org

EIB-financed projects: http://www.eib.org/projects/index.htm?lang=-en.

U.S. websites:

Market research section on the website of the U.S. Mission to the EU:
http://export.gov/mrktresearch/index.asp

Export-Import Bank of the United States: http://www.exim.gov

Country Limitation Schedule: http://www.exim.gov/tools/country/country_limits.html

OPIC: http://www.opic.gov

Trade and Development Agency: http://www.ustda.gov/

SBA's Office of International Trade
http://www.sba.gov/about-offices-content/1/2889

U.S. Agency for International Development: http://www.usaid.gov

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Chapter 8: Business Travel

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Business appointments are necessary and the person with whom you are meeting will generally decide the time. Avoid scheduling business trips to Belgium during July and August, the week before Easter, and the week between Christmas and New Year's, as they are prime vacation times. It is expected to arrive on time to an appointment, as arriving late may create the impression of unreliability. Meetings are generally formal but first appointments are more social than business oriented, since Belgians prefer to do business with people they know. It is best not to remove your jacket during a meeting.

Business cards are exchanged without formal ritual and it is recommended to have one side translated into Dutch or French (depending on the area of the country where you are doing business). If you have meetings in both the Flemish-speaking and Francophone areas, it is beneficial to have two sets of business cards printed, and to be careful to use the appropriate ones. It is important to use the appropriate language and to avoid speaking French to a Fleming and vice versa. English is generally widely spoken within the business community.

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SAFETY AND SECURITY: Belgium remains largely free of terrorist incidents. Belgian law enforcement and security officials, in close cooperation with neighboring countries, maintain a solid anti-terrorism effort and a peaceful environment for tourists and business. However, like other countries that are members of the Schengen Agreement of free cross-border movement, Belgium's open borders with its European neighbors allow the possibility for terrorist groups to enter/exit the country with anonymity.
Prior police approval is required for public demonstrations in Belgium, and police oversight is routinely provided to ensure adequate security for participants and passers-by. Nonetheless, situations may develop that could pose a threat to public safety. U.S. citizens are advised to avoid areas where public demonstrations are taking place.

CRIME: Belgium remains relatively free of violent crime, but low-level street crime is common. Visitors should always be watchful and aware of their surroundings, however, because muggings, purse snatchings, and pick pocketing occur frequently, particularly in the major cities. Transportation hubs, like the Metro (subway) and train stations, are also frequented by thieves, who take advantage of disoriented travelers carrying luggage. In Brussels, pick-pocketing, purse snatching, and theft of light luggage and laptops are very common at the three major train stations -- the North Station (Noordstation or Gare du Nord), the Central Station (Centraal Station or Gare Central) and especially at the South Station (Zuidstation or Gare du Midi). The latter is a primary international train hub, and travelers are advised to pay very close attention to their personal belongings when in the station. Common ploys are to distract the victim by spraying shaving cream or another substance on his or her back or asking for directions while an accomplice steals the luggage. It is a good idea to remain in physical contact with hand luggage at all times, and not to place carry-on luggage on overhead racks in trains.

Another growing problem, especially in Brussels, is theft from vehicles, both moving and parked. Do not leave valuables in plain sight where a thief may spot them. Thieves will sometimes position themselves at stop lights to scan for valuables in stopped cars. If they see a purse or other valuable item they break the window and steal the item while the victim is stunned. Expensive car stereos and GPS navigational devices are often stolen from parked cars. Always drive with windows up and doors locked. Travelers to Brussels should be aware that small groups of young men sometimes prey on unwary tourists, usually at night and often in Metro stations. Items such as expensive mobile phones and MP3 players are often the target. Travelers should carry only a minimum amount of cash, credit cards, and personal identification. Wearing expensive jewelry and watches is discouraged.

Americans living and traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department of State's internet web site at http://travel.state.gov, where the current Worldwide Caution Public Announcement, and the Belgium Consular Information Sheet http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1044.html can be found. Up-to-date information on security can also be obtained by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll free in the U.S. and Canada, or, for callers outside the U.S. and Canada, a regular toll line at 1-202-501-4444. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays).

Visa Requirements

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American citizens do not need a visa when they travel to Belgium for business or for personal travel. Their stay in the Schengen area should not exceed 90 days within a six month period. The American visitor will need to present a valid American passport (that does not expire before the end of the visit), proof of sufficient funds, and a return airline ticket.

The Schengen visa is valid for the following 24 European countries: Austria, Belgium, The Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. A Schengen visa issued by an

Embassy or Consulate of the above countries allows the holder to travel freely in all of these countries.

Visas issued on or before December 20, 2007 by the new Schengen States (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, The Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Malta) are only valid for these nine new Schengen countries, not for the whole Schengen area.

A citizen of the United States of America who intends to reside in Belgium for a period longer than 90 days, or for a succession of periods totaling more than 90 days per six month period, must first obtain a temporary residency visa.

When the applicant seeks to engage in a professional activity on an independent basis, the required residency visa can only be issued upon the presentation of a professional card and supporting documents.

The professional card is applied for through the Embassy or Consulate General and must be approved **before** the Embassy can issue a visa.

When the applicant seeks to engage in a professional activity on a salaried basis (employee status), the required residency visa can only be issued upon the presentation of a work permit and supporting documents.

The work permit is applied for and must be obtained by the employer in Belgium at the appropriate regional government office before the prospective employee enters Belgium.

The employer mails the work permit to the employee who can then contact the appropriate consular office in the jurisdiction which the employee resides. The employee must request his/her visa at least three weeks prior to his/her intended departure date. The normal processing time for this type of visa is one week. See http://www.diplobel.us/TravelingBelgium/Visas/IndependentProfessionals.asp for more information on application procedures for the professional card and temporary residence visa.

U.S. Companies that require travel of foreign businesspersons to the United States should be advised that security evaluations are handled via an interagency process. Visa applicants should go to the following links.

State Department Visa Website: http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english.html

http://belgium.usembassy.gov/service.html

Telecommunications Return to top

There are several telephone companies in Belgium. In order to be connected to the landline network, an initial subscription must be taken with one of the landline operators: Belgacom, Telenet, Belgian Telecom, Toledo Telecom, Mondial Telecom. The latter companies offer telephone and Internet services for private individuals as well as small companies and medium to large entities.

There are three major service providers for mobile telephones in Belgium: Base SA, Mobistar NV, and Proximus. Each company offers a range of services and packages, and it is recommended to compare tariffs and conditions carefully before entering into a contract. International roaming (which allows a phone on a Belgian contract to work outside the country) is available but must be requested and may cost extra. In order to obtain a mobile phone contract, visit a shop and provide the following:

- ID (passport or identity card)
- Proof of address (a utility bill, property rental contract or bank statement)
- Bank account IBAN number

The alternative to a permanent contract at a fixed monthly rate is a rechargeable/pay as you go card, where the prepaid card must be regularly reloaded with additional credit.

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Road and Rail Networks

Belgium has a highly developed road network. High-capacity motorways (freeways) are located around Brussels and cut across the country, such as the Wallonia motorway. A network of expressways supports the motorways.

Most of the motorways are part of other European routes. They facilitate access to neighboring countries and make it possible to travel easily from one town to another or across a region.

The Belgian rail network was the first to be built on continental Europe and is the densest in the world. However, the density is not uniform throughout the country, due to the recent trend of eliminating unprofitable lines.

There are five high-speed train services currently operating in Belgium: Thalys, Eurostar, InterCityExpress (ICE), TGV and Fyra. These high-speed lines support speeds up to 300 km/h (190 mph) and allow fast and easy transit to London, Paris, Amsterdam and other major cities in neighboring countries.

For more information see Belgian Railways (SNCB/NMBS) http://www.b-rail.be/main/E/

Inland waterways

Inland waterways form a relatively evenly dispersed network. The network depends on two large rivers: the Meuse and the Scheldt, and a network of canals. Inland waterways as a means of transportation for goods is becoming more and more popular due to the high cost of traditional road transportation.

One national airport and four regional airports

Belgium has one international airport (Brussels Airport) and four regional airports (Antwerp-Deurne, Charleroi, Liège and Ostend-Middelkerke).

The Brussels Airport is currently enhancing its relations with many different regions around the world. It also features a fair balance between scheduled flights and charter flights.

Brussels Airport is sometimes backed up by the regional airports, which provide extra support. Each of these airports specializes in certain niche markets.

Antwerp-Deurne: small airlines, business flights and freight.

Charleroi: industrial airport (aeronautics industry), low-cost carriers, business flights, and some scheduled services and cargo.

Liège: large air freight, tourist flights, and some scheduled services.

Ostend-Middelkerke: air freight (especially with Africa), scheduled services and tourist flights.

For more information see: Brussels International Airport http://www.brusselsairport.be

As in other countries, each industry/product uses its own mode of transport. For mass retail and merchandise, road networks are utilized for short distances (foodstuffs, etc.). For construction materials, oil and chemicals, inland waterways are typically used. Most energy and steel products are transported via the rail networks.

Language Return to top

Belgium has three national languages: Dutch (also referred to as Flemish), French, and German. The divisions are as follows: Dutch (official) 58%, French (official) 41%, and German (official) less than 1 %.

English is spoken and understood throughout most of Belgium. In Flanders, the northern region of Belgium, Dutch is the predominant language while in Wallonia, the southern region, most people speak French. Residents in a small section of Belgium near Germany speak German as their primary language. Brussels, the center region, is officially bilingual, speaking both Dutch and French.

As in any other country, language is a crucial part of doing business in Belgium. Many documents must be filed in at least one of the three national languages. It would benefit companies to have personnel who speak one of the languages, or to seek the help of a professional translator.

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MEDICAL FACILITIES AND HEALTH INFORMATION: Good medical facilities are widely available in Belgium. The large university hospitals can handle almost every medical problem. Hospitals in Brussels and Flemish-speaking Flanders will probably have English-speaking staff. Hospitals in French-speaking Wallonia may not have staff members who are fluent in English, however. The Embassy Consular Section maintains a list of English-speaking doctors, which can be found on the Embassy web site at http://brussels.usembassy.gov/medical_facilities.html

Information on vaccinations and other health precautions, such as safe food and water precautions and insect bite protection, may be obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747) or via the CDC's web site at http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/default.aspx. For information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad consult the World Health

Organization's (WHO) web site at http://www.who.int/en. Further health information for travelers is available at http://www.who.int/ith.

MEDICAL INSURANCE: The Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and whether it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. Please see our information on medical insurance overseas.

Local Time, Business Hours, and Holidays Return to top

Belgium is six hours ahead of Eastern Time in the United States (Greenwich Mean Time [GMT] + 01:00 Standard Time).

Business Hours:
8.30 am to 5.30 pm - Offices (Monday to Friday with 30-60 minutes for lunch)
9.00 am to 3.30 pm - 5.00 pm - Banks (Monday to Friday)
9.00 am to 6.00 pm - Shops (Monday to Saturday and until 9.00 pm on Fridays)

Typical hours for museums are 10.00 am to 5.00 pm, six days a week, and are closed on either Monday or Tuesday. Belgians usually have lunch between 1.00 pm and 3.00 pm and dinner, their main meal, between 7.00 pm and 10.00 pm, with peak traffic around 9.00 pm. Some stores close from noon to 2.00 pm, but stay open until 8.00 pm to compensate. In many towns, stores will stay open until 9.00 pm one evening a week, normally Fridays.

2014 Holidays:

January 1	New Year's Day
April 18	Good Friday
April 20	Easter
April 21	Easter Monday
May 1	Labor Day
May 29	Ascension Day
June 8	Whit Monday
July 21	National Day
August 15	Assumption Day
November 1	All Saints Day
November 11	Armistice Day
December 25	Christmas

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Legislation exists that exempts goods from import duties and VAT, if they are brought into Belgium for re-export. Such goods must be kept in a bonded warehouse until they are re-exported. The shipment does not have to be re-exported in total; the portion of the shipment destined for the local or EU market is liable for duties and VAT at the time when the importation takes place. Additionally, goods may be sorted, repacked and relabeled in bonded warehouses. Many customs clearing agents in the main ports and airports are able to provide these services in bonded warehouses.

For temporary entry of goods, Belgium accepts an ATA Carnet. An ATA Carnet is an international customs document that simplifies customs procedures for the temporary importation of commercial samples, professional equipment, and goods for exhibitions and fairs.

Personal belongings are acceptable for transport to Belgium and can be processed with customs approval with exemption from duty and taxes. A Commercial Invoice is required for all shipments seeking this type preference from customs. In order to ensure that the goods are properly identified and processed as Personal Effects, the shipper should mark both the Bill of Lading / Air Waybill and Commercial Invoice with this wording: *"USED PERSONAL BELONGINGS"*.

Shipments of personal effects that are received without the proper documents and descriptions will be subject to normal entry, and documentation requirements and delays may result in the clearance. Shippers are cautioned to submit only qualified personal effects (used personal goods having been in the owner's possession for a period of at least one year) and **not** to include articles (new clothing, souvenirs, etc.) that do not qualify.
See http://www.fedex.com/us/international/irc/profiles/irc_be_profile.html?gtmcc=us for further information on document requirements.

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www.VisitBelgium.com

http://www.diplobel.us/

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Chapter 9: Contacts, Market Research and Trade Events

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- General Consumer Goods
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- Environmental Technologies
- Oil and Gas
- Energy & Renewable Energy
- Green Building
- Books, Media, Paper and Allied products

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- Franchising

- Security and Safety Equipment
- Services
- Automotive
- Industrial Equipment

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To view market research reports produced by the U.S. Commercial Service please go to the following website: http://www.export.gov/mrktresearch/index.asp and click on Country and Industry Market Reports.

Please note that these reports are only available to U.S. citizens and U.S. companies. Registration to the site is required, and is free.

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Please click on the link below for information on upcoming trade events.

http://www.export.gov/tradeevents/index.asp

http://export.gov/belgium/tradeevents/index.asp

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Chapter 10: Guide to Our Services

The President's National Export Initiative aims to double exports over five years by marshaling Federal agencies to **prepare U.S. companies to export successfully**, **connect them with trade opportunities** and **support them once they do have exporting opportunities**.

The U.S. Commercial Service offers customized solutions to help U.S. exporters, particularly small and medium sized businesses, successfully expand exports to new markets. Our global network of trade specialists will work one-on-one with you through every step of the exporting process, helping you to:

- Target the best markets with our world-class research
- Promote your products and services to qualified buyers
- Meet the best distributors and agents for your products and services
- Overcome potential challenges or trade barriers
- Gain access to the full range of U.S. government trade promotion agencies and their services, including export training and potential trade financing sources

To learn more about the Federal Government's trade promotion resources for new and experienced exporters, please click on the following link: www.export.gov

For more information on the services the U.S. Commercial Service offers to U.S. exporters, please click on the following link: (Insert link to Products and Services section of local buyusa.gov website here.)

U.S. exporters seeking general export information/assistance or country-specific commercial information can also contact the **U.S. Department of Commerce's Trade Information Center** at **(800) USA-TRAD(E).**

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