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Aron

Setting The Context Across Belgium's Labour Market

A. Overview.

- Economic situation in Belgium

Normally Belgium has been a country that has attracted a lot of foreign investment. Both in absolute terms, as in a share of GDP, the Belgian-Luxembourg Economic Union has for a long time been among the 10 most popular countries to invest in for an international investor. Even when Luxembourg is excluded from the data, this remains the case. The reasons for this popularity are manifold. The Economist Intelligence Unit gives a list of possible determinants of foreign investment: the size of the host-country market, expected growth, input costs, geography, natural resources and the policy framework (EIU, World Investment Prospects, 2001).

And now, according to the negative export number, we can derive that the Belgian economy is suffering from the delayed world trade. Also other uncertainties (world politics, financial world) have an effect on the different economic variables, we can see it in the small consumption figures and the negative figures in investments.

In the beginning the consumer trust increased a little bit but later on it descended again because the labour market is rather unfavourable, the unemployment increases and the bankruptcies are piling.

For the second time the Belgian economy made in 2002 a very small growth. The National Bank is expecting a small growth for the year 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Growth in percentage</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. VOLUME OF GDP</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private consumption expenditure</td>
<td>3,3</td>
<td>1,0</td>
<td>0,6</td>
<td>1,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public consumption expenditure</td>
<td>2,4</td>
<td>2,1</td>
<td>1,6</td>
<td>2,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total gross fixed capital formation of which:</td>
<td>3,2</td>
<td>0,5</td>
<td>-2,4</td>
<td>-0,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- business</td>
<td>4,2</td>
<td>2,9</td>
<td>-4,0</td>
<td>-1,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- housing</td>
<td>0,8</td>
<td>-2,0</td>
<td>-2,9</td>
<td>1,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- public</td>
<td>1,9</td>
<td>-11,8</td>
<td>14,4</td>
<td>1,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic demand</td>
<td>3,3</td>
<td>0,5</td>
<td>1,1</td>
<td>1,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exports of goods and services</td>
<td>8,5</td>
<td>1,2</td>
<td>-0,1</td>
<td>1,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imports of goods and services</td>
<td>8,3</td>
<td>0,8</td>
<td>-0,1</td>
<td>1,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>3,7</td>
<td>0,8</td>
<td>0,7</td>
<td>1,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. PRICES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer price index</td>
<td>2,7</td>
<td>2,4</td>
<td>1,6</td>
<td>1,2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Labour market evolution and development. Reforms

According to our definition of competitiveness at a country level, the ultimate goal of economic policy is growth in well being. Among others, it includes high standards of living and high rates of employment. In reference to the latter the
situation in Belgium as well as in the European Union is not satisfying. But, although the employment rate is very low in Belgium, the total volume of employment in 1998 is one of the highest ever known. Moreover, the growth of the employment rate between 1990 and 1998 was larger than that of our main trading partners (with exception of the Netherlands) and the European average. However there is still a gap between the Belgian and the European employment rate. On the one hand, this can partly be explained by the relative low participation of women at the labour market. On the other hand, the employment rate for older people (age category 55-64) is very low in Belgium, which is mainly due to early retirement.

Despite a high level of unemployment, some enterprises or sectors in Belgium and in particular in the Flemish community have serious problems in finding appropriate personnel. This is mainly the result of a gap between the low level of education of the job seekers and the quality requirements that the employer wants. So, some groups, especially women with a lower educational attainment, are faced with difficulties in finding a job even when they are available. This is particularly true for Belgium that has a very high long-term unemployment rate. The level of public expenditures in active labour market programmes can help people into employment. Although Belgium has already a relative high level of labour market expenditures for passive as well as active measures, it is important to re-focusing them towards more active measures in stead of passive measures.

Although the proportion of people in the total employment who work part-time increased during the nineties, it remains primarily a female employment form. The low proportion of part-time work in Belgium is due to the low rate of part-time work among men, contrary to the Belgian women who works more part-time than the average European woman.

The labour productivity measured as GDP per man-hour is high in Belgium. But the average hourly compensation cost for a Belgian manufacturing production worker is also high in comparison with the other countries under review.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>employed / people between 15 and 64</td>
<td>60,9</td>
<td>58,1</td>
<td>57,2</td>
<td>57,4</td>
<td>58,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unemployed / total labour force</td>
<td>1,9</td>
<td>7,9</td>
<td>8,7</td>
<td>11,6</td>
<td>10,9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Unemployment, employment and participation rates in Belgium  

In Belgium there is a difference between people who are entitled to benefit welfare and the total amount of people who are not-working job-seekers. The last group include also the young people in waiting period (after school your waiting period of 9 months starts in which you won’t get welfare) and others (i.e. persons who got ruled out because of some reason).
The number of people who are entitled to benefit from welfare was 435,437 in July 2003.
In comparison with 12 months ago this number increased with 42,443 or 10,8%.
- Flanders: 22,705 people (of + 15,4%)
- The Walloon 13,236 (of + 7%)
- Brussels 6,502 (of +11,7%).

The total amount of not-working job-seekers is 569,323 (of whom 232,571 in Flanders, 253,525 in The Walloon en 83,227 in Brussels), this amount has increased with 10,2% since July 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>30th of June 1999 (in %)</th>
<th>Brussels</th>
<th>Flanders</th>
<th>Walloon</th>
<th>Belgium</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>employed / people between 15 - 64</td>
<td>53,0</td>
<td>60,6</td>
<td>54,7</td>
<td>58,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unemployed / total labour force</td>
<td>17,7</td>
<td>6,9</td>
<td>16,2</td>
<td>10,9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Unemployed rates: July 2003:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flanders</td>
<td>7,5%</td>
<td>11,2%</td>
<td>9,1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walloon</td>
<td>14,6%</td>
<td>22,2%</td>
<td>18,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brussels</td>
<td>20,4%</td>
<td>20,9%</td>
<td>20,7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Gender gaps**
  (source: June 2003, National Institute of Statistics, [www.statbel.fgov.be](http://www.statbel.fgov.be))

In Belgium women are higher educated than men, but their wages and employment rate is lower. Women also work more often part-time and are also less self-employed. In the rest of the EU there are more men (23%) who have higher education than women (21%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Higher education</th>
<th>Employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>51,1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>68,1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is also still a gap between men and women concerning the wages. A woman earns 89% of what a man would earn in the same position and with the same education. It's better than the EU average of 84%.

Unemployment rates for the month of July 2003:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>9,7%</td>
<td>10,9%</td>
<td>14,4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15,7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11,7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to a study (April 2003) of the “Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training (VDAB)” the number of male job-seekers increased the last 3 years with 22%, while the number of female job-seekers increased with only 2%.
The most important explanations given are:
  - more men work in cyclically sensitive sectors (IT, telecom, …)
  - women are higher educated

The same study concludes also that:
  - more women go out working, but are often working in part-time jobs (41% - men 5%)
  - men and women still keep working in the typical male and female sectors and jobs
  - more men have an executive positions
  - lower educated women have more difficulties finding a job than lower educated men
  - higher educated men have more difficulties finding a job than higher educated women
B. Skills development and lifelong learning.

Education and training are now recognised as a driving force of productivity and economic growth and a way for tackling the employment problem.

The output of education in terms of the number of qualified people is very good in Belgium. The percentage of people with a higher secondary education level and those with a tertiary education degree are both relatively high in comparison with the other European member countries. Moreover, the quality of education in science and mathematics seems also to be good since the Belgian 13-year old pupils have relative good scores on the science and especially on the mathematics performance tests.

- Lifelong learning policies.

*Remark: Education is in Belgium a regional matter and so the Flemish government is responsible for this policy.*

Lifelong learning is one of the top priorities set by the European employment guidelines. The Flemish authorities, too, acknowledge that lifelong learning is a precondition for the effective employability of employees and jobseekers and for horizontal and vertical mobility on the labour market.

The Flemish Government and social partners have made a commitment to increase the number of people aged between 25 and 64 in continuous training from 7.1% in 2001 (EU average 8%) to at least 10% in 2010.

A key lifelong learning policy target involves guaranteeing an appropriate starting qualification via initial education. This is of key importance for ensuring a smooth transition from school to the workplace. Consequently, a key aim is to reduce the number of young people leaving secondary school without proper qualifications.

Under the heading of the ‘Vilvoorde Pact’, the Flemish Government and the social partners are committed to halving the number of early school-leavers by 2010. The Flemish Education and Training Minister has adopted the mid-term target of reducing the number of early school-leavers by 20% by late 2004. Various measures have been adopted with a view to achieving this target: A modular system has been adopted for technical and vocational education dividing the knowledge and skills to be acquired into smaller modules, which are evaluated separately. This ensures that even early school-leavers receive some kind of qualification. As part certificates may represent an important experience of success for young people, the modular system can help prevent students losing interest in school.

The number of unqualified secondary school-leavers may also be reduced by work-and-study schemes. Such initiatives allow students to combine part-time education with in-company training, thus making for a smoother transition from school to work.
Education and training requirements are not limited to initial education. Businesses, too, are encouraged to invest in human resources. The Flemish system of training vouchers offers companies financial support for the costs (generally 50%) of employees undertaking training courses offered by recognised training providers. Further efforts and additional funding have helped ensure that the European benchmark of one computer for every 10 secondary school students in Flanders will be achieved in 2003.

Some examples:

a. Paid Educational Leave (BEV)
(*is a matter of the FPS Employment, on national level*)

The paid educational leave aims at the social promotion of employees in the private sector. They can get extra hours of leave for trainings spend during their free time or lessons followed during working times. This leave will be paid by the employer together with the normal fee. The employer can get a reimbursement from a special established fund.

The main target is to increase the global degree of development of the working population. This system can also play an important role in the integration of migrants and social discriminated sections of the population.

b. Training Cheques – employer / employee
(*is a matter of the Flemish Education Department*)

There are two types of training cheques:

For companies with the registered office in Flanders
Each cheque has a value of 30 euro. The company pays 50% of the cost and the Flemish government the other 50%. A company can only buy a maximum of 200 cheques each year with a limited validity of 12 months. You can only use the cheques for education with official certified training centres.

Conditions:
• The registered office of the company must be in Flanders.
• The company must be active in an acceptable sector
• The company cannot be a non-profitable organisation

For employees living in Flanders or Brussels
The employee pays 50% of the costs and the government the other 50%. An employee can only buy cheques until a maximum of 250 euro per year. He/she can only use the cheques for education with official certified training centres.

• Vocational training.

The Belgian Constitution provides that everyone has a right to education, with respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms. With a view to secure this right to all children, education is compulsory.
Compulsory education starts on 1 September of the year in which a child reaches the age of 6, and lasts 12 full school years. From the age of 15 (in some cases 16), young people can opt for part-time education and part-time work to comply with compulsory education in this way. Compulsory education finishes at the end of the school year of the year in which the pupil reaches the age of 18 or when he/she has gained the certificate of secondary education (irrespective of age).

However, compulsory education does not mean compulsory schooling. This means that children do not have to go to school to learn, they can also be educated at home.

Until he’s 12 years old a child goes to the elementary school, followed by the secondary school. In which they can choose out of some branches:
- general
- technical
- vocational
- art

After they reached the age of 18 they can choose in which direction they want to go:
- short-term high school (3 years: graduate degree)
- long-term high school (4 years, ex. engineering)
- university (at least 5 years)
- work
- some vocational training out of the regular education system

There are two important players in the market of vocational trainings: the Government and the Joint committees.
The Government has their own employment and training service which operates more or less independent. It’s organised per region: Flemish (VDAB), Brussels (BGDA), Walloon (FOREM).

The other one (the training funds of) the Joint Committees most of the time subcontract a training centre and pay them to train unemployed or employed (only the one out of their own joint committee) people.

Vocational trainings ~ VDAB/BGDA/FOREM

Those have a wide range of vocational trainings and other related to unemployed people. The offer includes among other things basic calculating and language skills, coping with stress and assertiveness training. But also long term trainings, for example from 0 to bicycle repairer. They also organise various trainings for employees and workers. The employee and the employer can take the initiative to start a course or training.

Vocational trainings ~ Training Funds of the Joint Committees.

First the Joint Committees or their Training funds make studies or contact their affiliates if their are certain needs in the sector.
A couple of years there weren’t enough educated ICT professionals. So Cevora, the training fund of the joint committee ANPCB (represents the most companies in Belgium) contracted some training centres all over Belgium. And gave them the assignment to organise IT trainings (web design, networking, programming, support, …) for unemployed people. Free of charge for the unemployed and Cevora paid the training centres. All the members of the joint committees pay every year a contribution for all services related to their sector. So the companies pay indirectly these (and other) trainings.

- **Continuous training at the work place.**

**Joint committees**
The procedure concerning the continuous training at the work place is more or less the same as the vocational training procedure. Again the joint committee (or the training fund) organise trainings for employees for the affiliated companies.
Trainings for new technologies (a new offset printing press), trainings on salesmanship for workers, new methodologies in the chemical industry are some examples.

VDAB/BGDA/FOREM
see above

**Syntra in Flanders**
Syntra used to be the training centre for self employed and SME’s. Someone who wanted to be a self employed painter could learn how to paint and how he has to do his total administration behind it (recruit someone, taxes, permits, …).
But Syntra also offers their trainings to everyone. For instance if I want to do the decoration of my house on my one, then I could follow lessons for one year at Syntra on how to decorate the kitchen, living area, the bathroom, etc.

**Trade Unions**
There are some small, local initiatives of NGOs who are related to trade unions. Most of the time their trainings are focussed on disadvantaged groups (women, low educated, immigrants, older unemployed people, …).
There are to many varieties to discuss in this report.

- **Skills development on ICT**

The use of the new information and communication technologies in education and training is necessary in order to move to a knowledge-based society.

And so all organisations, plans and systems above and below give priority to the new ICT developments.

In the French community of Belgium (no data available for the Flemish community), on average 23 pupils share one computer in lower secondary education. The European Commission proposes in its eLearning initiative a ratio
of 5-15 users per multimedia computer by 2004. In Belgium (French community) just a minority of schools (10th percentile) has a ratio of one computer for 10 students in 1998.


The outcome of these actions is that most schools largely fulfil the prerequisites of a full-fledged integration of ICT in schools. This vision paper wants to mark a new era. The authorities want to help schools convert into open learning centres and multimedia learning environments.

This vision paper starts from a new vision of learning and fits in with a broader innovative educational policy. The introduction of ICT is not an aim in itself. The principal aim is to provide high quality education for everyone. ICT can make a contribution to this.

The conclusion made in the paper is that the government policy aims at six key objectives:
- awareness-raising of the education sector;
- supporting teachers;
- providing the necessary basic infrastructure;
- introducing ICT literacy in the attainment targets and developmental objectives;
- stimulating schools to become open learning centres;
- ensuring that the (minimum) quality standards are respected.

This means a complete break with the policy of the past five years. Although permanent efforts to fulfil the preconditions (infrastructure, training, digital contents) have to be made, attention is shifting towards the learning environment itself. It is our firm conviction that only in this way a successful and valuable integration of ICT can be carried through.

- **Examples of good practice at national level**

a. Copernicus (Federal Government) reformation

A number of surveys and studies proved that civilians and civil servants have higher expectations from the Government as a service provider and as an employer. So the Government draw up the Copernicus plan to fulfil the needs of the civilians and the civil servants. One part of it is a renewed staffing policy, in which there is also place for training for the own employees. Those trainings are focused on the new ICT technologies and on customer friendliness.
b. Individual Vocational Training (Individuele BeroepsOpleiding)

Procedure:
An employer searches for a job-seeker who wants to do an IVT. If he/she finds someone than he/she has to contact the VDAB, BGDA or FOREM to make the contracts for this IVT. Together with the VDAB the employer fixes the programme and the duration of the IVT (1-6 months).

Benefits:
The employer only has to pay only the transfer costs, insurance and certain compensation, but no salary. And he gets also a premium of the VDAB. The employee gets training on the job and after the IVT a permanent employment. The employee gets his unemployment allowance plus a bonus.
C. Forms of employment and working times.

- **Information on permanent employment, temporary jobs and fixed-term employment.**


  91,2% of all employed people have a permanent job, 93,7% men and 88,0% women.
  44,5% of the fixed-term employees have a contract with a specific term or fixed-job, 17,5% are temporary employed (interim job), 10,1% has a contract with a local employment agency (see further: PWA-system). A small amount is combining a fixed-term job with an education. More than 13% is doing some other temporary work which isn’t specified.

- **Full time and part time employment.**

  (source: National Institute of Statistics, [www.statbel.fgov.be](http://www.statbel.fgov.be))

  In June 2003 the Institute found out that 37,7% of the employed women work part-time and only 5,9% of the employed men work part-time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>562,830</td>
<td>232,427</td>
<td>795,257</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Self employment.**

  The Flemish authorities support young companies in various ways and seek to streamline administrative procedures so as to provide more opportunities for the Flemish entrepreneurial spirit.

  Young companies can rely on the Flemish Guarantee Fund to supply them with risk capital. The ‘Matrix’ network for SMEs was set up in 2001 to encourage external business advice and networking between business advisers. Projects have been developed to stimulate the entrepreneurial spirit amongst young people in both secondary and higher education.

  The interaction of the Flemish authorities with businesses and citizens takes place via ‘one-stop-shops’. These offices offer assistance in all employment-related matters.

  The number of different offices is thus limited, while bundling the provision of services and making them more accessible.

- **Reconciliation between life and working time**
  In Belgium there are some good systems for employees who, at a certain time in their life, want to spend more time to live than to work.

**Parental leave:**
To spent more time with your growing children.
An employee can take parental leave in one of the following ways:
- complete interruption of maximum 3 months (which can be split per month)
- work half-time for maximum 6 months
- reduce the work time with 1/5th for maximum 15 months (which can be split per 3 months)

On condition that:
- his child is not older than 4 years or
- you adopt a child which is not older than 8 years or
- your child is disabled for 66% and younger than 8 years.

**Interrupt your career to...**
- take care of an elderly or a sick relative – complete interruption of maximum 12 months, work half-time or 4/5th for maximum 24 months.
- take care of a terminal patient (social, medical, administrative, psychological) for maximum 2 months per patient (complete interruption and reduction of working hours)

**Examples of good practice at national level.**

*Tijdskrediet/ “time credit”*
In 2001 the social partners in the National Labour Council (see further) concluded a new collective agreement (nr. 77). After a few adaptations following measures were agreed:

Employees:
- can quit working for at least 1 year, after which they can go back to work again
- reduce working hours and work half-time
- reduce working hours with 1/5th (example: instead of working 5 days, working 4 days)
- special measures for employees over 50

When an employee chooses one of these, he will also benefit from welfare. For example if he quits for one year he gets an allowance from the government up to a maximum of 500 euros per month.

**Local Employment Agency (Plaatselijk werkgelegenheidsagentschappen “PWA”)**

The aim of the local employment agencies is:
- To meet the needs of certain activities that are not produced in the normal labour market and which do not compete with it.
• To fulfil the demand of employment on behalf of the long-term unemployed people, persons with a subsistence level and some people entitled to financial social help, categories which have difficulties to find a place on the job market.

**Categories which can do activities in the framework of the PWA**

• Persons entitled to an allowance who are full unemployed since at least 2 years
• Persons over 45 years, entitled to an allowance who are full unemployed since at least 6 months
• Unemployed people who have had an allowance for at least 24 months in the time of 36 months preceding their registration with the PWA
• Persons in search of employment entitled to a subsistence level or financial social help
Activities:
• On request of private persons, non-profitable organisations, local authorities, non-commercial associations, educational institutes, agricultural companies and market gardens
• The activities have to be done on Belgian territory

The PWA employee can only work for a maximum of 45 hours each month and will be paid in cheques. The price of the cheques varies between € 4,96 and € 7,44. The long-term unemployed people receives a global monthly income that equals his/her full unemployment fee, increased with tax-free amount of € 3,72 for each performed hour. This means an extra of € 167,33 per month with 45 hours performed. The PWA is the employer and gives the employee an employment contract.
D. The role of social partners in shaping the labour market.

- Social Dialogue in Belgium

Belgium has an elaborated system of social dialogue at all levels (intertrade, sectorial and company) and in the different socio-economic fields (economic policy, social policy and occupational safety and health). Every two years, the social partners try to reach an intertrade agreement. In this agreement, measures about 'social progress' (wages, employment, training) are taken for active and non-active workers. The intertrade agreement is valid for the country's entire private sector. A system of control mechanisms and inspection, including labour courts, enables the effective implementation of agreements and regulatory systems. A similar consultation is also found in the public sector.

As a result of the state reform, regional consultative structures with a mainly advisory role have been set up. Consultations with the regional governments regularly take place on matters of their competence. These negotiations have already led to tripartite agreements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of consultation</th>
<th>Social matters</th>
<th>Economic matters</th>
<th>Preventive measures and protection at work (health and safety)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inter-trade and federal</td>
<td>National Labour Council (CNT)</td>
<td>Central Economic Council (CCE)</td>
<td>Higher Council for Preventive Measures and Protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sector</td>
<td>Joint Committees</td>
<td>Special Committees</td>
<td>Trade Committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company</td>
<td>Works councils</td>
<td>Works councils</td>
<td>Health and safety at work committees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The National Labour Council (CNT)**

The members' seats are equally divided between the most representative inter-occupational employers' and workers' organizations.

**ROLE OF THE NATIONAL LABOUR COUNCIL**

- to advise a Minister or the Houses of Parliament on its own initiative or at the request of these authorities, on general social issues concerning employers and workers;
- to issue opinion on jurisdictional disputes between joint committees.
- to conclude collective industrial agreements, which are binding on various branches of activity or all sectors of the economy. Moreover, a collective industrial agreement may be concluded in the National Labour Council for a branch of activity which is not within the competence of an
established joint committee or where an established joint committee does not function.

Beside these general duties, the Council carries out more specialized advisory tasks under social laws prescribing its preliminary consultation on all or part of the enforcement measures.

Such laws are for example those related to the following matters: work contracts, organization of the economy, collective industrial agreements and joint committees, protection of the remuneration, labour Act (working hours, Sunday rest, young people's work, women's work and protection of maternity), work rules, paid holidays, labour courts or tribunals, wage earners' social security and pensions, etc.

**Central Economic Council – CCE**

The aim of the CCE is to provide ministers or legislative chambers with opinions or proposals relating to national economic issues, in the form of a report expressing the different points of view within the organisation, either of its own accord or at the request of a minister or legislative chamber.

Areas covered by the CCE include employer/worker relations, the various aspects of the production/trade mechanism, and economic and social policy, from company to international level.

The CCE's remit is a purely consultative one. Its opinions are not binding: final decision-making power lies with the executive and legislative authorities. Moreover, consultation of the CCE is in principle optional: government and parliament are free to contact the social partners represented on the CCE. A certain number of legal provisions stipulate, however, that the CCE must give its opinion on certain subjects.

The CCE may set up special advisory committees for specific branches of economic activity. The remit of these committees is the same as that of the CCE, but limited to the specific branch concerned.

**Higher Council for Preventive Measures and Protection**

The Higher Councils tasks is to give advise, on own initiative or after a request, concerning measures on health and safety at the work place, psychosocial load caused by the labour, ergonomics, hygiene at work, ...

The Council is composed of an equal number of employers and trade unionists and also a number of experts.

**Joint committee**

Every company is affiliated to 1 of the 95 joint committees (= paritair comité). In these committees employers and trade unionists are equally represented.

The purpose is to group companies with related activities and to create special terms of employment for the specific sector.
Tasks of the joint committee:
- Make collective agreements
- Prevent or solve social conflicts
- Advise the Government, the National Labour Council and the Central Economic Council

**Members of the National Labour Council**

- **On workers' side:**
  
  *The Belgian General Federation of Labour (the Socialist F.G.T.B.-A.B.V.V.)*
  
  *The Belgian Confederation of Christian Unions (the Christian C.S.C.-A.C.V.)*
  
  *The Belgian Federation of Liberal Unions (the Liberal C.G.S.L.B.-A.C.L.V.B.)*
  
- **On employers' side:**
  
  *The Federation of Belgian Industries (F.E.B.-V.B.O.)*
  
  *The "Middle Classes" organizations (UNIZO.)*
  
  *The Agricultural organizations (U.P.A.-Boerenbond)*

**Members of the Central Economic Council**

- **On employers' side:**
  
  *The Federation of Belgian Industries (F.E.B.-V.B.O.)*
  
  *National Federation of the Chambers of Commerce and Industrie*
  
  *The "Middle Classes" organizations (U.C.M.-N.C.M.V.)*
  
  *The Agricultural organizations*

- **On workers' side:**
  
  *The Belgian General Federation of Labour (the Socialist F.G.T.B.-A.B.V.V.)*
  
  *The Belgian Confederation of Christian Unions (the Christian C.S.C.-A.C.V.)*
  
  *The Belgian Federation of Liberal Unions (the Liberal C.G.S.L.B.-A.C.L.V.B.)*

- **Other members:**
  
  Some Professors from different Belgian universities.
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Catholic trade union, www.acv-csc.be