Round Table

Canadian and Belgian Federalism

by Armand De Decker, Gérald A. Beaudoin and Francis Delpérée

There are very definitely differences between Belgium and Canada – their geographical area, to mention but one. There are also similarities. Both Canada and Belgium stand for the harmonious cohabitation of cultures, and both advocate a fair balance between common interests and separate interests. The following are abridged texts of presentations made at a conference during Canada-Belgium Week on October 20, 1999. Armand De Decker is Speaker of the Belgium Senate, Gérald A. Beaudoin is a member of the Senate of Canada, and Francis Delpérée is a professor at the University of Louvain and a corresponding member of the Académie royale de Belgique and of the Institut de France.

Armand De Decker: The question of how to define a federal state is one that has haunted legal experts for a very long time. What is it that separates a federal state from a unitary state, or from a regionalized state, or a confederation? In ethnological terms, the concept of *foedus* – the alliance, covenant or voluntary agreement – lies at the root of federalism. This alliance comprises a sort of social contract, in which not only spheres of influence and fields of jurisdiction, but also the rights of membership, are spelled out. Federalism amounts to practising the art of balance, reconciling respect for diversity with the goal of unity. On this point, it has been written that federalism is faithful to human nature – to the need to come together without losing one's uniqueness and identity.

The common denominator that may be inferred from the numerous definitions of the concept of federalism is this: federalism is the legal form that is expressed in centrifugal institutions. The usual federal practice involves trying to achieve unity by bringing together entities that were formerly sovereign. Belgian practice, on the other hand, involves trying to achieve sovereignty while preserving cohesion through solidarity, cooperation and the concept of federal loyalty.

Despite these two peculiar traits, Belgian federalism contains the essential elements of a federal system: the autonomy of the constituent elements, participation by those elements in federal decision-making, and cooperation – the principle of modern federalism.

Every federal system is in fact a construction *sui generis*. It is impossible to separate the federal structures from the geographic, economic, cultural, historical and even ideological factors that underlie those structures.

As Paul Martens, a judge on the Court of Arbitration wrote, analysing Belgian politics means, above all, measuring the quality of the compromises that it requires, knowing that a pluralist state – a state that is more concerned with promoting harmony than with legitimizing exclusions – necessarily loses in consistency what it gains in pacification.

The transformation of the Belgian state into a federal state resulted in a redefinition of the powers of Parliament. Since Belgium was created, it has had a bicameral system, the House of Representatives and the Senate having equal status. With the 1993 reform of the State, that system was radically reorganized. The two main threads of the reform were the transformation of the Senate into a chamber for "sober second thought" regarding legislative procedure and the representation of the federated entities in the Senate.

The House of Representatives is the political chamber. It alone holds political and budgetary power over the federal government, and enjoys the full range of powers of a State, thereby establishing a balanced relationship between the power of the central authority and the autonomy of the constituent entities.

As Belgium was organized by the framers of the Constitution in 1831, it did not meet that definition. It was a

decentralized unitary State. In addition to the organs of the central state, the institutional landscape contained only the provinces and communes, which were purely subordinate authorities. The unitary State could perpetuate itself only as long as the basic political and social structure remained relatively homogeneous. This was the case in 1831, but had become less so over the course of the second half of the twentieth century. Cultural and economic imperatives led to the creation of new authorities of a unique type: the communities and regions.

The adoption of the community structure was a response to a demand that had long been made by the Flemish movement, which has always worked toward genuine recognition of its unique language and culture. The regional structure, on the other hand, was historically the result of economic concerns on the part of the Walloons, who wanted autonomy in socio-economic matters.

Today, the communities and regions are autonomous legal entities which have both their own legislative and executive organs and what is in principle exclusive legislative authority in a large number of fields, as well as financial autonomy.

> ***In 25 years, Belgium has metamorphosed into a federal state. Its new identity is fully recognized in the new article I of the Constitution, which reads: "Belgium is a federal state composed of the communities and regions."***

However, the process by which Belgium became a federal State is an exception to usual federal practice. First, because of the bipolar structure of the state: despite the fact that Belgium is divided into four linguistic regions, three communities and three regions, the uniqueness of the Belgian system seems to lie in the coexistence of two major communities, the Dutch-speaking and French-speaking, within a single geographical unit. And second, because of legislative trends: the Senate has been assigned the role of a chamber for "sober second thought". In this scenario, the Senate's job is to ensure the quality of legislation, to inquire into broad questions of public interest and to evaluate the efficacy of legislation.

In addition, the Senate has a specific role to play in the balance to be maintained in our federal system. Twenty-one of the 71 senators are elected by the community councils from among their members. Through these senators, the communities can make their voices heard in the Senate when the Constitution and federal legislation regarding the status of the communities are reviewed. Senators from the communities may also participate in Senate debate with their federal colleagues and the federal government. This is source of the title by which the Senate is known: the "meeting place of the communities". As well, the Senate has the simultaneous mission of giving opinions in respect of conflicts of interest between the legislative assemblies, whether federal, community or regional. The Senate has appointed itself guardian of federal loyalty. All constituent elements of the federal State are bound to abide by federal loyalty in exercising their jurisdictions. It is therefore the task of the Senate to ensure that the broad conventions by which Belgium is governed are carried out in good faith.

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Senator Gérald A. Beaudoin: Canada is one of the oldest federations in existence, after the United States, which became a federal State, in 1787-89, and Switzerland, in 1848.

Canada followed their lead in 1867, after three constitutional conferences were held: the first in Charlottetown, the second in Quebec City in 1864, and the third in London in December 1866. The Quebec and London Resolutions led to the *British North America Act, 1867*, which was enacted on March 29, 1867 and came into force on July 1, 1867. An Act of the British Parliament serves as our Constitution. That Act has been amended on numerous occasions.

The *Constitution Act, 1982* patriated our Constitution, entrenched a *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and provided us with an amending formula; it also made some slight changes to the division of powers.

Section 52 of that Act affirms that the Constitution is the supreme law of Canada and that any law that is inconsistent with it is of no force or effect.

In 1867, Canada enjoyed extensive autonomy domestically, but was part of the British Empire. Between 1919 and 1931, Canada left the nest and gained its independence. In 1931, the *Statute of Westminster* confirmed Canada's political independence and its achievement of status in the community of nations.

There were two opposing schools of thought among the Fathers of the Canadian federation. John A. Macdonald, who was Prime Minister of Canada, wanted a legislative union, a unitary State, and made no secret of his feelings, while Georges Étienne Cartier, the leader of Quebec (Lower Canada), wanted a federal State because Quebec had had a civil code and was French-speaking and majority Catholic. The Maritime provinces also wanted a federation, for other reasons.

The Fathers reached agreement on a federation in which there would be three lists of powers: federal, provincial and concurrent. The federal government has jurisdiction in relation to the monetary system and banking, trade and commerce, bankruptcy, criminal law, marriage and divorce, the armed forces, etc.; the provincial governments have jurisdiction in relation to property and civil rights, municipalities, health, the administration of justice, education, etc.; and they have concurrent jurisdiction in relation to agriculture and immigration (federal legislation being preponderant), old age pensions and supplementary benefits (provincial legislation being preponderant), and the export of natural resources from one province to another (federal legislation being preponderant).

The federal government holds the residual power. Aeronautics, radio, atomic energy, offshore mining rights, the national capital, official languages and narcotics control have been brought within the residual power.

The courts have found the federal government to have an emergency power, which may be exercised in time of war and also in time of peace, for a major, crisis.

Each level of government is sovereign within its respective sphere. The Privy Council, the highest court at that time, decentralized the Constitution and made Canada into a balanced federal State. That court played a major role in our history, making 120 decisions regarding the division of powers. Today, Canada can be said to be a relatively decentralized federation.

The Constitution is composed of three elements: legislative rules, common law rules and constitutional conventions. There are few States or federations that have spent as much time and energy as Canada on balancing federalism. While the struggle for provincial autonomy began in the 19th century with Ontario, it took root in Quebec under Premier Mercier and the situation has remained unchanged since that time.

The Supreme Court took over from the Privy Council in 1949 and became the court of last resort for constitutional interpretation. Canadian federalism is a living thing, and Canadians take a lively interest in it. This, in my opinion, is the best possible solution for Canada, and a majority of Quebecers share that opinion.

The Supreme Court

Very careful attention is paid to reviewing the constitutionality of laws in Canada. The manner in which the Constitution is interpreted is just as important as how it is written. Legislation may be reviewed on constitutional grounds in relation both to the division of powers between the two levels of government in the federation, as has been the case since the very beginning, and now also, since 1982, in relation to the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, a charter entrenched in the Constitution which is binding on both levels of government.

The Supreme Court has done a huge amount of work in the last fifteen years in the area of rights and freedoms. It has delivered some 400 decisions in that field, and continues as well to rule on issues relating to the division of powers every year. It is our *de facto* constitutional court, even though it is a general court of appeal.

The heads of power enumerated in the Constitution are not all interpreted in the same manner. Some of them are construed liberally (property and civil rights) while others are construed more narrowly (trade and commerce).

The Supreme Court is a very powerful and independent court. It is composed of nine judges, three of whom are from Quebec. In a very real sense, they are constitutional judges.

In the history of our constitutional jurisprudence we find periods of centralization and periods of decentralization.

Constitutional Conferences

Constitutional conferences are held frequently in Canada, and contribute to the way in which our federalism evolves.

There have been fortunate developments in our federation, such as equalization payments, the right to "opt out" in certain cases, administrative arrangements and the implementation of treaties. We have a flexible federalism.

Because Quebec has a civil law system and the other provinces follow the common law, the courts have interpreted the federal jurisdiction over "trade and commerce" more narrowly, to protect Quebec's civil law, as they have in fact stated in their judgments.

Between 1867 and the present day there have been several hundred decisions by the Privy Council and the Supreme Court regarding the division of powers.

Canada is a type of federal State that is rich in resources and promise. It is multicultural, bilingual and bijural. In a number of respects, it is similar to Belgium, which has become a federal State. However, bilingualism in Canada is based not on geographical jurisdiction but on individual rights.

The theory of mutually exclusive powers is less rigid today than it was in the early decades of the federation.

The theory of subordinate legislation is regarded very cautiously in Canada; it tends to promote centralization.

A Word on the Canadian Senate

In 1867 it was decided that the Senate would be appointed, and not elected. The model for the Senate was the House of Lords, although the Canadian context was quite different from the British.

Senators are appointed by the Governor General. Pursuant to firmly settled constitutional convention and an Order in Council, Senators are chosen, and proposed to the Governor General, by the Prime Minister.

The Canadian Senate does not represent the provinces or the federated States as is the case in the United States, Australia and virtually all federal States.

Sir Georges Étienne Carter wanted and got parity in the Senate between Quebec and Ontario: 24 Senators for each of those two provinces. The principle of representation by population is applied in the House of Commons, but not in the Senate. The Senate represents the four major regions.

At present the Senate is composed of 105 Senators: Quebec has 24, Ontario 24, the four Western provinces 24, and Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island 24; Newfoundland, which joined the Canadian federation in 1949, was allotted six Senators. By a 1975 amendment, Yukon and the Northwest Territories were given one Senator each, and in 1999, Nunavut was given one Senator. Up until 1965, Senators were appointed for life. Senators appointed since 1965 hold office until they reach the age of 75.

The Amending Formula

There are five ways in which our Constitution may be amended: (1) the general formula (two thirds of the provinces representing at least 50 per cent of the population); (2) the unanimity formula; (3) the bilateral and multilateral formula; (4) the unilateral federal formula; (5) the unilateral provincial formula.

Under subsection 38(1) of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, the Constitution of Canada may be amended with the consent of two thirds of the provinces representing at least 50 per cent of the population of the provinces. That general formula, which is common called "2/3 and 50%" (or "7/50"), is residual in nature, in that it applies to any amendment other than those contemplated by the other sections.

Subsection 38(3) of the *Constitution Act, 1982* allows a province to exercise its right to opt out where a constitutional amendment would reduce its legislative powers, property rights or privileges. If it is opting out in respect of a provision relating to education or other cultural matters, section 40 of the *Constitution Act* provides for reasonable compensation to be provided.

Under subsection 42(2) of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, the right to opt out does not apply to the amendments contemplated by subsection 42(1).

The unanimity formula: Under section 41 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, there are five subject-matters that require unanimous consent:

- the office of the Queen, the Governor General and the Lieutenant Governor of a province;
- the right of a province to a number of members in the House of Commons not less than the number of Senators by which the province is entitled to be represented at the time this Part comes into force;
- subject to section 43, the use of the English or the French language;
- the composition of the Supreme Court of Canada; and
- an amendment to this Part.

The bilateral or multilateral formula: Section 43 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* authorizes amendments to provisions of the Constitution that affect only one or more provinces, but not all the provinces. The consent of the province to which the amendment applies is required.

Section 43 provides two examples.

However, it is understood that section 43 does not apply to amendments relating to the division of legislative powers, since that division, by definition, affects all provinces. The effect of this section is still difficult to determine. Nonetheless, having regard to the constitutional amendments relating to New Brunswick (rights of the two language communities) and Quebec (linguistic school boards), there is every reason to believe that this section may be used to "create" new provisions that apply to one or more, but not all, provinces; then, by the use of the word "including", section 43 suggests that the definition is not exhaustive, although it provides only two examples.

This means that there is a potential in section 43 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* that the federal and provincial authorities could use to their advantage, provided that there is the political will to make our federalism more flexible and decentralized.

The unilateral federal formula: Section 44 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* authorizes Parliament to make laws amending the Constitution in relation to the executive government of Canada or the Senate and House of Commons, subject to sections 41 (unanimity) and 42 (general formula). Section 44 reads as follows:

> 44. Subject to sections 41 and 42, Parliament may exclusively make laws amending the Constitution of

Canada in relation to the executive government of Canada or the Senate and House of Commons.

That section is a restatement of the former subsection 91(1) of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, which we examined earlier.

The unilateral provincial formula: Under section 45 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, the legislature of a province may make laws amending the constitution of the province, subject to section 41. Section 45 reads as follows:

Subject to section 41, the legislature of each province may exclusively make laws amending the constitution of the province.

Section 45 preserves the provinces' power to amend their internal constitutions, as was provided by subsection 92(1) of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, and as we saw earlier.

Conclusion

In closing, I would note that the Supreme Court has held that there is a "constitutional duty to negotiate" when a party introduces a resolution to amend the Constitution; the Court made this assertion in *Reference Re Secession of Quebec*. There is a duty to negotiate in respect of secession where a referendum produces a clear majority, in response to a clear question. However, the duty to negotiate also applies to other constitutional amendments.

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Francis Delpérée: Belgians and Canadians play the same national sport. No, it is not soccer, or hockey. It is constitutional roller derby. The difference is that from time to time Belgians score goals: that is, they actually change their Constitution. I would like to try to explain a few essential characteristics of Belgian federalism.

I am aware of the difficulty of this undertaking. I believe that we have to be careful of two particular traps that await us: the traps of words and of time. Words can entrap us. Belgians and Canadians often speak the same language, but we are talking about different institutions.

In Belgium, until recently, when we said that a movement or party was federalist, that meant that it was a proponent of autonomy, not to say sovereignty. In Canada, when you say that a party is federalist, the intention is, rather, to describe a party that Belgians would consider to be a proponent of centralized or unitary government.

Time can entrap us. The institutional changes that have occurred in Belgium did not all happen at once. The reform came about step by step, pragmatically and empirically.

It took place over a period of more than thirty years. No one says that the reform has been completed. And so it all depends on the point in time that we select for doing our analysis. For ease of presentation, I small limit my remarks to the present-day situation.

That being said, how does one describe Belgian federalism? It has two aspects. The first is more political, and it relates to the overall balancing mechanisms in the federal system. The second is more technical, and it relates to the methods used for allocating legislative jurisdiction, what in Canada is called the division of powers.

Balancing Mechanisms in the Federal System

The Belgian Constitution organizes the manner in which the legislative function is divided. In this area, it has moved away from the original unitary model – the model practised by Belgians for nearly a hundred and fifty years, from 1830 to 1970.

In Canada, there is no need to point out the meaning of the distinction between a unitary State and a federal State. In a unitary State, the law is "the same for everyone", in the words of the French *Déclaration* of 1789. In a federal State, there are different legislative bodies at work at the same time. Each one has a share of national sovereignty, and each one may make its own laws.

The recurring question is: "Who does what, who may do what, who has the power to do what?" Belgium is gradually but resolutely adopting this political philosophy, and so is taking the path of the division of powers.

Here, however, is where some clarification is required. Belgium, like thirty other States in the world, among them some very important ones, is engaged in federalism. But it is not engaged in the same federalism as everyone else. Quite simply, it is engaged in "Belgian-style" federalism. What does that mean? Briefly, four things.

- Essentially, the other federal States are engaged in associative federalism. The founding peoples come together, they meet, they associate to found a State. What we are doing is precisely the opposite. We are engaged in dissociative federalism. We are starting with a unitary State and deciding to divide up a significant portion of public powers among the communities and regions. This question always causes a little concern. Are there pitfalls along the way in this dissociation process? Is there not a risk that dissociation will lead to dislocation?

- The other federal States in the world are engaged in multipolar federalism. Fifty American states, twenty-six Swiss cantons, sixteen German Länder, ten provinces in Canada – not forgetting the territories. What we are engaged in is two-sided federalism, bipolar federalism. This is based on our north-south cleavage. I know that we have Brussels and we have

the German-speaking Community, which cannot be reduced to two blocs. But the institutional arrangements are organized around two major political communities – Flanders and Wallonia. And there is a constant risk of antagonism, confrontation and deadlock. I am not afraid of words. We are engaged in confrontational federalism, with all the conflicts that this kind of system may create in everyday institutional life.

- The other federal states are engaged in simple federalism. There is a federal level and there is a federated level. There is a clear rule governing the division of labour between the two levels: whatever is not federated is federal. Plainly, we are engaged in a more complicated federalism. There is a federal level, of course. But Belgium is unique in that there are two federated levels: there is a community level and a regional level. The two do not overlap perfectly. Thus we are engaged in "superimpositional" federalism. This is a major innovation, and it may appear both strange and complicated. But when it comes right down to it, it is not crazy. One federated political community will handle education, and another federated community will handle transportation. This illustrates a major concern in Belgian federalism. Let's solve problems one at a time, one after another. Let's build institutions in response to specific needs, and not according to an abstract political scheme. Plainly, this situation can also provoke major problems in terms of coordination at the federated level.

- The other federal States in the world are engaged in symmetrical federalism. In principle, the federated communities are put together in the same way, are assigned the same powers, and are given the same operating rules. In Belgium, this is not the case. We are engaged in asymmetrical federalism, to use an expression that is also heard in Canadian political discourse. We are engaged in a uniquely flexible federalism. This calls for a little explanation.

The Belgian Constitution starts with the words: "Belgium is a federal State which is composed of the communities and the regions." Articles 2 and 3 go on to provide that there are three communities – French, Flemish and German-speaking, and that there are also three regions – the Walloon, Flemish and Brussels regions.

The format is extremely simple, not to say simplistic. The reality is a little more complex. I would even be tempted to say that the text and the institutions are systematically out of phase. How can this be?

At first glance, we have three communities that are equal in law. Three regions that are equal in law. And – why not? – three communities and three regions that are equal in law.

Those are the principles. Those are the basic structures. That, in any event, is the working blueprint. Reality, however, can be quite different from the institutional scheme. Transfers of institutions and powers are going to happen, and they will skew or, in any event, rectify the original plan.

Here I should mention two policies that are distinct, but that arrive at the same result: the constitutional scheme and the institutional reality are skewed. What are these policies? I shall describe them using a zoological analogy: the cuckoo policy and the grasshopper policy.

(a) The cuckoo is the bird that has adopted the curious habit of laying its eggs in another bird's nest, leaving it up to that other bird to sit on them.

In the world of Belgian institutions, the cuckoo is the Flemish region. It has put all of its powers in the hands of the authorities of the Flemish Community. It has no specific institutions. Even though the Constitution persists in speaking of a Flemish Regional Council and a Flemish regional government, there are no such things. There is a Flemish Parliament and a Flemish government. They will discharge both community and regional responsibilities.

This is unquestionably a way of simplifying matters. But the Constitution gives no hint that this is how things would work out.

(b) The grasshopper is the insect described by La Fontaine. It sang and danced all summer. But, the fable tells us, it found itself in very bad shape when winter settled in, and so it went looking for its neighbour the ant to ask for help.

In the world of Belgian institutions, the grasshopper is the French Community. Since 1988, it has been gripped by financial difficulties. To overcome them, it did not put all its eggs in the nest of the Walloon Region. It kept its own institutions. But it transferred part, and only part, of its powers to the Walloon Region. It retained its jurisdiction over education, culture and the audio-visual field. But it no longer has jurisdiction over important sectors of social policy.

This is not a way of simplifying matters, and it may even be a way of complicating them. But it was a condition precedent to financial survival.

Let's take a moment to sum up. One thing is apparent: the features of the community and regional landscape are very irregular. The hierarchy among the institutions laid down by articles 1, 2 and 3 of the Constitution is all upside down.

The Flemish Community has swelled, since it has also taken on regional powers. The French Community has shrunk, since it has had to cede a large portion of its initial powers. The German-speaking Community is the only one that actually corresponds to the constitutional scheme.

The Flemish region does not exist. The Walloon region is overqualified, since it also exercises community juris-

diction. The Brussels region has a specific set of rules to ensure that francophones and Flemish coexist in the capital city.

Plainly, it is more complicated than it appeared at first glance. Most importantly, the situations that are identified for one community or region must never be transposed onto another community or region.

The Division of Powers in the Federal System

Let us examine the technical questions that arise in relation to the division of powers. I shall describe four of these questions.

- In Belgium, the federated entities, that is, the communities and regions, have jurisdiction only by devolution; residual powers belong to the federal State. Certainly, the Constitution contemplates the future transfer of the residual powers to the federated entities. However, in order for that to happen, there would have to be a constitutional accord, and this is not foreseeable at present. As the Court of Arbitration – which is our federal constitutional court – has said, this provision is therefore of no effect (CA, no. 76/98).
- In their respective fields of jurisdiction, the federated entities have autonomous powers. They may accordingly pursue "distinct policies". The result could be differences in treatment among citizens. Such differences cannot be considered *per se* to be contrary to the principle of the equality of Belgians before the law. Again according to the Court of Arbitration (no. 83/98), "Autonomy would be meaningless if the mere fact that there are differences in treatment among the persons to whom rules in respect of the same subject matter apply in the various communities and regions were held to be contrary ... (to) the Constitution."
- The communities and regions have exclusive jurisdictions. There are no shared or concurrent jurisdictions, other than in specific, and even exceptional, situations, which are expressly specified in the Constitution. One example is sufficient. When the Constitution places sports under community jurisdiction, "the framers must be considered ... to have given the communities and regions full jurisdiction to enact the rules that apply to the subject-matters transferred to them" (CA, no. 11/98; no. 73/98). The question of the status of athletes or of efforts to combat doping is also under community jurisdiction. However, community legislation must not infringe the provisions of the labour code, which remains under federal jurisdiction, or violate the principle of contractual freedom which enables everyone to decide the term of a contract of employment.
- In addition to the jurisdictions that have devolved to the communities and regions, they also have implied jurisdictions. In some cases, they may legislate in relation to fields of federal jurisdiction. It would not be wrong to say that Belgian law makes moderate use of implied jurisdictions. They are recognized, but clearly with caution. At least three prerequisites must be met.
  - The legislation enacted must really be necessary to the exercise of the jurisdictions of the community or region.
  - The subject-matter must be amenable to different application from region to region.
  - The intrusion of the federated authorities into the federal field must be only marginal (CA, no. 95/98).

The Brussels region may create an enterprise in the course of implementing its housing policy, which is a field within its jurisdiction. But in so doing, it may also legislate in relation to commercial law, company law and the organic legislation respecting communes (Ibid.).

I believe that there is a Canadian proverb that goes: "When I look at myself, I feel hopeless. When I compare myself, I feel hopeful."

In a way, I have the impression that when Belgians look at their little divided, complicated country, they are overcome by gloom, and feel overwhelmed by feelings of despair.

When they compare themselves to the other federal States in the world, such as Canada, their hopes rise again. They often discover the same questions, the same difficulties, the same problems. And sometimes, too, some innovative solutions. And they feel a little less alone.

I would hope that Belgians might be a little less narcissistic, that they would practice the art of self-ridicule a little less, and that they would allow themselves to look beyond the narrow confines of their State.

From that standpoint, I have hope. Europe demands that Belgians come out of their shell. There they have potential competitors and potential partners. If Belgians want to keep the capital of Europe, they have to get moving and become a part of the institutional, political and economic movement that is passing them by.

Fundamentally, the objective for Belgium is clear. King Albert II reminded us of it in his accession speech on August 9, 1993: "We have to create a federal Belgium in a federal Europe."

I humbly believe that this is an ambitious objective. But it is also an objective that can be achieved.