

THE SOCIAL - ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ROMANIAN - BELGIAN RELATIONSHIPS

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Abstract:

Belgium may be, for some of the Romanians, an experience outside the home country borders. The adaptation is done in time, for each one, it matters very much how you got in the destination country. The circumstances and knowledge of the host country language are essential for adaptation. It's very important to be recommended both to the individuals and to those working in institutions, associations etc.

Keywords: *economical relationships, cultural characteristics, cultural institutions.*

1. Introduction

Belgium has been a constitutional monarchy from 1831, with a bicameral parliamentary system at the federal level, located in Western Europe and consisting of three regions: Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels-The Capital. In Flanders, the official language is a Dutch dialect, in Wallonia the language is French, and in Brussels residents speak two official languages: Flemish and French. In Belgium there are three communities from the cultural point of view, namely Flemish, French and German (the latter, in the area bordering Germany). The English language is also widely used with greater frequency in business. The Roman Catholicism is the predominant religion.

1.1. Romanian - Belgian economical relationships

The year 2010 marked the 130th anniversary of bilateral diplomatic relations between Romania and Belgium. In 1838, Belgium established its first consulate in Galați, moved to Bucharest in 1842 and converted in the diplomatic agency in 1870. Consulates and vice-consulates are established after 1855 at: Brăila, Craiova, Iași, Constanța and Sulina. The establishment of the Romanian Legation in Brussels in March 1880 was followed by the opening, in 1881, of honorary consulates in Brussels and Liège, in Namur in 1921 and in 1932 in Louvain. However, the Belgian-Romanian Chamber of Commerce was founded at Brussels in 1919.

During the period of the Second World War the diplomatic relations were frozen, being resumed in 1946 and raised to the embassy level on the 3rd of December 1963.

Foreign companies enjoy the national treatment in Belgium, being assimilated to the indigenous ones. There are no restrictions on the repatriation of the capital and any requirements regarding the Belgian participation in setting up a company with foreign capital.

In terms of visa, Belgium is part of the countries that have signed the Schengen Agreement, the Romanian citizens do not need a visa for a stay not exceeding 90 days on the Belgian territory. Individuals arriving in Belgium are required to register with the municipal offices within eight days.

From the 1st of January 2007, Belgium has imposed transitional measures for a period of two years for the Romanian workers, extended in December 2008 for a period of another three years, until the 31st of December 2011. Thus, the Romanian workers who today intend to work in Belgium, do not benefit the principle of the free workers' movement, being forced to obtain a work permit.

In the case they want to get a job in one of the functions for which the Belgian labor market is unable to meet the demand of jobs, the Romanians have the same accelerated and simplified procedure (5 days) for getting the work permit, introduced in July 2006 for workers from Member States that joined the EU in 2004.

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Institutions, organisms and socio - cultural Romanian - Belgian relationships

Exchanges in culture, education, research and media were particularly low until 1990. According to the Cultural Cooperation Agreement between Romania and Belgium, cultural exchange programs were signed. Thus concerts, arts festivals, art exhibitions, etc... resulted. Romania is, after France and Quebec, ranked the 3rd among the Walloon Community's cultural partners from Belgium (the volume of trade and budget). The cooperation protocol between the Romanian Academy and the Royal Academy of Sciences, Letters and Fine Arts (Flemish) from Belgium are highlights in this respect. On 26 May 2000 at Antwerpen, the Center for Romanian Studies (Centrum voor Roemenie Studies - Ceres) had officially opened. On 14 February 2008 in Brussels, the Charter of Partnership between the Government of the French Community of Belgium and the Romanian Government as part of the "language and culture of origin" (LCO) was signed and it aims to extend the pilot project of the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth of teaching optional course of Romanian language, culture and civilization in schools from different European countries. Since 2010, in the Free University of Brussels (ULB) there is a Romanian language lectureship hosted by the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters operating under the Protocol signed in July 2010 between the Romanian Language Institute and the Free University of Brussels. The legal framework is similar to that existing between Belgium and other Central European countries. The legal basis of the bilateral relations strengthened in the period 1996-1998 by signing agreements to guarantee the investments, avoidance of double taxation, cultural, scientific and technological cooperation, legal assistance and cooperation with Flanders and Wallonia regions and communities. Commercial exchanges are mainly developed under the Treaty of Accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU, signed on 25 April 2005 in Luxembourg.

ROMBEL – Romanians in Belgium - www.rombel.com is the largest virtual community of Romanians living in Belgium, their main purpose is informing and the free exchange of views between them. Created in 2002 and currently numbering approximately 7000 members * (number available in January 2011), ROMBEL uses the internet - the fastest and most practical way of communication between the Romanians from diaspora, with an endless coverage and audience.

During its nine years of existence, ROMBEL evolved from a simple discussion group to an information portal, becoming a "de facto" representative of the Romanian community in Belgium. Among its members, ROMBEL was involved in numerous charity activities, offering the unique chance for several sick children in Romania to benefit from complex operations in Belgium, fact that have saved their health or gave their life back. Members, administrators, moderators involved in humanitarian cases by raising funds for operations or treatments, appointments and accompanying administrative maze of the hospital family, translation and linguistic mediation, hosting families arrived in Belgium.¹

Very important to keep the Romanian language is Romanian Government's concern to support educational projects. In the context of promoting the Romanian language and civilization in the European Union, the Ministry of Education has started with the 2007-2008 school year, a pilot project especially in areas where there are significant communities of Romanians.² If at first only Spain and Italy were concerned, starting with the school year of 2008-2009 the project was extended to Belgium, by signing a card partnership with the Ministry of the French Community of Belgium - The "Origin Language and Culture" Program. The project consists in the introduction in the Belgian education offer of a *Romanian language, culture and civilization course*, in the form of two hours per week and of an *intercultural opening course*. The parents are encouraged to

¹ www.rombel.org

² www.edu.ro, www.ilr.ro, www.enseignement.be/LCO,

register their children at this course which can be very beneficial. The project is a first, although there were Romanian language courses taught in European schools. This program applies to all levels of school education, and at the end of each year the students receive a certificate from the Ministry of National Education, which exempts them from certain other examinations in the case of the reintegration in the Romanian education. Complete information on this course is at: www.edu.ro / LCCR, www.ilr.ro (Romanian Language Institute) and www.enseignement.be / LCO, and the Romanian Embassy in Brussels.

Starting with 2010, there is a Romanian language lectureship hosted by the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Letters in Bruxelles.

The Romanian Institute operates since 2004 under the name of the Romanian Information Centre, and in 2007 joined the ICR de facto network abroad. In October 2011, it was officially transformed in ICR Brussels. Since 2007 it is one of the most active members of the network in Brussels of the European Union Network of Institutes of Culture (EUNIC).¹

Other Romanian socio-economical and cultural institutions from Belgium are:

- The Romanian Embassy in Belgium²;
- The Consular Section³;
- Honorary consulates at Antwerpen (Anvers), Liège (Luik), Mechelen (Malines), Brugge (Bruges)⁴;
- Permanent Representation of Romania to the European Union⁵;
- The Permanent Romanian Delegation to NATO⁶;
- The Romanian Office for Science and Technology to the EU (ORST)⁷;
- The National Union of the County Councils of Romania – The Brussels Representation Office⁸;
- The National Union of the Romanian Employers (UNPR)⁹;
- The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Romania -Brussels Representation Office¹⁰

The Miorița¹¹ Belgian-Romanian socio-cultural association organizes: Romanian language courses, exhibitions of traditional and contemporary Romania (painting, ceramics, wooden objects, clothing, glass, ...); creative workshops of eggs' painting, ceramics, pan flutes making, Romanian cuisine, ...; Romanian musical activities with singers and contemporary authors; meetings between Romanians and Flemish; Romanian wine tasting, social and cultural symposia and special events, company parties ...; information sessions and seminars about Romania, in general.

Other Romanian socio-cultural associations in Belgium are:

- *The Romanian Diaspora in BENELUX*¹²; This association promotes “*The Belgian Gazette*”-, Romanian online edition¹³ and “*Arthis*” - *La Maison Culturelle Belgo-Roumaine a.s.b.l.* ¹⁴ monthly publication «Quoi de Neuf ?» contains articles in 3

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⁵ <http://ue.mae.ro/>

⁶ <http://nato.mae.ro/>

⁷ www.rosteu.net,

⁸ www.uncjr.org

⁹ www.unpr.ro

¹⁰ <http://www.cciromania.eu>

¹¹ www.miorita.be

¹² www.dirobenelu.com

¹³ www.belgianul.com

¹⁴ www.arthis.org

languages: Romanian, French and și Dutch dialect organize language courses and professional training.

- « ROMANIA –EU » Bruxelles Club¹- A Romanian initiative for a united Europe”;
- L’Alliance belgo-roumaine a.s.b.l.²;
- Hermes.ro Cultural association³;
- The Romanian Spiritual Cultural Centre⁴;
- EUROPULS⁵- launched in April 2010;
- THE ROMANIAN ACADEMIC CLUB IN BELGIUM⁶ - launched in June 2010 –the

Romanian students, teachers, researchers association from Belgium.

Romanian Cultural and religious associations and churches in Belgium:

- B.O.R. Representation to EU Institutions⁷;

- Nicolas Orthodox Church in Bruxelles⁸. From the parish life we can say that: the Saturday evening vespers followed by the Divine Liturgy and the Bible School classes every Sunday from 10:00 - broadcasts live by www.Rombel.com. The Parish School organizes free glass painting for adults and children, Romanian language, history and geography, French, English, folk dances classes. There is a monthly magazine “The Gift of the Word” (possibly repeated in the future). Within the Romanian Orthodox Metropolis of Western and Southern Europe, two youth associations activates and they are represented in Brussels also: NEPSIS Association was formed on November 13, 1999 at the initiative of Metropolitan Joseph, in order to keep the flame of faith alive or to wake up the faith among the young people⁹ and AXIOS ASSOCIATION which aims to help children from two orphanages in Romania.

- The Romanian Centre of Orthodox Spirituality “Dumitru Stăniloae” –the parish school for children of 5-14 years old;

- “Buna Vestire” Orthodox Church in Bruxelles¹⁰;

- The Romanian Orthodox Parish “Sfântul Apostol Andrei și Sfântul Materne” – Aalst¹¹;

- The Romanian Greek-Catholic Mission in Belgium¹²;

- “Nașterea Maicii Domnului” Parish – Antwerpen (Anvers)¹³; Parish established in March 1993 and recognized by the Belgian State in May 1996, is open for jobs in Romanian from 10.30.

- “Pogorârea Sfântului Duh” Romanian Orthodox Parish, Liège¹⁴;

- Sfânta Parascheva Church, Bruxelles; The first liturgy was celebrated by the priest Bogdan Popescu on the 8th of September 2010; the liturgical schedule is: Wednesday and Friday 18.00-unsettled, followed by the holy Sacrament of confession, Saturday, 09.00 - Memorial service (memory of the dead), Sunday 10:00 am, Divine Liturgy, 12:30; invitation to tea. The “St. Parascheva Parish School” offers from the 1st of October 2010, lessons for children - religion, music, painting and drawing, Romanian language and

¹ www.euro-club.org

² www.abero.org

³ www.uniro.be

⁴ <http://cscrb.wordpress.com>; www.valenteumane.ro

⁵ www.europuls.ro

⁶ <http://www.caro-belgium.com/>

⁷ www.orthodoxero.eu

⁸ www.biserica.be, www.catedrala.be

⁹ www.nepsis.org.

¹⁰ www.eglisebruxelles.com

¹¹ www.parohiaaalst.be

¹² www.bisericagrecoatolica.be.

¹³ www.biserica.nl

¹⁴ <http://bisericaliege.wordpress.com/>

literature - and for adults - courses in spirituality and faith, biblical studies, painting and drawing.

- *The Romanian Christian Church “Elim” Bruxelles (the interdenominational evangelical church)*¹;

- *The Romanian Christian Church “Betel”*-faithful Pentecostals, Baptists and Evangelicals.

Conclusions

After 1989, the political dialogue had an upward trend, and areas of cooperation have diversified amid Belgium's constant support for the objectives of Romania in order to join the European Union and NATO. Taking into account the specific structure of the Belgian federal state, the Romanian Government has separate agreements with Flemish and Walloon entities.

Over the years, during the high-level contacts (Head of State, Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs), Belgium support has been reiterated for reforms in Romania, the excellent quality of the political relationships and the perfect dynamics of the economic and social relationships in recent years.

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¹ <http://www.elim-bruxelles.be>

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