

***“Both Romania and Belgium want a strong Europe,
working with its partners at international level for
peace and a rules-based international order”***

H.E. John Cornet d’Elzius



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The relations between Belgium and Romania date back to 1838, when the first Belgian consulate was opened in Galați. In the following years, the diplomatic relations evolved and the Romanian constitution of 1866 was modelled on the Belgian one. Another special element of our close bilateral relations is the decentralised cooperation initiated 35 years ago, thanks to which Romanian villages (impaired by the rural systematisation imposed under the former communist regime) “were adopted” by villages in Flanders, Belgium. **How would you characterise both the evolution of the diplomatic relations between Belgium and Romania and the decentralised cooperation during this period?**

The relations between Belgium and Romania are ancient and profound. Initially focused on trade (the first Consul of Belgium was a commercial agent involved in cereal trade and located in Galati), they flourished afterwards in different fields: e.g., military, legal, academic and scientific. To name just an example, **the well-known Romanian scientist Emil Racoviță participated in the famous Belgian Antarctic Expedition of 1897-1899** aboard the Belgica, the first expedition to winter in the Antarctic Region.

Today, **Belgium is the 13th investor in Romania** and our trade volume (exports and imports) exceeded 5 billion euros in 2023. Belgium contributes with **a company of 300 soldiers to the multinational battlegroup stationed in Romania** under French command and, at political level, the numerous bilateral contacts highlight a large degree of convergence between our two countries. **Both Romania and Belgium want a strong Europe**, working with its partners at international level for peace and a rules-based international order.

People to people relations have also developed considerably and are now an important pillar of our bilateral relations. They are nurtured by a large Romanian community in Belgium and an increasing number of Belgians in Romania. As Ambassador of Belgium, I am proud to mention that, in **1988, as a result of the initiative of a Belgian journalist, “Opération Villages Roumains” was set up in Belgium to fight the destruction of Romanian villages** by Nicolae Ceaușescu’s communist regime. Soon, new branches of this association were established in many European countries. **It is a true and beautiful model of European solidarity at grassroots level.**

For 35 years, the association Actie Dorpen Vlaanderen (ADV) has been keeping alive this flame of solidarity and people connectivity. Every year, it organises, with its Romanian partners, a large number of activities in the Romanian villages and in Belgium, with the Romanian diaspora. At the beginning of June 2024, Actie Dorpen Vlaanderen held in Suceava, with the generous hospitality of the County Council and the University Ștefan Cel Mare, the **9th Belgian-Romanian Forum on the theme “Migration and building resilient local communities”**.

Belgium held the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first six months of 2024. With a focus on the legislative agenda (in the first half) and actions to support the reflection on the future of Europe, the Presidency had a lot to accomplish in a short time span, given the date of the European elections. **Which are some of the key takeaways from the Belgian Presidency?**

The objective of the Belgian Presidency – **the 13th Belgian Presidency in the Union’s history** – was to deliver on an ambitious agenda for Europe to protect our people, strengthen our economy and prepare Europe’s future while upholding our values. The Belgian Presidency drove forward the legislative work (**74 legislative files concluded in trilogue meetings, and progress achieved on about 60 more legislative files** in the Council), dealt with crises on and at the shores of our continent, and supported work on preparing Europe’s future. **The Belgian Presidency brought competitiveness back to the heart of our discussions**, laying the foundations for a European Competitiveness Deal to be presented by the end of 2024. As Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said at the end of the Presidency, *“These results are a testament of the Belgian spirit to build compromises and get people to work together. This was truly a deal-making Presidency”*.

We have a new strategic agenda for the next five years in the European Union. How does Belgium see the future of the European Union and which are its main priorities for the years to come?

We stand at a pivotal moment. The world is rapidly becoming more complex for Europe to defend its core interests and values. The European Union’s neighbourhood is in crisis and requires a more proactive and stronger engagement.

At the same time, the EU needs to be resilient and agile to respond to unexpected crises. This requires **a more autonomous Union that is able to take more responsibility in defending its security, prosperity and the freedom for all Europeans**. This demands a recalibration of the EU's Strategic Agenda.

In that light Belgium calls for a consistent approach with the following priorities:

1. **Completion of a modern and robust internal market**, supported by the Letta report, which guarantees a level playing field both externally and internally through a simplified and more targeted EU state aid framework that halts the current temporary framework. Such a modern internal market should be accompanied by an adequate cohesion policy.
2. **Development of a comprehensive competitiveness deal** (built on a modernised and deepened Single Market as well as ambitious, sustainable and balanced free trade agreements) that stimulates a strong industrial base, secures technological leadership, increases productivity and inclusive growth throughout Europe.
3. **Achievement of a climate-neutral Europe by 2050**, ensured by the financing and implementation of the green and just transition, and the promotion of high-quality jobs aligned with the European Pillar of Social Rights.
4. **The need to take into account the unique characteristics of each region throughout the policy-making cycle**, and to work towards a more integrated and smarter regulatory framework, reducing the administrative burden and putting the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality at the centre.
5. **Enable the EU to maintain and strengthen its capacity to act internally and externally**, facing a new geopolitical reality in a turbulent world and with the prospect of enlargement, through unity, responsibility and solidarity.
6. **Ensure freedom for all Europeans**, by enhancing the rule of law, the defence of fundamental rights, and the resilience of our democracies.
7. **Lay the necessary groundwork for reforming the Union** to bolster its capacity to act in a new geopolitical environment, addressing key questions related to its priorities, policies, budget and governance.

“The European Union’s neighbourhood is in crisis and requires a more proactive and stronger engagement.”

H.E. John Cornet d’Elzuis

John Cornet d’Elzuis, the current Ambassador of the Kingdom of Belgium to Romania, has a rich diplomatic career and a broad experience in international and diplomatic affairs.

Between June 1993 and August 1997, he was Counsellor at the Permanent Representation of Belgium to the United Nations in Geneva (in charge of WTO, UNCTAD). He was Head of China Desk in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belgium (Aug. 1997 – Aug. 1999), Counsellor at the Cabinet of the Secretary of State for Foreign Trade (Aug. 1999 – Aug. 2000), before becoming Advisor to HRH Crown Prince Philippe of Belgium at the Royal Palace, a position he held until August 2004. Between August 2004 and July 2007, he was Minister Counsellor in Rome, Representative of Belgium to FAO, WFP and UNCTAD. In January 2008, he was appointed Deputy Chief of Cabinet of the Minister of Development and International Cooperation. From August 2009 to August 2012, he was once more Advisor to HRH Crown Prince Philippe at the Royal Palace.

He was Ambassador of the Kingdom of Belgium to Israel (December 2012 – July 2016) and to the Holy See (Aug. 2016 – Aug. 2020), before being appointed Director Asia-Pacific in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belgium (Aug. 2020 – Aug. 2023).

He speaks French, Dutch, English, Italian, and Spanish.