



Présidence belge
du Comité de Ministres
Belgisch Voorzitterschap van
het Comité van Ministers

HIGHLIGHTS OF BENELUX COOPERATION IN 2024 UNDER THE BELGIAN PRESIDENCY

Benelux 2024: 80 years of cooperation without borders

In 2024, Belgium held the presidency of both the Benelux Union and the Council of the European Union – a unique opportunity to further highlight Benelux cooperation within the EU framework. Significant progress was made on key topics such as security, the internal market and sustainability.

At the Benelux Summit on 26 November, the Prime Ministers reaffirmed their shared ambition: to continue promoting the Benelux Union as a pioneer and testing ground within Europe. The Minister-President of North Rhine-Westphalia and the Vice-President of the Benelux Parliament also took part in the meeting.



A SAFE AND RESILIENT SOCIETY

- **Stronger Police Cooperation**

The new Benelux Police Treaty has given a major boost to cooperation between police services. Thanks to the treaty, joint operations and cross-border actions have become easier to organise. Throughout the year, numerous joint checks were carried out, including targeted actions against drug trafficking.

- **Integrated Approach to Cross-Border Crime**

On 21 March, a symposium was held focusing on an integrated approach to tackling cross-border crime. Police forces, public prosecutors, other services and local authorities worked closely together on this initiative. The emphasis was on stepping up efforts to combat international organised crime, in part through cooperation with private partners and port authorities.

- **Stricter Fireworks Controls**

On 17 May, the competent Benelux ministers signed a joint declaration in Rochefort, calling on other EU Member States to enhance the control and harmonisation of fireworks regulations, using the Benelux Pyro Pass as a model. This digital permit system helps to prevent the illegal trade and use of fireworks, placing the protection of citizens at the centre – a model for Europe.



- **Migration Management**

New agreements with Mongolia and Kazakhstan have strengthened cooperation in the area of migration policy.

- **Faster and More Effective Crisis Response**

Benelux workshops led to the introduction of measures aimed at improving crisis communication in urban areas. During the PENTEX'24 exercise, the readiness of the Pentalateral Energy Forum partners was tested in the event of potential disruptions to electricity grids. The Benelux Union played an active role in the establishment of this network of European crisis centres.

- **Combatting Tax Fraud**

An international symposium held under the Belgian presidency developed strategies to tackle VAT fraud and reduce economic losses.

- **Water Management**

At the Water Summit (Watertop) on 26 March in Lanaken, a roadmap was adopted for cross-border cooperation on water safety. The focus is on a joint approach to the growing risks of flooding and drought in the region.

- **Strengthening Judicial Cooperation**

Senior European officials from various national executive agencies in the fields of justice, security and immigration met at the Benelux House to discuss the implementation of European legislation into national enforcement policies. The public prosecution services of the Benelux countries also explored ways to strengthen judicial cooperation between them.



INTERNAL MARKET AND MOBILITY



- **Support for SMEs and Digitalisation**

On 14 March, the Benelux adopted a recommendation encouraging electronic invoicing in public procurement. The aim is to promote secure and efficient digital transactions. A roundtable discussion held on 16 December with SME organisations led to initiatives aimed at reducing administrative burdens.

- **Improved Product Safety**

The Benelux introduced stricter limits for hazardous substances in ceramics that come into contact with food. This is an important step towards better consumer protection.

- **Automatic Recognition of Diplomas**

Since 1 May, diplomas have been automatically recognised between the Benelux countries and the Baltic states, increasing opportunities for study and employment mobility. Work is ongoing to extend this to other EU Member States. Significant progress was also made in the automatic recognition of professional qualifications.

- **Smarter and More Sustainable Mobility**

The Benelux is committed to an integrated transport system with harmonised standards, smart technologies and a strong focus on sustainability. This was reflected, among other things, in a joint Benelux declaration on electric aviation.



ENERGY AND ENERGY TRANSITION

- **Benelux as a Hydrogen Hub**

The Benelux strengthened its role in the European hydrogen strategy. Within the framework of the North Seas Energy Cooperation (NSEC), a new initiative was launched to support the integration of hydrogen and offshore wind energy.

- **Ban on the Export of Polluting Fuels**

Following a Benelux recommendation, and in consultation with the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and African countries, a ban on the export of polluting fuels was adopted and incorporated into existing regulations.

- **Pentalateral Energy Forum**

At a ministerial meeting of the Forum, two declarations were adopted: one on reliable backup capacity and another on the measures needed to make energy prices more competitive.



THE BENELUX AND BEYOND

- **Closer Ties with Neighbouring Countries and Partners**

In 2024, the Benelux prepared a joint action plan with Hauts-de-France, laying the groundwork for closer cooperation. Cooperation with North Rhine-Westphalia was further deepened, ties with the Nordic Council were strengthened, and efforts were made to build closer relations with the Greater Region.

- **Services for Citizens, Businesses and Governments**

In 2024, the Benelux operated at full capacity, holding a record number of meetings at various levels. In total, 272 working group meetings took place, in addition to 16 high-level and strategic meetings. There were also 5 ministerial meetings, 10 workshops and study days, and 4 working visits. From detailed working groups to ministerial gatherings: extensive consultations were held with a strong focus on achieving concrete results.

KEY EVENTS



Belgium Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation

- **Benelux Day - 5 September**

On 5 September, Benelux Day was celebrated for the first time, featuring youth debates, various activities, and the issuance of a commemorative coin.



- **Committee of Ministers - 19 December**

On 19 December, the Committee of Ministers approved the new 2025–2028 work programme. This programme sets the course for the coming years and places renewed emphasis on safeguarding prosperity and strengthening the resilience of Benelux society.



General Secretariat of the Benelux Union
Rue de la Régence 39, BE - 1000 Brussels
T +32 (0)2 519 38 11
info@benelux.int
www.benelux.int