

Institut d'Etudes Européennes  
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Luxembourg Institute for European  
and International Studies

Clingendael Institute of International Relations, The Hague  
Egmont – Royal Institute for International Relations, Brussels  
Luxembourg Institute for European and International Studies (LIEIS)  
Institut Pierre Werner, Luxembourg  
*with the support of the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Luxembourg*

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Conference

### **The future of the Benelux cooperation in a changing Europe**

8 - 9 February 2007  
Castle of Bourglinster, Luxembourg

#### **Abstract**

A seminar on 23-24 March 2006 in Schengen offered the first opportunity to discuss the future of the Benelux cooperation and covered especially the historic aspects of the Benelux cooperation. The objective of the conference in Bourglinster, however, was to look to the future: at the moment, the three countries find themselves at a crucial stage and have expressed their wish to continue their cooperation. The treaty of 1958, which will expire on 31 October 2010, has served the Benelux very well. Nevertheless, the initial role of the Benelux as an economic cooperation has changed over the last years and the Benelux has to define new priorities. In the past, it has been a catalyst for European integration as evidenced by the creation of Eurocontrol in 1960 and the Schengen agreement in 1985. For many other European states, the Benelux still is a laboratory of ideas and their common memoranda are very appreciated since they often create a dynamic process and help to increase political



cooperation at the EU level. Despite the successes, the Benelux needs to work on a strong new framework, which is able to adjust to needs in the future.

The conference in the castle of Bourglinster<sup>1</sup> was organized by the Clingendael Institute, the Egmont Institute, the Institute for European and International Studies and the Institut Pierre Werner with the support of the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Luxembourg. About 60 participants from the Benelux countries, but also from neighbouring countries discussed the future of the Benelux cooperation. The format of the conference was as follows: after each of the four short presentations and introductory remarks, the participants expressed their views and ideas during a discussion.

The meeting highlighted the need for the Benelux to clearly define the role it seeks to play in a wider Europe since a single country by itself will have a difficult stance in an enlarged European Union. The creation of collective strengths by means of coalitions and extended cooperation with other partners and/or (regional) entities will become vital. Therefore, there is a significant chance that the stable basis of cooperation within the Benelux could serve as a policy laboratory for future European initiatives and set an example for other countries.

One advantage of the Benelux cooperation is its pragmatic approach to common problems: police cooperation and collaboration in judicial affairs have proven to be highly successful and to offer visible results for its citizens. This cooperation should, however, not be limited to the Benelux countries but be open to include regional entities from neighbouring areas. Due to increased mobility and the geographical proximity of the Benelux area, the future potential of cross-border cooperation could also include areas like transport and sustainable environment.

It was also observed that cooperation between the Benelux countries was at its peak after the Second World War and that arguably it has now lost its importance and its drive in the EU of 25. Evidence for this decline is the Benelux's unclear position between the national and the European level, the question of a new generation of politicians, a missing link to a European agenda, and the underestimated weight of personality when it comes to intergovernmental cooperation.

Although suggestions have been made to institutionalise political cooperation where *ad hoc* initiatives work smoothly, there is fear to create additional hurdles in day-to-day business between the three countries if political cooperation will be given a mandatory framework. Instead of institutionalisation, participants suggested the need for more meetings at ministerial and sub-ministerial levels, enhanced cooperation with actors outside the Benelux ("Benelux +") and increased promotion of Benelux legitimacy and visibility.

In order to have a mission in a wider European context, the Benelux needs to know which areas it wants to address. Defining the future role of the Benelux in the wider Europe will be a tricky task; nevertheless, four recommendations were drawn up: the Benelux could serve as an initiator, as an open platform for political cooperation, as a laboratory and as a mediator in case of dissent between other countries.

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<sup>1</sup> The program and the list of participants can be found in the appendix. The seminar was held under the Chatham House Rule.

As for the drafting of a new legal framework for the Benelux cooperation, some participants suggested to design it in a flexible way that leaves enough room for adoption and modification – according to future developments of EU policies and the countries’ political will for further cooperation. Moreover, the new treaty needs to take into account the constitutional framework of the Belgian state and the possibility to extend cooperation within the idea of a “Benelux +”. Currently, recommendation papers and advisory opinions on the future cooperation are being discussed by the national governments. In addition, there will be another meeting in the second part of April 2007 under the auspices of the Belgian Presidency of the Benelux in order to draft a common political statement on the future of the Benelux cooperation.

### **Part 1: The role of the Benelux in the wider Europe**

The first part of the conference focused on the potential for a laboratory role of the Benelux, which can be seen in three areas:

- First of all, the Benelux can help to restore and foster the confidence of its citizens in further European integration. This implies delivering results and reforming institutions to involve people in the decision-making processes.
- Secondly, coalition building. The EU is paralysed by increased membership and smaller states run the risk of being sidelined. The Benelux is not in a position to challenge larger member states but it can build collective strengths. The weight of its 29 votes could make a difference to the EU decision-making process. Records show that common memoranda can set the agenda in an early stage of this process and the Benelux trio can push the issue. However, a common Benelux view is not always possible to reach, especially in the field of political cooperation.
- Thirdly, and this is the success story of the Benelux, the enhanced cooperation in the area of justice and home affairs can serve as role model. The fight against terrorism, tax fraud and illegal immigrants are only some examples. More examples are the Treaty of Senningen in 2005, and the successful cooperation on Crisis Management.

Recent developments in the EU have created new opportunities for the Benelux to act as a forerunner, for instance in the field of food security, the prevention of animal diseases and energy policies. The Benelux could set an example by removing final obstacles in order to complete the internal market. It could also set an example in increased military cooperation. The implementation of a so-called joint battle group still seems difficult to achieve, but on the other hand the navy of Belgium and the Netherlands already share joint headquarters.

The Benelux remains the most stable sub-group of the Union despite its occasional diverging opinions. These cleavages existed since the beginning and are mirrored in issues like agriculture, tax law or the countries’ economic orientation. Although it never had a perfect or ideal relationship, the Benelux managed to remain stable which can be explained by its historic links and the institutional framework, the Benelux. Acting together gives the three countries additional weight in the EU. Since the Treaty of Nice, the total votes of the Benelux equal the votes of a large member state. Common Benelux memoranda have influenced the decision making at the European level. However, it is questionable to what extent this still

counts in an enlarged EU. The future is seen to lie in enhanced cooperation as frequent “Friends of the Community” meetings with Eastern European countries since September 2002 show.

### Discussion

Various issues were raised during the discussion round: how can the Benelux fulfil the role of a European laboratory? What image does the Benelux have within the Union? Answers included the idea of the Benelux as a precursor and a continuous sub-group. The image of the Benelux was explained in terms of a two-sided coin: on the one hand, other European countries attach significance to common Benelux memoranda, which can be seen as a positive indicator for the success of the cooperation. On the other hand, it was also admitted that the Benelux could have left a rather negative image on Eastern European countries during negotiations prior to the Treaty of Nice: despite the will of having an own commissioner, it argued for a small commission and did not back the countries’ positions.

With regard to the insufficient cooperation on so-called battle groups, participants pointed out that three reasons made this difficult to achieve, namely: high costs, military traditions and the high amount of man power such an undertaking requires. Nevertheless, it was remarked that common training of troops has already taken place and the splitting of costs will soon be possible.

The discussion also touched upon the weight of votes. It was argued that the weight of 29 votes was overestimated since double majority voting will prevail in the future and that the change of votes at the Nice Summit was actually a step backwards. At the same time, it was mentioned that in practice, voting rarely takes place.

Another issue of discussion was the importance of good contact with big member states in the EU. The Benelux countries with their linguistic diversity can facilitate this access. Another topic that was raised was the involvement of the General Secretariat. At present, the Secretariat is not involved in the political cooperation. One could, however, envisage that it played a more active role. The issues of legitimacy and visibility were discussed and ideas were put forward on the organization of public hearings in the Benelux parliament to intensify public integration and to bring the Benelux closer to its citizens. Finally, it was agreed that common action could create influence: the participants recommended that additional influence could be gained by developing regional cooperation in other policy fields, which could then in turn serve as a catalyst for others.

## **Part 2: Benelux cooperation in practice: Cross-border regional cooperation and police cooperation**

The second session closely examined Benelux cooperation in practice and focused on police and cross-border regional cooperation. France and Germany took up the Benelux idea of free movement of people and together they signed a treaty in 1985, the Schengen Treaty. The Benelux offered to host the Schengen Secretariat and with the Treaty of Amsterdam, the Schengen agreement was incorporated into the EU framework. The Benelux police

cooperation was first discussed at the highest level at the EU Council meeting in Tampere, Finland in 1999. As a result of increased regional cooperation in police and judicial affairs, citizens were able to experience for the first time a practical approach to a concern of high interest, namely security.

The historic mission of the Benelux was to promote the common market and integration, which was taken over by the EU. Nevertheless, 50 years later, the commitment of the Benelux needs to be reasserted in order to give an important political message to the outside world. The Benelux must find new grounds and areas of cooperation and search for its future high potentials. 11% of the Benelux population lives at the border but increased mobility and its geographic proximity have led to the fact that the Benelux countries themselves can be seen as border areas. So far, it always worked well to find common solutions to practical problems. This is why in 1986 one success of the Benelux was to set up cross-border regulations, which also included 14 arrangements between bordering municipalities. Four examples perfectly illustrate the increased cooperation: first, a Formula One race where mixed Dutch and Belgian police patrolled the circuit; secondly, a bicycle tour through Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands that involved police bodies from all three countries; thirdly, the cooperation of Belgian and Dutch riot police during football events; fourthly, common approaches to investigation and arrest concerning drugs. Another recent development is the creation of two centres for Information Exchange located in the Netherlands and Luxembourg, which facilitate the internal Benelux cooperation among its police force. Furthermore, education programmes that aim to increase the awareness of cultural differences between the three countries have been set up by the Benelux and so far involved more than 4,000 police officers.

Externally, the Benelux has set up liaison offices that focus on the exchange of information related to organised crime. These present successes imply further cooperation in future. Policy domains such as traffic, mobility (railways, harbours, traffic networks) and spatial planning as well as food and health, even energy could be addressed by the Benelux. The General Secretariat could fulfil an additional role in the coordination of these new areas and act as a point of reference for the three Benelux countries. Although the Secretariat already provides support in the field of police cooperation, it is perceived to operate at too great a distance, that there is little contact between the national civil servants and the Secretariat in Brussels itself.

### Discussion

During the discussion, it became clear that increased police cooperation between the Benelux had become possible because there was sufficient political will on the part of the three countries since the beginning and that a practical need led to concrete results. The increased cooperation in the field of cross-border police had added more value to the initial treaty because it was facilitated over time and has been given a practical framework. Belgium has closed its Police Cooperation Centre in Eupen and moved into the common Benelux Police Cooperation Centre in Luxembourg, where in 2006 over 35,000 files of basic information have been exchanged within the Benelux, France and Germany. Speed and effectiveness have become key factors in the new cooperation since competences of the national police have increased: it was pointed out that since 2004, uniformed police was allowed to cross internal Benelux borders, physically intervene in critical incidents and even make arrests within the Benelux countries. Moreover, the pursuit with helicopters has been facilitated. Despite the

success of cooperation within the Benelux, issues like hot pursuit with France or within Schengen countries still pose problems.

Furthermore, the issue of a so-called “Benelux +” was raised. The idea behind this acronym does not only imply increased cooperation within the Benelux itself but also cooperation with other regional entities and bodies around the Benelux countries. A common political agenda on climate change would bring the Benelux and neighbouring regions closer together within the framework of sustainability. One can refer to the city of London, where municipalities closely cooperate in order to fight traffic conjunction and air pollution.

Moreover, it was pointed out that special attention could be given to internal and external francophone relations of the Benelux. In order to improve the relations between Maastricht and Liège, it was argued that a potential Dutch effort to build a bridge to France could improve the current situation and help to minimize the language factor as a division line between the Benelux. These division lines, however, do not mean that cooperation between the Benelux and a new legal framework have become irrelevant. On the contrary, it was generally felt that bilateral cooperation could not replace the Benelux framework. There are fields of cooperation which would be impossible without the Benelux Treaty. However, there is room for improvement and the new treaty has to take into account the new legal basis of Belgium. It was said that a new treaty could be an intergovernmental à la carte treaty, which – depending on the situation – is either used or not. In conclusion, it was argued that the future potential of cross-border regional cooperation and police cooperation lies in areas such as transport (where the issue of a common motorway toll has been raised) and sustainable environment (including policies on energy and climate change).

### **Part 3: Political cooperation between the Benelux countries**

The third part of the conference tried to come to grips with the question of political cooperation between the Benelux countries and to find approaches of future forms of political collaboration. European integration took off in the 1970s and the Benelux became almost obsolete. During the first years of its existence, the Benelux experienced faster and deeper integration than now. Four observations for a better understanding of this fact were made:

- Question of level: the Benelux is stuck between the national and the European level and needs to find areas that are not yet taken over by the EU. Nevertheless, it still has an advantage compared with other regional cooperation projects as a result of its geographic proximity, its economy and a common agenda.
- Question of generation: the intensity of Benelux meetings has decreased over the last years and informal meetings are not sufficient any longer. Compared with the meetings in the years after the London exile, they have lost their momentum and drive.
- Common views: the last five years of cooperation have hardly produced a lot of common ground in regard to the European agenda. The contrary was the case with the shifting of the votes after Nice, diverging positions on the Stability and Growth Pact or the Common Agricultural Policy and the aftermath of the Iraq war.

- Issue of personality: recent research shows that personality plays a crucial role when it comes to cooperation between the Benelux countries. In order to enhance cooperation and give it a new direction, influential politicians are needed.

The Benelux finds itself at a crossroads and needs to reflect on its future forms of mutual agenda setting. There is a clear need to continue the cooperation between the Benelux countries in order to avoid the countries' marginalisation on the European stage. So far, they have earned their respect within the EU by offering common views. Two examples are the Benelux position on enlargement or their common standpoint on the further steps in the Israel-Palestine conflict solution. It goes without saying that there is not always common ground on all policy areas. Nevertheless, the Benelux can be considered as a stable framework of cooperation. It offers practical and pragmatic solutions to problems that are in the interest of the three countries. Its Troika proposals on European integration increased the objectiveness of the subject and positively contributed to the value of the Benelux. This value could even be increased if more visibility were given to the Benelux actors. Despite being valued for its joint appearance, the Benelux cooperation and its achievements are not widely known among the European public.

It was generally felt that political cooperation should be extended and intensified, but not institutionalised. An argument against the institutionalisation of political cooperation is the additional hurdle in day-to-day business which such new institutional bodies would create. The Benelux's current effectiveness is based on its capacity to make rapid pragmatic decisions. These benefits should not be risked by institutionalisation. It is important that political cooperation should only be looked for in areas where a common view is possible. Ultimately, the chances to be neglected on a European stage decrease if the Benelux can present itself as a unified actor.

The participants concluded that the Benelux has lost a lot of its initial drive; what in the past was seen as farsighted can now be interpreted as outdated in the sense that there are at present excessively diverging opinions on European topics and a lack of clarity regarding the areas of cooperation. Improvements could be made in the following fields:

- increase meetings at ministerial and sub-ministerial levels
- closer (regional) cooperation and exchange of ideas by using the positive image of the Benelux
- increase Benelux visibility, publicity and promotion (also towards other entities)
- enhance the importance of the Benelux Parliament by greater exposure to the public and improved access to documents
- areas like energy and foreign relations could be used to give new impetus to the Benelux cooperation.

Regarding the future role of the Benelux, the following suggestions were made:

- the Benelux as an **initiator**. History shows that the Benelux can take over the role as an initiator (Messina Convention in 1955, Werner Plan in 1970), thus, this can also be a future role – including “Benelux +” projects.

- the Benelux as a **platform** for political cooperation. Due to its practical approach and common position on pressing issues, the Benelux could serve as a forum for enhanced political integration.
- the Benelux as a **laboratory**. New policies and fields of cooperation could be tested within the Benelux. Its effectiveness and additional value could firstly be tested on a rather small population and then exported to European level.
- the Benelux as a **mediator**. In an increased EU of 27 members, conflicts are inevitable. As a cooperation, which is known for its frequent consensus on various issues, the Benelux could fulfil its role as a mediator and negotiator between countries on a European level.

### Discussion

During the discussion, interesting points arose around the question of the institutionalisation of political cooperation. Should it become an obligation or stay an option? It was broadly agreed that it should remain an option. However, special emphasis was given to a stronger political will of the countries and harder efforts to succeed. Political cooperation should not become compulsory but should in principle take place whenever it is possible. One participant pointed out that the ambassadors of the Benelux countries in Russia coordinate their interviews and give them together: Benelux joint positions have a broader basis than a single position of one country and can facilitate a lot of issues. It was mentioned that cooperation does not necessarily come into existence after the first rounds of negotiation but can sometimes take time to develop. In some cases, cooperation increases automatically after a period of diverging opinions, in others, a country sometimes needs to be weighed upon in order to compromise.

As for the role of a mediator, the opinions diverged: On the one hand, the Benelux could neutrally arbitrate between the rival parties without being a slave to history in case of disagreement between European countries. On the other hand, it was said that in the first place the members needed to agree among themselves on various issues because chances to mediate successfully are minimal if positions within the Benelux are too far apart.

As for increased visibility, the opening of common consulates was mentioned, including as showing visible results to the citizens. It was agreed that there was still room for this type of work and harmonization beyond borders should be envisaged.

Finally, special interest was given to the question of a pragmatic and practical approach to political cooperation:

- Regular meetings before council meetings should clarify and coordinate common approaches and not create additional difficulties.
- Meetings outside the Benelux frame with other countries should take place on a regular basis.
- Intergovernmental Benelux conventions should be opened to outside participants (keyword “Benelux +”) and
- more summits with other regional cooperation units should be organized.

## Part 4: Further Benelux procedures and steps to be taken

The fourth and last part of the conference centred upon the future approach to a new Benelux Treaty and the future potential of the Benelux cooperation. An Advisory Council for International Affairs in the Netherlands finalised a report on the Benelux cooperation and will publish it by the third week of February 2007. This report includes a pragmatic approach and offers recommendations on the future Benelux cooperation to the Dutch government. Focus is given to the added value of the cooperation in economic and political areas and the role of the current Benelux institutions. Moreover, the advisory report touches upon three dimensions of future cooperation:

1. **Political cooperation:** Coalition formation implies an enormous added value – the multiplying effect can help to increase influence and a Benelux joint agreement could break EU cooperation deadlocks.
2. **Testing ground:** Due to the recognition of the Benelux in the EU treaties, the three countries are in a better situation than other regional cooperation to initiate and explore new fields of cooperation within its borders. Its achievements are recognized outside the Benelux and with the consensus of the big neighbours like France and Germany, the critical mass to move issues onto the European agenda could be reached.
3. **Practical cooperation:** There are pragmatic solutions to problems within the Benelux; however, it must realise its potential in today's Europe and define its areas of cooperation. There is a lack of adequate focus on Benelux core activities; it operates in a very wide range of issues on a lot of levels and no clear involvement of political levels in the capitals can be seen.

The question is, can Benelux, as it functions today, realise this? The answer is NO.

- Lack of basis. The views of the three countries on the future of the EU are too different.
- Lack of focus. Too many Benelux commissions and sub-commissions deal with too many issues without involving the political levels in the three capitals.
- Lack of leadership.

In other words, the Benelux is looking for a mission with a strategy and leadership; nonetheless, there is little support for a revolution in the organization.

It has been proposed to focus Benelux activities on **practical areas** like cross-border issues, spatial planning, land use planning, internal security, communication, public health, transport, police and energy. On **political issues**, the consultation should be more frequent but only in areas where a common position is possible. As to the **institutions**, it was proposed that the office of Intellectual Property could receive more competences and the Parliament could be opened to non-Benelux parliamentarians.

When it comes to a new treaty between the Benelux countries, it is a fortiori important to include Belgium's communities and regions. This new "mixed treaty" will distribute competences to Belgian federal levels and community and regional levels. The new treaty

should not install supranational actors in the Benelux. Nor should the existing framework of cooperation be hastily modified by drastic changes. It should leave room for intensive consultation between the three countries in order to find common positions. Certain issues need to be adopted, others need to be modified and core areas urgently have to be defined. The new treaty should include a legal basis for “Benelux +” cooperation, and allow enough flexibility to adapt to pressing needs and future developments.

The role of being a protagonist can be intensified since Art. 306 of the EC treaty allows further Benelux integration and makes it possible to cooperate on issues which are not yet addressed at the EU level. Moreover, attention should be given to the fact that it is difficult to find national legislation which is connected to the old treaty of 1948 and scrapping the entire old treaty would be rather risky. The question remains as to whether to add an extensive protocol to the existing treaty or draft an entirely new treaty. No matter for which option the countries will opt, it will need to be ratified. One suggestion was to include a list of annexes to the new treaty that defines which articles of the old treaty should be abolished. Nevertheless, scanning through existing national dispositions of the old Benelux treaty has turned out to be a complex task.

The coming months will be used for reflection and Belgium, who has the presidency of the Benelux, will call the governments of the three countries together in the second half of April 2007 in order to make a political statement on extending their cooperation. Interesting discussions are expected to develop when first proposals for a new treaty will be presented by the Belgian presidency.

### Discussion

The discussion after the last part of the conference concerned the forms of military cooperation between the Benelux countries. Is there additional room for cooperation within the air force since cooperation in the fields of the navy is already taking place? Does military cooperation actually need to take place in the Benelux context since there are already instruments at the EU level? It was remarked that combined defence efforts were bilateral between the Netherlands and Belgium and that the coordination on military affairs would also depend on the new Dutch government and its position in regard to new planes and helicopters. As for political cooperation, the participants pointed out that one should consider work plans for the Benelux cooperation in which the General Secretariat, the Committee of Ministers and the Chairman of the Presidency play an important role.

Emphasis was put on increased openness to ad hoc cooperation with other (regional) entities and the idea to organize seminars among national public servants to involve them in the Benelux cooperation process was suggested. As for the further steps towards a new framework of the Benelux cooperation, it was reaffirmed that a political statement of the three governments was planned for the second part of April 2007 and that until then, one would await the results of the transmitted recommendations and documents.

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## Concluding remarks

During the conference, the participants discussed the role and functions which the Benelux could fulfil in the future by touching upon common achievements in the past and present. The creation of Eurocontrol in 1960 and the Schengen agreement of 1985 can be seen as one of the milestones in an enhanced Benelux cooperation. More recently, the Benelux managed to successfully coordinate areas like cross-border police cooperation and drafted common policies concerning justice, drug policy, immigration and disaster prevention. Apart from common achievements, the occasional lack of political will was mentioned, especially the institutionalisation of a political cooperation was highly debated. While some want to see reforms of the General Secretariat, make it slimmer and assign it with new competencies, others fear that an institutionalisation will create an additional handicap for political cooperation due to its mandatory nature.

The exact direction of future Benelux cooperation will depend on the review of the submitted proposals and recommendations by the national governments. However, it is clear that cooperation between the Benelux will continue, despite doubts over its form and framework.

The conference tried to anticipate future developments and came up with recommendations, out of which three key issues crystallized:

### Visibility and legitimacy

Although the Benelux cooperation is well known within its territory and it has earned respect from other countries due to its common memoranda, its functions and achievements are little known among the (European) public. Moreover, it was mentioned that national civil servants have little insight of the day-to-day business within the Benelux. In order to bring the cooperation closer to its citizens and the administrative bodies of the national governments, the Benelux has to increase its visibility and legitimacy by enhancing promotion and transparency:

- work plans with the coordination of the General Secretariat, the Committee of Ministers and the Chairman of the Presidency would allow to schedule ahead,
- seminars among national public servants would allow their involvement in Benelux business,
- access to legal Benelux documents could reduce the distance between Benelux bodies,
- open sessions in the Benelux parliament could serve to facilitate engagement in new forms of cooperation (“Benelux +”) and
- more competencies should be given to the Court since it does not have the ability to interpret all legal rules common to the three countries.

### Role definition

If the Benelux wants to have a say and act as an influential player on a European level, it will have to explicitly name its core functions and fields of cooperation. The fields of cooperation could include:

- cross-border issues like spatial planning, land use planning, police and judicial cooperation
- internal security



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- communication
  - public health (food security and prevention of animal diseases)
  - transport (including the possibility of a common motorway toll)
  - environment with a focus on energy and climate change

Moreover, the Benelux could take over the role as a forerunner and incorporate the following functions:

- platform for political cooperation and a stage for dialogue and exchange
- laboratory and testing ground for new policies
- initiator for additional impetus on European level
- mediator in case of dissent between countries

### **Surplus value**

Flexibility and pragmatic solutions to pressing problems can be considered as the main positive aspects of the Benelux cooperation. Another positive point is the fact that issues are being dealt with when they arise – leaving sufficient room to adapt to recent and future developments within the Benelux and the European Union. These values can even be empowered when the Benelux seeks to establish new forms of cooperation beyond its borders and tries to engage with other (regional) entities and partners within a new legal framework that allows the notion of the “Benelux +”.

Marcus Hitzberger

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Conference

## **The future of the Benelux cooperation in a changing Europe**

8-9 February 2007  
Castle of Bourglinster (Luxembourg)

### **Programme**

#### THURSDAY, 8 FEBRUARY 2007

*20.00:* Opening dinner at the Castle of Bourglinster with Luc Frieden, Minister of Justice of Luxembourg

#### Friday, 9 February 2007

**Opening remarks** by Gertjan Storm, Netherlands Ambassador in Luxembourg, and Ambassador Arlette Conzemius, Director of International Economic Relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Luxembourg

#### *09.00-11.00:* **Part 1: The role of the Benelux cooperation in the wider Europe**

*Chair:* Jaap de Zwaan, Director of the Clingendael Institute

*Discussants:* Alfred van Staden, Professor of International Relations, Leiden University  
Christian Franck, Professor, President, Institut d'Etudes Européennes,  
Université Catholique de Louvain

In this first part the potential of the Benelux cooperation will be discussed from the perspective of changes in the European Union. The following dimensions will be elaborated. First, the impact of enlargement on the position of the Benelux countries. Secondly, the more prominent role of (groups of) the big member states and its impact on the Benelux countries. Thirdly, the increasing need to form coalitions in the EU. Fourthly, the potential role of the Benelux as a laboratory for (enhanced) cooperation. The core issue in this part is to what extent more intensive cooperation among the three Benelux countries helps to maintain and strengthen their position in the EU of 27 or even more?

*11.00-11.15:* Coffee break

**11.15-13.00: Part 2: Benelux cooperation in practice: cross-border regional cooperation and police cooperation**

*Chair:* Charles Elsen, former Director General of the European Council

*Discussants:* Bernard Hoetjes, Professor of regional administration in international perspective, University of Maastricht

Peter Reijnders, Counsellor for police and judicial cooperation, Royal Netherlands Embassy, Brussels

René Lindenlaub, Director of Information, Police Grand-Ducale, Luxembourg

In this part the focus will be on Benelux cooperation within the framework of the Benelux organisation (and treaty). This cooperation has evolved during the past decades. The Benelux has in particular been able to adapt to the rise of the EU as the main framework for economic integration and has changed and developed new areas for cooperation among the three member states. This applies specifically to police and cross-border cooperation, where the Benelux acts as a secretariat and facilitator for the various initiatives. In this session the meaning and potential of this practical cooperation will be discussed. This session will also deal with whether new areas of cooperation can be envisaged (energy, environment, etc.).

**13.00-14.30:** Lunch at the Castle of Bourglinster

**14.30-16.30: Part 3: Political cooperation between the Benelux countries**

*Chair:* Claude Misson, Director general, Egmont - Royal Institute for International Relations

*Discussants:* Martine Schommer, Ambassador, Permanent Representation of Luxembourg to the EU, Brussels

Raphaël Mathieu, Research Fellow, Defence Study Centre, Brussels

*External viewpoint:* Wichard Woyke, Professor of Political Science, Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Münster

The Benelux political cooperation takes place outside the framework of the Treaty and the Benelux organisation. It has various dimensions, the most noteworthy being the Benelux memorandums that have regularly been published as a contribution to the process of treaty reform (Convention/IGC's). But also on enlargement, justice and home affairs, EU-energy policy, the Israeli-Palestine conflict, etc. the three countries have put forward common positions. The aim of these interventions is to set the EU agenda and to strengthen the negotiating positions of the Benelux countries. In this session the discussion will focus on the results of the political cooperation; to what extent did it have an impact on the EU at large. In addition the question whether this cooperation should be extended, intensified and institutionalised further (role EU organisation, EU permanent representations, capitals, in the Treaty?)

**16.30-16.45:** Coffee break

*16.45-18.30:* **Part 4: How do we go from here: a new treaty, new instruments / institutions, new policies?**

*Chair:* Mario Hirsch, Director of the Institut Pierre Werner; Chairman of the Steering Committee of the LIEIS

*Discussants:* Alain Kundycki, Ambassador, Belgian Embassy in Luxembourg  
Jan Rood, Head, European Studies Programme, Clingendael Institute  
Maarten Vidal, Researcher, Institute for International Law, Catholic University of Leuven  
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In this final session the question is what steps should be taken in the process of prolonging the cooperation in order to make the cooperation more effective. This issue refers to different topics. Firstly, how to deal with the treaty: prolonging it, amending it or negotiating a new treaty (including the issue of Belgian representation and ratification), then the role of the institutions and the tasks of the Benelux (the political as well as the practical cooperation).

Clingendael Institute of International Relations, The Hague  
Egmont - Royal Institute for International Relations, Brussels  
Luxembourg Institute for European and International Studies (LIEIS)  
Institut Pierre Werner, Luxembourg  
*with the support of the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Luxembourg*

Conference

## The future of the Benelux cooperation in a changing Europe

8-9 February 2007  
Castle of Bourglinster (Luxembourg)

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