

### Balkan Smell of Belgium

Belgium is divided into three regions: the Dutch-speaking Flemish area, the French-speaking Walloon area and the bilingual area of Brussels (capital city). Six municipalities in the surroundings of Brussels are in the special situation of being located in Flanders while mainly populated by French-speakers. Since 1963, these municipalities have benefited from certain “linguistic facilities”: the residents may use French in their relations with the town’s public authorities although Dutch remains the official language. In 1998, Leo Peeters, then Flemish minister of domestic affairs, issued a circular which changed the regulation on the use of languages in these municipalities with linguistic facilities. Since then, municipal councils must be held in Dutch and all administrative documents must be provided in Dutch. The French-speaking population contests this ministerial circular which, according to them, is in breach of the federal linguistic law while, on the contrary, according to the Dutch-speakers, the bill is legally sound. This difference in points of view aggravates the debates between communities in Belgium.

TC IN	TC OUT	Description
00:00	00:18	Overall view of Linkebeek town
00 :18	00 :36	Mayor of Linkebeek
00 :36	00 :49	Damien Thiéry, Mayor of Linkebeek, says: “Linkebeek is a small town of more or less 5,000 inhabitants which is located in Flanders, in the northern part of the country. Yet, the town is populated by 84% French-speakers”
00 :49	01 :05	Pascal Delwit in his office
01 :05	01 :49	Pascal Delwit says “The linguistic frontier was established in Belgium 1962/63; it split the country between the Flemish territory, the Walloon territory and the Brussels’one. The critical issue was the municipalities that were changing regions. If they were not changing regions but had a substantial linguistic minority, facilities were established. It means that in a number of Flemish towns, especially the ones located around Brussels, linguistic facilities were granted to the French-speaking community, such as the possibility to express views in French language before the municipal council and the possibility to receive administrative documents in French language.”
01 :49	02 :03	Cabinet of Flemish domestic affairs ministry, Marino Keulen
02 :03	02 :35	Marino Keulen says “I apply the law and it is my role as minister to ensure the application of the law. Legally, the linguistic facilities have been grounded in the territorial legislations, therefore it would be very difficult to suppress them in practice. So, when they exist, I apply them. I note that originally, these facilities had been established to enable the people who live in these towns to learn the official language or extend their knowledge of it. In practice, it has not happened.”
02 :35	02 :54	Pascal Delwit in his office
02 :54	03 :39	Pascal Delwit says: “There is conflict of interpretation that has deepened over the years and I would say that each stakeholder has reinforced his position. One of the aims pursued by the Flemish government through the Peeters circular letter was to provide an interpretation ( <i>of the linguistic law</i> ) according to which, for instance, a citizen could not

		request once and for all that administrative documents would be provided to him in French, he would have to repeat his request for a French version for every operation of the political, administrative and electoral life of the community.”
03 :39	03 :50	Marino Keulen in his office
03 :50	04 :24	Marino Keulen says: “This circular letter explains how the linguistic law should be applied concretely. And clearly, it states that in any Flemish town, even one with linguistic facilities, if a citizen wants an administrative document in French, he or she must renew this specific claim upon each request. The Council of State ( <i>the highest administrative jurisdiction</i> ) has ruled that this interpretation of the law was valid. Therefore the circular really is a practical explanation of a federal law, it cannot be considered as a Flemish law but only as a federal law.”
04 :24	04 :32	A street in Linkebeek
04 :32	04 :43	Vox pop. A Linkebeek resident: “Everyone must speak the language of the place where he or she wants to live. If I went to Italy, I would have to speak Italian, if I wanted to buy bread there, I should not do it in Dutch, I must adapt.”
04 :43	04 :55	Images of Linkebeek
04 :55	05 :07	Vox pop. A Linkebeek resident: “This is not a handicap for living in Linkebeek. There is no problem between communities in Linkebeek. I think it is politics that blows it out of proportions.”
05 :07	05 :13	Linkebeek’s municipal council
05 :13	05 :16	Vox pop. A Linkebeek resident: “I speak the two languages so there’s no problem.”
05 :16	05 :30	Mayor of Linkebeek
05 :30	05 :44	Linkebeek Municipality council, two Flemish municipal councillors leave the room because French is being spoken.
05 :44	06 :09	Damien Thiéry, mayor of Linkebeek, says “The essence of these facilities that were introduced in our Constitution was to allow public debate, hence the municipal council, to take place in the two languages. Since the release of the circular, French language has been bannished from municipal councils which means that everyone is forced to use Dutch when there are only two councillors out of 15 who are Dutch-speakers.”
06 :09	06 :20	Pascal Delwit in his office
06 :20	06 :44	Pascal Delwit says: “We have observed some surprising situations such as the ban on children to speak French in the school playground, the requirement to master Dutch to apply for social housing, the obligation for children attending a course in a Flemish town to strictly speak only Dutch. So, some quite curious situations...”
06 :44	07 :31	Flemish extremists demonstrating before the town hall of Wezembeek-Oppem, a municipality with linguistic facilities.
07 :31	07 :42	Marino Keulen in his office
07 :42	08 :20	Marino Keulen says “I have less problems with minorities. We can agree on some things and disagree on others. Belgium is quite advanced on

