

BACKGROUND OF THE LAW OF 25 October 1919 ON INPAs and 70 YEARS OF THE FAIB

Background:

- Early 20th century, commercial companies were the only ones with legal personality, although Belgium hosted many international associations with the simple “de facto” status.
- In 1919, a law granting them civil personification was enacted (there were some 130 international associations already); two years before the law on (national) non-profit organisations.

Rationale for selecting Belgium:

- It successfully organised the 1910 Brussels Universal Exhibition
- Owing to Belgium's geographical position and its status as a neutral country (until the First World War), many international associations established there;

Brussels, capital of the scientific world

- Ernest Solvay established the Physics Councils, also known as the "Solvay Councils", gathering the elite of science, with prestigious names such as Einstein, Niels Bohr, Marie Curie, Heisenberg, Pauli, de Broglie, Max Planck... The first Solvay Council of 1911, which took place at the *Hôtel Métropole*, remains an essential and major event that “has profoundly changed the way science is done”.

The fact that Belgium became a real scientific centre in the first quarter of the 20th century probably explains why the 1919 law on international associations, only referred to associations with a scientific purpose. It was not until 1954, following the intervention of the FAIB, that this law was amended to broaden the purpose of the international associations to be philanthropic, religious, artistic or educational as well.

In 2002, the legal provisions relating to non-profit international associations (INPAs) is further extended, with the active involvement of FAIB's president Ambassador André De Schutter, since they are now open to associations that "pursue a non-profit-making aim of international utility".

The Treaties of Paris and Rome, creating the EEC, having its headquarters located in Brussels, as well as NATO moving its Headquarters here, considerably helped to strengthen Brussels' reputation as a good place to establish international associations.

Originality of the 1919 law

Is and remains one of the few laws on non-profit associations with an international dimension.

The Belgian law of 25 October 1919 served as an example for the drafting of European Convention on the recognition of the legal personality of non-governmental organisations signed in Strasbourg on 24 April 1986¹, as well as for the drafting of the European Commission's proposal for a regulation on the statute for a European association, although the latter has not been adopted yet.

A hundred years later...

Still today, on the eve of centenary of the 25 October 1919 law, the FAIB is actively coordinating the position of the international associations sector on the reform of “company and association law” currently at stake. However, the draft law amending the Code on companies and associations has yet to be voted on in plenary session for these provisions to enter into force.

Some FAIB history

1907 Creation in Brussels of the Central Office of International Institutions, which became the Union of International Associations (UIA in 1910).

The thought to create FAIB was well received by the organisations set in Belgium and encouraged by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which put its premises at the disposal of FAIB's constitutive assembly. The assembly nominated M. Paul Van Zeeland (Prime Minister and Minister of State) as President, confined the secretariat with UIA and set the following goals:

- To revisit the Belgian legislation on international associations
- Pursue the construction in Brussels of an “International House” with the capacity to host the secretariats of numerous international associations and offer space for congresses, and conferences, as well as serve as information centre
- Address demands for practical advice.

In 1949 thus 70 years ago, the leaders of the UIA set up the “Federation of International Associations established in Belgium (FAIB)”, precisely on **16/06/1949**.

Not much can be found today on the first leaders of FAIB, which was chaired for **17 years** by Ambassador André De Schutter (from 1994 to 2010) who played an essential role in the first serious reform of the law of 1919. He unfortunately passed away last June at the age of 90!

1950: ???

1952: together with UIA: creation of the first Directory of International Organisations established in Belgium;

1983: International Association Centre (IAC)

Ms Ghislaine **De Coninck** managed the federation for some 25 years and much of what she initiated is still in place today. In **2009**, she passed the baton to me and I have been fortunate to collaborate with a very supportive Board of Directors, of which several members are here today, and with President **Daniel Van Espen** until 2017 and **Adrian Harris** since then. I do hope that the efforts and strive for modernisation of the “old lady” are tangible (examples: the salary benchmark comparing remuneration at the level of trade associations and NGOs broken down by type of position – from top management to administrative staff and plenty more). We will soon be updating the socio-economic survey with the support of visit.brussels to which we would appreciate a large response from the sector.

We are fortunate to rely upon the technical support of our Associated members (20), several of whom are here today, who are our know-how and provide a valuable source of reliable information for our members and readers of our newsletter.

The team (partly composed of volunteers) is also key in providing top service to its members. I take this opportunity to welcome – on your behalf – Nelson Wright who joined the team last week as communications and administrative assistant.

Thanks...

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