

PRESS RELEASE

# Belgian economic mission to the United Kingdom

From May 8 to 12, Princess Astrid, representing the King, will lead an economic mission of Belgium to the United Kingdom (UK). With more than 400 participants, 214 companies and organizations and four days of activities in the Greater London Area, this mission will be one of the largest ever organized.

The large number of registrations and the extensive program reflect the great interest of our companies, universities and research centers for the opportunities within the framework of our trade relationship with the UK.

## Official Delegation

HRH Princess Astrid will be accompanied by the following ministerial delegation:

- Tinne Van der Straeten, Minister of Energy, replacing Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sophie Wilmès
- Jan Jambon, Minister-President of the Flemish Government and Flemish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Culture, ICT and Facility Management;
- Willy Borsus, Deputy President of the Walloon Government and Walloon Minister for Economy, Foreign Trade, Research and Innovation, New Technologies, Agriculture and Spatial Planning;
- Hilde Crevits, Deputy Minister-President of the Flemish Government and Flemish Minister for Economy, Innovation, Work, Social Economy and Agriculture;
- Pascal Smet, State Secretary of the Brussels-Capital Region, responsible for Urban Development, European and International Affairs, Foreign Trade, Fire Fighting and Emergency Medical Assistance.

## Organisation

The economic missions are jointly organised by the three regional agencies responsible for promoting trade relations and investment (Flanders Investment & Trade/FIT, Brussels Invest & Export /hub.brussels, Agence Wallonne à l'Exportation/Awex), the Foreign Trade Agency and the FPS Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation.

## General context

It is the first economic mission that will take place since the start of COVID-19 pandemic, more than two years ago.

The UK is the fifth largest economy in the world and offers many opportunities for the service sector - especially financial services - and for research and development, thanks to the presence of world-renowned research centers.

The UK's departure from the European Union ensures that trade relations are governed by the provisions of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) between the EU and the UK that came into force in 2021. Bilateral relations between our two countries naturally fall within the framework negotiated between the EU and the UK. The TCA leaves room for member states to build further cooperation with the UK, as long as it is in line with its principles.

The federal government is committed to strengthening ties between Belgium and the UK, in full consultation with the EU and our EU partners. In this context, Minister Wilmès went to London in October 2021, and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo signed a declaration in November 2021 to highlight the importance of these intense ties around shared prosperity, green transition, health, biopharma and security. See the declaration here:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1037445/UK-BE\\_Joint\\_Declaration.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1037445/UK-BE_Joint_Declaration.pdf).

This economic mission fully fulfills these objectives and focuses on economic sectors in which our two countries can strengthen each other, in more traditional but also newer sectors.

### **A historic relationship with close ties between two neighboring countries, looking to the future**

Belgium and the UK share many interests and values. Belgium and the UK are among the most globalized countries in the world with very open economies that have every interest in promoting free trade on the international stage.

Belgium and the UK are neighbors who share not only close geographic proximity, but also a historic trading relationship and an innovative spirit. The economic ties between Belgium and the UK are historical, intense and deeply intertwined. Trade between our countries has deep historical roots that date back to the Middle Age, such as the development of the garment industry and the import of wool from England. Today, the UK is our largest non-EU trading partner (fifth largest customer and eighth largest supplier), with historic sectors that include: chemicals, transport equipment, machinery and food products. In addition, the UK is also in the top 5 largest foreign investors in our country.

The economic fabric of our country has great similarities with that of the UK: the dominance of the service sector, the importance of SMEs, a high degree of globalization and good cooperation between the private sector, government and academia. The COVID-19 pandemic has proven the great importance of sectors such as health, biopharma and life science - also for our relationship with the UK: British research and Belgian production facilities were instrumental in containing the pandemic.

### **A program focusing on economic sectors in which our two countries can reinforce each other**

The sectors that receive special attention in the program are:

- Chemicals, Pharmaceuticals and Life Sciences
- Agri-Food and Food Industry
- Architecture and Construction
- Transport and Logistics
- Cleantech

These sectors are part of this economic mission, but of course the economic cooperation with the UK is broader. In the area of energy cooperation, there are opportunities in the development of infrastructure (interconnectors) and renewable energy (green hydrogen). This was emphasized by the declaration of both Prime Ministers, as well as the Memorandum of Understanding on energy cooperation that was recently concluded.

In addition to the various B2B and B2G appointments organized for participants, the program is further enlivened by numerous events organized by the regional agencies responsible for promoting trade relations and investments, with a specific sectoral focus.

Belgian know-how in port activities and logistics supply chains, sports equipment and technology, the excellent quality of our regional products and food industry and the inauguration of a Belgian landscape garden, but also our advanced healthcare and Belgian solutions for "smart" buildings will be showcased during various sectoral forums. A large section deals with sustainable energy cooperation, including the organization of a seminar on offshore electricity and a visit to the UK Atomic Energy Authority in Culham.

### **Political meetings**

The British State Minister of State for Europe and North America James Cleverly will receive the delegation on Monday, May 9. Further political meetings are planned during the mission, such as

with the Minister of Economy and Energy, Kwasi Kwarteng. The Minister responsible for international trade, Penny Mordaunt, will participate in the activity of the Federation of Belgian Enterprises (FEB) on May 10.

**The full program and all useful information about the Belgian economic mission to the UK are available on the following website: <https://www.belgianeconomicmission.be/>.**

**During the mission, the program can be followed on social media under the hashtag #BEmissionUK.**