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Title of relevant section

Use of language in Belgium

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Clauses

Belgium recognises three official languages: Dutch, French and German. The Belgian Constitution (Art. 4) divides the country into linguistic areas which form the foundation for the federal structure; Belgium has four linguistic areas: The French speaking area (Wallonia), the Dutch speaking area (Flanders), the bilingual area of Brussels Capital and the German speaking area (Land of Eupen and Belgian Eifel within province of Liège in the region of Wallonia).

There are no restrictions concerning the use of foreign language in advertising. There is a freedom of language use in the private sphere that applies to advertising courtesy of Article 30 of the Belgian Constitution. In principle, advertising in any language is permitted in Belgium in the private sector; Public authorities are permitted to enact language legislation (affecting use of languages by the authorities and any advertising commissioned by them).

The prevailing Belgian law comes from Book VI of the Code on Economic Laws, which in Chapter 3 (Art. 8) requires references or statements subject to labelling to be expressed in a language understandable to the consumer taking into account the linguistic region where the goods or services are offered. Whilst not directly applicable to advertising, the same principle typically applies for advertising campaigns with the result that Dutch is employed in Flanders, French in Wallonia and German in the two small communities in Wallonia. In the case of Brussels, the languages used in advertising campaigns are restricted to French, Dutch and English and combinations of each. The majority of campaigns are run in both Dutch and French, followed by French-only campaigns (from figures taken from Janssens 2001).

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