



Flanders
State of the Art

Together through turbulent times

Presidency brochure

VLAIO



PREFACE

Business Finland already noted it in its first session on geostrategic tensions: we are heading towards 'turbulent times'. European Commission President von der Leyen confirmed this statement in her State of the Union and the competitiveness challenges were clearly highlighted in the Draghi report.

The VLAIO presidency is taking place during this turbulent period, which is characterised by challenges concerning competitiveness, climate ambitions, and geopolitical developments. We will face these challenges together during the VLAIO presidency, under the slogan **'Together through turbulent times'**. 'Together' refers to the importance of collaboration, not only between TAFTIE agencies, but also between each agency and its ecosystem, where VLAIO, with the VLAIO network, has a strong starting position.

The programme focuses on a joint approach and the exchange of knowledge between the Taftie agencies in order to better deal with these turbulent times.

During the first **online session**, we will look towards the **future** by asking how climate and sustainability ambitions can be reconciled with industrial competitiveness. This aligns with the topic of the **Clean Industrial Deal**, presented by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in Antwerp, 2 years ago, on 26 February 2025.

In April we will reflect on the **past** in Ghent, the city of technology. We will draw on the experiences that the agencies have already gained with various aspects addressed in the Clean Industrial Deal and

with initiatives related to **strategic autonomy and competitiveness**. In doing so, we will emphasise key European strategic initiatives such as IPCEI and Chips JU, as well as new financing mechanisms and encouraging new industrial activity through start-ups.

The June session **'Ecosystems and beyond funding (agencies)'** will focus on **how** we can get through these turbulent times together. In Antwerp we will discuss collaborative ecosystems, with interactive workshops on fostering networks and innovation which go beyond just providing financial support. Additionally, we will offer networking opportunities between Taftie members and the VLAIO Network.

We cannot ignore external threats in these turbulent times. So security and defence are also priorities. In Bruges, we will examine the **'Role of agencies in a changing situation of security and defense'**. The programme in September will address general (cyber)security matters and how agencies can support defence initiatives.

Finally, the presidency will reflect on the **'relations on the European level'** between national actors and EU frameworks. The interaction between research, innovation, and state aid policies will be explored, with attention to the challenges of moving innovations from research to market.

With this programme, we navigate towards a future where collaboration, innovation, and resilience are central, ensuring that Taftie as a network emerges stronger from these challenging, turbulent times.

We hope to see you there!

PROGRAMME 2026

Feb 10	Digital sessions & Executive Working Group Meeting Reconciling climate and sustainability ambitions with competitiveness of industry 📍 <i>Digital</i>	1
Apr 21-22	Extended insight session & Executive Working Group Meeting Strategic autonomy and competitiveness 📍 <i>Ghent</i>	2
June 18-19	Annual Conference Day & Board Meeting Ecosystems and beyond funding (agencies) 📍 <i>Antwerp</i>	3
Sept 22-23	Insight session & Executive Working Group Meeting Role of agencies in a changing situation of security and defence 📍 <i>Bruges</i>	4
Nov 24-25	Policy Forum & Board Meeting Relation with the European level 📍 <i>Brussels</i>	5



PRESIDENCY TEAM

Executive Committee



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CHAIRPERSON OF THE BOARD
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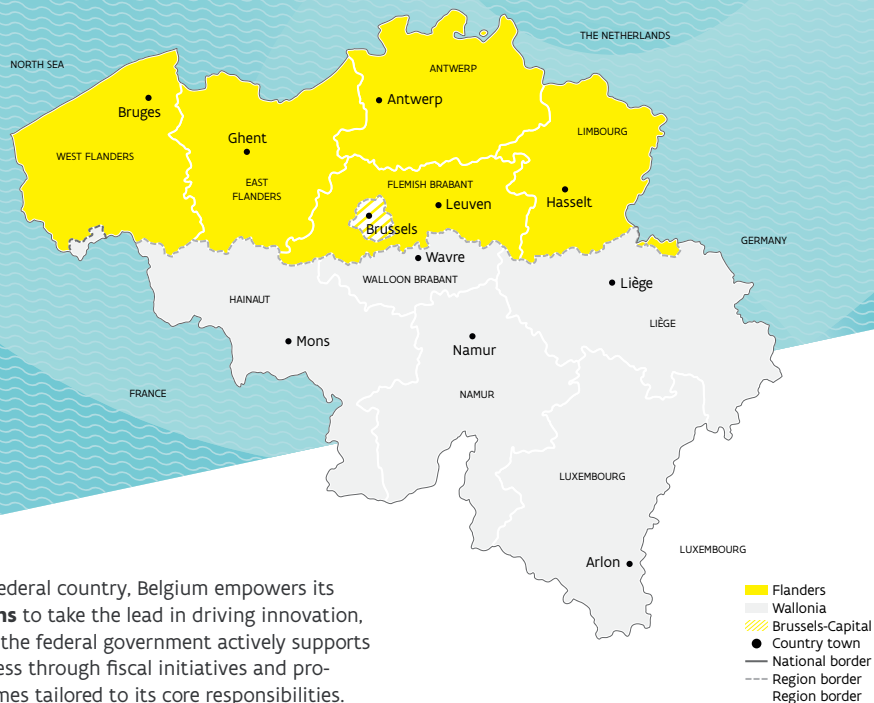
EVENT MANAGER
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Els Schelfhout

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BELGIAN CONTEXT: REGIONS LEAD INNOVATION



As a federal country, Belgium empowers its **regions** to take the lead in driving innovation, while the federal government actively supports progress through fiscal initiatives and programmes tailored to its core responsibilities.

Innovation leader Flanders

Flanders proudly stands among Europe's elite as a true **'innovation leader'**, securing an impressive 31st place out of 241 regions.

Relative strengths:

- innovative SME's collaborating with others
- international scientific co-publications
- SMEs introducing business process innovations

Relative weaknesses:

- trademark applications
- sales of new-to-market and new-to-firm innovations
- exports of medium and high technology products

Flanders represents a dynamic ecosystem fostering innovation and entrepreneurship. The region implements a comprehensive policy mix designed to support enterprises, complemented by collaborative efforts with four specialised agencies.

3,52% OF FLANDERS' GDP SPENT ON R&D

Flanders has an outspoken focus on innovation and has surpassed the 3% goal with **3,52% of its GDP spent on R&D (2023)**, compared to an **EU average of 2,11%**. For R&D expenditure, we are leaders in the EU, closely followed by Sweden. On a global scale Flanders scores 5th after Israel, South Korea, Taiwan and the US.

For Flanders the high percentage of GDP spent on R&D is the result of **a high level of investments in R&D by our companies** (72% of R&D investments), aided by tertiary education institutions (16% of R&D investments) rather than governmental expenditure (12% of R&D investments).

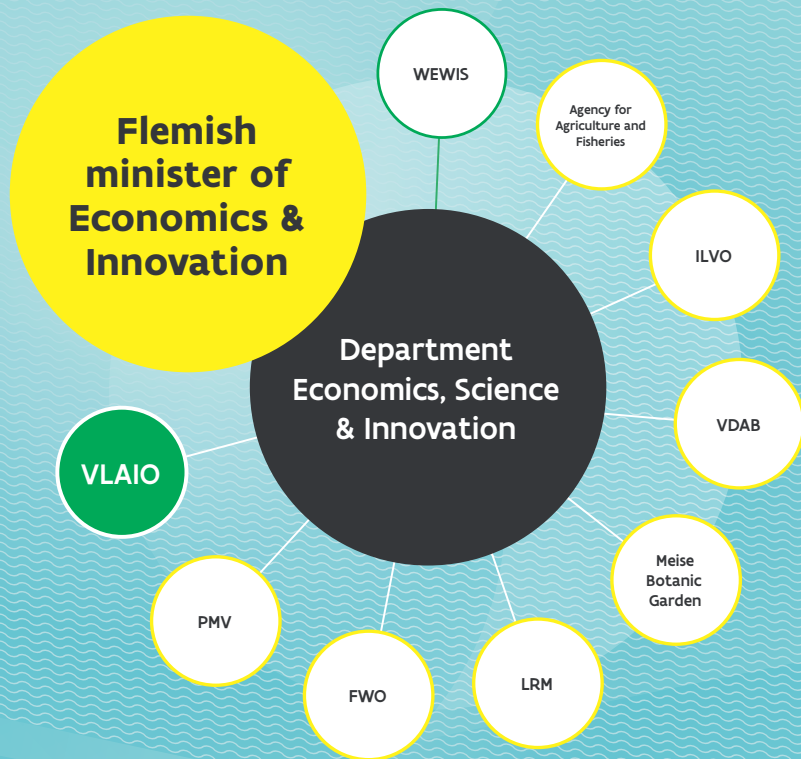


Belgium strong innovator

Belgium claims the 6th spot among the EU-27 as one of the **'strong innovators'** in the **European Innovation Scoreboard 2025**.

1. Sweden	
2. Denmark	
3. The Netherlands	
4. Finland	
5. Ireland	
6. BELGIUM	

VLAIO helps entrepreneurs grow



40.250
Total contacts of VLAIO Contact Center

844 million
Total financial support

264 million
VLAIO Program R&D&I in industry, of which 2/3 to SMEs

415
Total personnel

2,3 million
Visits to vlaio.be

3 INCREDIBLE THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT FLANDERS

Soon you will be welcomed in Flanders. Flanders, though modest in size, boasts a tremendous wealth of art, heritage, culture, food, drink, and so much more. That Belgium is famous for its beer and chocolate, you already know, but did you also know that ...



The internet was co-invented by a Fleming?

It's amazing how fast things change. Can you even imagine life without the internet? You have a Fleming to thank for that as well: Robert Cailliau. In 1989, while working at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), he collaborated with American Tim Berners-Lee to develop the very first version of the World Wide Web. This unsung hero from Flanders helped steer modern history in a new direction.

All the art on the moon comes from Flanders?

Flanders is truly a "state of the arts." Flemish masters have been captivating the world for centuries—and even the stratosphere hasn't stopped them. There's only one work of art on the moon, and it comes from Flanders. In 1971, the Apollo 15 mission left behind "Fallen Astronaut," a sculpture by the modern Flemish master Paul Van Hoeydonck. The 8.5-centimeter statue pays tribute to all those who gave their lives for space exploration.



The world's longest tram line is in Flanders?

Flanders is big in reputation but small in area, making it ideal to explore by public transportation. The tram lines weaving through major cities like Antwerp, Brussels, and Ghent are a great example. But Flanders is also home to the world's longest tram line: the coastal tram. Running parallel to the entire Flemish North Sea coast, it covers an impressive 67 kilometers. It's the perfect way to travel between various gems along the North Sea—from one museum, past another mussel restaurant, to the next sunny spot.

