BETWEEN OFFICIAL STATUS AND MINORITY RECOGNITION:

THE BELGIAN CASE AS A EUROPEAN MIRROR.

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Program of the presentation

- Quick presentation of the speaker and short introduction

- Belgium's Linguistic Landscape

- Strengths and Challenges

- Lessons for Erasmus+ Projects

- Link with Erasmus+ Priorities

- Conclusion

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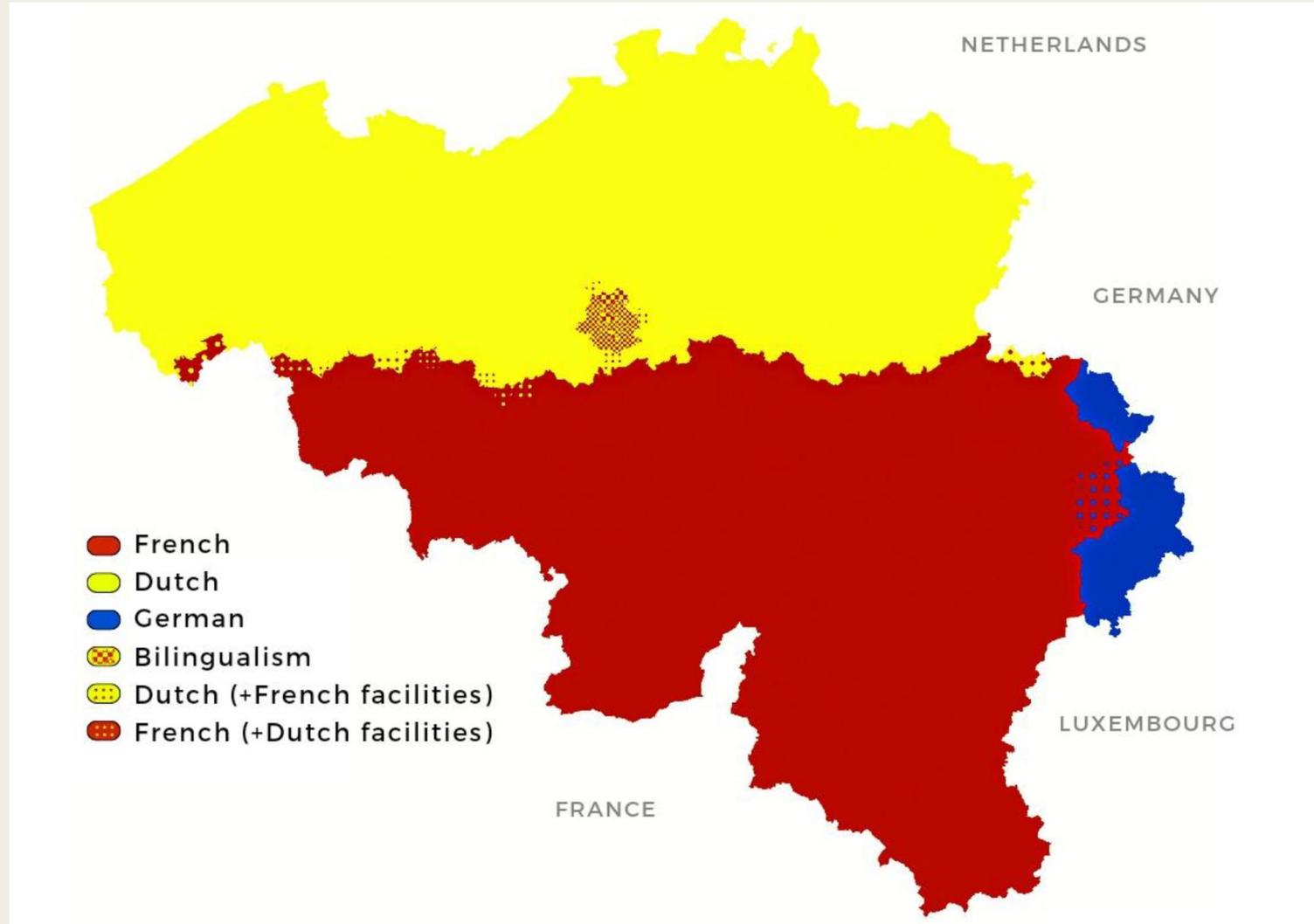# Presentation&introduction

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What is EPALE ?
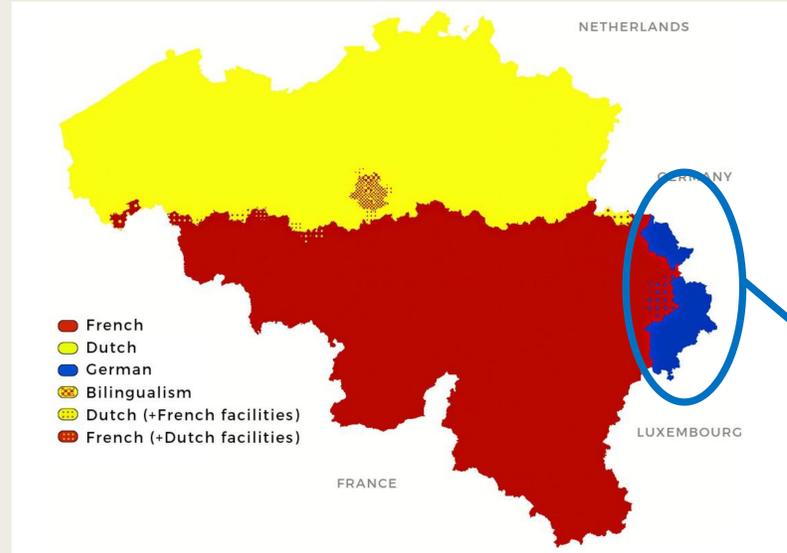
Belgium's linguistic landscape

A country organised out of tensions between the linguistic communities

- The Dutch-speaking region (Flanders) = 6.5 millions inhabitants (+/-60%)

- The French-speaking region (Wallonia) = 4.5 millions inhabitants (+/-39%)

- The German-speaking region (East Cantons) = 78000 inhabitants (+/- 1%)

- The bilingual Brussels-Capital Region (proportion = 92% French speaking- 8% dutch speaking)

Belgium's linguistic landscape

French
Dutch
German
Bilingualism
Dutch (+French facilities)
French (+Dutch facilities)
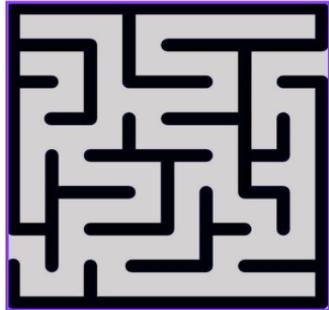
Focus on...

The German speaking Community

-Nine municipalities
-Own government *(25 seats, 1 minister-president and 3 ministers)*
-Unique example in Europe
-Fostering cross-border cooperation (Luxembourg-Germany)

Strengths and Challenges

STRENGTH

- **Legal Recognition**: The Belgian Constitution protects three official languages, ensuring institutional support.

- **Autonomous Communities**: Each linguistic community can shape its own language and education policies.

- **Active Participation**: The German-speaking Community is a great example of how small language groups can actively engage in Erasmus+ and international cooperation

CHALLENGES

- **Language Borders**: Fixed in the 1960s, these borders can create tensions, especially in municipalities with language facilities.

- **Facilities Municipalities**: In the Brussels periphery, some municipalities offer services in both Dutch and French. While designed to protect minorities, these arrangements often spark political debate.

- **Fragmentation**: The division of powers between communities can lead to inconsistent policies, making national coordination on language issues more difficult.

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Lessons for Erasmus+ Projects

Belgium's experience offers valuable lessons for Erasmus+ projects:

- **Inclusivity Beyond Official Status**: Not all minority languages are unofficial. German is official and yet spoken by a small minority.

- **Community Engagement**: Projects that involve local communities from the start are more likely to succeed and be sustainable.

- **Flexible Frameworks**: Given the diversity of linguistic contexts, Erasmus+ projects should be adaptable to local realities.

- **Promotion of Multilingualism**: Encouraging the use of multiple languages fosters mutual respect and intercultural understanding.

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Some links with Erasmus+ priorities

1. Inclusion and Diversity

- Ensuring access and visibility for small language communities;

- Involving minority representatives as co-creators, not just beneficiaries.

2. Digital Transformation

- Create **open digital resources in minority languages** (e.g. MOOCs, mobile apps, audio content);

- Foster multilingual online communities and platforms that encourage cultural exchange;

3. Environmental Sustainability

- Encourage **community-based environmental action** by tailoring content to local cultural and linguistic realities;

- Use linguistic diversity as a bridge to **traditional ecological knowledge**, which is often embedded in minority languages.

4. Participation in Democratic Life

- Support intercultural dialogue across language communities;

- Tackle disinformation and exclusion by **empowering linguistic minorities** with tools to participate equally in society.

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TCA - *Minority languages uniting in diversity* - COSENZA – June 2025

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Conclusion

In summary, Belgium's linguistic experience teaches us that **language should be a lens, not a barrier**, when designing Erasmus+ projects. By connecting inclusion, digital access, ecological awareness, and democratic participation through multilingualism, **we can better support minority communities across Europe**—turning linguistic diversity into a strategic asset.

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