0. Introduction

Belgium is an officially trilingual country (Dutch, French and German). It has three communities, i.e. the German-speaking, the French-speaking and the Dutch-speaking one. It has three regions, the Walloon region, the Flemish region and the region of Brussels-Capital and it has no less than seven governments. These are in random order (i) the federal one, (ii) the government of the German-speaking community, (iii) the government of the French-speaking community, (iv) the government of the Flemish community, (v) the government of the Walloon region, (vi) the Brussels government and (vii) the Council of the region Brussels Capital. Given the fact that Belgium counts about 30,000 km² this means that there is one government per 4,286 km². I believe this to be a world record. The French-speaking and the Dutch-speaking region have adopted the principle of linguistic territoriality, i.e. French and Dutch are the sole official languages in these regions. The German-speaking region is bilingual (German-French), the Brussels region is bilingual as well (French-Dutch). Theoretically, this means that in the bilingual areas one would expect societal multilingualism to coincide with individual plurilingualism. By societal multilingualism is meant those societies legally accepting two or more languages while individual plurilingualism refers to the actual knowledge of these languages by its citizens. In this contribution the interplay between individual plurilingualism and societal multilingualism will be examined in Belgium. It will be shown that the current social demand for individual plurilingualism, especially in Brussels, can be seen as a positive reaction towards European developments. Below, is an outline of the main ideas developed in the paper.

2. Historical Developments.

Historically speaking, East and West Flanders, a fief of the king of France, adopted de facto societal multilingualism from the Middle Ages onwards. In Brabant and Limbourg, a fief of the German emperor, French became important when the dukes of Burgundy made Brussels their northern capital in the 15th century. Societal multilingualism entailed individual plurilingualism. The best illustration of this – though probably apocryphal – is the anecdote about Emperor Charles V who spoke Italian to the ladies, Spanish at court, French to diplomats, German to soldiers and Dutch to servants and horses!

Individual plurilingualism in Belgium installed itself from the Middle Ages, was boosted in the 17th century through the prestige Louis XIV’s France and caused the
beginning of a language shift in Brussels in the 19th and early 20th century. This process referred to as *frenchification* came to an end in the early 1960s. At that time a body of legislation was installed that promoted societal multilingualism but discouraged (early) individual plurilingualism. In the last decades of the 20th century an increasing interest in individual plurilingualism has arisen mainly because of the internationalisation of Brussels.

The evolution in Wallonia was completely different. The linguistic evolution of the area follows at a distance what happened in France. As in France many dialects lost ground after the French Revolution and the rapid increase of French standardisation processes.

### 3. Societal Multilingualism vs Individual Pluralingualism

It is interesting to see that, until recently, in societies where societal multilingualism led to individual plurilingualism upward mobility was the driving factor behind it. Belgium was no exception. At one point, namely towards the end of the 19th century in Brussels this strategy was even institutionalised through the organization of special bilingual education for Dutch-speaking school children in order to have them gain faster access to education in French.

Individual plurilingualism in Flanders and in Brussels was violently opposed by members of the Flemish Movement in the 19th and 20th century, who feared that individual plurilingualism and *frenchification* were identical and that it was a threat to the mere existence of the Dutch language. Flanders’ language policies ultimately led to a heavy body of language legislation in 1962-3 which still affects attitudes and thinking.

The last decades of the 20th century saw interesting changes come about. Two developments are responsible for this change.

1. In urban areas a substantial numbers of migrant worker’s children started populating the schools. This led to some form of bilingual education for non-indigenous children. Since 1982 *Foyer* organized bilingual programmes and this experience has created a new interest in individual plurilingualism in the 1990s.

2. The gradual unification of Europe opened the way for a change in the way languages and language learning were evaluated and perceived. Europe’s language policy, promoting the knowledge of at least two other languages than the mother tongue, has given a boost to individual plurilingualism.

### 4. Individual Pluralingualism vs. Linguistic Legislation

The increasing interest in individual plurilingualism conflicts with current linguistic legislation. In Belgium it is illegal to organize classes in Dutch/French, as the case may be, before form 5 in Flanders and Wallonia, and form 3 in the Brussels area. However, since 1998 the Walloon government has issued a decree permitting primary schools, under certain circumstances, to organize immersion classes. The response to this has been fair. Around 20 schools have reacted positively. Most of them opted for
Dutch as a second language (L2). 20 - 80% of the curriculum is devoted to L2. In Brussels only the schools collaborating with the Foyer project follow bilingual programmes in Spanish, Italian or Turkish. Officially this programme is not meant for Belgians, but a number of Belgian parents’ children with no migrant background are also involved. In Flanders no such programmes exist at the moment.

5. Individual Pluralingualism vs. Multilingual Language Methodology

Interest in bilingual education and by extension multilingual education – since all students (should) study at least two languages – has stimulated the debate about multilingual language methodology. While in Wallonia the term immersion has been adopted under the influence of the Canadian experience, elsewhere in Europe and Belgium the term content and language integrated learning (CLIL) is favoured. CLIL differs from immersion in the sense that it is more flexible. It focuses on five dimensions. Apart from language, environmental factors, cultural factors, content factors and learning factors are taken into account.

6. Individual Pluralingualism vs. Education

It seems that individual pluralingualism without necessarily aiming at upward social mobility - in other words devoid of political implications - can enhance language education in particular and education in general significantly. Various arguments will be given to support this idea and to point out its importance for sustaining societal multilingualism.

7. References
