

Speech by the Minister-President of the Government of Flanders

Jan JAMBON

on the occasion of Flanders Day

Brussels, 4 July 2022¹

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am extremely pleased that so many of you have come here to join us in celebrating our Flanders Day. Today, more than ever, this celebration takes on a deeper meaning because it refers to a people's struggle for self-government. Of course our political struggles can in no way be compared to what the people of Ukraine have to endure today. I would however like to use this opportunity to mark our solidarity and support. Ukraine is being ravaged by a war that has no other cause than the blind expansionism of a tyrannical regime that wishes to impose its will on another people who only wanted peace.

With all the challenges the world faces today from war and conflict, climate change, the slow depletion of resources and the associated need for sustainable energy, only further global collaboration will be able to save us from future catastrophes like these.

Flanders has been a hub for international politics, trade and culture for centuries. In order to maintain this position, we depend on the world around us for our prosperity and development. Then, as now, Flanders must be international, or it is not Flanders. Flanders is international!

In a globalised world, the interests of 6.6 million Flemish people must be actively represented. As an open society and economy, Flanders combines its commitment to the people of Flanders, businesses and organisations, with the will to be a committed player in the world.

This implies a never-ending quest for new opportunities and new partners.

¹ Check against delivery

One of the most important tools for achieving strong collaboration with our international partners is Flanders' foreign network. It consists of 13 diplomatic representations, some 100 economic offices of Flanders Investment & Trade and a VISITFLANDERS network, active in some 30 international markets.

In Flanders, the Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office is the first point of contact for foreign embassies and diplomatic representations. Our door is always open to you.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The European Union is and will remain the foremost and primary lever for Flanders' foreign policy. EU policies are having an increasing impact on domestic policy. It is an essential part of Flemish prosperity and well-being and of Flemish policy in general.

Flanders resolutely opts for strategic diversification and rejects protectionism. The strength of our economy lies precisely in its openness. We need to secure our energy security and supply for the coming years and ensure it for the future, by diversifying our energy supply and increasing our own renewable energy generation. In order to do this, we are looking to collaborate with partners around the world.

The current crisis is forcing us all to make the shift towards a climate-neutral and sustainable society even faster. The Government of Flanders is therefore aiming for a greater focus on energy-savings and the expansion of renewable energy. We will turn our strategic dependence into an economic opportunity by supporting innovative energy sources such as CCS/CCU (Carbon Capture Storage / Carbon Capture Utilisation) and green hydrogen.

Flanders' knowledge centres are renowned throughout the world and the collaboration with our companies is an important engine for technological innovation and the development of a sustainable energy policy. Our universities and university colleges work closely with the strategic research centres such as imec, VIB, VITO and Flanders Make, generating applications that can be immediately commercialised by companies.

Today more than ever, knowledge is not only power, knowledge is wealth, prosperity. The future.

Your excellencies,

We here in Flanders want to share our knowledge with partners at home and abroad. The Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office, the export agency Flanders Investment & Trade and VISITFLANDERS open windows and doors to the world for Flanders. I would like to take this opportunity to bring a few recent initiatives to your attention.

These include the roll-out of a global network of Flemish technology attachés, operating from local innovation hubs in strategic locations around the world: the Science & Technology Offices. This is how Flanders Investment & Trade (FIT) is supporting innovation players abroad and aiming to boost the international reputation of Flemish innovation.

Thanks to some recent substantial enhancements to that network, 10 Science & Technology Offices are already operational. You can find them in New York, Palo Alto, Paris, London, Copenhagen, Munich, Mumbai, Singapore, Guangzhou and Tokyo.

Flanders dispatches not only its diplomats, but also its sons and daughters. This year, the Government of Flanders launched the Fayat Scholarships. With these scholarships, we are making top international institutions more accessible to ambitious and talented students from Flanders, because they are our future captains of society. As early as September, the first group of talented students will go abroad. In a way, these students will also be ambassadors for Flanders.

Furthermore, Flanders wants the world to see what is happening in our region. I hope that many among you are familiar with "Flanders News Service" by now. This is a new initiative from the Government of Flanders, whereby English-language coverage of Flanders is offered by the independent press agency Belga.

In times of fake news, I would therefore like to emphasise the independent nature of the news-gathering by the Flanders News Service. This initiative also contributes directly to the appearance of and knowledge about what is going on in Flanders. The responses I have received during my conversations with you over the past few months demonstrate a great deal of enthusiasm for this initiative.

Other major news is that, after the summer, the Government of Flanders will be launching a major technology and innovation festival in 2024, highlighting the opportunities technology has to offer and how Flanders, its companies and research institutions are at the cutting edge of innovation.

Another highlight will undoubtedly be the spring of 2024, when Flanders will co-chair the European Council together with the Federal and other regional governments. Flanders will assume the EU presidency on the important topics of Culture, Industry, Youth, Agriculture and fisheries. I am confident our EU presidency in 2024 will be a new opportunity to further deepen our cooperation. I already look forward to working together with all of you.

Flanders wants to be an open society that reaches out to foreign partners to build something new and great together.

We have a very open economy and are the 15th-largest exporter in the world. Flanders can safely be called the logistics centre of Western Europe – with 3 ports and 60% of the European consumer market within a 500 km radius.

Flanders is the centre of the European Union and houses several international institutions. Flanders is home to no less than 191 nationalities. We are international at heart.

Your Excellencies,

A country – and certainly a small country – can do nothing without foreign partners. Throughout world history, isolationism has led only to poverty and misery and to endless and all-consuming conflicts.

Diplomacy is the art of reconciling the seemingly irreconcilable. You all have a role to play in this that cannot be underestimated.

Seeking mutual interests across borders, managing and if possible resolving conflicts, and establishing and maintaining lasting international relations are the core tasks of diplomats.

I would like to invite you to join me in raising a glass to good collaboration and a festive celebration of our Flanders Day.