

**NATIONAL/FEDERAL/REGIONAL POLICIES AND
PROGRAMMES OF DIGITIZATION OF THE SCIENTIFIC
AND CULTURAL CONTENT**

BELGIUM

FEDERAL AUTHORITY

(December 2003)

I. FEDERAL DIGITIZATION POLICIES FOR THE CULTURAL AND SCIENTIFIC CONTENT

1. Bodies responsible for cultural and science policies

1 A: Ministries / Government departments

Belgian Federal Science Policy Office (Service public fédéral de programmation Politique scientifique – Programmatorische federale overheidsdienst Wetenschapsbeleid)

The Federal Science Policy Office is the Government department responsible for the federal science policy. It is placed under the authority of the Federal Minister of Science Policy (currently, Mrs Fientje MOERMAN, Minister of Economy and Science Policy).

- **Web site :**

<http://www.belspo.be>

- **Leading official**

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- **Responsibilities and sectors covered**

As a result of the State reform implemented in 1980, the general public competences in the sector of culture (including the memory institutions: libraries, archives and museums) have been transferred to the cultural Communities. Nevertheless several institutions have remained under the responsibility of the federal authority so as to allow them to continue to preserve and develop as appropriate what is a priceless indivisible heritage. Their tasks lie at both national and international level.

Ten of the federal scientific and cultural institutions are "Federal Scientific Establishments (FSEs)" with a large autonomy, are placed under the administrative control of the the Federal Science Policy Policy, namely (in chronological order): the General State Archives (created in 1796); the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (1801); the Royal Observatory of Belgium (1826); the Royal Art and History Museums (1835); the Royal Library of Belgium (1837); the Belgian Royal Institute of Natural Sciences (1846); the Royal Museum of Central Africa (1897); the Royal Meteorological Institute (1913); the Royal Institute of Artistic Heritage (1946) and the Belgian Institute of Space Aeronomy (1964). To these ten institutions should be added the Research and Documentation Centre on War and Contemporary Societies, which partly comes under the General State Archives whilst enjoying autonomy status. The Belgian Royal Film Archive is also funded by the Federal Science Policy budget. The Royal Museum of the Army and Military History comes under the federal Department of Defence.

Websites: ... http://www.belspo.be/belspo/res/institut/esf_en.stm (FSEs)
<http://www.ledoux.be/> (Belgian Royal Film Archives)
<http://www.klm-mra.be/> (Royal Museum of the Army and Military History)

I B: Related bodies or organizations which are involved in policies related to cultural and scientific content and which may have a role regarding digitization

Board of directors of the Federal scientific establishments (FSEs)

- **Leading official :**

Dr. Philippe METTENS, chairman of the Directing Board of the Federal Science Policy Office, chairman of the Board of directors of the FSEs

- **Contact person**

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- **Responsibilities and sectors covered**

The Board's mandate is:

- to co-ordinate the scientific, administrative and financial management of the federal scientific establishments, in particular as regards initiatives requiring common implementation mechanisms;
- to give the Minister of Science Policy, on demand or on own initiative, advice on all issues regarding the working of the establishments;
- to co-ordinate the budgetary proposals of the establishments.

Remark. As a result of the ongoing reform of the federal administration, the directors of the FSEs will in the near future become members of the Directing Board of the Federal Science Policy Office.

2. Short inventory of digitization policies

- **Principal bodies responsible**

Belgian Federal Science Policy Office (Directing Board)

Board of directors of the Federal scientific establishments (FSEs)

Management Committees of the FSEs

- **Framework for the policies**

White Book for the modernization of the Federal Scientific Establishments (FSEs) "Horizon 2005"

A major initiative was taken in May 2002 by the federal Minister of Scientific Research and the Government Commissioner responsible for Science Policy, namely the publication (with the Directors of the FSEs) of the White Book "Horizon 2005" that aims at giving a significant impulse to the modernization of the ten federal scientific establishments (FSEs), in synergy with the ongoing reform of the federal administration. The establishments should be raised to the highest international level as regards both quality and social relevance of the research and scientific public service they carry out. And they should permanently secure that this high level of performance is maintained. In order to reach these objectives and to fill the gap accumulated with regard to the similar foreign institutions, significant extra-investments will be needed during ten years, in particular as regards infrastructure.

For more information see: http://www.belspo.be/belspo/home/publ/pub_ostc/esf/Witboek_fr.pdf

The programme of the new federal Government (July 2003) states that the Government will carefully examine the practical ways for implementing the recommendations of the White Book.

- **What are the objectives of this policy**

The conservation and valorisation of the scientific, historical and artistic heritage held by the FSEs has been identified as a major issue at stake, in order to give the FSEs the capacity to keep in phase with the evolution of the society (new museology, use of new information technologies, in particular digitization policy, etc), to contribute to the image of the country and of its institutions and to improve the services to the society, the political authorities and the citizens. Another major challenge is the role the FSEs have to play in the development of the information society and the e-Government initiatives, and especially in the improvement of access to knowledge.

Eight programmes of action have been identified, the first of which being called "Using the new information technologies in order to secure the management and the access to heritage". A set of wide ranging measures in favour of the digitization of the scientific and cultural heritage is proposed including the digitization of collections, inventories, catalogs and data and the development of new – online and offline – electronic services.

- **How is this policy implemented and co-ordinated?**

A preparatory strategic study aimed at contributing to the setting up of the digitization action plan for the ten Federal Scientific Establishments (FSEs) and the Royal Film Archive (RFA) was carried out by an external consultant in 2002 and achieved in March 2003.

The main tasks of the study were: (i) to make a comprehensive inventory of the collections, skills, resources and needs and to draw up a state-of-the-art report; (ii) to build a shared vision and a common strategy with the FSEs and the RFA for the ten years to come; and (iii) to make an estimation of the human, technical and financial resources needed.

An accompanying committee composed of representatives of all establishments and of the Federal Science Policy Office was created. Four thematic working groups (documents; artistic objects, scientific objects; digital management) were set up.

A multiannual digitization plan is now currently being set up, following the conclusions of the study and the recommendations of the accompanying committee and of the Board of directors. A global and collective approach to a large-scale digitization of the scientific and cultural heritage held by the FSEs will be followed (e.g. on standards, technical and regulatory constraints, guidelines for priority settings, etc), taking into account the individual constraints and priorities and the specificities of each institution. The agreement of the Council of Ministers will be asked for extra-funding and complementary sources of financing will be sought.

II. FEDERAL DIGITIZATION PROGRAMMES FOR THE CULTURAL AND SCIENTIFIC CONTENT

3. Short inventory of the digitization programmes

Multiannual Information Society Support Programme (2001-2008)

The Programme is implemented by the Federal Science Policy Office and backs up the various initiatives taken elsewhere. Its aim is to stimulate the use of information technologies in target sectors (i.e. the federal administration, the federal scientific establishments (FSEs), the non-market sector, and the Belnet users community) through application projects. The technologies concern the complete array of tools for, e.g., digitizing, processing, exchanging and disseminating information of all kinds, emphasizing what is actually at stake with respect to the interoperability of existing systems. The programme has a total multiannual budget (2001-2008) of EUR 15.2 million.

For the FSEs, the programme gives the preference to projects that use a cooperative approach to tackle the digitization of these highly specialised establishments' collections and information holdings with the purpose of ensuring their conservation and facilitating their use. What is more, in line with the European initiatives taken in this area, it is expected to see the development of innovative application projects on accessing this heritage, especially when it comes to access for users outside the FSEs themselves, that is, the scientific community, education sector, the broad public, etc. The projects are carried out in partnership with technical and/or academic service providers.

As a result of two calls for proposals issued in 2000 and in 2002, nine projects involve FSEs. They cover the following topics:

- towards a Belgian virtual union catalogue;
- digital access to aerial and astronomical photographic archives;
- document management integrated system for scientific organisations;
- telematic network for teaching art history in universities;
- digitization of ethno-musicological sound archives;
- multimedia archaeological research system;
- generalized natural sciences online spatial information system of the FSEs;
- centralised electronic information system on genetic resources of living plant material (a prototype for woody plants);
- critical system for integration, digitization and retrieval of Belgian penal statistics.

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III. FEDERAL DIGITIZATION PROJECTS FOR THE CULTURAL AND SCIENTIFIC CONTENT

4. Ongoing individual projects

Projects planned in the current three-year framework programmes of the federal scientific establishments

The projects are funded by the own budgets of the establishments and partly by a special research budget allocated by the Federal Science Policy Office.

General State Archives

Providing of genealogical sources in the form of microfilms and digitized documents accessible via Internet – Development of electronic services of historical information and documentation (digital reading rooms).

Research and Documentation Centre on War and Contemporary Societies

Complete computerization of the inventories of the collections – Digitization of photographic documents.

Royal Library

Carrying out of the computerization of ancient catalogues (« retroconversion ») – Digitization of Belgian journals from the XVIIIth century until 1920.

Royal Institute of Natural Sciences

Inventory, digitization and online release of collections and data banks, and of the catalogue of the library and archives.

Royal Museum of Central Africa

Digitization of collections and data – Creation of a virtual museum.

Royal Observatory

Digitization of astrophotographical negatives and of the library catalogue.

Royal Meteorological Institute

Systematic automation of the data collection – Development of the observations data banks and digital modelling.

Institute of Space Aeronomy

Development of multimedia tools of information and education.

Royal Museums of Art and History

Development of interactive multimedia means in the galleries – Computerization of the libraries, of the slides library and some inventories.

Royal Museums of Fine Arts

Computerization of the inventory of the works of art and of the catalogues of the archives and the library.

Royal Institute of Artistic Heritage

Carrying out of the computerization of the library, full transition to digital photography, carrying out of the digitization of the collection of photographic negatives and providing access to them on Internet.

This document was established by:

The **Scientific and Technical Information Service (STIS)**, a Division of the **Federal Science Policy Office**

The STIS is specialized in: (i) scientific and technical information brokerage and promotion of information systems; (ii) information and documentation on science policy and (iii) information and support for federal players concerning European research, innovation and culture activities. The STIS is also active in the field of digital heritage (archives, libraries, musea).

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