



**Fédération Européenne
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FEMS: year report 2020

The two main features in 2020 are the establishment of a new government and of course the consequences of the corona pandemic.

Since the elections held in May 2019, Belgium had been missing a federal government while the other regional governments were already installed: in March 2020, the previous government got the support of the Parliament so that it could function now as a “normal” government with “full powers” until end of September 2020.

On October 2020, the new Government, under the Leadership of Alexander De Croo (Flemish Liberal Party), was installed with seven represented parties. Three families of parties were represented in both linguistic parts (Liberal, socialist and green); the Christian democratic party was only represented by the Flemish CD&V.

The fight against COVID 19 was their biggest challenge and of course the financial repercussion on the economy.

The first corona wave was very fatal in Belgium but figures were maximized: indeed, all deaths were assigned to corona while many people were multi-morbid and did not suffer only from corona. Moreover, there was no confirmation by testing at that stage of the infection.

It might be necessary to stimulate the experts/authorities to settle the same protocol for the counting of victims.

There is now a third wave: it seems to be less deadly and makes more infected victims in a younger population. However, those people have less problems and need less intensive care treatments or hospitalization.

The social effects are still present and the financial consequences are very important. For instance, the travel “industry” and the cultural sector are still suffering very badly from limitations and problems.

Most live congresses have been “postponed” or canceled and are now organized as virtual meetings, webinars or online events.

Of course, vaccination is now the new solution for the crisis.

However, we are facing the problem of the provision of vaccine vials by the pharmaceutical companies: many were initially promised but not really provided.

In addition, thrombosis was detected in a very low number of vaccinations but it was decided that the benefits of the vaccination were more important than the side effects. For those vaccines an age limit was applied.

The will for the vaccination varies in the different regions Flanders where figures are the highest, followed by Brussels and Wallonia where the intention to vaccinate is the lowest ... as it appears, the French-speaking people are looking to France where there are more antivaxers...

As Belgium is a “federal” country, our different authorities have put different criteria for the prioritization of the different age groups: Flanders starts with the over 85s, Brussels with the over-75s and Wallonia with the over-65s. This accounts for confusion in the population.

It is obvious that we can see the effects of the increasing numbers of vaccinated citizens as the number of infected people is decreasing as well as the numbers of hospital admissions. Moreover, less people are dying of COVID.

Today, more than one third of the general population is vaccinated or got at least one dose: it is expected that for the end of the summer holidays, the entire population will have got at least one dose.

Normally, when 70 % of the population will have been vaccinated, the social situation should “normalize” and the constriction measures could virtually be given up: this might happen in September 2021.

Today, schools are more or less open in normal conditions. The industry is requested to work from home as much as possible in order to limit the traffic and social contacts.

Restaurants and bars are still closed but from May 8th 2021, the terraces will be able to reopen as it is safe outside. Restaurants and bars are expected to reopen fully in mid-June 2021.

Figures are gradually going back to normal but those are still high in both infected people and hospital admissions. Although those figures are slowly decreasing as well as the number of patients needing intensive care treatment, they are still too high to loosen the rules.

It is very clear that the general population is hoping for the relaxation of the restrictions so that progressively, more freedom is given...

For now, the forecasts depend on figures...

Bernard Maillet
Head of Delegation for Belgium