

# **WE EXIST !**

## **100 citizens of Brussels from all walks of life and origins APPEAL to the political authorities and to all their fellow citizens**

**Negotiations will soon be underway. They will shape the future of Belgium and thereby that of Brussels. They will be conducted between Flemish and Francophone political parties, rather than between representatives of the country's three Regions**

**We, residents of the Brussels Capital Region, refuse to have our fate decided in this manner. Because it is high time to proclaim that the population of Brussels can no longer be reduced to two groups, "Flemings" on the one side, Francophones on the other. Because it is high time to stop regarding Belgium as being made up of two opposing Communities and to enable the country's three Regions to flourish side by side, each with its own identity and efficient institutions.**

Many of us, residents of the Brussels Capital Region, were born outside Belgium. Most of us speak more than one language and, in many of our families, languages live side by side. As Europe strengthens its presence in Brussels, the city becomes increasingly international and complex, a city-region with a character of its own, increasingly different from both Flanders and Wallonia. This complexity constitutes a challenge. But it is absurd to seek to squeeze it into the straitjacket of the two Communities. If properly managed, this complexity is an asset of which we can be proud and which must be used to make Brussels more dynamic, and thereby the neighbouring regions and Europe as a whole.

In this spirit, we, residents of the Brussels Capital Region, want to make our city a place where people of all origins are happy to live, work and move around, meet up and have fun, access education and health care, grow up and even grow old, a democratic city that combines tolerance and solidarity, efficiency and conviviality.

To be equal to this ambition, we will need to break new ground.

We will need to provide our international city with an effective system of governance, by reshaping the competences of the communes and the Communities. Together with the two other Regions, we will need to create a body that can thoroughly rethink the distribution of employment and housing between the Brussels Region and its periphery and to manage land use and mobility accordingly in this larger area.

We will need to intensify ongoing efforts to rehabilitate the city's public spaces and to develop its housing stock, to foster the mixing of functions and populations within neighbourhoods, to tame car traffic and to favour gentle forms of transport.

We will need to confront head on the specific problems and huge inequalities that bedevil Brussels' education system and associate in this effort all the school networks active in the city. In particular, we will need to harness the city's linguistic wealth to ensure that most

of the children who grow up there become proficient in three languages – those that prevail in Brussels, in Belgium and in Europe, respectively, – and thereby better equipped to find jobs in Brussels and beyond.

We will need to multiply initiatives – from the Zinneke parade to car-free Sundays – that bring together all components of the Brussels population to share in the pleasure of living in a cosmopolitan and convivial city, both respectful and proud of its minorities and opposed to all forms of segregation.

More than ever before, it is vital today that the community of all Brussels residents should prove its existence to those seeking to deny it, mobilize around an ambitious but realistic project, and get actively involved in shaping its own fate.

What is at stake here is primarily the well-being of those women and men who, like us, have chosen or will choose to move to Brussels or keep living there.

What is also at stake is the role of Brussels as capital of this strange but captivating country called Belgium and as a dynamic force that benefits all three Regions.

Lastly, and to an ever growing extent, what is at stake is the mission that has been bestowed to Brussels as capital of the European Union, this unprecedented historical experiment with which the destiny of our city is henceforth intimately linked.

**The undersigned invite all Brussels citizens who share their analysis and their ambition to join them in signing this appeal and in circulating it.**

**They also invite all Brussels-based political representatives, whatever languages they happen to speak, to acknowledge the existence of a real community of citizens of Brussels, and commit themselves to representing it as a whole.**

**Finally, they invite all participants in the forthcoming institutional negotiations to accede to the demands set out in this appeal, and to grant Brussels, like the other Regions, the power to shape its own future.**