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United States Department of State  
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors  
Office of Inspector General

# Report of Inspection

Embassy Brussels, Belgium

**Report Number ISP-I-10-04A, December 2009**

## ~~IMPORTANT NOTICE~~

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## **PURPOSE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE INSPECTION**

This inspection was conducted in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspections, as issued by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, and the Inspector's Handbook, as issued by the Office of Inspector General for the U.S. Department of State (Department) and the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG).

### **PURPOSE**

The Office of Inspections provides the Secretary of State, the Chairman of the BBG, and Congress with systematic and independent evaluations of the operations of the Department and the BBG. Inspections cover three broad areas, consistent with Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980:

- **Policy Implementation:** whether policy goals and objectives are being effectively achieved; whether U.S. interests are being accurately and effectively represented; and whether all elements of an office or mission are being adequately coordinated.
- **Resource Management:** whether resources are being used and managed with maximum efficiency, effectiveness, and economy and whether financial transactions and accounts are properly conducted, maintained, and reported.
- **Management Controls:** whether the administration of activities and operations meets the requirements of applicable laws and regulations; whether internal management controls have been instituted to ensure quality of performance and reduce the likelihood of mismanagement; whether instance of fraud, waste, or abuse exist; and whether adequate steps for detection, correction, and prevention have been taken.

### **METHODOLOGY**

In conducting this inspection, the inspectors: reviewed pertinent records; as appropriate, circulated, reviewed, and compiled the results of survey instruments; conducted on-site interviews; and reviewed the substance of the report and its findings and recommendations with offices, individuals, organizations, and activities affected by this review.



**United States Department of State  
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors**

*Office of Inspector General*

PREFACE

This report was prepared by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, and Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended. It is one of a series of audit, inspection, investigative, and special reports prepared by OIG periodically as part of its responsibility to promote effective management, accountability and positive change in the Department of State and the Broadcasting Board of Governors.

This report is the result of an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the office, post, or function under review. It is based on interviews with employees and officials of relevant agencies and institutions, direct observation, and a review of applicable documents.

The recommendations therein have been developed on the basis of the best knowledge available to the OIG and, as appropriate, have been discussed in draft with those responsible for implementation. It is my hope that these recommendations will result in more effective, efficient, and/or economical operations.

I express my appreciation to all of those who contributed to the preparation of this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H.W. Geisel".

Harold W. Geisel  
Deputy Inspector General

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**This inspection report on Embassy Brussels should be read in conjunction with *Tri-Mission Coordination in Brussels, Belgium*, ISP-I-10-15.**





## CONTEXT



Roughly the size of Maryland, Belgium is a long-time U.S. ally. This country of over 10 million people is a highly developed market economy at the crossroads of Europe. Belgium helped found the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and both organizations are headquartered in Brussels. Heavily dependent on exports, it is the 12th largest U.S. trading partner. More containers are shipped from the huge port of Antwerp to North America than from any other

port in the world. Over 900 U.S. companies are located in Belgium; one in 12 Belgian employees works for an American firm.

A constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy, Belgium is usually governed by a coalition government. The current fiscal crisis and its impact on banking, budgetary issues, and a 10 percent unemployment rate are key government concerns. Language and economic and political differences between the Dutch- and French-speaking parts of Belgium have so divided the nation's society that Belgium has become a federal state, with increasing autonomy given to regional and local governments.

According to its Mission Strategic Plan (MSP), the top embassy goal is to foster a counterterrorism partnership, notably in Afghanistan where Belgium supports the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) by providing security at Kabul airport, stationing Belgian F-16s, and other measures. The country also aids Afghanistan's economic development. Belgium is active in nonproliferation efforts, including the Container Security Initiative, and has been a U.S. diplomatic partner in peacekeeping efforts in the Balkans, Central Africa, and elsewhere. Bilateral relations, normally close and cordial, were strained by disagreements over the Iraq war, but this strain has largely dissipated. Belgium worked closely with the United States during its 2007-08 membership on the UN Security Council; Belgium will hold the EU presidency in the second half of 2010. The embassy conducts outreach with Belgium's Muslim community to emphasize the United States' openness, inclusiveness, and tolerance, and supports local efforts to prevent radicalization.

The Embassy exercises primary responsibility for overseeing the joint administrative support (JAS) unit, which supports it as well as the USEU and USNATO, also in Brussels. All three missions share a security office. More tri-mission cooperation in public diplomacy, reporting, policy coordination, visitor support, and training could result in a more effective operation, but this potential remains to be fully realized.

Recent resource restrictions challenge the Embassy's ability to accomplish its agenda. Global repositioning transferred several political, economic, and management positions elsewhere. Budget cuts have reduced discretionary public diplomacy funds; (b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2) The fluctuating dollar-euro exchange rate stresses post planning and budgets. A long-delayed rehabilitation of the chancery and a perimeter security project are underway, but there are no funds to enlarge an inadequate consular section.

Thousands of American military personnel are stationed in Belgium. The Embassy, USEU, and USNATO host thousands of official visitors each year, which strains post resources.

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTION

From April 2007 to January 2009, Embassy Brussels was led by a noncareer Ambassador who came to his job with significant and relevant executive leadership in the private sector. By all accounts, he used his business acumen and experience to excellent effect, notably in two areas. The first was in building important relationships with both the Belgian and American business communities, and with senior Belgian Government officials charged with financial and trade matters. The second was his active and visible outreach to the Belgian community to improve the image and standing of the United States at a time when both were suffering as a result of Belgian misgivings about U.S. policies, such as the Iraq war. His efforts in both areas were judged highly successful. In particular, he is credited with shepherding to production a 20-minute film that highlights the closeness of Belgian-U.S. ties from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The film continues to play well to Belgian audiences and has been employed effectively to counter anti-American sentiment.

The deputy chief of mission (DCM), who has been chargé d'affaires since January 1, 2009, arrived in Brussels 4 months after the Ambassador, on a direct transfer from another DCM assignment. Because of the Ambassador's high-energy leadership style, it fell to the DCM to serve as both moderator and mediator, tasks he seems to have accepted ungrudgingly. His determined efforts have earned him appreciation and respect, and high marks for fairness, integrity, and engagement. After the Ambassador's departure, the chargé has stepped fully into the demanding role of principal spokesperson for the Embassy and the U.S. Government. He is a poised and polished public speaker, in French and English. Moreover, he has moved comfortably into the role of chief interlocutor with senior Belgian officials, including the prime minister, with whom he has established excellent rapport. He is also working to institutionalize the important business and official contacts that the Ambassador developed during his tenure.

Internally, the chargé has shepherded the Embassy through wrenching adjustments prompted by significant cuts in personnel and financial resources, including the consolidation of the downsized political and economic sections into a combined unit. He has exerted clear and effective leadership over a country team that includes senior representatives of eight agencies charged with advancing significant U.S. commercial, defense, homeland security, and law enforcement objectives. Embassy staff

members value his personable leadership style and his attentiveness to issues that affect workplace and community morale. In sum, the chargé is well-positioned to hand over to a new ambassador, an embassy that, despite resource constraints, is successfully fulfilling its essential tasks.

## ELEVATION OF THE POLITICAL-ECONOMIC COUNSELOR POSITION

The Embassy has submitted a request to elevate the position of the political-economic counselor from FS-01 to FE-OC. The OIG team supports this request. The justification for this action rests on the fact that Belgium is regarded as the capital of Europe. Its role as the host country for both the EU and NATO gives it influence far beyond that of other countries its size. The country is also a significant political and military ally of the United States, a major trading partner, and a recipient of substantial U.S. capital investment. In addition, the United States has a strong interest in Belgium's internal political stability, which could be affected by domestic forces advocating regional autonomy or even the country's separation into two separate nations. There is strong bilateral cooperation on counterterrorism and terrorist finance issues.

Beyond supervising his section, the counselor exercises broad responsibility for the day-to-day coordination of the other U.S. agencies that have bilateral activities in Brussels, such as the Foreign Commercial Service (FCS), the Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). He is also the embassy point of contact for the agricultural attaché at Embassy The Hague and the focal point for much of the Embassy's coordination with USEU and USNATO. In addition, he has frequently been called upon to serve as acting DCM. While both the JAS management counselor and the regional security officer have in recent months been called upon to serve as acting DCM, this arrangement is not ideal since it pulls them away from their already heavy responsibilities and tends to compromise the perception that the JAS relates to and serves all three Brussels missions equitably.

## POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

### POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Embassy Brussels has been forced to reduce its work on economic and political issues since the 2004 inspection. The GRP, which shifted Foreign Service resources to posts in China, India, and elsewhere, eliminated two political and economic officer positions in Belgium. The downsizing no longer justified separate economic and political sections, each of which had been led by an FS-01 counselor. The Embassy combined the two sections under a single political-economic counselor at the FS-01 level in 2008 and eliminated the second FS-01 position.

In addition to the counselor, two political officers, an economic officer, and two LE staff members make up the political-economic section, augmented by frequent short-term interns. The Embassy has recommended in its MSP, the addition of a third LE position to help its efforts in furthering bilateral cooperation in counterterrorism and terrorist financing, and in fostering Belgian development assistance to Afghanistan and Africa. The OIG team sees merit in this request. Once an entry-level officer (ELO) position is restored to the section in the summer of 2009, it will return to roughly the right size. Another ELO is expected in the summer of 2010.

The Embassy recently asked the Department to upgrade the counselor to the OC level because of his wider responsibilities. The OIG team supports this request. The justification for this is discussed in greater detail in the Executive Direction of the inspection report.

With fewer resources, the Embassy had to reorganize its workload. In line with MSP priorities, it has concentrated on policy advocacy and support for visitors, and has reduced reporting and analysis by the American officers. All required reports on human rights, religious freedom, and trafficking-in-persons, for example, are now drafted by LE staff.

In addition to managing the rebalancing of resources and production, the political-economic counselor must devote much time to integrating the two former sections. The process has been made easier by a high level of professionalism and cooperation by staff members but has not yet made much headway. Everyone ex-

cept the counselor still concentrates exclusively on either economic or political work. The files have not yet been combined. Most reporting focuses on either economic or political issues. The OIG team made informal recommendations to facilitate this integration, including having the section's two LE staff members work on both political and economic issues rather than do only one or the other. As a practical matter, it will be difficult to complete this process until the end of the current reconstruction in the section's work space, when all officers make a planned move to a different floor in the chancery. However, the section is making effective preparations for its temporary relocation, including plans to shift from its heavy reliance on paper records to electronic filing. The section's work is likely to proceed more smoothly since the counselor dealt forthrightly with the disruption caused by one staff member's unprofessional behavior.

Internal coordination appears good due to nearly daily section meetings. All personnel except the LE staff share a common suite. While travel money appears adequate given Belgium's small size, representational funding has been extremely limited, reducing officers' ability to develop and maintain necessary contacts.

The counselor works occasionally with other agencies at post to promote economic and commercial interests. These agency activities are by and large complementary and not duplicative. The section focuses on policy matters while FCS concentrates on export and investment promotion. Both sections meet jointly with the local American Chamber of Commerce once a month. The counselor also chairs a quarterly interagency meeting with agencies at post with transportation equities: the Department of Homeland Security, FCS, CBP, and TSA. Agricultural issues are largely handled by the agricultural attaché stationed at Embassy The Hague. The section handles civil aviation issues with the help of the FAA representative at the embassy and the transportation officer at USEU.

## Reporting and Analysis

As described above, the loss of positions under the GRP initiative forced Embassy Brussels to reduce reporting. It now undertakes less analysis and makes greater use of spot reports, a daily roundup of developments, and emails. The majority of cables consist of reports of demarches, while many of the rest are scene-setters and readouts of meetings. Nevertheless, the section reported in depth on several issues with significant implications for the United States, including Belgium's plans to contribute aid and military forces to Afghanistan, to move away from commercial nuclear power, and to respond to problems in its large banking sector. The counsel-

or uses well-thought-out reporting plans to guide both economic and political work. Reporting on foreign policy, energy security, and political/military issues is timely, well-researched, and forward-looking.

Internal political reporting needs to be more closely linked to U.S. interests. The Embassy closely tracks the growing separatist sentiment in Belgium's Flemish and Walloon communities, which caused a crisis in 2008 when these groups could not agree on a national government. Assigning different officers to follow Flemish- and French-speaking politics, however, risks isolated reporting on each group. Rather than mirror Belgium's own divide, the section needs to integrate both stories and report them from a combined, U.S. perspective. During the inspection, the section moved to tighten reporting into shorter but more analytical cables that explain how Belgium's internal politics influence its reactions to U.S. requests.

**Recommendation 1:** Embassy Brussels should assign responsibility for internal politics in both the Flemish and Walloon communities to a single officer. (Action: Embassy Brussels)

## Advocacy and Operations

Bilateral relations, strained by disagreements over Iraq and other issues, are once again close. Belgium is increasingly willing to cooperate with U.S. objectives in Afghanistan and elsewhere. The Embassy has rebuilt its contacts with all levels of the Belgian Government and used them to expand its advocacy of U.S. policies and interests. Among other things, it launched a strategic dialogue on Africa to take advantage of Belgium's expertise on Central Africa, where it continues to have influence.

The Embassy prepares demarches carefully and delivers them effectively. A review of records showed that it has taken appropriate action on all bilateral and multilateral instructions. Most demarches are well-received. Despite increasing devolution of responsibility to regional authorities, the Belgian Foreign Ministry generally provides clear answers on behalf of its government as a whole. As in the case of many EU countries, however, Belgium will consider U.S. demarches on issues under EU jurisdiction only if they are received before the EU has agreed on a common position.

Rigidities in procedures handicap U.S. efforts to increase bilateral cooperation against trafficking in persons (TIP). Belgium is not a major center for trafficking. However, it reports statistics on TIP issues on an annual cycle that does not coincide

with the Department's annual TIP report cycle. Confusion over this conundrum led to unproductive tensions between the embassy and the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (G/TIP) that required high-level time and attention to sort out. To prevent misunderstandings in the future, the OIG team informally recommended that the embassy report more information on this subject in front channel cables.

## Coordination with the U.S. Mission to the European Union and the U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Even though their offices are located only a 30-second walk from each other, coordination between the Embassy and USEU is less than one would hope for and expect. Coordination seems hampered by different cultures, portfolios, and priorities at the two missions. Staffing shortages, particularly in the Embassy's political-economic section, have also been a significant factor. USEU does so much on trade policy that the Embassy's main economic value-added is on issues such as export controls and nonproliferation. The OIG team informally recommended the Embassy attend the weekly meetings of political and economic clusters at USEU and invite reciprocal attendance at its own staff meetings.

Although the EU determines continent-wide trade policy, reporting and advocacy is needed at the bilateral level. Since the United States is not an EU member state, embassies in capitals must continue to play a key role in influencing a member state's views before a common EU position is decided. Embassy Brussels remains eager to work more closely with USEU on major policy issues to coordinate parallel and simultaneous approaches at the bilateral and multilateral levels.

In its separate report, *Inspection of Tri-Missions Coordination in Brussels, Belgium, ISP-I-10-15*, the OIG team addressed the wider need for improved communication and coordination among the three Brussels missions. It also addressed a formal recommendation to all three missions and offered suggestions on how this could be accomplished at both senior and working levels.

## Environment, Science and Technology, and Health

There is no full-time environment, science and technology, and health officer. Key issues in this portfolio, such as energy and climate change, occupy about 20 percent of the economic officer's time. Although Washington guidance has been

lacking during the change of Administration, Embassy Brussels is prepared for climate change, in particular, to become a more active portfolio in the run-up to the December 2009 Copenhagen negotiations on a post-Kyoto climate agreement.

## TRADE PROMOTION

Trade promotion is handled by the Embassy's commercial section, which is headed by an FCS officer and includes nine LE staff. U.S. firms are active in major sectors, including pharmaceuticals, chemicals, petroleum, legal services, information technology, and automobiles. Belgium hosts a number of U.S. firms' European headquarters and major distribution centers.

The commercial section, with help from the political-economic section and the front office as needed, is pressing the Belgian Government to change regulations that unfairly burden firms, especially in the pharmaceutical and aviation sectors. It educates Belgian officials on how an improved investment climate can help job creation and works with the local American Chamber of Commerce and similar Belgian organizations on how to lobby effectively for foreign investment.

According to FCS, the former Ambassador, who had been a successful businessman, understood the importance of building personal relationships to pave the way for commercial success. This pro-business attitude needs to be institutionalized so that future Ambassadors and other senior staff do not have to reestablish such personal relationships from scratch. The chargé supports FCS efforts through his participation in commercial events.

FCS and political-economic section officers meet at the monthly meeting of the American Chamber of Commerce in Belgium, and the FCS chief attends country team meetings. Still, such limited contacts may be insufficient for FCS and political-economic officers to gain an adequate understanding of what each section does and discover how they can help each other. The OIG team informally recommended there be regular meetings between the political-economic and commercial sections to improve mutual understanding. The OIG team also informally recommended the incoming Ambassador meet regularly with the commercial section to understand how commercial issues affect U.S. interests and how the front office can best aid FCS efforts in Belgium.

## LAW ENFORCEMENT COORDINATION

As stated in its MSP, the Embassy places a high priority on sensitizing the Belgian Government and people to the threat of international terrorism and works with local authorities to investigate, prosecute, and deter terrorist activities. Several recent prosecutions for terrorism reflects that Belgium is getting this message. There is also U.S.-Belgian cooperation to reduce transnational crime, including narcotics and human trafficking, cyber crimes, and financial crimes.

The embassy political officers have primary responsibility for law enforcement and counternarcotics issues, but do not provide oversight to law enforcement agencies at post, including the legal attaché and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). The law enforcement working group, which is chaired by the DCM with the support of the regional security officer, typically has met on a quarterly basis. Coordination is also done through country team meetings and personal telephone and email contacts. There have been occasional problems, because the Federal Bureau of Investigation and DEA sometimes do not recognize Department interests and capabilities in the law enforcement area, and Department officials are in touch with law enforcement contacts without informing colleagues from other agencies. However, when such issues arose, they were resolved between the officers and their counterparts in sister agencies or by the political-economic counselor. In an annex to this report, the OIG team recommended the law enforcement working group convene monthly to serve as a regular vehicle for law enforcement coordination.

## PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

The embassy public diplomacy (PD) section currently has one officer and nine LE staff. It is housed in newly renovated quarters in a building about two blocks from the Embassy and includes a multipurpose room and an information resource center.

The acting public affairs officer (PAO) is an FS-03 officer filling an FS-01 position. She heads a vibrant, experienced, and cohesive team. Even though the staff is often overworked and stretched thin, it maintains high morale. The summer 2009 arrival of a new PAO and the impending hiring of an LE staff employee to fill a vacancy will help to ease the heavy workload.

Following the abrupt departure of the former PAO in 2007, morale initially nosedived. The chargé d'affaires asked the deputy PAO to serve as acting PAO. He

met with the PD staff to explain the staff change and to hear their concerns, which improved morale.

The chargé often suggests PD programs, including those at universities, where he usually speaks in fluent French. He and the acting PAO have an excellent working relationship. The PD function is fully integrated into the MSP. The section enjoys good relations throughout the Embassy. For example, as part of its youth outreach program, the section recruits officers from several embassy sections to give lectures in high schools.

The former Ambassador arrived at post amidst criticism in the Belgian media about his appointment. The PD section arranged media availabilities for him, which helped to calm the waters. In the autumn of 2008, after years of anti-American bias in the media and among the elite, the PD section undertook a major campaign to help turn this situation around. With the active support and involvement of the Ambassador, it produced a 20-minute film celebrating 175 years of Belgian-American friendship. This proved to be an almost indispensable part of many programs that PD and its Belgian partners organize throughout the country. It has set a positive tone and helps rebuild the positive image that the United States had enjoyed in Belgium for many years.

The PD section cooperates with the other tri-mission PD sections and with the European Media Center, also known as the Hub, which is described in the Tri-Mission Coordination section of this inspection report. The section offers U.S. speakers for Hub interviews and coordinates media availability for visiting VIPs. It often shares speaker programs with USEU. The acting PAO communicates regularly by email and telephone with the other PD sections and the Hub.

Many embassy personnel were unclear about the respective capabilities, roles, and responsibilities of the PD section and the Hub. Accordingly, the OIG team believes the Hub and the PD section should brief all incoming officers who will be engaged in media outreach about the function and activities of their media operations. Using briefings and printed materials, they should similarly advise their journalist contacts, supervisors, and desk officers in Washington, and VIPs planning on travel to Brussels.

**Recommendation 2:** Embassy Brussels should collaborate with the European Media Center to develop guidance that clearly defines their respective roles, capabilities, and services and require that embassy officers are briefed about the functions and activities of media operations. This guidance should also be disseminated to journalists, supervisors, and desk officers in Washington, and VIPs traveling to Brussels. (Action: Embassy Brussels)

The information resource center is housed in the PD section of Embassy Brussels. It is an Internet team supporting the Embassy, USNATO, USEU, and their PD sections and works closely with them to provide research and to develop or update Web materials. It produces the Trans Atlantic Focus and Article Alert newsletters for use by the EU PD staff.

## CONSULAR AFFAIRS

Embassy Brussels' consular operation has adept and inventive officers, competent local staff, and a cramped, ungainly facility. Current consular management has caught up on years of neglected management controls and maintenance, has launched some unique innovations, and is seeking further improvements to work flow and morale.

The section is led by an FS-02 officer, ably assisted by an FS-02 occupying an FS-03 deputy position and an ELO in a consular/public diplomacy rotation. Five LE employees staff the visa unit, three staff the passport unit; and three staff the special consular services unit. One LE employee works full-time on federal benefits. Section staffing is adequate for the workload.

The former consular section chief spoke Dutch, but no other officer within memory of the local staff has done so. Nearly all Dutch speakers who apply for consular services also speak English. LE staff members interpret for the few who do not. Although about 90 percent of French-speaking customers also speak English, all three officers speak French.

## Facility

The consular work area is small and crowded, measuring about 230 square meters on one floor and 60 square meters in a finished basement. The basement is not very useful since it is far from the public windows. The entrance to the work area is through the waiting room. These deficiencies, pointed out in the 2004 inspection report, are even more acute now due to the subsequent addition of three more employees.

The Embassy deferred maintenance to the section for several years in anticipation of a planned 2006 move, but the Bureau of Diplomatic Security withdrew its approval shortly before the move was to take place. The incoming section chief found a facility that not only needed cosmetic work, but was unsafe due to broken

ceiling tiles and partitions and exposed wiring. He made repair and restoration a priority, strongly supported by the DCM and JAS. The result is a bright, clean area that is still overcrowded and does not meet the Bureau of Consular Affairs line-of-sight requirements. Consular management has long stressed these deficiencies in its consular package, and, most recently, in the annual certification of consular management controls.

Since 2006, the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) has proposed several different renovation plans for the consular space. None was completed due to lack of funding. The most recent plan includes more public windows and an employees' entrance through the adjacent USEU building, but it does not provide adequate work space for employees and does not include a logical work flow.

**Recommendation 3:** The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations should draw up a new plan for the renovation of Embassy Brussels consular section that has the approval of both the Bureau of Consular Affairs and Embassy Brussels. (Action: OBO, in coordination with CA and Embassy Brussels)

## Management

Consular management has introduced initiatives that make the most of the consular facility despite its deficiencies. Public hours are staggered, with separate times for nonimmigrant visas, immigrant visas, passports, and reports of birth. Visas and reports of birth are handled by appointment only; appointments for routine passport replacement are being phased in, as well. A radically new process for nonimmigrant visas has reduced, by more than 50 percent, the time it takes to handle each application. As a result of these efforts, the waiting room is never overcrowded, and customers are satisfied with the speed and efficiency with which their requests are handled.

Consular management works skillfully with both the Embassy and USEU, seeking, negotiating, and providing cooperation whenever needed. The electronic system for travel authorization that requires citizens from visa-waiver countries to register electronically prior to traveling to the United States was deployed recently without a hitch, thanks to effective coordination and outreach by the consular section, the Department of Homeland Security, the PD section, and the chargé d'affaires. There were no complaints from the Belgian Government and only a few grumbles from the press and individual travelers. Although noncompliance is not penalized, Belgium has an 87 percent compliance rate with the electronic system for travel authorization.



since no other employees have their expertise. The recommended merger of the American citizen services and passport units will require cross-training. Employees unanimously ask for training.

Since the section is moving toward an all-appointment system, it can free up one day per week from appointments. This would assure that staff is present to handle walk-ins and emergencies, but would still provide uninterrupted time for training and development, outreach, and other service-enhancing work. Seasonal rushes could be accommodated by reintegrating those days into the appointment schedules during busier months. Training and special projects would boost morale by boosting knowledge, responsibility, and productivity.

**Recommendation 4:** Embassy Brussels should adjust its consular appointment systems to leave one day per week appointment-free, except for walk-ins and emergencies, to allow staff training and project development. (Action: Embassy Brussels)

## Passports and American Citizen Services

Passports and American Citizen Services are two separate units. This division confuses customers and limits local staff's ability to respond to unexpected surges in demand, and to address American citizens' problems holistically. The units merging into one is usual in consular sections of this size.

**Recommendation 5:** Embassy Brussels should merge its passport and American citizen services employees into a single unit. (Action: Embassy Brussels)

The consular section accepts applications for passports and consular report of birth through the military courier service from U.S. military and other personnel at Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers Europe, and through the USNATO management section for NATO staff and dependents. The USNATO deputy management counselor holds a consular commission and has access to the consular consolidated database. He also provides appropriate notarial services. A memorandum of understanding guides this process and complies with regulations. Applicants pay tourist passport fees via money order.

The Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers Europe, courier frequently submits incomplete or incorrect applications for passports and reports of birth. The courier does not respond promptly to requests for information or corrections to these applications. This causes delays in document processing for many U.S. military customers.

**Recommendation 6:** Embassy Brussels should provide training on how to handle applications for passports and reports of birth to U.S. military couriers who compile and deliver the applications to the Embassy for processing. (Action: Embassy Brussels)

The Report of Potential Evacuees (also known as the F-77 report) has not been updated since 2007. This report plays a central role in evacuation planning, training exercises, and crisis response plans, and must be updated every year. Consular management will submit an update before the end of June 2009 and will report annually in the future.

## Visas

Immigrant and nonimmigrant visa applications are accepted by appointment. A new intake process for nonimmigrant visas sees applications checked, scanned, and the fingerprints collected in a single step. Within minutes of presenting the application, the customer is ready for interview. Most are out of the section in less than an hour, versus 2 to 3 hours earlier in 2009.

The embassy visa referral policy is up-to-date and correct, but is rarely used. Most Belgians travel without visas. Those who call contacts within the Tri-Mission for referrals are passed to the visa unit's local supervisor, who can offer appointments outside of normal visa hours. With this special handling available, Tri-Mission officers do not feel the need to refer visa applicants.

The deputy management counselor at USNATO forwards nonimmigrant visa applications for official travel to the consular section on behalf of non-American NATO staff members and dependents. The memorandum of understanding between this officer and the consular section does not include visa work.

**Recommendation 7:** Embassy Brussels should amend or rewrite the memorandum of understanding between the consular section and the U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's deputy management counselor to include the acceptance of visa applications for official travel. (Action: Embassy Brussels)

## Fraud Prevention

Brussels is a low-fraud post. The ELO and local visa unit employees are preparing a sophisticated validation study on third-country visa applicants, which they will report by cable. Consular management wrote and transmitted the overdue semi-annual fraud report during the inspection. The report will be submitted on time in the future.

## Federal Benefits

One local employee handles Federal benefits for Belgium; his position is reimbursed by the Social Security Administration. Demand for Federal benefits has increased substantially due to the "baby boom" generation starting to retire, and the employee's workload has mushroomed. The regional Federal benefits officer in London helped him analyze and prioritize his work, but consular management is certain, and the OIG team agrees, that he needs help to avoid falling farther behind and disadvantaging the customers he serves.

**Recommendation 8:** Embassy Brussels should engage with the regional Federal benefits officer to determine whether the employee's workload is atypically high and to construct a concrete plan to address it, if appropriate. (Action: Embassy Brussels)

This employee must often engage in high-volume telephone conversations with elderly customers, unavoidably disrupting others' concentration. A recent retirement in the consular section has freed up a more private cubicle, and the OIG team informally recommended the Federal benefits employee move to that space.

## Visas Viper

Visas viper meetings are chaired monthly by the chargé d'affaires, and submissions are made as required.



## RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

<b>Agency</b>	<b>US Direct Hire Staff</b>	<b>FMA &amp; EFMs</b>	<b>LE Staff</b>	<b>Total Staff</b>	<b>Funding FY-08</b>
State Program	32	1	18	51	\$6,990,500
ICASS	24	11	148	183	29,667,700
Diplomatic Security	25	3	30	58	8,480,600
OBO	3	0	1	4	6,898,607
Public Diplomacy	1	0	9	10	1,941,900
Consular Machine-Readable Visa Fees	-	-	-	-	98,771
State Gift	-	-	-	-	37,818
State Representation	-	-	-	-	50,200
Public Diplomacy Representation					8,600
Department of State Subtotal	85	15	206	306	\$54,174,696
American Battle Field Monuments	4	-	36	40	-
Department of Commerce	1	-	7	8	1,257,300
Department of Homeland Security	4	-	1	5	-
Department of Defense	18	-	5	23	-
Department of Justice	9	-	0	9	-
Department of Health and Human Services	2	-	1	3	-
Department of Transportation	9	-	3	12	-
Other Agency Subtotal	47	0	53	100	1,257,300
Total	132	15	259	406	\$55,433,996

\*The staffing and budgeting statistics include personnel of the JAS unit, which supports USEU and USNATO as well as Embassy Brussels.

## MANAGEMENT OPERATIONS

The work of the JAS section, which supports Embassy Brussels as well as USEU and USNATO, is discussed in the inspection report, *Tri-Mission Coordination in Brussels, Belgium*, (ISP-I-10-15).

## INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS SECURITY

This topic is covered in *Tri-Mission Coordination in Brussels, Belgium*, (ISP-I-10-15).

## QUALITY OF LIFE

This topic is covered in *Tri-Mission Coordination in Brussels, Belgium*, (ISP-I-10-15).



## MANAGEMENT CONTROLS

The Embassy's chief of mission exercises responsibility for certifying management controls, which encompasses all of the operations of the JAS. The August 2008, Embassy Brussels' Chief of Mission Management Controls Statement noted that, taken as a whole, the system of management controls was effective and provided reasonable assurance that management control objectives were achieved. No management control weaknesses were reported. USNATO has its own internal controls officer who is responsible for those management operations not handled by the JAS.

Embassy Brussels corrected most of the issues found in the previous inspection. These issues include the establishment of a comprehensive, routine, and special maintenance plan using the work order for windows automated tracking program, a position in the print shop was reprogrammed to customs and shipping, the regional medical manager was reassigned to Frankfurt, and a contractor was hired to complete database application requirements. Embassy Brussels was unable to find a bank willing to provide accommodation exchange.

Chief of mission and deputy chief of mission contracts with official residence staff expire upon the departure of these officers. The management counselor executes interim agreements with the official staff until replacements arrive. The establishment of this procedure prevents any potential fiscal irregularities that could occur without having valid contracts in place. The financial management center has copies of all official residence staff contracts.

Infrequently, Embassy Brussels has unauthorized commitments. The financial management unit received three invoices without proper obligating documents over a 2-year period. The procurement staff reported these occurrences and started procedures to ratify these unauthorized commitments.



## LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1:** Embassy Brussels should assign responsibility for internal politics in both the Flemish and Walloon communities to a single officer. (Action: Embassy Brussels)

**Recommendation 2:** Embassy Brussels should collaborate with the European Media Center to develop guidance that clearly defines their respective roles, capabilities, and services and require that embassy officers are briefed about the functions and activities of media operations. This guidance should also be disseminated to journalists, supervisors, and desk officers in Washington, and VIPs traveling to Brussels. (Action: Embassy Brussels)

**Recommendation 3:** The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations should draw up a new plan for the renovation of Embassy Brussels consular section that has the approval of both the Bureau of Consular Affairs and Embassy Brussels. (Action: OBO, in coordination with CA and Embassy Brussels)

**Recommendation 4:** Embassy Brussels should adjust its consular appointment systems to leave one day per week appointment-free, except for walk-ins and emergencies, to allow staff training and project development. (Action: Embassy Brussels)

**Recommendation 5:** Embassy Brussels should merge its passport and American citizen services employees into a single unit. (Action: Embassy Brussels)

**Recommendation 6:** Embassy Brussels should provide training on how to handle applications for passports and reports of birth to U.S. military couriers who compile and deliver the applications to the Embassy for processing. (Action: Embassy Brussels)

**Recommendation 7:** Embassy Brussels should amend or rewrite the memorandum of understanding between the consular section and the U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's deputy management counselor to include the acceptance of visa applications for official travel. (Action: Embassy Brussels)

**Recommendation 8:** Embassy Brussels should engage with the regional Federal benefits officer to determine whether the employee's workload is atypically high and to construct a concrete plan to address it, if appropriate. (Action: Embassy Brussels)



## INFORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Informal recommendations cover operational matters not requiring action by organizations outside the inspected unit and/or the parent regional bureau. Informal recommendations will not be subject to the OIG compliance process. However, any subsequent OIG inspection or on-site compliance review will assess the mission's progress in implementing the informal recommendations.

### POLITICAL-ECONOMIC SECTION

Embassy Brussels has combined its economic and political sections, but has not yet merged them into a single unit.

**Informal Recommendation 1:** Embassy Brussels should require that after the sections settle into their planned workspace, the economic and political sections merge their working and permanent files, contact lists, reporting plans, and portfolios and revise the work requirements of their locally employed staff members to reflect the new approach.

The political-economic section would be better supported by one senior and one junior LE staff member than by one solely political assistant and one solely economic assistant.

**Informal Recommendation 2:** Embassy Brussels should recruit a political-economic assistant to replace its retiring political assistant and revise the job description of its economic assistant to take on both economic and political work.

Coordination of political and economic work among the Tri-missions in Brussels is too limited.

**Informal Recommendation 3:** Embassy Brussels should attend selected meetings at the U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization on an ad hoc basis, but assign an officer to attend the meetings of the U.S. Mission to the European Union's economic and political clusters on a regular basis while extending reciprocal invitations to its own staff meetings.

Rigidities in procedures for evaluating countries that cannot share trafficking data with the United States until too late each year to meet Department deadlines have strained relations between Embassy Belgrade and G/TIP and threatened to make the annual TIP report on Belgium an inaccurate reflection of reality.

**Informal Recommendation 4:** Embassy Brussels should report its evaluation of Belgian Government performance against trafficking data at regular intervals throughout the year, as well as in the annual report to reduce disputes over the final draft of the annual trafficking-in-persons report.

There is little regular contact between the political-economic and FCS sections. As a result, neither section appears to have an adequate understanding of how the other works or how each could help the work of the other.

**Informal Recommendation 5:** Embassy Brussels should require regular meetings between the political-economic and the Foreign Commercial Service section to improve mutual understanding.

The former Ambassador, who had been a successful businessman, understood the importance of the work of the embassy commercial section and undertook establishing relationships favorable to U.S. commercial interests. This interest in commercial issues should be fostered in the new Ambassador.

**Informal Recommendation 6:** Embassy Brussels should require that the incoming Ambassador meet regularly with the commercial section to understand how commercial issues affect U.S. interests and how the front office can best aid Foreign Commercial Service efforts in Belgium.

## CONSULAR

The employee who handles Federal benefits often engages in high-volume telephone conversations with elderly customers, unavoidably disrupting others' concentration.

**Informal Recommendation 7:** Embassy Brussels should move the employee who handles Federal benefits to the more private cubicle vacated by the American citizen services local supervisor who recently retired.

## PRINCIPAL OFFICIALS

	Name	Arrival Date
Chargé d'affaires a.i.	Wayne J. Bush	08/07

### Chiefs of Sections:

Political/Economic	Richard M. Eason	08/07
Public Affairs	Ellen P. Irvine, Acting	09/07
Joint Administrative Services	Andrea J. Nelson	06/08
Consular Affairs	Colwell C. Whitney	08/06
Regional Security	Kevin W. Bauer	08/06

### Other Agencies:

Foreign Agricultural Service (Resident in The Hague)	Steve Huerte	08/07
Foreign Commercial Service	Paul Kullman	08/07
Federal Aviation Administration	Anthony F. Fazio	08/06
Transportation Security Administration	Richard D. Kolodner	11/07
Office of the Legal Attaché	Robert F. Clifford	05/08
Drug Enforcement Administration	James C. Kabel	07/03
Department of Defense	COL Daniel J. Fagundes	07/07
Office of Defense Cooperation	COL Michael A. Salvi	07/07
Department of Health and Human Services	Dr. Ian T. Magrath	03/00



## ABBREVIATIONS

CBP	Customs and Border Protection
DCM	deputy chief of mission
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
ELO	entry-level officer
EU	European Union
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
FCS	Foreign Commercial Service
GRP	Global Repositioning Program
G/TIP	Office to Monitor and Control Trafficking in Persons
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JAS	joint administration support
LE	locally employed
MSP	Mission Strategic Plan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OBO	Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations
OIG	Office of Inspector General
PAO	public affairs officer
PD	public diplomacy
TIP	trafficking in persons
TSA	Transportation Security Administration
USEU	U.S. Mission to the European Union
USNATO	U.S. Mission to NATO

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