

Belgian politicians begin `battle of Brussels`

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In the absence of a solution to reform the Belgian state and set up a new government, French-speaking politicians have apparently turned to plan B: laying the ground for a future "federation" grouping together Wallonia and Brussels. Flemish nationalists immediately denounced the "provocation".

The French-speaking Belgian community will adopt the name "Federation Wallonia-Brussels," it emerged yesterday after a debate in the Walloon parliament in Namur.

The political declaration, which has not been enacted at federal level, was announced yesterday (4 April) by Rudy Demotte, premier of the Wallonia region and representatives of Belgium's four biggest French-speaking parties – the Socialists (PS), the liberals (MR), the centre-right (cdH) and the Greens (Ecolo).

"In this framework, the four French-speaking parties state loud and clear that for them, the Brussels-Capital Region would never be transferable to another entity," Demotte stated.

Demotte, who is also president of the French-speaking community, also made clear that the decision, which had been looming from some time, was a bid to counter efforts by Kris Peeters, premier of Flanders, to establish lower status for Brussels than other regions.

The Belgian federal state comprises three regions: the Flemish Region in the north, the Walloon Region in the south and the Brussels-Capital region in the centre, which is encircled by Flemish territory.

Brussels, however, is largely a French-speaking city and the dispute over reform of the Belgian state has centred on the status of the region, which is now officially bilingual but effectively managed by the two other large regions.

The French community of Wallonia-Brussels already exists. But a 'Federation Wallonia-Brussels' would mean Wallonia refusing to accept Brussels being co-managed by Flanders, writes an editorialist at RTBF, a French-speaking public TV station.

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