
Press release: Establishment of the non-profit organisation BEL Center to continue the work of physicists

Robert Brout, François Englert and Georges Lemaître

Brussels, 8 September 2020

On Tuesday 8 September 2020, the incorporation deed of the non-profit organisation BEL Center, which was established to continue the work of physicists Robert Brout, François Englert (2013 Nobel Prize in Physics) and Georges Lemaître, was formally signed. The signing took place in the presence of the authorities and representatives of the four founding universities - ULB, UCLouvain, VUB, KU Leuven – and Barbara Trachte, the State Secretary of the Brussels-Capital Region responsible for Economic Transition and Scientific Research.

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BEL Center was set up to continue the pioneering work of the physicists Robert Brout, François Englert - 2013 Nobel Prize in Physics - and Georges Lemaître, in terms of research and to promote collaboration between institutions.

Canon Georges Lemaître already reached out to the university in Brussels before World War II (and during it). A professor at the Catholic University of Louvain, he is widely considered one of the fathers of the 'Big Bang' Theory. His work turned the history of the Universe (cosmology) into an observational science. Robert Brout and François Englert, meanwhile, developed a new approach that proved key to our current understanding of the world on a microscopic scale, but also its cosmological evolution. They also sought to promote collaboration between universities (UC Louvain-KU Leuven and ULB-VUB by this time), among others with jointly-organised courses.

Subsequently, this collaboration was enshrined in a federal programme - the "inter-university focal point". To continue this collaboration, the Belgian Senate voted a motion, the day after the 2013 Nobel Prize was awarded to François Englert - recommending the creation of a centre for research and excellence, named after these three precursors.

This move, which had the support of researchers at ULB, UCLouvain, VUB, KULeuven, has come to fruition today with the establishment of the non-profit organisation BEL Center. The Brussels-Capital Region has made available Tournay-Solvay Castle as offices and working space. The castle will be renovated for this purpose.

The non-profit organisation's mission is to promote the scientific excellence of the Brussels-Capital Region; to get involved in and host research activities for this purpose in a central, stimulating and creative environment; to strengthen centres of scientific excellence; to play a decisive role in raising public awareness of the importance of scientific research, in collaboration with existing organisations and institutions; and to consolidate the successful collaboration between different research units. The centre also wants to develop collaborations with artists and engage with and reach out to the public.

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