

Bittersweet Take on Belgian ID Crisis

Voice-over 1:

François Pirette is no ordinary tourist. That's his stage name to begin with. He's one of Belgium's most popular veteran comedians. Well, among the French speakers he is. A sketch he did in 2005 inspired a major rift between the Francophones and the Dutch speakers. His character was a Flemish minister whose tone changes depending on which media he's talking to.

Voice-over 2:

Belgium is the living proof that very different communities can live together in complete harmony, simply by sharing the same ideals and values... Now you listen to me! We're gonna keep Brussels! You keep the king! You're gonna need the crown for when we bury Belgium! Cos with me in 2008, Belgium's like Capri: FINI. It's over! Get it?!

Voice-over 1:

There wasn't any break-up. Two years later, Belgians in their thousands marched united, to keep their country together - French speakers, Dutch speakers and German speakers. The intercommunal mood is still tense, the identity crisis still sticking in François Pirette's throat.

Voice-over 2:

The same as anywhere in the world, in Belgium it's common to find road signs using red and white. So we let loose with the paint on all the traffic poles, until it dawned on some Flemish politician in a bad mood that these are the Walloon colours. Sure. Or the colours of Monaco for that matter.

Anyway, he convinced his mates to repaint theirs in their colours: black and yellow. So my country was repainting its traffic poles while the rest of the world moved on. We got stuck at the lights.

Voice-over 1:

Thierry van Cauberg, that's the comedian's real name, went on with his work, and his stage show was televised. It broke audience records.

Voice-over 2:

I went to do the washing the other day... it was high time. Things had got rather grubby.

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