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General information about ministerial small sheets

Ministerial sheets (also abbreviated as MV or FM in catalogues) are a rather specific and interesting category within Belgian philately. At first glance, they resemble stamp sheets, but they serve a completely different purpose.

Despite their unique status within Belgian philately, "ministerial sheets" (official souvenir sheets) have received only limited study. Apart from entries in the OSC catalogues, there is very little consolidated documentation available. These albums aim to provide an overview of Belgian ministerial sheets and their place within the broader field of Belgian philately.

This project is not merely a standard collector's checklist; rather, it serves as a reference work for a highly specialized area of Belgian philately. This makes it potentially unique and a valuable resource for future collectors.

Overview of this Belgian minister small sheets project

Objective

A free digital album of Belgian 'minister' souvenir sheets.
A separate, free blank album containing inventory lists for collectors.
Focus exclusively on Belgium.

What is difficult to find?

There is no single, comprehensive reference work that deals exclusively with all Belgian souvenir sheets.
Much of the information is scattered across:

- old periodicals;
- auction descriptions;
- specialized publications from philatelic societies;
- archives of the Belgian postal service (Bpost).

This is precisely what makes it an intriguing area of expertise within Belgian philately.

Unique value of the project

The time required for research should be taken into consideration before realization.
The information available is based on the receipts concerning the envelopes of the Prime Minister, noting the dimensions and the exceptions fr
Besides a simple album, it constitutes a thorough documentation of the domain of the collection.
A level of detail is superior to the information provided by the catalogs of the OSC.

Album contents
For each miniature sheet:

- miniature sheet number
- subject
- year of issue for the stamp(s) in question
- scans (if available)
- notes
- excluding purchase price, however
- spaces to indicate whether scans of the miniature sheets are present or missing

What exactly are ministerial sheets?

They are black-and-white prints of issued postage stamps.
Ministerial sheets are small sheets of stamps that bpost traditionally presents to government ministers, dignitaries, or invited guests. They generally contain **the same stamps as the official issue**, but are **presented in a format** that is not made available for general sale.

They are usually produced in small print runs.
They often feature a dry stamp (a type of embossed stamp serving as a mark of authenticity).
☞ Important: they are not genuine postage stamps. You cannot therefore use them to send post.

In the Belgian stamp catalogue, they are listed separately (MV/FM) under almost every stamp issue.

What were they used for?

Ministerial sheets were (and sometimes still are):
Promotional gifts from the postal administration
Distributed to: ministers and senior officials, important figures, and sometimes also to subscribers or collectors
They therefore served a representative or promotional purpose, rather than a practical one.

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How are they collected?

Although they are not actual postage stamps:
they are indeed collected by philatelists
they are listed in catalogues, often at the bottom of an issue
they sometimes have a catalogue value, depending on their rarity
Because the print run is small, certain ministerial sheets can be quite sought-after.

Difference from other collectables

To clarify:
Type: Postage stamp, First Day Cover, Minister's sheet

Why are they interesting?

They showcase stamp designs in a different way
Often more attractive or 'sleeker' than the actual stamps
Small print runs → potential collectable value
Less well-known → niche within the hobby

What you can deduce from this

Print runs are often extremely small (20–100 copies!)
Themes range from classical architecture to comic strips
They are usually designated with special catalogue codes (MV / FM + number)

How do you recognise a genuine minister's sheet?

1. Black and white (or very plain)

Genuine minister's sheets are almost always printed in black and white
They show the stamp design, but without colour and without a face value
👉 If you see a colourful sheet, it is not a minister's sheet, except for exceptions (see entry "KC")

2. Special paper and printing

Often printed on thick, slightly glossy or matt paper
The printing is usually very sharp and fine (proof-quality)
No gum (so not sticky like real stamps)

3. Dry stamp (very important!)

Almost always present
An embossed stamp (you can feel it with your fingers)
Usually from the Belgian Post Office (formerly RTT / De Post)
👉 Is the dry stamp missing?
➡ Then you need to be extra careful (may be genuine, but often suspicious)

4. Very small print run

Often: approx. 20–30 copies (classic issues), sometimes up to approx. 75 or slightly more (modern)
👉 Consequently: rarely found and usually not offered 'en masse'

5. Format and layout

Often: multiple stamp images on a single sheet, wide margins, sometimes different designs combined
They resemble a presentation sheet more than a standard stamp sheet.

What the 'Stes' list really is

Note: "STES lists" are not included on this site.

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'**Stes**' is an abbreviation for an internal technical production list used by the Belgian postal printing office (at the time known as 'De Post' / 'Regie der Posterijen'). It is not a philatelic catalogue—like the OBP/COB—but rather an inventory from the printing facility. The term 'Stes' is short for 'Stes-lijst' (Stes list) or 'Stes-nummering' (Stes numbering)—an internal production list that Bpost (formerly 'De Post') utilized at its printing plant in Mechelen. This list contained technical details regarding every stamp issue:

🎯 Purpose of the Stes list

The list was used to record **all print orders**:

- ministerial sheets
- proofs
- specimen material
- unissued designs
- internal test prints
- special orders for government cabinets or departments

Ministerial sheets are **non-commercial issues** and are therefore **not included in the OSC catalogue (only noted as mentions)**. To track them, collectors and archivists often use the 'Stes' reference from the printing house list. This code helps to identify:

There is no such thing as an official "Stes list."

🧩 What does a Stes record contain?

A Stes entry typically contains:

t).

- **Stes number**: An internal reference code for the print job (similar to an RP or project number).
- **Date**: The date of printing, approval, or internal registration.
- **Description**: A brief technical description of the sheet or stamp.
- **Color / printing technique**: For example: black and white, offset, intaglio, overprint, or proof.
- **Format:** The dimensions of the sheet (as in your table: 150 × 178 mm).
- **Department / printing house**: Sometimes indicated by codes such as Ds, RP, Mechelen, or Brussels.

In short, it is a **production log**, not a collector's list.

🧩 In summary

"Stes" = Bpost's internal printing list.
Contains technical information regarding stamps and sheets.
Used for ministerial sheets, proofs, and unsold issues.
Not an official catalogue, but useful for archival identification.

⚠ Common misconceptions (important!)

❌ 1. First Day Sheets (FDS)

With postmark (no dry stamp)and date: Often colourful, larger print run
👉 These are not ministerial sheets

❌ 2. Proofs (essays/proofs)

May also be black and white, but: usually without a postmark, often unique or otherwise labelled
👉 Look very similar, but are a different category

🔍 What are proofs?

Proofs (also known as essays or proofs) are preparatory prints produced during the design process of a stamp.

Typical characteristics:
May be black and white or in different colours
Often printed on different paper or card
No dry stamp (usually)

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Sometimes marked with indications such as 'essai', 'proof', or printing notes
Not intended for sale, but for internal approval
Often unique or in very small print runs

What are ministerial sheets?

Ministerial sheets are:
Official prints of final stamps
Printed in small runs for the minister / administration
Almost always with a dry stamp (very important difference!)
Identical to the actual stamps (same design, colours, perforation)
More of a ceremonial or archival item

Key difference in one sentence:

👉 Proof = test phase (before the design is finalised)
👉 Ministerial sheet = end product, but printed exclusively for official purposes

Practical guide

If you are unsure about a item:
Dry stamp + finished stamp → ministerial sheet
No dry stamp + deviations → probably a proof

How did proofs originally come into circulation?

Initially, proofs were not intended for collectors at all.
They circulated only within a small circle:

1. Internal distribution

Proofs went to: designers, engravers, printers, senior officials (postal administration, ministry)
👉 These people used them to approve or amend designs.

2. Informal "souvenirs"

And this is where it gets interesting:
In the 19th and early 20th centuries, there was: less strict control, less awareness of "collectible value"
As a result:

- employees sometimes took proofs home with them
- they were given as gifts to acquaintances or business contacts
- designers or engravers kept personal archives

👉 This is one of the main ways in which they ended up in collectors' hands.

3. Archives released later

Many proofs remained for years in: printing house archives, postal administrations
Later, there were: clear-outs, auctions, transfers to museums or collectors
👉 This is how larger quantities came onto the market "all at once".

4. Exchanges between early collectors

From the late 19th century, a network of philatelists emerged:
civil servants and printers exchanged items
some collectors had direct contacts at printing works
👉 Particularly in countries with a strong philatelic tradition (such as Belgium, France and the United Kingdom)

⚠ Important distinction from ministerial sheets

Ministerial sheets: deliberately distributed to high-ranking officials
Proofs: not officially distributed, but rather 'leaked' or informally circulated

In summary

👉 Proofs came into circulation through:

- internal staff
- personal archives
- subsequent archive sales
- early philatelic networks
- Not through an official issue as with ministerial sheets.

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A separate album for proofs?

Yes, for some people it's absolutely essential, but not on this site
They're cross-linked on the site (under the same issue as MV, labelled 'proof' or 'proof copies').
Why for some people?
Different function → proof = development phase, MS = final product
Different collecting criteria (paper, colour proofs, states, annotations...)
Different market and valuation
Keeps your collection logical and 'scientifically correct'
Best approach applied here:
Main collection: Ministerial sheets (MV)
Parallel: Proofs / Essays / Proofs
Possible third branch: designs / original drawings (if ever available)

Modern reproductions or fantasy issues

High risk on online marketplaces
Sometimes:
artificially made to look "old"
without official provenance
Be particularly careful if:
the price is "too good to be true"
the seller provides no details

Extra tip (important for collectors)

Use a catalogue such as:
OBP Catalogue
Ministerial sheets are often listed there with:
codes such as MV, FM,

Practical checklist

If you want to assess something, check this:
✓ Black and white?
✓ No value indicated?
✓ Dry stamp present?
✓ Known to be a small print run?
✓ Does it match a catalogue (MV/FM)?
At least 4/5 "yes" = good chance it's genuine

Checkpoints if you run a suspicious sheet through the 5 checkpoints, you can make a quick assessment

What does "at least 4/5 'yes'" actually mean?

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If you can answer “yes” to at least 4 of those 5 characteristics, then:
➡ there is a good chance you have a genuine ministerial sheet.

📌 Example

Suppose you have a stamp:
✓ Black and white → yes
✓ No value → yes
✓ Dry stamp → yes
❓ Print run unknown → doubtful
✓ Found in a catalogue → yes
🔟 That’s 4 out of 5 ‘yes’
➡ So: probably genuine

⚠ Important: this is no guarantee

It is a quick, practical rule of thumb, not proof.
Why?
Some genuine ministerial sheets, for example, lack a clear dry stamp
Good forgeries can mimic 2–3 characteristics
Catalogue information is sometimes hard to find

📌 Do "ministerial sheets" (*ministervelletjes*) exist in countries other than Belgium?

There are historical examples from other countries. Belgium is therefore not the only nation where stamp proofs or special presentations of stamps were gifted to dignitaries. However, the specific Belgian tradition—featuring a black-and-white print on special paper, embossed with the seal of the relevant ministry—is particularly distinctive.

The term "ministerial sheet" (*ministervelletje*) is uniquely Belgian, though the underlying concept exists elsewhere. These are special stamp sheets or proofs produced in very limited quantities, typically intended as gifts for dignitaries, invited guests, or philatelic organizations. In Belgium, they were generally not made available for sale to the general public.

In other countries, similar items can be found under different names, such as
France: *feuillets de luxe* (deluxe sheets) or special presentation prints.
Luxembourg: (deluxe sheets) and proofs for official contacts.
The Netherlands: presentation folders, proofs, and special issues for invited guests.
Germany: *Gedenkblätter* (commemorative sheets) or official commemorative and presentation prints.
Switzerland: deluxe prints for collectors and official bodies.

United States — Roosevelt Presentation Albums

Around 1903–1905, special albums containing proofs of U.S. postage stamps were compiled and presented to influential individuals, cabinet members, and high-ranking officials. In total, 85 such albums were produced. This is a well-documented example of a similar gift-giving practice, although it involves albums containing proofs rather than the exact same type of Belgian "ministerial sheets" (*ministervelletjes*).

United Kingdom — Presentation Cards and Gift Albums

The British postal authorities created special presentation cards—featuring new stamps and a brief explanatory note—for prominent individuals. In 1960, for instance, 80 such cards (complete with envelopes) were produced. In addition, deluxe albums containing stamps were presented to figures including the Queen, the Prime Minister, and various government ministers.

What makes the Belgian case particularly notable is that these "ministerial sheets" have evolved into a distinct collecting category, complete with their own catalogue numbers and a dedicated market for philatelists. Some Belgian ministerial sheets had print runs of only a few dozen copies, making them exceptionally rare.

Belgium appears to be one of the few countries where these ministerial sheets have developed into a separately catalogued area of philately.

Lots of reading and collecting pleasure
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