

# Belgian monarchy rocked by Queen's tax avoidance plans

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Belgium plans to slash the annual stipend of the dowager Queen Fabiola after politicians learned she had set up a private foundation to provide for nieces and nephews and for her favourite Catholic charities after her death.

Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo told MPs he wanted to cut the payment from €1.4 million (£1.18m) to €923,000 (£776,000). The widow of the late King Baudouin – a devout Catholic who in 1990 stepped aside temporarily to avoid signing the country's abortion bill – insisted the money came from property inherited from her Spanish family.

The 84-year-old now says she has dissolved a charitable vehicle founded in September that allowed her to pass on monies.

The emergence of the plan a few weeks ago provoked rare outrage in political and media circles in Belgium and has rocked the monarchy to its foundations.

"This weighs heavily on me," Fabiola said of the storm that her activities caused. "It was never my intention to finance this foundation with monies from my stipend, but with monies from my inheritance and my Godfather."

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