

Principles of the Flemish Movement in connection with the state reform

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Context

Following the reformation of the Belgian state into a federal structure (see the Congrès National Wallon & Herman Vos' earlier proposals for state reform) in 1970, a next endeavour followed in the ensuing years to further clarify and specify the federal state structure. This ultimately resulted in a proposal for state reform called the "Egmontpact", which could rely on the support of the Flemish-national party Volksunie. Heavy protests however ensued the publication of the pact, including from numerous social-cultural associations and pressure groups associated with the Flemish movement, formally called the "Overlegcentrum van Vlaamse verenigingen" (Coordination Center of Flemish association). This document, which specifies the principles of the most important cultural associations of the Flemish movement, is an indication of the political tense context following Belgian state reform. The failure and heavy protests would ultimately contribute to the formation of a new political party, the Vlaams Blok.

During the meeting of the States-General of the Flemish Pressure Groups and Cultural Associations in Brussels on 4 November 1978, the Principles of the Flemish Movement in connection with the state reform were formulated and presented in a concrete text. Because this text reflects fairly well the major objectives of the current Flemish movement, we consider it useful to print this document in its entirety. It can only give readers interested in the future of our language and culture in Belgium - and we hope they all are - a better understanding of what Belgium is about these days.

‘The Flemish Movement aims at the prosperity and well-being of all Flemish people. To achieve this aim, the Flemish people must be able to develop fully and possess the right of self-determination in the political, cultural, social, economic and financial fields.

In realising this right to self-determination and new structures, account must be taken of the existing realities, which are: the Belgian state, the entire Dutch language community, Europe and the world.

With regard to the unification of the continents and the world, national political institutions can no longer take the form of completely sovereign states. The right of self-determination will therefore be accompanied by cooperation within the framework of larger wholes, within which the life of popular communities takes place. In the Europe of tomorrow, however, these popular communities will play an essential role; indeed, some aspects of today’s state structures will fade or disappear in favour of the Europe of Peoples.

Due to historical circumstances, the Flemish people, belonging to the wider Dutch linguistic and cultural community, are part of the plurinational Belgian state structure.

Since the interests of the people come before the interests of the state, the Belgian state context should not stand in the way of the optimal development of the Flemish people’s community.

The self-determination of the Flemish people and its development into a conscious, cohesive and dynamic community require, among other things:

- its own territory with fixed, unassailable borders;
- one official language, i.e. Dutch;
- sovereignty without any limitation - except for matters assigned to higher levels (e.g. Belgium and/or Europe) - over all its own territory and all its inhabitants;
- its own legislative, executive and judicial institutions, which are simple, efficient and people-oriented; this includes: one parliament and one government, competent for all matters not assigned to higher levels;
- own financial resources;

- respect for the democratic rules of the game and for everyone's worldview, including in political practice.

Autonomy for the Flemish community can be achieved, while respecting Belgian reality, by employing federalist principles and techniques of state organisation. These consist mainly in the division of powers among autonomous but integrated entities. Given the principles described above, the federalisation of Belgium must entail shifting political power to two fully-fledged federated states, the Flemish and the Walloon, to which are granted the widest possible powers, including residual power, while the joint federated state is granted those powers required for its proper functioning. If the right to optimal autonomy within the Belgian state framework cannot be met and Brussels does not become the true capital for the two communities, it is inevitable that the Belgian state will lose all meaning for Flanders and that other solutions will impose themselves on the basis of the right to self-determination.

The current Brussels situation creates a separate problem. This problem is created by the fact that the capital, originally a Flemish city and located in the Flemish part of the country, has gained a numerically strong Francophone presence for about 50 years.

The Brussels agglomeration cannot be considered a political entity on the same footing as Flanders and Wallonia, for the following reasons among others:

- Brussels is an urban area, socially and economically indistinguishable from other major cities.
- Brussels does not constitute a separate ethnic community; apart from foreigners, its inhabitants belong to one of the two major ethnic communities in Belgium.
- As federal capital, Brussels has its own specific role to play: the functions of region and federal capital are incompatible.
- In a federal state with two federated states, a third, additional federated state would permanently upset the political balance, posing serious dangers for the Flemish federated state and for the federal state.
- After all, Brussels also has an important European task to fulfil.

In the capital, Brussels, the two communities should be treated as equals. The Dutch-speaking and French-speaking inhabitants are entitled to their own structures and institutions. Matters related to the Brussels area that fall within the competence of an urban administration require joint, jointly managed institutions, to which well-defined powers are assigned.

The primacy of man over the state requires a democratic rule of law. The first democratic principle is that of legal equality of all citizens. Therefore, at the level of the federal state and the federal capital, all policy decisions, regulations and

relations must be governed by full equality under the law between the citizens of both parts of the country.

This means, among other things, that the federal parliament must be composed on a proportional basis and decide by simple majority. The rule of decision-making by simple majority can only be waived in well-defined cases, such as for the amendment of the federal constitution and for some fundamental federal matters.

On financial resources, the principle of fiscal autonomy should apply. This means that the two Länder must have autonomy to collect and spend as many major taxes as are necessary for the exercise of all their powers; the same applies to the federal state. Endowments are to be rejected in principle.

Aid from one federate state to another, directly or indirectly, is only possible in specific cases and on the basis of a free decision and proper consultation.

The Flemish federated state must have all the necessary powers and resources to determine its socio-economic development as independently as possible.

In a popular community there are different ideologies, ideologies and interests in the religious, philosophical, social, economic and political fields. It follows that positive pluralism and constructive tolerance are fundamental. Every citizen must feel like a full member of the community and be fully respected in their individuality. This means that any form of oppression or discrimination against a single person or group is excluded'.

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