**Pro Flandria Manifest**

**Belgium should not be a template for Europe**

*Belgium is the expert par excellence in terms of monetary transfers. The money flowing from Flanders to Wallonia and Brussels is good for an astonishing 16 billion euro per annum. This constitutes an assault on the Flemish prosperity and does not result in structural improvements for the southern part of the country. These money flows are part of the reason for an eventual disintegration of the Belgian federation. Europe should be inspired by these “Belgian experiences”, and tread very carefully when centrally deciding on measures that later on will prove very difficult to be politically enforced. Too much is at stake here. When the whole continent is faced with economic decline, and frustration is spreading massively, even the highly civilised West could rather quickly be confronted with revolutionary and violent movements from certain parts of its populace. We see it as our duty to avoid this at all cost. Through democratic processes and under the condition that there is a way back, independent nation-states must be able to delegate parts of their sovereignty to Europe. Flanders is such a nation-state in the making; it has embraced its responsibilities vis-à-vis solidarity from the start. Flanders will continue to do so, only however, on the grounds of clear and enforceable agreements.*

**Intra-Belgian transfers**

Both Belgium and the European Union suffer the consequences of stark domestic differences in competitiveness and prosperity. The debt crisis has pushed these differences into real fault lines. Pro Flandria does not question the necessity of solidarity as such; the Northern European states will benefit from stable trading partners in the South, and vice versa. This solidarity however, has to be both efficient and fair. The internal Belgian transfers from Flanders to Wallonia, calculated to be € 16 billion (VIVES 2012) are falling short on both accounts. Because of their sheer size, these transfers are unfair, and neither have they led to structural economical improvements. The Belgian transfer union is placing a stranglehold on Flemish prosperity. This in turn leads to heightened tensions in Europe’s heartland.

The Flemish concerns are not limited to domestic solidarity. On a European level as well, too heavy burdens are put on us. Flanders is already overstretched by catering for the suffering Walloon economy. It is beyond comprehension that on top of this, one expects Flanders to take on additional engagements in caring for other debt-ridden states on the European scene.

**Sustainable solidarity**

Structural deficits require structural solutions! The hasty ad hoc decisions, taken under pressure because of the euro crisis, are not resulting in a robust solution. We hope that our political leaders realise that a transfer union, without significant changes to the socio-economic and fiscal policies in Southern Europe, is not desirable.

Solidarity is a necessity, but should not constitute a blank check without commitment to real change. Income-supporting money flows should not withhold the recipients from taking their fate in their own hands. The Belgian experience has taught us that the solidarity trap is looming around the corner. Instead of giving hand-outs we must urge the debt addicted countries to take up their responsibility.

The transition will be a rude awakening for all parties involved, yet only a sincere commitment to compromise and much discipline will be able to hold the family together. Instead of holding on to inflationary, money-printing policies and burdening the North-European countries with massive amounts of target-claims that will almost be impossible to reclaim, we would be better off compelling affected countries to implement domestic devaluations and radical restructuring. Only that way will they be able to regain their competitiveness and economic health. The composition of the Eurozone is not something that should be dogmatically retained.

However, economic woes are not the only problems Europe is confronted with. The democratic deficit of the European Union and the quarrels between the Council and the Commission are running high. Genuine demands for democratic legitimacy of all this was never voiced so loudly by the European citizens. Treaties and national parliaments should be meticulously respected. Governmental efficiency and discipline are the only means to safeguard that the design errors of an individual country –which happens to be in the centre of the “Union”- will not be reproduced on a much larger scale.

**Europe should not “belgianise”**

If Europe would “belgianise” the results would be disastrous. Even in the best of families monetary problem can easily lead to quarrels. One day, our children will have to claim back the debts made by previous generations in Southern countries to finance their consumption. Family members, friends and neighbours will be turned into debtors and creditors. A failing and unfair transfer system will create tension and unrest within the European family. And wasn’t the Euro created to bring tranquillity and peace!

The almost self-evident way in which the Belgian North–South transfers were perceived did not bring the Flemish and Walloons closer together. To the contrary, Belgium will disintegrate as a result of it. In a country with insurmountable socio-economic and cultural differences, this will be the inevitable evolution towards a more efficient government. As such, this hasn’t to be adverse to a further European unification. We rebuild the semi-detached house into a stand-alone one, but the village remains the same. Pro Flandria is strongly convinced that Flanders and Wallonia, as independent nation-states but safeguarded from the cumbersome Belgian governmental system, will be able to create a common future on the European level in a more efficient way.

*Flanders is too large for Belgium and Belgium too small for Flanders. Flanders has to become a nation-state for it to be able to be a full-fledged European member state.*

**About Pro Flandria**

Pro Flandria is a network of men and women hailing from the business world, the field of education, the media, the cultural sector and other relevant parts of society. It will strive to ensure that the prosperity of Flanders and the other European states is safeguarded for the future. Pro Flandria will take the forefront to ensure that to all European citizens, but primarily to the younger generations, more opportunities are offered. In order to achieve this all countries will have to take up their responsibilities, and take matters in their own hands if and when necessary.

Pro Flandria does not engage in party politics but from a democratic concern denounces anti-political behaviour. This requires an open dialogue with all parties and interest groups, without reservations and without exclusions. We consider it as one of our major tasks to strongly participate and position ourselves in the public debate about governmental efficiency, nation-building and the European Union. We try to achieve our goals through activities like symposia, publications and networking, and we always propagate business-like analyses and solutions, with a focus on efficiency and fairness. In our recently published bundle of essays “Vlaanderen en Europa. Grenzen en Noodzaak aan solidariteit” *(Flanders & Europe. Limits and Necessity of Solidarity)* we offered a forum to nationally and internationally reputed politicians, economists and philosophers, to debate about the future of European integration, the Euro-zone and nation-building for Flanders. We believe that the outcome of these exchanges constitute a beacon to those Flemish politicians that opt for a strong Flanders in a strong Europe.

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