

BRUSSELS, CAPITAL OF EUROPE

“Enlarge Brussels with the Walloons and the Flemish of Brabant ...”

“Extend the frontiers of Brussels to Diest and Nivelles ...”

That is what Roland Duchâtelet proposes.

“If we really want to make of Brussels the Capital of Europe we should be bold enough to extend the frontiers of Brussels to those of Flemish and Walloon Brabant and create a metropolis under one authority,” said Roland Duchâtelet, President of the VIVANT Party in the columns of *Het Belang van Limburg* and *Gazet van Antwerpen*.

The VIVANT President also made the same declaration in person in the Flemish Church. For the Flemish parties, Brussels should not be enlarged and the electoral entity of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde should be split up to avoid future frenchification of Flemish Brabant.

Roland Duchâtelet finds this a legitimate point of view and points out that if the Flemish parties keep to it they should logically withdraw the bilingual facilities they offer.

The other side of the coin, with this position, is that Brussels will no longer have the space necessary in order to become the real European capital and that the socio-economic benefits linked to that situation would be lost.

“A choice must be made between these two options,” thinks Mr Duchâtelet.

The senator of VIVANT, a partner in the Open VLD cartel, is the second political figure within a few days to announce a new constitutional position.

On Friday 4 January, Philippe Moureaux of the Socialist Party said it was time to talk of constitutional change and had even talked of “confederalism” (a taboo word).

GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN

“Give Brussels Space”

Summary

Roland Duchâtelet points out that Brussels should no longer be considered just the capital of Belgium. It is necessary to think across frontiers and give Brussels further opportunities in the construction of Europe.

The European model will be able to maintain strong social security in a free market economy confronted with giants like China and India only if the European Union increases its economic dynamism.

“That is why a European capital is needed. At present, among the three important European cities (Strasbourg, Luxemburg and Brussels), Brussels is regarded as the capital – yet it is not so officially. But that should not prevent Brussels developing so as to qualify as the official European capital if it really wants to.”

“NATO and the European Union are already installed there. There are also many international organisations and companies with numerous well-paid employees, 10,000 accredited diplomats and 30,000 lobbyists. Immigration is important. But the City of Brussels is too small to accommodate them all. It has 33sq.km. for 145,000 inhabitants. And the 19 communes of Brussels-Region, for about 1 million inhabitants, has 162 sq.km. – ridiculously small compared with a metropolis.”

“I envisage an enlargement of Brussels to include the Flemish and Walloon Provinces of Brabant, which would give it 3,200 sq.km. for 2.4 million inhabitants.

In making of Brussels one urban region with one central authority, problems of planning, transport and security will be easier to solve – as well as those connected with administration and finance.”

“At present, it is necessary to negotiate with 19 communes, with Brussels Region, with the Flemish government and the Walloon government, with the government of the French Community and with the federal government – which creates many delays.

The language question would also be resolved, for within the boundaries of the old Brabant there are as many Flemish people as Francophones. The official languages would be Flemish, French, German and (as an international language) English. The Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde question would be solved at the same time and the electoral district would no longer have to be split up.”

“I think it is good that the Flemish hold on to the principle of territoriality. It is perfectly legitimate. But that does not mean that Brussels should not be allowed to develop as the European capital with all the economic benefits deriving from this new status.”

“After a year of political debate enabling the population to form an opinion, a referendum could be envisaged. But this may not be of much interest in this instance, for new ideas are involved and people are very conservative.

The political structures could also make the decision, in the context of constitutional reform of the State, for example.”

“This proposal regarding Brussels has been discussed and approved within VIVANT but not with the cartel Open-VLD. We are now trying to persuade the VLD that this is the right way to go. Many citizens and politicians share our view but nobody dares say so because the status of Brussels is taboo.”

“We want to open up the dialogue. I am in favour of a drastic reform of the State giving more competences to the regions, including fiscal powers. That would develop competition between the different administrations, their work would be of higher quality, there would be fewer public servants and things would be less expensive.”

HET BELANG VAN LIMBURG

Summary

Yves Leterme: “It has taken the six months spent on forming a government to persuade everybody that reform of the State is useful and necessary.”

In an interview in the VIF, Philippe Moureaux also pleads for radical reform of the State and even talks of confederalism. He calls on Flanders to maintain solidarity with francophone Belgium and points out that a majority of three quarters is required for further reform of the institutions.

Reform of the State should also take into account the split of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde and in this context the francophones will again raise the question of the extension of Brussels. Roland Duchâtelet is concerned with it, not politically but for economic reasons.

Like other metropolises, Brussels could acquire the living space it needs to become the capital of Europe. The economic benefits would be considerable.

Philippe Moureaux breaks the taboo for francophones on the question of confederalism; and Roland Duchâtelet openly preaches heresy in the Flemish Church. Both have thus taken up prominent positions so as to turn thoughts to the economic aspect rather than stay with the emotional approach of reform of the State.

The Flemish will not prevent the existence of Belgium and solidarity because they win wider competences. And the francophones will not stop coming into Flemish Brabant because Brussels does not extend itself, and BHV splits up; only, they will no longer be able to vote for francophone politicians.

It is the Group of Twelve that will prepare the State reform, which we hope will be full of good sense and pragmatic.