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The Brussels metropolis: developments between Lille and Berlin? ¹

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Abstract

The least known of the different scenarios being debated for Brussels are probably those for the development of a metropolis or an urban community. In their minimalist versions, both scenarios can be envisaged without requiring institutional reform and without touching the borders of Brussels, which makes them less "onbespreekbaar" - depending on the interlocutor - than enlargement of the city, co-management, or the European district. Lille's development is based on two territories: the urban community that groups 85 municipalities and the metropolis that transcends state borders. Berlin and Brandenburg have explored a merger, but the project was blocked by a referendum. However, various types of formal 'metropolitan'-type cooperation have been put in place. The four scenarios resulting from these two cities offer lessons for the development of Brussels.

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The future of Brussels has given rise to a number of scenarios that have already been debated. The best known is probably the idea of a European district, the well-known "Brussels, DC". A novel describes the siege of Brussels² and a film portrays the building of a wall along the city's borders³. A study by the Centre for Operations Research and Econometrics (CORE) proposes the enlargement of Brussels to 31 municipalities⁴ while a recent report by Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KUL)⁵ states that the Brussels urban region comprises 62 municipalities. The French-speaking political parties would like to see the Brussels-Capital Region encompass at least the municipalities with language facilities on the city's outskirts.

The idea of a "Greater Brussels" is attractive to some because it would give Brussels an institutional tie-up to its economic hinterland, along with greater demographic weight for the Flemings in Brussels, leading "naturally" to better language balance in the enlarged entity. For others, it is very simply "onbespreekbaar"⁶. A more credible alternative could therefore be the model of the Lille urban community and metropolis, or the cooperation between Berlin and Brandenburg, their main relevance being that they do not call into question existing territorial divisions.

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² Jacques Neyrinck, *Le siège de Bruxelles*, Paris, Labor, coll. Espace Nord, 1996.

³ *Le Mur*, directed by Alain Berliner, 1998.

⁴ "Critères pour la détermination des frontières de Bruxelles", by Pierre Berquin, under the supervision of Isabelle Thomas and Henry Tulkens, 1999.

⁵ Report on the study by Martin Buxant published in *La Libre Belgique* ("Selon la KUL, la région bruxelloise compte 62 communes"), 2 August 2007.

⁶ "Not open to discussion".

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After reviewing these two foreign experiences, we will highlight the factors contributing to the development of the two cities into metropolises, but also those representing obstacles. We will then attempt to transpose the two cases to Brussels, with the goal of determining whether or not they are feasible given the peculiarities of the Belgian situation. Although these scenarios are not on the agenda today, it is nonetheless interesting to study them so as to shed light on the Belgian situation through a comparative analysis. We could, moreover, adopt the subtitle of the report adopted in 2000 by the Construction Confederation: "Comparing and Improving"⁷.

Lille

Lille embodies two options. On top of the urban community scenario is that of the international metropolis. While the former is defined by the 1966 law on urban communities (Article 3, which creates four urban communities), the concept of international metropolis is harder to pinpoint. It could be considered the "concentration of different rare and important municipal public services for a far-reaching territory where a set of urban structures of different levels are organised into a hierarchy" or the "organisation of a system of relations between players within a perimeter of common interests" (Tetra, 2000: 7).

Although the concepts of urban community and international metropolis in Lille cover different territories and geographical, economic, cultural and political realities, they are still closely linked. It is often difficult to distinguish between those coming under one entity or the other. The city of Lille, for example, is an integral part of the urban community of Lille, a public corporation for intermunicipal cooperation established by the law of 31 December 1966, renamed "Lille Métropole Communauté Urbaine" (LMCU, Lille Metropolis Urban Community) in 1997.

A number of events have contributed to the development of Lille's international influence. Although it is impossible to put an exact date on the creation of the Lille international metropolis, Didier Paris and Jean-François Stevens identify at least a "fork in the road" of Lille's development (2000: 122). It occurred in 1986 with the signature of the Franco-British treaty creating the Channel Tunnel. The conjunction of that event with the unexpected decision to allow the TGV high-speed train to go through the city centre triggered the dynamic that has been at work in Lille since the 1990s. It has gradually evolved from an industrial city into an international metropolis geared towards tertiary activities. Lille has also given culture an important role, climaxing with the organisation of "Lille, European capital of culture" in 2004.

The LMCU is an association of 85 municipalities covering a territory of a little over 600 km² (around four times as big as Brussels) with a population virtually identical to that of the Brussels Region. The entity is managed by two bodies. The Council, its deliberative body, is made up of 170 members who represent the councils of the participating municipalities. Since 1989, it has been chaired by Pierre Mauroy, assisted by 43 vice-presidents and 8 secretaries who make up the Bureau. This high

⁷ Confédération Construction Bruxelles-Capitale, 2000. Bruxelles et les autres métropoles - se comparer pour s'améliorer, Bruxelles.

number of representatives is justified by the need to respect certain balances (local, political, etc.). Since 1999, the Bureau may be assigned certain powers that are usually the responsibility of the Council, with the aim of facilitating and speeding up decision-making.

Although the LMCU does not have the same status or autonomy as the Brussels-Capital Region, its powers are similar to those exercised by the Regions in Belgium: urban planning, public transport, water, waste collection, roads, signs and signals, as well as fire fighting services. In addition, they exercise powers which are currently at least partially still the responsibility of the Brussels municipalities, such as housing and subsidised housing, car parks, and even cultural and sports equipment (which in Belgium are the responsibility of the municipalities and the Communities).

While Paris and Stevens argue that the signature of the Franco-British treaty for construction of the Channel Tunnel marks the defining moment for development of the Lille metropolis, industrialist Bruno Bonduelle maintains that the city's candidacy to host the Olympic Games represented "a triggering moment for a number of decision-makers" and that "wherever business leaders take their problems in hand, as in Lille and Lyon, things start moving" (2001: 4). Paris and Stevens say essentially the same thing when they observe that Lille's development into a metropolis is a "voluntary process of mobilising stakeholders behind the dynamic of metropolitan development" (2000: 155). They also discuss the concept of "metropolitan governance" that contributed to Lille's development by involving all stakeholders, not just politicians or business leaders. Civil society as a whole participated. Consensus, moreover, is only valid if all approve and participate in its dynamic.

The role of the different players is extremely important, as is that of the instruments they put in place. As early as 1966, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) of Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing was created. Its scope of action was expanded in 2006 following the merger with three other CCIs, forming the Greater Lille CCI. In 1985, the Agency for the International Promotion of the Metropolis was established with the remit of creating employment by attracting new businesses to the area and stimulating the development of existing firms. The Greater Lille Committee was put in place in 1993 by Bruno Bonduelle. It is undoubtedly an instrument for the development and promotion of Lille created to support Lille's candidacy for the Olympic Games. Bringing together players with a wide variety of profiles (academics, business leaders, politicians and representatives of associations), all involved in the life of Lille, it recommended, among other measures, the exclusive use of the name Lille in reference to the entire territory of the urban community. Lastly, since 1990, the Development and Urban Planning Agency has been in charge of the Master Plan for the Development and Urban Planning of Lille Metropolis. This instrument, developed by a joint association of local elected officials from the different municipalities of the Lille district, has five goals: international promotion, development (economic and urban), accessibility, quality (of life and of the environment) and solidarity (social cohesion, coherent taxation and a restoration of geographical balance) (Syndicat mixte du Schéma Directeur de Lille Métropole, 2002: 22).

The plan's promoters focus on the ideal positioning of the Lille metropolis, both nationally and internationally. Indeed, local factors must be taken into consideration. Internal balances in the metropolitan territory must be guaranteed while the territory itself must be integrated into the entire Nord-Pas-de-Calais region. The Lille me-

tropolis goes beyond national borders, moreover, since its hinterland covers part of Flanders and Wallonia. Its development thus means that consideration must be given to the entire zone of influence, irrespective of borders. Lille exists not only within a strictly French framework, but also within a European framework. That is why the Master Plan stresses the necessity of building special ties with Brussels, the capital closest to Lille (2000: 27).

A programme of cross-border cooperation subsidized by the European Union⁸ covers the border region between the Lille metropolis and the zone of influence of Courtrai and Tournai, the "Euro' met". Its main objective is to enhance the attractiveness of the bi-national region (which also covers parts of two Belgian Regions). It is not the only cross-border cooperation in place, however. In 1991 the Standing Cross-border Intermunicipal Conference (COPIT) was created. It brings together the LMCU and Belgian intermunicipal bodies (Mouscron, Tournai, Kortrijk, Roeselaere and Ieper). The members of the Conference have put together a master plan known as the "Grootstad", with support from the European Regional Development Fund⁹ and from DG Regio's TERRA programme.

As an urban community, Lille constitutes an entity proper. The powers of this entity are similar to those of the Belgian Regions, since they are closely related to the territory and the economy. Compared to the LMCU, the Lille metropolis is a vaguer and sometimes variable concept, which goes beyond the territory of the LMCU. It helps to link the LMCU to its economic hinterland, beyond national borders. It consists in various cooperation activities formalised in different projects that do not systematically involve the same protagonists, but with the common denominator of the participation of the LMCU, playing the role of lynchpin. The conjunction of the actions of the urban community and of the metropolis with consensus-building by all Lille stakeholders created the new dynamic that resulted in Lille's renaissance. These metropolitan governance initiatives have led to a competitive spirit contributing to its recognition as a European metropolis.

Berlin

Berlin, like Brussels, is a federated entity¹⁰ completely enclosed within another federated entity. The German capital is hemmed in by the Land of Brandenburg, which represents its natural economic hinterland. Unlike the Belgian situation, however, German reunification brought about a desire to develop synergy between the two Länder. The main motivation was the streamlining of urban planning, economic and employment policies, as well as the integration of different existing institutional and economic structures with the aim of avoiding duplication. This determination to develop cooperation allowed the creation, in 1992, of a joint government commission that keeps watch over the organisation and form given to cooperation.

⁸ Interreg 2 North-Pas-de-Calais-Western Flanders

⁹ ERDF - Interreg 3a France-Wallonia-Flanders

¹⁰ Berlin is the typical example of a "city-state" type of federal capital. Indeed, in the German case, as in the case of Vienna, the federated entity merges with the municipality. The Land of Berlin simultaneously exercises federal and state powers, unlike Brussels, where the Region co-exists with 19 municipalities, whose policies are not necessarily coordinated.

Given the absence of community or linguistic problems, this will to develop closer ties could not be blocked in Germany for the same reasons as in Belgium. In addition, the proposed cooperation concerns only two of the country's 16 Länder. The situation is different in Belgium. The three Regions could be involved in a scenario of enlargement of the capital, which would be tantamount to the situation existing prior to the country's federalisation and the splitting of the Province of Brabant. At first sight, the German case appears simpler, but that impression fails to take account of the traditional division between the centre and the outskirts, between the city and the suburban or even rural areas, to say nothing of the differences between West Berlin and the eastern part of the city or country.

Berlin has problems identical to those existing in Brussels, including the sensitive question of migration towards the outskirts. The German capital has had negative net migration since 1995. Many of these departures are moves to the nearby outskirts of Berlin (Grésillon and Kohler, 2001: 18), with both households and companies leaving the city for the outlying areas. As in Brussels, financial and tax considerations have prompted certain companies to move to the neighbouring Land. Indeed, in Berlin, corporate taxes and the price of land are higher than in Brandenburg, and administrative procedures are more onerous and slower in the capital. (Hauswirth, Herrschel and Newman, 2003: 127).

The Belgian and German capitals both suffer from the problem of commuters. More than 100,000 inhabitants of Brandenburg commute daily to Berlin for their jobs. These people use the capital's infrastructures without helping to pay for them¹¹. In addition, it is more advantageous for the municipalities of Brandenburg close to Berlin to become dormitory suburbs than to invest in attracting economic activity (Hauswirth, Herrschel and Newman, 2003: 130)!

Upon recovering its status as the nation's capital after reunification, Berlin hoped to become a key economic hub and to attract German and foreign investors, but it failed to take into consideration the competition from western cities such as Frankfurt, Stuttgart and Munich (Grésillon and Kohler, 2001: 104). As Berlin has learned, being the political centre is not necessarily synonymous with economic attractiveness¹².

Brandenburg would also stand to gain from a merger. As a Land of eastern Germany, it is still lagging behind to a large extent. Brandenburg officials are aware of their economic dependence on Berlin. Merging with the capital would thus help reduce the cost of bolstering its competitiveness (Hauswirth, Herrschel and Newman, 2003: 123), but would also prevent Berlin from developing at its expense (Grésillon and Kohler, 2001: 115).

Since the two Länder are closely tied in terms of economic development, a merger seems logical. Germany's basic law allows for such a possibility, provided the population is consulted via a referendum. The new entity would allow the capital, the only

¹¹ As in Belgium, income taxes in Germany are levied at the place of residence and not at the place of employment.

¹² The German case is a good illustration of this phenomenon, but it is the fate of most federal capitals. Washington, for instance, is the political capital of the United States, but its economic capital is New York. Canberra and Ottawa also attract little capital, unlike Sidney and Vancouver.

"real" city in the area¹³, to be united with its hinterland. Proponents of a merger were consequently hopeful that formal cooperation would draw more investors than would mere common projects lacking an overarching framework. They planned to facilitate relaunch of the economy of the new Land in order to stimulate its growth. The merger of the two Länder would also strengthen the new entity's influence on the federal government, since the resulting Land would have greater weight than the two separate states, even when the two carried out concerted actions (Hauswirth, Herschel and Newman, 2003: 123).

The merger referendum held in 1996 ended in failure, but it was quickly decided to organise a second attempt in 2009. In fact, the outcome of the 1996 referendum was positive in Berlin, but negative in Brandenburg. This difference originated first and foremost in the ongoing East-West division. Berlin was isolated from its natural environment during the cold war, so the inhabitants of Brandenburg were probably less inclined to support integration with the capital, especially because the GDR had invested heavily in its capital, at the expense of the rest of the country. Since then, Berlin has sometimes been demonized, to such a point that this phenomenon can represent an obstacle to the implementation of projects with entities from the eastern part of the country. In addition, the fear of a loss of identity in a merger cannot be ruled out: the inhabitants of Brandenburg fear being absorbed by the capital, which has a larger population (3.5 million in Berlin compared to 2.5 million in Brandenburg). Lastly, Berlin's poor economic health certainly helps explain the refusal by Brandenburg, whose citizens could see the merger as a way for Berlin to wipe its public deficit slate clean.

Even in the absence of a merger, however, Berlin is gradually evolving into a metropolis. As early as 1995, Berlin and Brandenburg signed an agreement on joint regional planning that established the Joint Regional Planning Directorate. This cooperation body, for which there is no precedent in Germany (Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung, Umweltschutz und Technologie (Berlin) and Ministerium für Umwelt, Naturschutz und Raumordnung des Landes Brandenburg, 1998: 7), is responsible for spatial planning for the entire territory of both Länder, with a view to "sustainable harmonisation of the interests of Berlin and Brandenburg" (1998: 6). The Bund also facilitates cooperation between the two entities, in particular with the creation of a joint employment office to enable the jobless to look for work anywhere in the two states, even though this is a federal competence.

There are also a number of smaller-scale activities, for example, a programme for the development of tourism. These are in most cases rendered possible in the absence of financial stakes (Hauswirth, Herschel and Newman, 2003: 125). Two areas where cooperation was recently implemented are agriculture and the judicial system. The agricultural sector is now organised in Potsdam, since Berlin has no farms (apart from a few situated in Brandenburg). On the judicial side, a joint civil court is based in Berlin, with another situated in Brandenburg hearing financial cases.

The Berlin and Brandenburg bodies charged with industrial development and export support, although still autonomous, work together to improve promotion of the re-

¹³ Potsdam, the biggest municipality and the capital of Brandenburg, has only 138,000 inhabitants.

gion among potential investors. The two Länder also collaborate extensively with cities on the Polish banks of the Oder.

If the merger of the two Länder were to be based exclusively on these forms of co-operation put in place over a decade ago, it could be given effect quite quickly. Before organising another referendum, however, the continuing approval of Berlin's citizens will have to be confirmed and the inhabitants of Brandenburg will have to be convinced of the merit of the project.

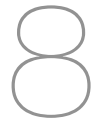
We might note in passing, in connection with the case of Berlin, the practically opposite situation in Vienna, which has been hemmed in by Lower Austria since its creation as a city-state in 1921. Until that date, the two entities had formed a single Land. Considerations of a political nature – gerrymandering, in fact – led the Austrian authorities to split the Land of Lower Austria to limit the influence of the Social Democrats to the capital alone, whereas previously they prevailed over the Conservatives in the entire Land. Another interesting element in the comparison with Brussels and Berlin is that Lower Austria maintained the seat of its institutions in Vienna up until 1986, when a referendum carried by 56% of voters moved the capital to St Pölten. In contrast with the relationship between Flanders and Brussels, Lower Austria considered itself, up until the 1986 move, as a federated entity without its capital. There was a clear will to develop an identity on the one hand, and the region on the other, at the time of the consultation on the new capital.

Lastly, Washington provides another illustration of a federal capital hemmed in by and consequently prone to engage in specific forms of cooperation with the states surrounding it. Created artificially from territory handed over by Maryland and Virginia, the District of Columbia, like Brussels and Berlin, was confronted with problems typical of big cities, in particular those created by the fact that the more affluent inhabitants were moving out of the city to the neighbouring states. A regional body has been in place since 1957, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG), a sort of embryo urban community, compared to Lille. It is made up of representatives of Washington and of 20 other neighbouring municipalities, as well as members of state houses of representatives and members of Congress. Its role as an independent organisation is to facilitate cooperation in areas related to transport, the environment, housing, health and public safety, without this involving any transfer or delegation of powers by the participating municipalities.

What project for the Brussels metropolis?

The idea of an urban community is not new as far as Brussels is concerned. Charles Picqué, discussing it in 1999, stated that the concept "does not call into question the principle of territoriality but would serve as the basis for achieving common objectives and solidarity in terms of taxation between the Brussels Region and its natural hinterland. [It] would also confirm the guarantees for the French-speaking majorities of the municipalities with language facilities and justify the guaranteed representation of the Flemings in the Brussels Regional Council." (1999 : 46)

In a report published in 2000, "Brussels and other metropolises. Comparing and Improving", the Brussels-Capital Construction Confederation reiterates its support



for the establishment of a Brussels urban community, adding that it has been recommending that course of action since 1995. The Belgian capital would thus form part of a European movement of the enlargement of cities to their outskirts (2000: 99). Creation of an urban community would contribute to a rationalisation of urban policies in terms of available services and financing.

The two cases described in this article illustrate two different options. On the one hand, Lille provides experience with both the urban community and the European metropolis. On the other, the Berlin scenario for the merger of two Länder is an attempt at enlargement, but also offers the example of the different forms of cooperation developed between the German capital and Brandenburg. Both Lille and Berlin can consequently serve as a model or at least offer certain lessons for Brussels.

Neither scenario is incompatible with the situation in Brussels. In fact, everything would depend on the scope of enlargement, if it were to take place. If limited to the six municipalities with language facilities, it would make sense to create an urban community with the Brussels hinterland. If enlargement went beyond the six communes, the greater part of Brussels' zone of influence would be integrated into the capital and consequently the establishment of an urban community would be less appropriate.

The enlargement of Brussels nevertheless seems impossible in the near future. Berlin, pending a merger with Brandenburg, therefore presents an interesting alternative. Before being able to put their ambitious project into practice, the officials of Berlin and Brandenburg are cooperating in certain areas, although formal coordination is still rare. This is not a model similar to the urban community but consists in ad hoc actions that are sometimes institutionalised to a certain degree. The cooperation concerns spatial planning, tourism, agriculture and certain courts. A key point in the comparison with Brussels is that these powers are exercised by the Länder and not by municipalities. Accordingly, the cooperation agreements are signed between Berlin and Brandenburg.

Transposition of the case of Berlin-Brandenburg cooperation is particularly sensitive given the division of powers in Belgium. Urban planning, for example, is a power shared by the Regions and the municipalities. A cooperation instrument would therefore have to be not only interregional but also intermunicipal, which is likely to result in complicated procedures. Agriculture is not a major concern in Brussels and the courts depend on the federal level. Cooperation in those areas is therefore not necessary. On the other hand, the case of tourism is more problematical since it can be "personalised" and thus eludes the Brussels Region.

This touches upon a particular problem that has already been highlighted by the political players themselves: the division of powers. Numerous regional or municipal representatives are calling for a streamlining of the municipal and regional spheres of activity. This would prevent "competing" areas, to use a federalist term. The aim would be to ensure that a policy area is managed at only one level of power instead of being shared by the municipalities and the region, but such reorganisation concerns only those powers exercised by the region or the municipalities. Tourism, for instance, is not concerned by this potential reform.

The Berlin-Brussels comparison makes it possible to identify areas where cooperation in Belgium could take the form of cooperation agreements, in the event these

policies were totally in the hands of the region (essentially urban planning, spatial planning and mobility). A few cooperation agreements have already been signed between Wallonia and Brussels, in order to appoint external trade representatives representing both. So it is possible to imagine the development of this option for other regional matters.

The Lille metropolis is based on networks established between French municipalities and Belgian municipalities in order to harmonise certain activities such as urban planning or mobility. This brings to light a regrettable Belgian paradox: it is often easier to cooperate with another country than with the other Belgian Community or Region. Brussels in particular is penalised by this situation. As in Lille, it would be necessary to rally all the players concerned (political representatives, business leaders and civil society) around a common project.

Without considering enlargement, but in order to formalise cooperation, we can imagine the transposition of the LMCU model to Brussels. Transposition nevertheless runs into a major obstacle: the multiplicity of players. The body to be put in place is not simply intermunicipal, because it would be pointless to create a body that can work only on local matters. The coordination body must necessarily involve the regions and the delegation of regional powers to the new body seems inevitable. This is not impossible, as seen with an example set by the German-speaking Community of Belgium. On 1 January 2005, certain regional powers were transferred to that Community. Political considerations alone might prevent the two or three¹⁴ Regions from delegating certain matters to a Brussels (or Brabant) urban community.

The creation of such a body would also do away with the problems of the refinancing of Brussels and a review of the levying of individual income taxes. Competition in that respect would be reduced since all the municipalities of the hinterland would form part of a common entity with Brussels. The urban community could therefore provide a solution to the lack of balance between GDP and average income.

The scope of cooperation would still have to be determined, along with practical arrangements, such as the organisation of the Council and the Bureau or the question of the budget. There could be questions about the future of Brussels as a federated entity in the event of successful implementation of the urban community project. With the delegation of a large number of its powers, would the Brussels Region become an empty shell, limited de facto to its three Community Commissions and supervision of the municipalities? Would this not give additional ammunition to those who argue that Brussels is not a Region "like the others"? Is that a risk worth taking?

A phased-in transition

The enlargement of Brussels seems illusory and the creation of an urban community, although it has the support of different stakeholders, is not likely to become a reality any time soon. Given the impossibility of putting it in place in the near future, it seems essential for all the players involved in the metropolitan development of Brussels to meet. Opening up a group to members other than local representatives (as in

¹⁴ Depending on the desired size of the urban community.

Lille, but not in Washington, where only representatives of municipalities sit on the MWCOG) could be a first step on the road to metropolitan governance.

The major factor that contributed to the development of Lille was its candidacy to host the Olympic Games. A parallel can be made with Brussels. Indeed, in 2003, certain Flemish politicians spoke up in favour of the Flemish Region's candidacy. Since cities alone are eligible, however, the possibility of Brussels' candidacy was discussed.

Without campaigning for Brussels to host the Olympic Games, we would nevertheless point out that an ambitious project like the Olympics could rally stakeholders concerned with the Brussels metropolis. Indeed, the 19 municipalities alone could never accommodate all the infrastructures required. Collaboration with the municipalities of Brabant would be imperative for bringing such a project to successful conclusion. A metropolitan system of cooperation could thus be initiated and might subsequently lead to the creation of an urban community.

There is no lack of projects for Brussels and the ranks of proponents of the urban community continue to grow, including in the political sphere (at least among French-speaking political leaders). It is well known that Charles Picqué is convinced and, during the past regional legislature, MR (Mouvement Réformateur, liberal party) regional councillors tabled a draft proposal along those lines. The CDH (Centre Démocrate Humaniste, centrist party) electoral platform in 2004 also called for such a project. The Flemish parties may be more receptive to the arguments of the Construction Confederation, but its report dates back to 2000. For now, the option of case-by-case cooperation, based on the example of Berlin and Brandenburg, seems the most realistic way forward.

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