



Memorandum for the Flemish and European elections 2009

On 7 June 2009, citizens of the Flemish Region of Belgium will elect members of the Flemish Parliament as well as Members of the European Parliament. The set of regional competences that members of the Flemish Parliament will represent offer a wide range of opportunities to develop a policy aimed at achieving peace and preventing violence. These competences encompass many urgent issues, such as the arms trade, the development of a peace economy, and the education sector's efforts to promote peace education. The European Union also works for sustainable enhancement of peace and security in many areas, and the European Parliament plays an important role in the realization of that goal.

The Flemish Peace Institute supports the work of the Flemish Parliament through its policy-oriented basic research on, for example, the arms trade, military research and development (R&D), peace education and peace attitudes. Furthermore, the Institute advises the Flemish Parliament and Government on peace issues. In the present Memorandum and on the basis of its advisory and research activities, the Peace Institute reviews issues that require urgent attention in the next legislative term. The intention is to help define positions in the run-up to these two important elections and to inform the future political debate.

The Peace Institute emphasizes three areas in this Memorandum, under the headings Peace can be Learned, Peace and the Economy, and Flanders in the World. The sections below first summarize relevant research results for each of these areas, followed by boxes presenting practical recommendations for action.

1 Peace can be Learned

Research carried out by the Flemish Peace Institute indicates that there is a general consensus that peace is a good thing, and that war and violence are condemnable and unproductive. Nonetheless, many people continue to be victims of, for example, domestic violence, bullying or traffic aggression, shootings and other forms of violence. Although war and violence are common throughout the world, we must not become complacent. Violence can be prevented and peace can be learned.

Many people believe that they can personally contribute to the creation of a peaceful and non-violent world, primarily by raising and educating children in a culture of peace. Although raising children is mainly the responsibility of parents, governments also have a part to play. Four of five polled Flemish respondents are of the opinion that it is incumbent on the government to ensure that present and future generations remain informed about the madness and horrors of war. Policies can guide and steer education and the enhancement of the role of civil society. In its research programme “Peace in Society”, the Peace Institute found recurring approaches to enhancing the conditions for peace based on the importance of upbringing and education, the great impact of the media, and the pivotal role of social networks.

Structural support for Peace Education

The Peace Institute initiated a large-scale research project that systematically mapped out Peace Education projects in the school sector. These facts and data can contribute to the political and social debate on how to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes regarding non-violence, tolerance and a basic democratic attitude. The study shows that, thanks to the efforts and commitment of a large number of dedicated, energetic administrators and teachers, schools in Flanders have already set up quite a few Peace Education projects. The research also shows, however, that Peace Education and civil society need structural support.

In order to structurally entrench Peace Education, the Peace Institute proposes the establishment of an Internet portal that would clearly inform the education sector and youth organizations about available and ongoing Peace Education projects. The organizations offering such projects and educators who want to use those projects must be encouraged to establish better interaction and alignment of demand and supply. The Institute also recommends systematic attention to introducing methodologies for Peace Education in teacher training. At school level, ‘a pioneer package’, geared to the final attainment levels and network-specific curricula, could remove any unnecessary apprehension regarding the use of resources for Peace Education. ■

An explicit peace message on the commemoration of the centenary of World War I

The period 2014-2018 will mark the 100th anniversary of World War I. The horrors carried out on the frontline trenches in the narrow strips of no man's land from the Yzer to Switzerland took the lives of millions of people between 1914 and 1918. This centenary will bring many visitors to Flanders Fields and will present an opportunity to reflect, to propagate a notion of peace, and to build a bridge to the international community.

The preparations for this commemoration have already begun at various policy levels. The Peace Institute supports the idea of an integrated vision combining tourism, heritage, culture, foreign policy, education and training. At the commemoration, the Institute proposes to take concrete action on 'peace tourism' and to propagate an explicit peace message in cooperation within and outside the Belgian borders. ■

High-quality media coverage about the international community

The Peace Institute's study "Peace in Flanders" shows how the media influence people's attitudes towards peace and violence. People who are well-informed, especially about the international community, tend to have a more outspoken positive attitude to peace and non-violence. They are also more willing to actively contribute to developing those issues. Both consciously and unconsciously, the media play a crucial role in the commitment of people to peace and in the development of a general positive attitude to

peace. There is a need for more, and particularly more in-depth and clear, international media coverage. The Institute's research indicated that press coverage of peace and international security issues has decreased consistently over the past few years.

The Peace Institute will continue to study the role of the media, but already now recommends more action to ensure high-quality coverage of the international community. ■

2 Peace and the Economy

It is important to seek the right balance between economic interests and ensuring the best conditions for peace and security. Conflict resolution, prevention of violence and peacekeeping deserve special attention in the establishment of that balance. For instance, more than two thirds of polled Flemish respondents believe that our industrial sector should not export weapons or military equipment to countries at war, even when this would incur the loss of jobs. However, peace and the economy are not at all mutually exclusive: on the contrary, a synergy is both possible and crucial for our wellbeing.

Sustainable economic growth can promote peace, and economic activity benefits from a secure, non-violent society.

One area where there is a tension between peace and the economy is the arms trade, but it is essential to effectively control the arms trade to promote peace and stability. And importantly, arms trade policy must be fully transparent in order to enable democratic follow-up, control and accountability.

Effective and transparent control of the arms trade

The Peace Institute is convinced that peace and security benefit from effective regulation of the arms trade through unambiguous legislation, proper implementation, and efficient follow-up and control. Consistent, appropriate arms trade control policy also works to the benefit of the legal security of the companies involved. Both Flanders and Belgium must strive to establish high standards of arms export control at the European level. Such standards would enable the creation of an efficient control policy without harming companies' international competitive positions.

The Flemish defence-related industry supplies high-technology components mainly for integration into larger weapon systems: almost three quarters of Flemish arms exports go to foreign industry for further processing. This trade takes place largely in the absence of information about possible further sales or guarantees as to the end-use of the exported military equipment. The Peace Institute proposes the establishment of a more refined legislation, inter alia with respect to control of the end-use of exported arms and military equipment.

Arms trade policy must be transparent in order to enable democratic control. The Peace Institute recommends maintaining the current levels of transparency in the Flemish export and import licensing procedure, but also extending the reporting requirements to include all types of licence (temporary licences and extensions, general licences, etc.). In addition, more information should be reported on what actually happens with those licenced exports – the actual import, export and transit of arms.

Communication and service vis-à-vis the industry are important elements in arms trade control policy. The Peace Institute is of the opinion that existing contacts between government and industry must be complemented with regular, frequent communication, so that all companies can become familiar with the applicable legislation and procedures, and the government can closely follow developments in the industrial sector. Furthermore, the Institute recommends streamlining the administrative procedures for the handling of applications for export and import licences in order to limit the uncertainty experienced by industry about the timing of decisions to be taken. ■

Research and innovation for a sustainable peaceful economy

In the general interest of society and on the basis of ethical considerations, a peace economy is the only option. There are no indications that the choice for peace would obstruct economic development. A literature review performed by two independent defence economists shows, for example, that support for military R&D is not beneficial on a macro-economic level. Future development lies in research-intensive sectors – such as electronics, energy, biotechnology and the medical sector, – that contribute to sustainable and peaceful economic progress.

It is commendable that the Flemish Government stimulates economic development and research, innovation and employment. The Peace Institute is of the opinion that the allocation of public funds should preferably and by priority offer a sustainable social added value.

Another Flemish institute, the Institute for the Promotion of Innovation by Science and Technology (IWT) is subject to a guideline for projects with a military purpose. It excludes the possibility of government support and finance for military projects. The Peace Institute concurs with the approach in which defence-related initiatives cannot be treated as normal economic activities. It also recommends that IWT guideline be clarified as regards its scope and the procedures that should be followed. Furthermore, the Peace Institute recommends that the reservation regarding military projects should not be restricted to IWT support. Rather, it should be applied to all investments, risk coverage, services, etc., through all the support channels of the Flemish Government. ■

3 Flanders in the World

Flanders is not an island. Our region operates within broader structures: federal Belgium, the European Union, the United Nations (UN), etc. The competences Flanders has in Belgium also apply to the international level. For example, in the area of international trade, the economy, the environment or culture, Flanders maintains close contact with many countries. It is important that Flemish foreign policy is strategically directed at the promotion of peace and the prevention of conflict, and that it takes shape at the Belgian, European and UN level.

There is broad support for a multilateral foreign policy that puts peace, security and democracy first: three quarters of polled respondents agree

that Europe should specialize in diplomatic conflict resolution and almost half believe that only the UN can decide to use military force against a country. In addition, the Flemish population votes for a world without nuclear weapons: the proliferation of nuclear weapons is regarded as one of the most urgent international issues, and more than two thirds of respondents agree that Belgium should not allow the stationing of nuclear weapons on its territory.

In exerting its competences, the Flemish Government has developed a foreign policy in several areas. It is necessary that members of parliament contribute to increasing democratic control of that policy and help define the strategic framework.

A democratic foreign policy for peace

The Peace Institute is in favour of an integrated vision for Flemish foreign policy for the promotion of peace and the prevention of conflict, implemented on the basis of collaboration and consultation at the Belgian, European and UN level. That foreign policy needs broad democratic support and the close attention of parliaments. The democratic debate on foreign policy in the Flemish and European parliaments therefore deserves continued attention and new impetus.

It is important to have clear and open communication channels with the international forums dealing with the Flemish competences, for instance consultation on UN initiatives in international working groups on arms trade. The representation and exchange of information in those forums must be organized efficiently.

International obligations and commitments must be enhanced at all levels, and it should be recognized that local and regional structures can significantly complement the activities of state and interstate organizations. Concretely, the Peace Institute strongly recommends that Flanders implements UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security, e.g. by supporting projects aimed at promoting the role of women in conflict resolution. Furthermore, the Peace Institute argues that states and other relevant entities should sign the 2008 Hiroshima-Nagasaki Protocol, as it is a powerful bottom-up signal to delegations to the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference that they should work to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. ■

The Peace Institute is an independent organization attached to the Flemish Parliament. The Institute engages in scientific research on questions of peace and provides information and documentation. Based on its research the Institute provides advice to Parliament or the Government.

Further information

For the study **'Peace in Flanders'**, the Peace Institute asked more than 1,000 Flemish citizens what they think about peace and what they (want to) do about it. The results of the survey are presented in a report and a brochure, and they have contributed to the points made in this Memorandum.

In the brochure **'10 questions & answers on arms export'** the Peace Institute examines the complex issues of the arms trade: an overview of the most important elements of procedure and practice.

In the **'Report on Micro and Macro Peace'**, the Peace Institute reports on the current situation regarding Peace Education in primary and secondary schools in Flanders.

The advice note **'Flemish policy and UN Resolution 1325 concerning Women, Peace, and Security'** illustrates the (opportunities for) implementation through Flemish policy of this UN Security Council Resolution and identifies the lacunas and obstacles.

The background note **'IWT guideline on support for research projects with possible military applications'** offers an overview of the origin and evolution of the debate on government support for military R&D and on the IWT guideline in particular.

These and other reports, brochures, advice notes, etc. of the Peace Institute are available at www.flemishpeaceinstitute.eu.