

Separatist Victory Puts Belgium on the Chopping Block

by Karel Vereycken

Oct. 19—On Sept. 22, the *New York Times* presented its vision of the “New World.” Included in a list of nations, such as Mali and Syria, which are targeted for breakup by al-Qaeda terrorists, the *Times* headlined its article, “Belgium (Finally) Splits Up,” since, if it weren’t for Brussels, “Belgium would have split up long ago.”¹

“Strangely,” adds the paper, “it is “Brussels” [Belgium’s capital city]—shorthand for its role as headquarters for the European Union—that could facilitate a divorce—“As Europe integrates, national borders will become less important than cultural and ethnic lines” (see box).

Less than three weeks later, with the Oct. 14 election victory of the New Flemish Alliance (N-VA), the separatist party whose program starts with the breakup of Belgium, the prospect of a breakup is again in the forefront. The party’s victory was the largest landslide of the entire post-World War II period, at both municipal and provincial council levels. And if these voting trends are continued into the 2014 general elections, a breakup will become deadly real.

Ungovernable

Before the Oct. 14 elections, Belgium had gone without a national government from June 2010, when the N-VA became the largest party in Flanders, and the Socialist Party (SP.a), the largest in Wallonia, until December 2011. During that time, Belgium was governed by a caretaker government, while negotiations were dead-

1. The current shape of Belgium, a densely populated (11 million, in about 30,500 square miles), and economically active area, at the geographical center of Western Europe, resulted from several wars and conflicts. Until the Revolt of the Low Countries in 1572, against the imperial rule of the Spanish Habsburgs, what is now called Belgium, together with an area of Northern France, was the southern part of the Burgundian Low Countries. As a result, the country has two major national languages: Flemish (identical to Dutch) and French, spoken by the “Walloons” living in the South.

locked over formation of a new government. Finally, in December, the current government, led by Walloon socialist Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo, was sworn in.

In the municipal elections in Flanders (the northern part of Belgium, inhabited by 6 million Dutch-speaking Flemings) municipal elections, the N-VA, with 1,600 city councilors, came close to the vote received by the Christian Democrats (CD&V). N-VA leads in the number of votes in 48 Flemish cities and municipalities, 35 of which will have an N-VA mayor. Some larger cities such as Ghent, Bruges, and Ostende remain under Socialist Party mayoral rule, but the N-VA now becomes the leading force in the opposition.

In the five Flemish provinces (West Flanders, East Flanders, Antwerp, Limburg, and Flemish Brabant), the N-VA garnered 1.16 million votes at the provincial councils, resulting in 104 council members of a total of 351.

While nobody is contesting the election results, or



Belgian Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo has called for breaking up the banks, Glass-Steagall style, in contrast to the British-orchestrated calls by the New Flemish Alliance, for breaking up the country into North (Flanders) and South (Wallonia).

calling for a recount, irregularities were widespread, with the use of electronic voting machines, and officials from both Flanders and Wallonia have called for a return to paper-ballot voting.

Fight for Glass-Steagall

In early September, Prime Minister Di Rupo, aware of the calls for a Glass-Steagall-style solution to the financial crisis emanating from high-level quarters in the U.K. and the U.S. (as communicated by the Belgian LaRouche movement, known as Agora Erasmus—see box with leaflet), called for banking separation. In the leading Belgian daily *La Libre Belgique*, Di Rupo was asked on Sept. 1, what kind of banking reform he was con-

sidering; he answered:

“We have to exit the financial system’s own logic of privatizing profits and socializing losses. The financial assets circulating in the financial world are no longer sufficiently dedicated to the real economy....

The Breakup of Nations: New Plot, Old Policy

As early as 1957, the Austrian-born Leopold Kohr, steered by the British, using the model of the Swiss cantons, wrote a program to break up the European nation-states into a mosaic of some 50 ethnic- and language-based principalities, all under the rule of a single European federal superstate. Promoted by the Dutch beer magnate Freddy Heineken as a Eurotopia, this policy resurfaced in 2005, in a book titled *The Size of Nations*, written by Alberto Alesina and Enrico Spolaore.

Not by accident, both “economists” are pupils of Robert Mundell, officially the “father” of the euro. “Economic integration,” they argue, “favors

the political disintegration” of nation-states. Two of the main obstacles facing a “nation” (e.g., Catalonia, Corsica, Padania, Scotland, Bavaria) wishing “to leave” a nation-state, disappeared with the creation of the euro: the need to have one’s own currency and a market for one’s trade. Therefore, the creation of the euro, they observe, is, by its very nature, “vaporizing” the legitimacy of national borders and the very existence of large states themselves.

Today, as soon as Spain began to refuse to submit fully to the Troika (the European Commission, European Central Bank, and the IMF), both Catalonia and the Basque regions decided to go ahead, without the green light of Madrid, with popular referenda on independence. In Belgium, of course, the Flemish “nationalists” of the N-VA are the strongest supporters of the EU dictatorship.

—Karel Vereycken

“My conviction is that we have to break up the banks, to reduce their size and protect the assets of the citizens in a way we can avoid having states intervene. Legislation has to be adopted such that the consequences of all risky behavior goes to those involved...”

In response to the Prime Minister’s call for a Glass-Steagall-style banking reform, the conservative employers unions immediately branded Di Rupo “a Marxist.” It is worth noting that in Bruges, the N-VA campaign headquarters operated out of the Unizo employers union building. Historically, the N-VA has been close to a group of Flemish neo-conservatives centered around a think tank, In de Warande, headed by the former CEO of KBC Bank Remi Vermeiren. Johan van Gompel, a KBC economist, and Jacques Stockx, of KBC’s research department, who ran a “simulation” of a breakup of Belgium as long ago as 1979, are top members of In de Warande. Economist Jan Jambon, also a member of the think tank, was elected as a mayor in Brasschaat for the N-VA last weekend.

FIGURE 1

Belgium’s Northern and Southern Provinces



Agora Erasmus: Di Rupo Is Right on Glass-Steagall

The Belgian LaRouche movement, Agora Erasmus, issued the following leaflet following the Oct. 14 election:

On October 14, the Belgians rejected en masse the political class in power since the end of World War II. They are calling to end the impunity of those who take personal advantage of the policies that are leading the nation to disaster, policies that deprive us of skilled jobs and decent wages, affordable housing, health care, and education, and, much more important, our ability to offer a future for our children. Of course, we mean the large Franco-Belgian banks, which in the name of European “solidarity” are demanding brutal austerity for all except themselves, and which impose their rule over Greece, Ireland, Portugal, and Spain, in order to loot the money they lost in their financial casino.

Our Prime Minister, Elio Di Rupo (whatever his political coloration), seems to have a sense of the challenge of our epoch: Does one have to continue

sacrificing the people on the altar of the “Golden Calf,” or does one have to restrain the banking lobby to channel credit back to the real economy and social progress? The Prime Minister happens to be the only government leader in Europe who, with courage, and perhaps at the risk of his life, has publicly identified the unique solution to the current crisis: break up the banks as was done with the Glass-Steagall Act, a law promulgated by Franklin Roosevelt in 1933 (and in Belgium starting from 1934).

In an interview with *La Libre Belgique*, the Prime Minister clearly indicated the problem: “One of the big problems is the size of the banks. In the UK, banks represent 600% of GDP; in Denmark, 500%; in the Netherlands, in France, in Belgium, they represent between 360 and 400%. As soon as these banks have a problem, the impact on countries is gigantic. One has to exit the proper logic of the financial system which is to privatize profits and to socialize (mutualize) losses. Vast amounts of money circulate in the financial world and are no longer sufficiently dedicated to the real economy. That isn’t normal. There exists a demand, in Belgium as well as in other countries—in the USA for example—to break up the banks: on the one side the deposit banks, on the other the investment banks.”

—Karel Vereycken



New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) boss Bart De Wever won a big victory in Antwerp mayoral elections, but downplayed the party's number one aim: the breakup of the Belgian nation into two separate countries.

The Fall of Antwerp

In the city of Antwerp, the second-largest port in Europe, and the economic heart of Belgium, the N-VA, running its native strongman and party president Bart De Wever, won big, with 37.7% in the municipal elections. While citizens may be fined for not voting, 15% of eligible voters stayed away from the polls. Another 2% voted “white” or “invalid” to show disinterest or discontent.

While the N-VA siphoned a big chunk of its votes from the openly xenophobic Flemish Interest (formerly, Flemish Block) party, Socialist Mayor Patrick Janssens lost votes on the left that went to the Green Party (8%) and the PvdA+, a far-left party that did door-to-door campaigning on single issues, such as the right to affordable housing and health care.

The N-VA's huge victory is, in part, explained by the fact that it did not run on its real program! While breaking up Belgium remains point one of the party program, in order to exploit the growing anger of people who have lost jobs, lack adequate housing, and are suffering under EU austerity, which has slashed social welfare, the N-VA campaign concentrated on opposing a “high-tax government,” and postured, Obama-style, on the slogan, “the power of change.” Implicit, but unspoken, in this demand is the need to get rid of the “expensive” national government and even more expensive social

welfare given to legal and illegal immigrants.

In Belgium, and in Antwerp in particular, the economic crisis is hitting hard. In September, bankruptcies increased by 13% as compared to last year. Official figures indicate that in 2011, one out of seven Belgians is in risk of descending into poverty (15.3%); that's over 1.6 million Belgians. In Wallonia, the rate reaches 19.2%, while it is “only” 9.8% in Flanders. In Brussels, a metro driver died of tuberculosis, and now all the employees of the firm are being tested for the disease. While Belgium has an extensive rail network, going back to the days of Friedrich List (1789-1846), now budget cuts will lead to the closing down of 170 rail lines. Prices for a ticket from Antwerp to Rotterdam will increase by 200%.

While the current monetarist system breeds a caste of obscenely rich, in Antwerp, many Turkish and Moroccan immigrants, but also Belgians, live below the official poverty rate. While the average poverty rate is over 20%, some neighborhoods score between 30 and 50% of inhabitants living in poverty.

De Wever, a Small-Time Mussolini?

N-VA's strongman is Bart De Wever, who, as an historian, claims to follow the ideology of the 19th-Century Irish conservative philosopher Edmund Burke. But more precisely, De Wever admires and is in contact with the British psychiatrist and columnist Anthony Daniels, a.k.a. Theodore Dalrymple, a theorist of “compassionate conservatism.” Dalrymple says that granting rights to people via a welfare state makes them irresponsible. Not addressing this problem, he says, is tantamount to indifference. Erosion of personal responsibility makes people dependent on institutions and favors the existence of a threatening and vulnerable “underclass,” according to De Wever.

Full of “compassion,” De Wever pleads for cutting welfare entitlements to the poor, for their own good, in order to “incite” them to actively look for jobs, especially if those concerned are Walloons or immigrants. Of course, this ideology is ideal for the London-centered financial oligarchy, which is determined to take down the welfare state, to save the banks and break up the nation-states.

On Oct. 14, De Wever gathered his followers at a Hotel in Antwerp for a march on City Hall, with people



Agora Erasmus/Karel Vereycken

Agora Erasmus, the Belgian arm of the LaRouche movement, shown here organizing in Brussels in July 2011, is campaigning for a Glass-Steagall solution to the crisis. The sign says, "Split Up the Banks, Not Belgium."

carrying huge posters emblazoned with his image. De Wever went to "het schoon verdiep" (the top floor of the beautiful floor of Antwerp's 16th-Century City Hall,

where the mayor's office is located). He spoke from the balcony to the crowd gathered on the square, as if he were the Pope. Although only the mayor-elect of Amsterdam, he called on the prime minister to open discussions for a breakup of Belgium, clearly indicating that for him, becoming mayor of Antwerp is only considered a stepping stone to grab power in Brussels. About economy, trade, navigation, and infrastructure, he knows *zilch*. Of Roman emperors, everything.

To crown it all, on Oct. 18, Mayor-elect De Wever met, as if he were a head of state, with British Prime Minister David Cameron. Cameron has allowed Scotland to organize a referendum on "independence," in a situation quite unlike that of Belgium. Yet, ironically, the U.K. might be split up, and become a "model" for the breakup of the other European nation-states that might oppose the City of London.

The author is the founder of Agora Erasmus (Bene-lux).

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