

Foreword

Paul De Grauwe (KULeuven) & Philippe Van Parijs (UCLouvain)

One major challenge the state reform is meant to address is the steady economic divergence between Flanders and Wallonia. This divergence turns out to be paralleled by a divergence in the measured performance of the Flemish and Francophone school systems. Whether the latter divergence contributes to the former or the other way around, addressing the educational divergence must be part of the solution. But this demands that we should first understand the causes of this divergence.

A close look at the available data reveals that the lower educational performance of the French-speaking community cannot be ascribed entirely, or even mainly, to the inferior economic performance of the Walloon economy or to the higher proportion of children of recent foreign origin in the Brussels Region. It also suggests that the divergence is not a recent phenomenon that could be explained, for example, by Flanders' higher per capita expenditure in education. All the contributions to this volume attempt to shed light on this issue, without prejudices or taboos, by considering, rejecting or proposing for critical discussion alternative explanatory conjectures.

The lead piece by economist Vincent Vandenberghe (Louvain) is a revised version of the background paper for a Re-Bel public event organized on this issue on the 3rd of June 2010. The contributions by Sergio Perelman, Pierre Pestieau and Daniel Santin (Liège), by Jean Hindriks and Marijn Verschelde (Louvain and Gent) and by Frank Vandembroucke (Leuven and Antwerpen) are written versions of the comments presented on that same occasion. The contribution by Dirk Jacobs (ULB) mobilizes some results from a report on the schooling of immigrant children in the two Communities in order to shed further light on the puzzling divergence.