

Foreword

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This e-book collects written versions of the presentations made at Re-Bel's public event on social federalism, which took place in Brussels on June 3rd 2010. The lead piece was written by Patricia Popelier, Ninke Mussche and myself (UA/Forum Federalisme). Discussants were Benoît Crutzen (EURotterdam), Johanne Poirier (ULB), and Frank Vandebroucke (UA). Danny Pieters (KUL) was also scheduled as discussant, but was unfortunately unable to attend the event.

The lead piece mobilizes both legal and social policy insights in order to re-think the way our social security and social policy system is organized. We basically call for abandoning the exclusivity principle in the social field, and for daring to think of other forms of power allocation, such as parallel, framework and concurrent power allocation, which would allow for more autonomy for the sub-national entities, while at the same time preserving solidarity.

Benoît Crutzen's discussion weighs the pros and cons of decentralization. His starting point is that a key issue is whether the rules of the game should remain federal (and thus decentralization should be limited only to the implementation of policies) or, rather, decentralization should apply to the whole system, thus de facto creating distinct sub-federal social security systems. The discussion clearly points to the fact that another key issue is whether decentralization should be directed towards the Communities or Regions, and how should decentralization be implemented in the Region of Brussels.

Johanne Poirier reflects on some potential advantages and risks of adopting alternative modes of distribution of competences, as the lead piece proposes. She also points to the risks of a "joint decision trap", to the potential of the introduction of "spending power" and to the potential and risks of cooperation.

Frank Vandebroucke diagnoses two dilemmas in the social federalism debate. What he calls "the Pieters Dilemma" refers to the impossibility of having a de-federalisation of social security on a Community basis without contradicting the fundamentals of social insurance: either one allocates social policy competences to the Brussels Region, or one keeps social security at the federal level. The second dilemma is at the core of Vandebroucke's critique of the lead piece: introducing shared powers in social security would entail the introduction of a hierarchy among norms at the two levels of government, which nobody in Belgium would accept.

The e-book closes with a reply by the authors of the lead piece to Vandebroucke's second dilemma.