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La sécurité à Bruxelles

Veiligheid in Brussel

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Translator: Jane Corrigan

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I. Observations

1. *Introductory remarks. An outline of the security and prevention issue*

a. Originally, 'security' referred to protection with respect to outside dangers or the general absence of dangers. With time, this term acquired a more limited and specific meaning: on the one hand, it is a *state* characterised by the absence of *civil insecurity* understood as the absence of disorder, risks or threat of disorder; on the other hand, it is a specific field of intervention aimed at maintaining public order. Civil insecurity, however, does not constitute a consensual notion. For some, it is a concrete experience (criminality, victimisation), and for others, it is an indirect experience conveyed by the media. Furthermore, the 'feeling of insecurity' associated with insecurity may be a 'fear of crime' or an uneasiness related to the loss of social cohesion or, more broadly, to social insecurity. Insecurity is therefore a social creation. Furthermore, many studies show that insecurity and the feeling of insecurity are not related.

b. Issues related to insecurity were quickly reduced to petty and more serious urban crime, to which 'uncivil behaviour' and 'public disorder' have been added. Besides the fact that it places entire disputes in the background, this reduction has the effect of *localising* public mechanisms for combating insecurity and of focalising them on *public spaces* or spaces which are accessible to the public.

c. Along with the difficulty of understanding 'what insecurity is', there is also the difficulty of determining the solutions to this phenomenon, as they are often based on notions which are themselves polysemous. This is the case of 'prevention', which is a key issue in public policies. Although it seems to be a consensual intervention category, its translation into mechanisms leads to theoretical and practical problems. It allows highly varied mechanisms to be grouped together, including police saturation of a neighbourhood, community mediation and street workers. The risk of contamination of more 'social' actions by more 'penal' actions is therefore

very real. Furthermore, this vagueness has the consequence of overshadowing relations with the repression they are confronted with all too often.

d. Although insecurity justifies various policies and mechanisms, in most cases their evaluation only concerns their effectiveness and not their effects, impact or pertinence. This leads us to an observation of incapacity: it is not possible to provide a global and detailed view of the security situation in Brussels. The available figures (police statistics and victimisation study) refer to police action or provide a monolithic account without enabling a fine distinction to be made between different types of victimisation.

These limits, as well as the scope of our subject, have led us focus on the policies and mechanisms *presented* as having to provide a response to insecurity and/or the feeling of insecurity. We have also left out exclusively penal policies and mechanisms, as they come within the remit of the federal government, which goes beyond the scope of this summary.

2. *Specificity of Brussels as regards security issues*

The same questions arise in all big cities and have an influence on security issues. Furthermore, Brussels is a special case, as the Belgian and European capital, a bilingual region, a main communications hub and major producer of wealth. There are major security problems related to the mobility of workers (commuters, road safety, etc.), the movements of populations (immigration, international crime, etc.), economic activities (financial, tax and environmental crime) and the maintenance of order related to (inter)national institutions and European summits.

The complexity of the situation in Brussels is also due to the local context. As it did not go along with the amalgamation of local authorities movement in 1977, to this day Brussels remains a patchwork of 19 municipalities which are highly contrasted from a political, geographic, spatial, demographic, socioeconomic and ethnic point of view. This contrast has become even more apparent since the transformation of 19 municipal police forces into 6 local police areas made up of 2 to 5 municipalities, without justifying these groupings according to the type of criminality or socioeconomic or urbanistic characteristics.

However, contrary to what one may think, the situation in Brussels in terms of security is stable. Crime rates are not increasing. The rate of victimisation is of course relatively high, but the analysis of figures shows that although criminal offences are rather frequent, their seriousness is relative: 57% of reported offences are thefts and extortions,¹ whereas only 7% are malicious injuries. The figures related to the feeling of insecurity are however higher than in the other regions: 18.6% of the inhabitants of Brussels state that they always or often have a feeling of insecurity, compared with 7% in Flanders and 11% in Wallonia.

¹ This category includes in particular the less serious forms such as simple theft without violence or breaking and entering.

3. *Mechanisms in terms of security and prevention*

There are many policies in Brussels which deal directly with security issues. This situation has two effects.

On the one hand, in addition to local policies (federal and municipal grants), grants exist at all levels of authority in Brussels: federal and/or regional for security policies strictly speaking (security contracts, Brussels prevention contracts, European summit contracts, administrative sanctions contracts); community, related to aid and protection provided to youth; and European, federal, regional and local, related to the urban regulation and renewal policy (big city contracts, neighbourhood contracts and shopping area contracts, or local, regional or federal tailor-made projects, all of which are supposed to have an impact in terms of security) (see annexe 1).

On the other hand, the diversity of mechanisms is considerable despite their common characteristics:

- A will to integrate security and social approaches by attempting to link them together via coordination, dialogue and partnership mechanisms.
- Increasing importance given to the issues of 'uncivil behaviour' and 'public nuisance' rather than to 'criminality'.
- Emphasising the accountability of members of the 'community'.
- The appearance of new hybrid functions combining security and social aspects (park guards, security and prevention agents, etc.).
- A territorialisation of mechanisms on a neighbourhood basis.

These mechanisms may be classified according to their essential objectives as defined by those in charge of the projects:

- a. Proximity mechanisms aimed at bringing public services closer to the population

The interfaces between the population and administration or local authorities: police stations, legal centres, local administration, municipal mediation centres, dialogue assistants, ombudsmen, etc.

Proximity functions, for the surveillance of public spaces and to reassure the population and improve contact with it: neighbourhood police, community policing and urban stewards.

- b. The development of physical environments

In order to reduce the occurrence of a problem by favouring security through adequate development (better urban lighting, protection of defenceless users of public thoroughfares, bins, dog waste areas, urinals, etc.), or in order to develop public space (green spaces, playgrounds, sports facilities, etc.). This category also includes 'techno-prevention' (bicycle coding, security premiums, visit following a robbery, etc.).

c. The surveillance of territories

Three types of surveillance are favoured in general:

- Human surveillance by local stakeholders.
- Technical surveillance: this mainly involves the installation of surveillance cameras in public thoroughfares, in certain strategic places.
- Surveillance by the inhabitants of a neighbourhood: very rare in Brussels (RIQ – *Réseaux d'information de quartier*).

d. The quality of life and social ties

In order to improve life in neighbourhoods, social housing or schools by reinforcing social ties through the improvement of the physical and/or social environment, several approaches have been developed:

- Creation of structures allowing inhabitants to live together and to have common projects (community centres, youth centres, outreach work in the streets or neighbourhood, etc.)
- Conflict resolution: school, social, neighbourhood, debt, etc. mediation services
- Neighbourhood dialogue
- Creation of local employment: urban stewards, cleaning or small repairs, sociocultural activity leaders, etc.
- Urban renewal and revitalisation of neighbourhoods

e. Suppression of uncivil behaviour

Municipal administrative fines or systems based on a taxing of undesirable behaviour aimed at the suppression of uncivil behaviour. Today, these systems are very widespread (their concrete use is presented in MEERSCHAUT et al. 2008).

II. Questions-issues

1. *The lack of evaluation*

A trustworthy and relevant instrument providing an overall picture of Brussels and a detailed view of the localisation of security problems does not exist. Not only is there a glaring lack of figures, but, when they do exist, they do not allow a measurement of the true state of insecurity (neither criminality nor the feeling of insecurity).

Furthermore, on the one hand, near-experimental evaluative research does not exist in Brussels (based on a 'before/after' or 'here/there' evaluation) which would allow the causal link to be established between a mechanism and the expected results. On the other hand, external evaluations centred on impact or the pertinence of actions are gradually being replaced by 'internal' evaluations which mainly monitor compliance with obligations related to the various grants and the use of financial means. Therefore, no precise information can be provided as regards the effectiveness of public action in Brussels in terms of security.

2. *Difficulty to consider security policies in a more global context (well-being)*

The unrealistic idea of Brussels as a dangerous city has led certain stakeholders to develop a security project for the city based on a squared territory under permanent surveillance, preferably with the presence of the police force, and aimed at the control of problematic behaviour.

One of the most disturbing changes in this area is the development of 'techno-prevention', which has not really been called into question. The increase in the number of cameras significantly modifies the status of public spaces and life in the city for the populations who live there. It favours the idea of security not as something which ensues from the peaceful and harmonious cohabitation of different populations, but as a state of surveillance. In this area, the distinction between reassurance (feeling of insecurity) and action to combat criminality (security) is particularly important.

3. *Difficulty to consider policies specifically for Brussels*

In Brussels, there is clearly a problem with the coordination and coherence of various actions, which is still accentuated by the recent division of territories and authorities in charge of defining and evaluating policies to prevent criminality, as well as local police policies.

In this context, let us also mention the difficult position of Brussels in terms of police recruitment, which takes place mainly outside Brussels. The recruits are posted at the beginning of their career for a very short period of time (usually two years) in a city they do not know or necessarily like, and whose problems they do not truly understand. The police force therefore lacks staff who really know the city and make a long-term commitment to it.

4. *Difficulty to consider security at the level of the city*

More and more often, security policies are based on territorial units represented by neighbourhoods. Their coherence is not called into question, thus favouring a fragmented view of the city and its problems and policies to be implemented, and the phenomena resulting from the overall balance in the city escape analysis. Furthermore, rather than viewing insecurity as a product of a given urban configuration, this vision tends to point a finger at the presence of foreign elements, or at least elements which cause problems within the social fabric.

5. *The lack of means*

Brussels faces special restrictions in terms of security, whose costs are difficult for the city to meet. Inflation in recent decades, police tasks and police officers are very expensive for Brussels. On the other hand, the shortage of police officers remains a particularly sensitive issue, due to obligations in terms of bilingualism or heavier workloads. Brussels therefore lacks the means to develop its own security approach and to meet its specific obligations.

This lack of means also has effects on the proposed policies. The police reform which reduced the ascendancy of local authorities over the police led the municipalities to hire new staff to ensure part of the maintenance of local order. There was therefore a gradual shift of certain police tasks to urban stewards (community policing and observation of uncivil behaviour) or to private stakeholders (management of ticket machines), without questioning this shift as regards service quality or ambiguity in terms of competence.

6. *Increase in the number of unclear and uncertain functions*

The dispersal of mechanisms and sources of funding not only leads to problems in terms of coherence, but also to an increase in functions in the field. The result is a nebula of institutional or community social workers with various titles related to security issues, struggling to work together.

This situation presents two major problems. The first is that of unclear functions and the absence of a regulatory framework, which forces stakeholders to constantly 'invent' their practices without being sure that they will be recognised. These functions are defined concretely at (micro)local level, which leads to a great variation in practices. The second problem is related to the high level of mobility of staff involved in these mechanisms, which compromises the long-term accumulation of experience and knowledge. This mobility is due in particular to the unattractive salaries for the functions concerned and their uncertain nature as a result of risks related to the renewal of grants and unattractive statuses (fixed-term or part-time contracts, uncertain status related to social aid programmes).

7. *Municipal administrative fines*

Municipal administrative fines were initially presented as a means of widening the capacities of municipal authorities by allowing them to define their own local security policies through the incrimination of public nuisance, but soon proved to be inconsistent.

In terms of policy coherence, there is a lack of harmonisation among neighbouring municipalities, which leads to absurd situations, especially from the point of view of police who work in several territories.

In terms of autonomy, the application of the administrative fines mechanism to mixed offences (administrative and penal) depends to a large extent on the local police and the public prosecutor's department. The former has the authority to determine offences and identify those who commit them, and the latter may prevent the municipalities from applying the mechanism for these types of offence; in the district of Brussels, this is always the case for petty theft, which therefore cannot be subject to municipal administrative action.

Municipal autonomy is therefore very relative, especially since the mechanism is now presented as an essential element of municipal security policy. More and more, municipalities are called to implement it in order not to appear to *tolerate disorder*, which could have a negative effect on criminality and lead to an intervention of the (federal) penal system, which would be costly for taxpayers.

III. Policy options

1. *Figures, evaluation and rationalisation*

Brussels must develop a system to evaluate security problems as well as the impact and relevance of policies. It must therefore take as wide a scope as possible into account, encompassing everything from local diagnostics to the most general consequences of actions undertaken. A Brussels observatory for security and the prevention of criminality has been proposed². It should be one of the evaluation tools and should be complemented by an ambitious strategy for long-term funding of regular external evaluations by independent bodies.

While it is important to evaluate impacts, it is also necessary to specify the expected effects and resulting costs before the creation of new mechanisms. This involves the establishment of follow-up methods when projects are in their initial phases.

2. *Going beyond the notion of security policies to the benefit of city policies*

If we accept a broad view of the notion of security and the idea that many types of public action are concerned, it is necessary to revise the very structure of the policies being considered. It would be advisable to leave the security policies based on the maintenance of order to the federal authorities (Ministry of the Interior) as much as possible to fully integrate security into the city's policies as a whole. The Flemish Region has set an example with its analysis in 'Witboek stedenbeleid. Over stadsre-publieken en *rastersteden*'. The Walloon Region has also attempted to move in this direction, with its Prevention and Proximity Plans (PPP).

The authors therefore recommend a true urban project centred on the notion of well-being as a way of taking the security problem seriously as well as the social problems it reveals. This evolution involves the establishment of a precise inventory of current initiatives and subsidisation methods.

3. *Competences of the different levels of authority*

The institutional complexity of Brussels is major problem. This situation does not necessarily call for a radical simplification. The diversity of the levels of authority allows interventions on behalf of the most adequate levels. This requires taking into consideration the appropriate level for public action.

Therefore, if the neighbourhood level is appropriate for developing certain policies, it cannot be the only level taken into account for security issues. A municipal, regional and even national balance must be considered. Brussels must therefore develop specific policies for the city considered as a whole, and even participate in defining policies concerning its surroundings.

In this context, it is necessary to question the possible role played by the Region regarding coordination (e.g. municipal administrative sanctions) and the stimulation of stakeholders in the field. In the same way, it is essential for part of the efforts to be centred on the elaboration of a true policy of knowledge in terms of security.

² BOCART 2008

Finally, the Region must become a negotiator in managing the mobility of police staff.

4. Funding of security policies specific to Brussels

It is a logical result of the special position of Brussels and the ensuing specific costs that the funding of security policies and police in the Region must be re-evaluated. This issue is part of the more general problem of funding for the Region.

5. A stabilisation of public policies in terms of security

The uncertainty of functions created in the framework of security policies poses a problem. It is important to define these functions more precisely and to evaluate them carefully, as well as stabilise those which have received a positive evaluation. It is also just as essential to stabilise the situation of staff.

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Appendix

The mechanisms for preventing criminality and combating insecurity in Brussels
Source : FRANSSEN, SMEETS (2008)

Police policies					
Type	Since	Funds*	General objectives	Projects/specific objectives	
National security plan	2007-2010 (last plan)	Federal	Definition of the police contribution integrated into the federal crime policy	Federal police: priority missions and objectives and distribution of human and material resources Local police: priority phenomena. Base of security plans according to area	
Security plan according to area	2007-2010 (last plans)	Local (Federal)	Police policy for local police	Local police: Priority missions and objectives Capacity to carry out criminal police and administrative police missions Contribution of local police in carrying out federal missions Possible missions and objectives specific to a municipality in the area	
Urban security policies					
Type	Since	Funds*	General objectives	Projects/specific objectives	
Security contracts (Belgium) (Strategic plans for prevention and security since 2007) 103 municipalities in Belgium, 14 municipalities in Brussels (2007-2010)	1992	Federal (Ministry of the Interior) Brussels-Capital Region Local	Fight against urban insecurity and fear of crime	Police (until 2002)	Modernisation of local police Neighbourhood police (community policing and decentralisation of police stations) Youth and social police brigades Improving relations between police officers and immigrants (dialogue assistants) Improvement of assistance
				Social	Youth centres and outreach work Community centres and social mediation Centre for drug addicts Centre for the homeless
				Situational prevention	Surveillance of public spaces (urban stewards); public lighting; video surveillance
				Victim support	Assistance to victims Legal assistance
				(1996) Justice	Support for alternative measures
				Insecurity and criminality analysis	Local safety audits (2006) Criminal cartography
Prevention contracts (Brussels) 19 municipalities in Brussels	2002	Brussels-Capital Region	Crime prevention	Prevention agent	
'European summits' contracts (Brussels) 6 police areas (19 municipalities)	2003	Federal	Ensure security during European summits	Hiring of local public security agents (non police agents) Financing of police overtime Language training for police officers Purchase of equipment Improvement of telecommunications	
Municipal administrative sanctions contracts (Belgium) 15 municipalities in Belgium, the city of Brussels	2006	Federal	The implementation of municipal administrative sanctions	Hiring of mediators	
Municipal administrative sanctions contracts (Brussels) 19 municipalities	2006	Brussels-Capital Region	The implementation of municipal administrative sanctions	Hiring of a 'sanction agent'	

*Public funds and grants (administration levels)

Urban regulation policies

Type of contract	Since	Funds*	General objectives	Projects/specific objectives
Neighbourhood contracts (Brussels) Since 1994, 44 neighbourhoods, 10 municipalities	1994	Brussels-Capital Region Federal Local	Social revitalisation of neighbourhoods Rehabilitation and renovation of public spaces and buildings	Rehabilitation of existing housing and creation of new housing Embellishment and renovation of public spaces Creation of neighbourhood facilities (children's centres, community centres, sports halls, local associations) Development of local employment Development of citizen participation
Shopping area contracts (Brussels) 7 municipalities	2006	Brussels-Capital Region Federal	Increase the dynamism and attractiveness of the shopping areas	Creation of activities (encourage new businesses, assistance for shop signs, etc) Renovation of public spaces and accessibility (construction of accommodations, neighbourhood access, social mix and coordinated interventions of public services) Attractiveness (embellishment of the neighbourhood)
Big cities contracts (Belgium) 7 municipalities in Brussels	2000	Federal	Improve the quality of life, living conditions, safety and economic revival of cities Compensate for social insufficiencies of disadvantaged populations	Urban renewal (40% of budget) Cultural and sports activities Presence in public spaces Prevention at school and elimination of illiteracy Social integration and creation of local employment Improving cleanliness
Flemish Cities Fund (Flanders and Brussels) 13 municipalities in Flanders + Brussels-Capital Region	2003-2007	Flemish Community Commission (Brussels-Capital Region)	Fighting dualism in cities Improving the quality of life	Financing of small projects proposed by municipalities: Urban renewal Multifunctional renovation Social economy projects
Urban 1 and 2 (Europe) 3 municipalities in Brussels (1994), 5 municipalities in Brussels (2000)	1994-1999 2000-2006	Europe (Federal)	Social and economic revitalisation of neighbourhoods	1994: Development of business centres, local economy desks, social economy enterprises and neighbourhood infrastructures (internet access points, community centres, sports centres, etc) 2000: Development of neighbourhood infrastructures and facilities (cultural centres, employment centres, community centres, etc) Renovation of industrial wastelands Access to new technologies and e-administration Local development (creativity workshops for youth, etc)
URBACT 1 and 2 (Europe) 183 cities (URBACT 1)	2002-2006 2007-2013	Europe (Federal) (Local)	Improving urban development, economy, employment and social cohesion	Creation of networks and working groups for the exchange of knowledge and practices between cities in the urban programme