



# Press Conference

Rabat

December 8th, 2005

## **Dialogue and debate**

The press conference in Rabat has three goals. First of all we think that it is necessary to enter into a dialogue with the Moroccan government concerning the immigration of Moroccan nationals to Belgium in general and concerning different particular dossiers (integration of Moroccans in Flanders, the acceptance of criminal in Belgium residing Moroccans by Morocco and criminal Belgians in Morocco by Belgium, immigration of illegals, the problem of family reunification and international marriage).

We also want to use this occasion to solve a number of misunderstandings and prejudices concerning Vlaams Belang. Vlaams Belang wants to give the opportunity to the Moroccan press and the Moroccan officials to get to know Vlaams Belang. At last, Vlaams Belang also wants to put forward some propositions to slow down immigration from Morocco to Belgium and to simplify the integration of immigrants of Moroccan origin in Flanders.

With the visit of a Vlaams Belang-delegation, Vlaams Belang also wants to reach the hand to the Moroccan community in Belgium. Vlaams Belang wants to incite the in Belgium residing immigrants with a Moroccan origin to integrate. For this purpose, it is necessary that the Moroccan government cooperates actively. On the other hand Vlaams Belang wants to give the Moroccans who reside in Belgium and who want to return, the chance to do so. With this purpose Vlaams Belang wants to launch a number of initiatives (for ex. a return fund).

Vlaams Belang is convinced that Morocco is a democratic country which stays open for debate and dialogue. Vlaams Belang doesn't want to interfere in the internal affairs of Morocco. Vlaams Belang does wish to start an open dialogue about immigration and integration and show that Europe is not the promised land for the many immigrants of Afrika and North-Afrika who have immigrated. Instead of opening the gates for a new wave of immigration, Vlaams Belang thinks it should be the intention to support actively the development of the countries of origin of many of these immigrants. In this way we create a perspective for the future of the many illegal immigrants.

## **Vlaams Belang: What do we stand for, what are our aspirations?**

Vlaams Belang is a Flemish political party who's main goal is to create an independent Flemish state, since Belgium is an artificial country, consisting of two different communities, the Flemish (Dutch speaking) and the Walloon (French speaking). Total population reaches 10 million inhabitants, 6 million of which are Flemish. It is our belief that a Flemish independency remains the best guarantee for safeguarding our prosperity and the future of the Flemish people.

Additionally, Vlaams Belang is a party standing up for traditional values. We consider the family to be the prime cornerstone of our society, that's why we respect and defend it. Vlaams Belang can be called a right-winged nationalist and democratic party. Vlaams Belang wishes to emphasize the right to a safe society, and wishes to achieve so through firm actions against criminality.

Vlaams Belang also cares to protect the native Flemish identity. This identity is under great pressure due to an accelerating mundialization. That's why we resist mass-immigration and why we pay the greatest attention to protect our language, culture and singularity. Hundreds of thousands of immigrants have settled in Flanders over the past few decades, initially for labouring, afterwards through asylum, international marriage, family-reunions. It is our opinion that in order to maintain our Flemish singularity, those immigrants should adapt to our ways of living, language, culture, values and morals. If not, they ought to be encouraged to return to their country of origin. At this moment in Belgium, their numbers are overwhelming, certainly in the cities. Those immigrants are isolating themselves from our society, which leads to the impossibility of adaptation, and to social deprivation and problems.

## **Belgium is not heaven on earth**

Some Moroccans here in Morocco might, unfortunately, have the wrong impression that their fellow-countrymen who have migrated earlier to Belgium, have by now build up a nice and comfortable way of living, and that Belgium may well be heaven on earth. Truth is, the reality shows them differently. Once arrived in Belgium, they are confronted with a vast number of social and other problems.

### *High rates of unemployment.*

A major part of the adult Moroccan population in Belgium is unemployed. Studies executed by the Government clearly indicate that the ratio of unemployment of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants had reached the level of 38% (2002-2003), while the mean percentage for native Belgians is 7%. Those immigrants that have received Belgian nationality balance on a rate of unemployment of about 29%, thus hardly less than of those without our nationality. Recently, in October 2005, the rate of unemployment of immigrants of Turkish and Moroccan origin has raised to a stunning 48%.

Unemployment of the poorly educated appears to be a structural problem in Belgium. Flanders, September 2005, counted 248.624 unemployed residents, of which 120.195 were poorly educated. The Turkish and Moroccan accounted for 12.9% of this last group. Improvements in the employment of the poorly educated is not to be expected, on the contrary. Lots of factories and industries are shutting down, and move to exotic countries with low wages. The jobs move along with them, leaving here a vast number of unemployed. On top of that, the recent expansion of the EU towards the former East-European countries, where wages are considerably lower, also brings forward a delocation from Flanders towards those countries. Supplementary, this expansion means another huge immigration of poorly educated Polish labourers, and people from other Eastern European countries.

### *Slowing down integration.*

Immigration through marriage prevents considerably the integration of the Moroccan community into the Flemish society. By this means, lots of adult Moroccans find their way to our country, over and over again. These adults, who will not be attending education, will hereby not be learning our language, and thus live ignorant of our laws, habits, values and morals. This leads towards lots of trouble. Those immigrants through marriage, tend to continue to behave along their Moroccan traditional way of live.

Because of this lack of knowledge of the Dutch language, and the accompanying cultural gap, those immigrants can not participate in a normal way in the public live, and get caught in a social trap and isolation. They can not participate on the labour market, they are cut off from leisure ore Flemish cultural events, and even receiving medical care, like going to the doctor or an hospital, turns out to be problematic. Besides all practical considerations, those marriages between Moroccans from Belgium and Moroccans coming from Morocco, tend not to last very long. Approximately 30% of those 'mixed' marriages is dissolved within the first few years. One of the main reasons for this high rate of failure, is that both man and woman

have different expectations towards each other concerning the role they play within this kind of marriage. The most difficult is the situation where the woman grows up in Belgium, and the man, coming from Morocco, not knowing the language, unable to find work etc, becomes completely dependant of his wife, which confronts him with an unknown role-pattern.

#### *Falling behind in Education.*

The position of Moroccons, even from second or third generation, in the Flemish education, is very problematic. The Moroccan children most often enter school with severe shortcomings of their Dutch language skills. Those kids have to face these difficulties by themselves, while their parents are unable to assist their kids in completing assignments and courses, because of their own lack of education and knowledge of our language. Lots of Moroccan kids get frustrated by the consequential underachievement, and eventually drop out of school. Almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Moroccan pupils meets an early ending to their school career, and leaves without a degree. Not even 1% of the Moroccan students reaches the levels of higher education. Those that do, face poor results, not even 30% manages to successfully complete the higher education and obtain a degree.

#### *High rates of criminality among Moroccan youngsters.*

Moroccan youngsters are growing up in a very difficult and complex environment. On the one hand they incorporate the traditional Moroccan values and morals, through their home-bound raising. On the other hand they meet the Flemish community (school, leisure activities etc) and are confronted with the European (and particularly Flemish) values and morals. This makes that those kids grow up in a world without a clear framework of morals to guide them through their youth. When they eventually have to deal with poor educational outcomes, and unemployment, they face difficult times. Unemployment among Moroccan youngsters in particular, is devastating.

## Call for cooperation between Belgium and Morocco.

### *1. Ending double nationality.*

Belgium is known for a very easygoing legislation concerning nationality. In order to obtain the Belgian nationality, no serious criteria or demands have to be met by the applicant. No cultural adaptation is required, neither any knowledge of the Dutch language. Receiving the Belgian nationality has become a simple matter of administration. Children, born from parents who have lived for five years on Belgian soil, are given automatically the Belgian nationality (droit du sol).

Very often do these "new" Belgians prefer to keep their original nationality, besides their newly acquired Belgian nationality. For instance, the Moroccan legislation does not automatically retract the Moroccan nationality at the moment one of her citizens acquires a new nationality. Even more, Moroccan adults who have newly acquired the Belgian nationality, have to ask for (and receive a) special permission to renounce their original Moroccan nationality.

As a consequence, lots of Moroccan immigrants in our region have both Belgian and Moroccan nationality. Vlaams Belang clearly understands that it is far from self evident that the Moroccan authorities would be automatically retracting Moroccan nationality from their citizens who receive a new nationality. It appears very logical that someone, who considers himself to be a Moroccan, and wishes to remain so, would not be keen on losing that Moroccan nationality, simply because his mother gave birth to him on Belgian soil and therefore automatically donating him this strange Belgian nationality.

For Vlaams Belang, the basics of nationality should be thought over once again, in terms of principles of lineage (droit du sang), in accumulation with the option that a new nationality can be acquired, only after a successful process of assimilation. Thereby it is our statement that the legislation allowing a person to keep his double nationality, should be annihilated. This requires an adaptation of the Belgian legislation towards immigrants, allowing them to chose between their old or the new Belgian nationality. They can choose for binding their faith and fortunes to out Flemish community, or they can choose to keep their Moroccan nationality. The most important prerequisite for acquiring the Belgian nationality, will be an unambiguous choice for assimilation, and for Belgian citizenship. Vlaams Belang thinks that it should be the Moroccan authorities that have to simplify the possibility for Moroccan citizens, who would like to choose for a full Belgian citizenship, and thereby renounce the Moroccan nationality, to administratively do likewise. Morocco has to cut ties with those "former" Moroccans in order for them to become "new" Belgians. Both Belgian and Moroccan authorities should be addressing this topic clearly and firmly.

### *2. Cooperation on returning illegal immigrants.*

Family reunions are not the only way of immigration. Besides this formula, there is always a huge illegal immigration from Morocco towards Belgium. Every year, the Belgian police forces detect around 30.000 illegal immigrants, without the proper legislative papers. According to Wim Bontink, chief of police on illegal immigration, the Moroccans represent the largest subgroup. It is the presence of a large Moroccan

community in Belgium, that attracts those illegal immigrants towards our region. The circumstances of everyday live for these people, is astonishing poor, while they live hidden away from public live and accommodations, because of the fear of expulsion after discovery (since their presence is illegal, they break immigration laws, what automatically should lead to expulsion).

In the Parliament, the Government was interrogated about it. The answers made clear that officially no agreement was made between Belgian and Moroccan authorities, concerning taking back illegal immigrants, but nevertheless that generally spoken, the practical realisation encountered few problems. At this moment, mutual agreements on reuptake of illegal immigrants, can be made on the level of the EU-authority only. Negotiations between the EU and Morocco have been going on for quite some time. Even on November 22th, the Belgian – Moroccan Association Council gathered with this topic first on agenda. Vlaams Belang hopes that these negotiations will be ended soon, and result in new ratification.

### *3. Detention in the home country.*

On April 10<sup>th</sup> 2004, over 1.100 Moroccans were imprisoned in a Belgian jail. An unknown number of Belgians is currently held in a Moroccan prison cell. Belgium has, since July 7<sup>th</sup> 1997, a mutual arrangement with Morocco “concerning assistance to detained persons and relocation of sentenced persons”. This gives the opportunity for Moroccan criminals (in Belgian prisons) to do their term in a Moroccan jail, and likewise, for Belgian sentenced persons in Moroccan jail, to do their term in a Belgian prison. In order to arrange a relocation, 3 criteria have to be met:

1) the sentence has to be definitive, 2) the criminal act leading towards the conviction must be a criminal act in both Belgian as Moroccan legislation, 3) the prisoner has to give his consent on the relocation. These requirements are almost literally derived from the European Treaty of Strasbourg (May 23th 1990) concerning transnational relocation.

Ove the past 4 years, 15 Belgian citizens were relocated from a Moroccan to a Belgian Prison after conviction. Only 1 Moroccan went over to Morocco to do his term in a Moroccan prison. The severe regime in the Moroccan penitentiary institutions will account for this low number. This can be derived from the fact that it is the part of agreement or consent, that finishes off the relocation. In mean time, Belgium has ratified a supplemental protocol concerning relocating, stating that it is NOT necessary to have the prisoners consent when it is necessary for the convicted person to leave the country after conviction. We regret that Belgium has stated that it will not apply this protocol “if the person, at the moment of conviction, was legally taking up residence in the Kingdom.”

It is the belief of Vlaams Belang that, only pronouncing what the treaty states, the treaty with Morocco of 1997 must be altered in this way, thus making it possible for Belgians and Moroccans, even without their consent or permission, can be forced to do their term in a prison of the country of origin. It is our opinion that this should be made possible, regardless of were the convicted person had his residence.

#### *4. Support for Moroccans voluntary returning to Morocco.*

On many occasions, Moroccans living in Belgium, are willing to return to their country, because of a feeling of home-sickness, or because of the huge social and other problems they are facing in Belgium. Currently, the Belgian authorities are not supporting these Moroccans, even worse, those ways of remigration are in a way obstructed by the Belgian legislation. Contrary to Belgium, most other European countries do have a solid support program for immigrants willing to return to their country of origin.

Taking the Netherlands and Denmark as an example, Vlaams Belang insists that the Belgian authorities, as an alternative to assimilation and integration, would support both legal and financial the actual return of those volunteers. Belgium has known such a financial bonus for remigration, between 1985 and 1989, but it has been cancelled in 1989. Once again, according to our party, arrangements between Moroccan and Belgian authorities should be made in order to facilitate the practical realisation of this remigration.

#### *5. Support to Morocco concerning asylum-, immigration- and repatriation policy*

A year ago, some European politicians such as the German minister of home affairs Otto Schilly, the Italian European commissioner Rocco Buttiglioni and the British prime minister Tony Blair launched the proposal to arrange refugee camps in North Africa, where the Africans, who are requesting asylum in a European country, would be caught. This proposal was eventually however rejected by the European council of ministers. Also the Belgian minister of home affairs, Patrick Dewael, was opposed to the proposal.

The impact of this decision just now becomes clear. In October 2005 thousands of black Africans stormed the Spanish enclaves Ceuta and Melilla. At least 30,000 fortune seekers of below the Sahara are staying in Morocco and Algeria hoping ever to enter Europe. Of course the presence of these people in Morocco causes numerous social problems.

Morocco is considered to withstand these problems and moreover to organize the repatriation of these Africans to their countries of origin (Senegal, Mali, Cameroon, Ghana...). Among others, the late king Hassan II took numerous measures to embank illegal immigration to Europe. It is however least equitable that Morocco must turn up for these costs, because these people are on the road to Europe and Morocco has in this question only a transitfunction.

The Vlaams Belang thinks that the European Union must urgently help Morocco. A good solution would exist to install, in association with the Moroccan governments, common European centers on Moroccan territory, where asylum seekers can request asylum and from which also the repatriation of the Africans to their countries of origin can be regulated. These centers, as well as the repatriation, must be entirely financed with European money. In this way Morocco would be considerably relieved of the heavy efforts which it now must make to stop the flow of people in direction of Europe.

Awaiting the planning of these centers, Belgium must intervene in every way in a part of the costs, which spends Morocco now on the relief of the fortune seekers and the accompanied return.