



The Cabinet of the National Explorers
Entrusted with Unblocking the
Spatial Deadlock Around the Belgian
and European Capital



Open letter to Bert Anciaux, Flemish Minister of Culture, Youth, Sport and Brussels

Regarding: Festive launch of the Belgian architecture mission at the 11 th international architecture biennale in Venice by means of the multimedia installation '1907... After the Party'.

Brussels, 15 September 2008

Dear Minister Anciaux,

The coming ten weeks architects of all countries will gather in Venice to represent their people and fatherland on the 11th International Architecture Biennale. As is appropriate, also the Belgian nation is represented and even more, it has the 100th birthday of its pavilion in the Giardini to celebrate. However, this representation was not obvious. Since the latest national elections, as you undoubtedly know, Belgium is going through a deep crisis. Its different communities are striving for the full recognition of their own language and culture and are making the Belgian nation shake to its foundations. Especially in and around the Belgian and also European Capital the communitarian tensions are rising to ever higher levels. A difficult to solve spatial and metropolitan deadlock threatens to sweep away the country in a communitarian struggle of all against all. To unblock this deadlock is the assignment which we, in all humility, have set for ourselves as architects and philosophers.

We have approvingly taken notice of the decision to delegate Office Kersten Geers and David van Severen as the architectural ambassador of the Belgian nation. For this we want to thank the international jury who, with their objective choice, have assisted the curator on duty, Moritz Küng. As year-long defenders of an autonomous architectural discipline, Office KGDVS is most suited to represent the Belgian nation in these times of national crisis. Their office philosophy that 'architecture is architecture' will guarantee that Belgium will score abroad, without running the risk that the fierce brotherly struggle at home will also manifest itself in all its vigour on the unique international platform that the architecture biennale has been for many years.

Following the dictate of the curator to present the current state of architecture in Belgium on a one-to-one scale, Office KGDVS chose to exhibit the Belgian pavilion as such. The architectural intervention consists of a high wall that not so much closes the Belgian pavilion off, as forces the visitor to approach it differently. In this way, a unique oasis is created for reflecting the Belgian pavilion and its turbulent, hundred-year history. It testifies to a great flexibility that where architecture necessarily fails on the level of communication, Office KGDVS exhibited two art works of internationally renowned artists in the pavilion. Both art works refer to a finished party that never took place or hasn't yet taken place, a message that is further strengthened by the title Office KGDVS chose for their contribution – '1907... After the Party' – and the layer of confetti in and around the pavilion. In this way, Office KGDVS treats the international architectural community to an architecturally but also artistically outstanding experience – not without a playful allusion to the unremitting Belgian crisis.



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As national explorers we are very impressed with this beautiful homage to the Belgian pavilion as well as the oasis of calm that it has created around it. Especially the way in which the architectural gesture of Office KGDVS does not allow for a univocal interpretation will be recognized and appreciated by many of our countrymen. The Belgian citizens, regardless to which community they belong, experience the same ambiguity every day in trying to grasp the background and scope of their home country's crisis. Furthermore, by creating an oasis of peace and contemplation in times of great social unrest, architecture teaches us to go about with our daily business unperturbed, regardless of the imminent crisis. By eschewing a direct commitment with current political issues, Office KGDVS further learns the Belgian citizens to leave the formulating of solutions to stubborn problems such as that of the rim surrounding Brussels, to those who are professionally equipped to solve them: their political representatives.

As national explorers we draw our lessons from the subtle multimedia intervention of Office KGDVS. It shows how the internal division between communities on a national level, doesn't necessarily have to disturb the international representation. And architecture is no exception in this regard. Crisis or not, Belgium keeps sending its delegations to all parts of the world. Most recently to Beijing, now to Venice and soon to Kabul. These missions show how a divided nation can be glorious insofar as it keeps its sports, military or architectural excellence strictly separated from political quarreling. Precisely in times of deep crisis, the autonomy of strategic disciplines such as sports, architecture and warfare has to be protected. Or, like a great Italian man of state once put it poignantly: 'a people is great only to the degree in which it knows how to make architecture and war'. The visitors of the Belgian Pavilion will undoubtedly return home with a strengthened belief in the future of Belgium as the true home for all its communities.

Dear Minister, we strongly hope that you will take this learning moment to heart in decisions on future projects and endeavors on the level of architecture and sports – two matters that fall within your competence – and that you will not allow these distinguished disciplines to be contaminated by political affairs. In line with our role as national explorers we gladly offer you our services in fulfilling this difficult task.

Yours faithfully,

Gideon Boie Matthias Pauwels