

Abstract

According to the Court the Flemish government staff planning process has not yet been perfected

Not later than in the nineties the Flemish government started with a staff policy centered around staff plans. But, according to the Court, it has not designed and implemented this policy in a sufficiently consequential way. It has never instructed clearly what its intention was with the staff plans and it waited till 2009 to lay down a staff plan procedure. The monitoring of government entities' staff plans is focused on the reporting process, which is, however, not yet sufficiently regulated. Moreover as the Flemish government has committed itself to maintaining a status quo in staff employment by its decision of 2003 it has also adversely affected the consistency of this policy. And even in this respect it has proved to be a failure. Since 2004 the number of staff members with the Flemish government has increased by 10%. Finally staff plans have only slowly been effected due to the recent restructuring measures adopted as part of the Better Administrative Policy reform ("Beter Bestuurlijk Beleid") and they leave to be desired.

Pre-2004 policy

The staff planning policy kicked off in 1993 with the HOOP-project⁽¹⁾. Since 2000 the Flemish government promoted staff planning rather than staff establishment. At the end of 2001, however, it appeared that these plans resulted in an increase in staff employment and related cost. Consequently the Flemish government decided as a matter of principle to disallow any additional salary appropriations. From 1999 to 2002 process implementation and staff planning projects were carried out within the Flemish Community department while calling upon an external expert. Total costs amounted to 7 million EUR. In spite of an extensive expert guidance and a robust methodology staff employment under staff plans continued to increase, due most of all to a deficient support from the senior officials that had to draw up these plans. Therefore at the end of 2003 the Flemish government introduced an employment status quo with the Flemish government, under the motto: no employment cutback, no employment growth.

2004-2009 Policy

The 2004-2009 Administrative Affairs policy documents have not yet formulated any concrete objectives with regard to process and staff planning issues. Since the introduction of the Better Administrative Policy restructuring project the Flemish government has provided senior officials with a management code, a frame status and management and administration contracts. The 2005 management code is a robust management instru-

¹ Hoop : Homogene Organisatie en Ontwikkelingsplannen (Homogeneous Organisational and Development plans)

ment, but enjoyed insufficient support till 2008. The frame statute confined a staff plan to a staff need plan and there are still few administration contracts.

Guarantee of success

The management code has left to the entities how to follow up the quality and implementation of their staff plan. The Flemish government has not provided for a check on the accuracy of the start-up staff plans and waited till mid-2009 to lay down a separate procedure for the process-based staff plans. This procedure could no therefore be used for the plans that were approved in the meantime. Also, the Flemish government waited till mid-2009 to monitor budget neutral staff plans. Besides quarterly reporting on salary cost and staff actually employed does not lay any link with the staff plan and the entities hardly comply with this reporting requirement. The envisaged incorporation of reports on staff planning in the cycle of administration contracts, activity plans and annual reports has not yet been perfected due partly to deficient approved common reporting templates. Finally the Flemish government has not regulated reporting on the implementation of the administration contract or the PLOEG annual ning(2).

Inconsistent decision

By introducing its 2003 employment status quo decision the Flemish government meddled directly with the way entities can determine their staff needs. This decision is not compatible with a robust factually-based staff planning, which could account for a decrease or an increase in employment in certain entities.

Practical implementation of staff plans

In 2008 the Court requested the staff plans from 62 entities. They all had a start-up plan and by the end of July 2008 thirty-eight (that is 61%) had also an approved staff plan. Eleven entities (that is 18%) were still drawing up their staff plans.

Quality discrepancies

Plans differed from one another both in terms of size and format. Among them only fifteen plans (that is 39%) centered entirely on process descriptions and no more than eleven (that is 29%) showed a link between processes and desired staff. Entities did hardly indulge in process optimisations, which, by the way were more devoted to quality increase than efficiency. Consequently process remapping generally resulted in a need for

² Ploeg : *Plannen, Opvolgen, Evalueren en Gewaardeerd worden (Planning, following-up, assessment and being appreciated)*

additional staff. The Flemish government's employment status quo decision accounted largely for the limited process optimization. 80% of the staff plans failed to lay a link between processes, staff requirement and objectives. Also, an explicit long term vision was usually missing. Most staff plans did not contain an in-depth analysis of the gap between the present staff employment and the actual staff needs. They did not contain a detailed implementation plan either. Six entities called upon external consultancy to draw up their staff plan, although they could have already accumulated some experience since 1999 and could have provided cheaper advice to the civil servants Agency.

General conclusion

The Court has concluded that in spite of an experience in staff planning of over ten years and the hiring of external consultants, the Flemish authorities have designed and implemented their staff planning policy in an insufficiently consistent way. Moreover this policy lacks consistency due to the 2003 decision to maintain an employment status quo. In addition, the guarantee of policy implementation is not comprehensive. Since the restructuring reform staff plans have only slowly been effected and their quality is largely liable for improvement. The endeavour in the field of staff planning and process simplification in all Flemish authorities has not effectively resulted in the leverage provided to perform the same range of tasks with less staff members.

Minister's response

The minister of Administrative Affairs said in reply to the Court's observations that he would take account of the recommendations made by the Court in its Administrative Affairs policy note and in the follow-up trail regarding staff planning.