

# Abstract

## **Improvement regarding the management of staff matters at the Tourism Flanders Agency (“Toerisme Vlaanderen”)**

*In 2001 the Belgian Court of Audit issued a report about Toerisme Vlaanderen management of personnel matters. That audit brought a whole series of major problems to light. In 2005 the Court decided to assess how far progress had been made. It found that the Agency was now operating more efficiently, more effectively and more in accordance with the law than in 2001. It addressed both the structural problems and the problems related to individual staff members. For issues that had as yet not been completely addressed, it noticed that improvement was mostly on its way. There were still, however, a few problem areas left. To solve them, action should be initiated by the Agency, the Flemish Government and the decree legislator.*

### **Areas of improvements**

These last few years, Toerisme Vlaanderen made noticeable efforts in terms of objective hiring of and promotion opportunities for home staff as well as in terms of accuracy of their payments. Compared to 2001 over half of all structural problems were completely resolved and almost all individual remarks were put right. As to the remaining problems the Agency was now on the way to improvement.

### **Employees working under contract**

In the last few years Toerisme Vlaanderen used almost exclusively contract personnel although permanent tasks should, in principle, be assigned to permanent civil servants. The minister promised that following the coming into effect of the “Beter Bestuurlijk Beleid” decree, the Flemish Government would come out with a new personnel plan containing a personnel establishment that would better meet the current needs and leave more room for hiring permanent staff.

### **Personnel management**

In comparison with 2001 Toerisme Vlaanderen staff organization had now improved both qualitatively and quantitatively. Procedures were worked on and now offered a higher degree of certainty as to the administrative situation of each staff member. They also provided a guarantee for an accurate payment of salaries. However, there was still some room for improvement: an intermediate reporting level should be put in place between the HR service and the Agency management and the job descriptions should be more specific about the various tasks. The Agency should also complete its staff files ; this was seen as a difficult task as in the past administrative decisions were not always written up. As a general rule the Agency could still increase its legal and administrative know-how in staff matters.

## **Non-profit organization**

To accomplish some of its tasks, Toerisme Vlaanderen still used personnel from a non-profit organization. The daily operation of the Agency was therefore interwoven with that of the non-profit organization, which was itself used as a way to hire staff under mostly more favourable terms of employment. The Flemish Government, the Agency and the non-profit organization itself were now aiming at the dissolution of the non-profit organization and the incorporation of its staff into the Agency's personnel. The Court of Audit warned against the risk of creating new inequalities between staff members.

## **Salaries**

Although the Agency didn't perform a systematic evaluation of all staff members, it awarded its collaborators higher salary scales and since 2005 it had submitted its staff to a full cycle of functioning evaluation. It did away with the benefits awarded without legal foundation and in existence since 2001, such as commission fees, personal cost repayment at a flat rate or the private use of a leased vehicle. However, it did not always enforce the regulation without errors : for instance, it paid back travel expenses for ordinary commuting expenses. Admittedly, after the 2001 audit it reviewed a great number of its staff careers, but the corrections made were not always right. Moreover the payment of arrears or the recovery of amounts unduly paid showed shortcomings. As numerous data were missing, it was impossible to give a true picture of who got a too high or too low salary. The Agency acknowledged this but was unable to clarify the situation.

## **Staff employed abroad**

In spite of repeat promises, there were still no staff regulations for the 56 staff members working in the offices abroad. As a result, their terms of employment were still at great variance, even in 2005. In some cases it was even unclear whether Toerisme Vlaanderen was the employer. There were striking differences in salaries. Moreover, there was still no frame for defining the number and the nature of vacancies abroad and there was no legal basis for selecting contract employment instead of permanent employment. Toerisme Vlaanderen was aware of the problem and set up a study group to deal with this. Among the policy options open to the Minister, one would be to standardize staff regulations and the salaries of all Flemish public departments having staff working abroad.

## **Minister's reply**

On 17th November 2005 the minister informed the Court that the Toerisme Vlaanderen new management had taken action that had led to significant results. He underscored that the changing processes were still ongoing and that the remaining problems would be addressed. The minister regarded the Court of Audit's report as an incentive to carry on along the same lines.