

## ■ ■ ■ Les dépenses primaires publiques belges dans une perspective historique longue (1953-2007): déterminants non-discrétionnaires et discrétionnaires

R. SAVAGE

*Conseiller général des Finances*

*Service d'Etudes et de Documentation du*

*SPF Finances*

### ABSTRACT

One of the main issues in the analysis of the public finances is the study of the structural budgetary stance, which aims at differentiating between non-discretionary (cyclical or other) impacts on one side, and the underlying discretionary of deliberate impulsion (“fiscal stance”) on the other side. As far as the Belgian case is concerned, this study aims at updating a long-standing analysis of the “public primary expenditure” side of the issue, this time on the basis of more recent data in the European system (ESA95) until 2007 included. This analysis requires defining a long-term “neutral” reference path, which integrates various incidences identified as non-discretionary (relative prices, cyclical, socio-demographic, etc.). The analysis confirms that, after the considerable cut in primary expenditure in the years 1993-98 in order to meet the Maastricht criteria, the discretionary stance in this respect has been reversed since then and is now clearly expanding again in volume; this is mainly true if one takes into consideration the fact that a major part of public expenditure is de facto linked to a price index derived from the health index and not from the national consumer price index. However, this conclusion must be qualified if we take into account that some of the primary expenditure is in fact tax or social contributions *reductions*, recorded in ESA95 as job subsidies (expenditure) and not as fiscal or para-fiscal loss of revenues.

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