In the last thirty years, Belgian budgetary policy has focused on the evolution of the ratio of public debt to GDP. Indeed, an increase of this ratio is considered to be a threat to maintaining the control of budgetary policy and can lead to the so-called “snowball effect”. The article proposes a refined reading of this indicator.

It may occur that, under unchanged policy, the debt/GDP ratio continues to grow while decreasing in the longer term. This may be due to the so-called “negative super tanker effect” which illustrates the temporarily unchanged path of the indicator. Likewise, still under unchanged policy, a fall of the debt/GDP ratio due to a “positive super tanker effect”, may prevent a deterioration of the public finances. The critical factor for the future of the public finances is in fact the difference between, on the one hand, the structural rates of revenue and, on the other hand, the primary expenditures (expenditures excl. the interest charges on the public debt).

Keywords: Public Finances; Budgetary policy.

JEL Classification: H68