



For Wim Wuyts it is abundantly clear that taxation must now really be on the agenda of the board of directors. As program director of the executive development centre CEDEP in Fontainebleau, he also has a plan of action to achieve this. And a program.

With the initiatives around Base Erosion & Profit Shifting (BEPS) of the OECD, the Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base of the EU, the aggressive attitude of European Commissioner Margarete Vestager against the niche taxation of individual countries, national tax reforms in various countries (Belgium is hopelessly behind, dragging its feet on corporate income tax) ... it is clear that tax rules are on the move. Public opinion is hounding the policymakers. Non-transparent situations are no longer tenable. Tax positions that only yesterday were based on agreements with governments are suddenly a real risk today.

"Indeed, the board of directors must now take responsibility for fiscal matters more than ever," Wim Wuyts is sure of this. And he should know, because not only has Wuyts been Vice President, Global Head of Tax at Bekaert and Chairman of the tax commission of the FEB since 2008, but as of this year he is also program director of taxation at the European Centre for Executive Development (CEDEP), an organisation already set up at the end of the 1960s by a number of large companies such as L'OREAL, DANONE, Tata Steel and also Bekaert. For this reason, he spends 20 percent of his professional time on the INSEAD campus in Fontainebleau.

Financial Times describes CEDEP as "One of executive education's best-kept secrets, an organisation which employs some of the world's top business professors and yet is not a business school; it lists some of the world's top companies among its members, but it is not a club, and by reputation at least, has a better wine cellar than any business school. "

"I don't know the wine cellar yet (smiles)," responds Wim Wuyts. "And our mission must be clear. Until a few years ago, most tax ideas came from bottom-up. A good tax expert would talk to some outsiders, formulate a policy and implement it. It wasn't rare for the board not to really know what went into the tax constructions. In many companies, the board of directors devoted very little attention to taxation. This can no longer be the case in the current context.

The ultimate fiscal responsibility must lie with the board. The analysis should begin with all the important elements that have been creating a new context over the past few years, such as BEPS, the active attitude of the European Commission, the OECD and other political dynamics. The company strategy, organisation as well as its leadership skills must be aligned to this. In this way, organisations can formulate a tax policy that is fully based on the business strategy and on these new environmental factors, and a policy that is also explicitly supported by the board, as well as through the audit & finance committee."

Wim Wuyts explains how to do this in his tax leadership programmes. "In this VUCA world, characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity, final accountability for taxation must be attuned to the global strategy of their organisation. This requires quite different competencies and a new mindset. For this reason, the program uses lecturers in strategy, governance and leadership, but also calls on professionals who are working with taxation on a global basis. During the sessions, we discuss, among other things, the internal alignment of the board to operations. After its success in Fontainebleau, the program will also be held in Silicon Valley next year. For that reason, Wuyts toured the *Valley* together with Jens Meyer – academic dean of CEDEP – at the beginning of November, to adapt the programme to the more complex American international tax context, together with the large Silicon Valley companies. Wuyts is always on the go, always *somewhere halfway* as indicated in the title of his latest book.

A second initiative of the school is a series of lectures intended to increase board awareness. In 45-minute sessions for the audit and finance committee or the Board, we explain the context, free of commercial interest. We come and we go. "