

focus on flanders

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Firm leadership is lacking in the CD&V, says De Crem

crisis threatens after disastrous opinion poll and criticism from acw

On the eve of its socio-economic conference, the Christian-Democratic party CD&V appears to have landed up in a fresh crisis. An opinion poll published in the French-language daily *Le Soir* reveals that the party has dipped under the 20% mark for the first time, although all politicians are aware that this kind of poll is relative. However, the disquiet increased further when the brand new leadership of the Christian labour movement ACW sharply criticised the CD&V's conference texts. The ACW feels that the party no longer has any vision in respect of socio-economic issues. On top of that, the new generation of CD&V members of parliament are demanding a prominent place on the electoral lists. One of them is Pieter De Crem, who made a dram-

ic appeal to his party chairman Stefaan De Clerck to take a firmer grip on the reins of leadership (FF).

LUC VAN DER KELEN • HET LAATSTE NIEUWS • 20 SEPTEMBER

'Stefaan De Clerck should concentrate wholeheartedly on the party chairmanship and have himself replaced as mayor of Kortrijk until the elections. He has to make a clear-cut choice: either Brussels or his city'. So says CD&V member of parliament Pieter De Crem, an important representative of the new CD&V generation on the eve of a crucial party conference. De Crem is not calling into question the chairman himself, but rather the way in which he is leading the party. This has to be more intensive and more professional, the MP says. 'The chairmanship of the largest opposition party is a full-time job. The chairman must be physically present, and lend his undivided attention. Stefaan De Clerck should assume the leadership on all important issues, and set himself up as the challenger to Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt. Continuing to combine his Kortrijk and Brussels mandates is just not on,' according to De Crem. In De Crem's view, the leadership of the party has not been fulfilled sufficiently and De Clerck should surround himself with a new generation of politicians. 'The chairman should elicit a vote of confidence at the conference this weekend. He should commit himself to going into the elections with a new programme and with a new team. People do not yet regard CD&V as something new. A new party that goes to the polls with its old senior figures would be hilarious,' says De Crem.

INTRODUCTION



Did Sabena have its pockets picked by Swissair and is there any evidence pointing to this? That is one of the questions that the parliamentary committee of inquiry responsible for ascertaining the causes

of and responsibilities for the bankruptcy of the national airline is trying to answer. It is in the context of this question that the raid carried out by Belgian detectives, led by Brussels examining magistrate Jean-Claude Van Espen, on the Toulouse (France) headquarters of the aircraft manufacturer Airbus, must be viewed. The raid forms part of the judicial inquiry that has been under way since last November further to a complaint lodged by former Sabena Technics employee Philippe Doyen. After all, according to a good number of insiders it was this contract, worth EUR 1.2 billion, that dealt Sabena its death-blow. Sabena's last chief executive Christophe Müller does not mince his words on the subject, in his book "the Crash of Sabena". In the book, Müller writes: 'Not a single airline has ever done what Sabena decided to do in 1997: renew the entire fleet, and also increase it again. That is a deadly cocktail.' But up until now the circumstances surrounding the decision to go ahead with the mammoth purchase of 34 Airbus aircraft have remained unclear. Why did the board of directors, which was in favour of purchasing Boeing aircraft, nonetheless opt for Airbus under pressure from Swissair? What is more, why did Sabena boss Paul Reutlinger all of a sudden decide to double the order from 17 planes to 34? Why did Swissair pass on options on Airbus aircraft to Sabena around 1997, and how is it that these were suddenly converted into actual orders? And all this without the then Sabena management having secured financial guarantees from its shareholders Swissair and the Belgian Government. The consequences of this purchase are well documented: it pared away EUR 25 to 35 million from the operational result every year, according to *Gazet van Antwerpen* (19 September). On the basis of the correspondence between Airbus, Swissair, and Sabena at the time, Van Espen is now trying to find out whether Swissair had a secret agreement with Airbus or if backhanders were paid to any of the bigwigs at Swissair. According to *Het Nieuwsblad* (18 September), Swissair reportedly received exceptional discounts for its own purchases thanks to the Sabena order. Many Belgians, but in particular the Belgian government - whether or not it 'had its pockets picked' - and the many former Sabena employees and employees of the bankrupt Sabena supply companies, will no doubt be following the inquiry with Argus' eyes. But even if the inquiry comes up with proof to substantiate a possible claim, this will be cold comfort for the former Sabena employees who are out of a job.

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief

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Flemish Government has a budget agreement

there is still room for new initiatives thanks to the financial fund for one-off expenses

On Sunday 15 September the inner cabinet of the Government of Flanders succeeded in eliminating the deficit of some EUR 202 million in the Flemish budget. As requested by the High Council for Finance, the budget has a sizeable surplus of EUR 324 million. The government made a special point of ensuring that all scheduled expenditure would go ahead. Still there was room for new initiatives thanks to the FFEU (Financieel Fonds voor Eenmalige Uitgaven - Financial Fund for One-off Expenses). Some EUR 210 million has been taken from this fund, which had been built up with unused funds from previous budgets. The Flemish Minister for Transport Steve Stevaert (SP.A) is drawing no less than EUR 100 million from it, in order to tackle the black spots in the roads infrastructure where accidents are frequent. Welfare Minister Mieke Vogels (Agalev) receives an additional EUR 25 million for her care insurance scheme, but she still does not have enough with that. The Flemish citizen will have to help foot the bill, from now on paying an annual contribution of EUR 25 instead of the EUR 10 that he paid this year. The Flemish Government is also making an extra EUR 25 million available for social housing. FFEU funds are also available for new rest homes, scientific research, soil sanitation and new sewers. According to the Planning Office, the Flemish economy will grow by 2.4% in 2003, but the government has taken into account a figure of 2% when preparing its budget. A trade cycle buffer of EUR 30 million (0.4%) has been introduced in order to be able to absorb economic blows (FF).

GUY TEGENBOS/BART DOBBELAERE •
DE STANDAARD • 16 SEPTEMBER

Vogels is receiving EUR 25 million for the care insurance scheme, but also EUR 37.5 million for the Vipa, an investment fund for welfare and health infrastructure. Renovation and modernisation work on old peoples' homes and other facilities for senior citizens are paid from this. Steve Stevaert is being given EUR 100 million in order to

adopt an accelerated approach for tackling black spots in the roads infrastructure. These are places where road accidents often occur and where changes to the infrastructure, such as the laying of roundabouts or lane narrowing, could lead to safer driving conditions. Stevaert wanted to do away with these black spots in the space of fifteen years, and this should now be possible in just five years' time.

According to Stevaert, over the entire period of office he has seen to it that expenditure for transport has risen by some EUR 2.5 billion - by 2 billion in the ordinary expenditure, and by an extra half billion in the form of the extra investments for the black spots. The government is earmarking an additional EUR 25 million for housing. There is talk of the renovation of around a thousand houses, via co-operation between the public and private sectors. The Government of Flanders will also be further promoting the idea of tenants purchasing their subsidised flats. Those who refurbish old, dilapidated houses will receive something extra in the form of a freezing of the original advance levy on income derived from real estate, even though the value (the cadastral income) of the house in question rises.

WIM VANDE VELDEN • DE FINANCIËEL-
ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 19 SEPTEMBER

In drawing up its draft budget for 2003, the Government of Flanders has released a further EUR 7.5 million, right at the last minute, aimed at doing away with waiting lists in the sector for the care of disabled persons. In the spring, when the budget audit is carried out, the government will look for the remaining EUR 12.5 million in extra funding needed to be able to help all 1,600 urgent cases on the waiting lists. The Minister-President also called for an innovation pact to be concluded with trade and industry and the universities. The target objective is a budget of 3 % of gross domestic product for research and development in Flanders. This means some EUR 60 million a year. In the meantime the Flemish Gov-

ernment is releasing EUR 66 million for 2003. According to Dewael, the private sector should also make an effort.

RUUD GOOSSENS • DE MORGEN •
19 SEPTEMBER

Dewael and Co. are continuing the reduction of the Flemish debt. At the end of 1998 the debt still totalled EUR 6.6 billion. By the end of this budget year, that amount will have shrunk to EUR 3.9 billion. According to Dewael, the government will therefore succeed, without too much difficulty, in halving the debt by the end of its term of office. The government stresses that it is keeping all its promises. Thus, for example, the previously agreed reductions in the tax and premium burden (representing EUR 580 million), such as the abolition of the radio and television licence fee and the cut in registration fees, are being left untouched.

EUR 12.5 million in FFEU money is being pumped into the environmental fund for the cleaning up of contaminated industrial land. The Municipal Fund will rise next year by EUR 323 million to EUR 1,542 billion. The budget for Culture and Youth Affairs is being upped by approximately EUR 28 million.

Flemish Education Minister Marleen Vanderpoorten cannot really unveil any sizeable presents. For her, there were no extras appearing out of the blue. However, Dewael pointed out that the implementation of agreements made previously, such as the various collective labour agreements, is already costing an exceptionally large amount of money (EUR 388 million or 5% of the education budget).

HOUSING

Gabriëls stimulates the building of social housing

advance levy for income derived from real estate frozen for 5 years

In the budget for 2003, the Flemish Government is doing away with all renovation premiums, even though Housing Minister, Jaak Gabriëls (VLD) had prepared a proposal for a decree to make the Flemish renovation premiums more attractive from 1 October onwards. There is now a new proposal on the table, to have the advance levy on income derived from real estate frozen for five years, even though the cadastral income of the house in question rises as a result of the renovations. Another scenario is the lowering of the advance levy on income derived from real estate in urban areas. Gabriëls did receive EUR 25 million from the Fund for the Financing of One-off Expenses (FFEU) to work on a Guarantee Fund in social housing (FF).

WIM VANDEVELDEN • DE FINANCIËLE-
ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 17 SEPTEMBER

The fund should make public- and private-sector (PPS) co-operation possible in the social housing sector. The fund can be used to make up the difference between the rental price that a private partner can receive on the private housing market and the social housing rental prices. According to Gabriëls, the PPS formula should make it possible for 1,000 new subsidised flats to be built in the short term. According to Gabriëls, interest has been expressed by British, Dutch, German, and Italian investment funds. Now the minister wants to adapt the housing code, so that tenants in the social housing sector can purchase the subsidised flats they are living in much more easily. At the moment a rented flat can only be bought if the flat is at least 15 years old, and this

may only happen at the initiative of the housing companies. Gabriëls wants to put an end to this. His aim is for the 13,000 people in subsidised rented accommodation who have an income of more than EUR 23,550 to be able to purchase their subsidised flat.

In order to stimulate this acquisition of ownership, the minister will be consulting with the banking and insurance sector. The minister feels that there are possibilities on account of the fact that interest rates for mortgage loans are currently at historically low levels. He wants to offer tenants in the social housing sector a 'package', with an attractive mortgage loan, an arrangement for the debt balance insurance, and an insurance against loss of income. For, says the minister, the more tenants that decide to buy their subsidised flat, the more resources will be freed up for new social housing construction projects. The minister is sticking to the target of building 15,000 new subsidised flats in the current term of office.

CARE INSURANCE

Care insurance premiums provoke protests

FF EDITOR

From the general funds for 2002, EUR 25 million is being transferred to the reserve fund of the care insurance scheme, and there will be an annual injection of EUR 100 million into this care insurance scheme. Welfare Minister Mieke Vogels (Agalev) announced that as a result, 132,000 senior citizens would receive a benefit payment from the Flemish care insurance system in 2004, as compared with 64,000 at the moment. But the annual compulsory contribution for all Flemings, irrespective of their income, is being increased from EUR 10 to EUR 25. The Greens and Socialists had urged that the contribution be made income-linked, but the only concession they secured was that the contribution paid by widows, incapacitated persons, handicapped persons, orphans, and those on subsistence-level benefit remains pegged at EUR 10. However, this is anything but good news even for the majority of the

elderly who receive a benefit payment. The maximum benefit payment for senior citizens receiving care at home is being cut from EUR 125 to EUR 90 a month, and that for nursing home residents in severe need of care is being cut from EUR 160 to EUR 125.

The socialist and Christian health insurance funds are going up the wall. Guy Peeters, general secretary of the Socialist Health Insurance Funds attacks the liberal VLD, in particular. He feels that they want to let the health insurance funds do all the dirty work, because as an anti-taxation party, the VLD does not want to allow any more tax increases to be announced before the election in 2003. Peeters is thereby threatening to give the health insurance fund members detailed information on 'the unjust decision taken by the Flemish Government.'

The SP.A parliamentary party in the Flemish Parliament was not sparing in its criticism either, and wants the additional EUR 15 to be taken off again as

quickly as possible. Steve Stevaert, Deputy Minister-President in the Government of Flanders, supported this criticism and gave some explanation as to the Government's decision.

RUUD GOOSSENS • DE MORGEN •
18 SEPTEMBER

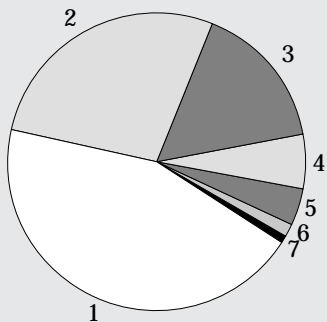
'The problem is that the mutual insurance funds that collect the contributions are currently not allowed to charge on an income-related basis. Either we change that, or we finance the care insurance scheme out of the public funds,' Stevaert was quoted as saying. But that last option was not realistic now. 'Mieke Vogels (Agalev) was against it, because it meant that she had to look for extra funds within her own budget. Seeing that she has not kept her budget under control, those funds are not there. And we did not like the idea of increasing her funds again.'

Care insurance scheme will become income-linked in 2004

RUUD GOOSSENS • DE MORGEN •
19 SEPTEMBER

Stevaert's remarks sent Minister Vogels (Agalev) up the wall. In a fiery press release, she made it clear that Stevaert had not 'at any point during the negotiations, or during the preparations for the negotiations, made it clear that he could not accept the agreement.' The Green minister reminded Stevaert of the proposal that she herself had made a few months earlier: an additional care tax or 'an extra levy that would be visible on the tax return'. For: 'Believing that you can resolve the care insurance scheme using the public funds that are still remaining after the tax cuts is not realistic.' After the budget talks Minister-President Dewael attempted to extinguish the fuse. He stressed that the care insurance scheme would become income-linked as soon as possible, preferably as early as during the budget for 2004. 'That is what is stated in the coalition agreement, too,' said the Minister-President. 'This is a transitional system. At the moment it is technically impossible for an income-related contribution to be collected via the health insurance funds'.

THE BELGIAN HEALTH INSURANCE FUNDS



- 1 Christian health insurance fund (44.3%)
- 2 Socialist health insurance fund (27.6%)
- 3 Independent health insurance fund (15.9%)
- 4 Liberal health insurance fund (5.9%)
- 5 Neutral health insurance fund (4.0%)
- 6 Railways health insurance fund (nmbs) (1.4%)
- 7 Assistance fund (0.8%)

SOURCE: KNACK GRAPHICS

CD&V loses ground in opinion poll

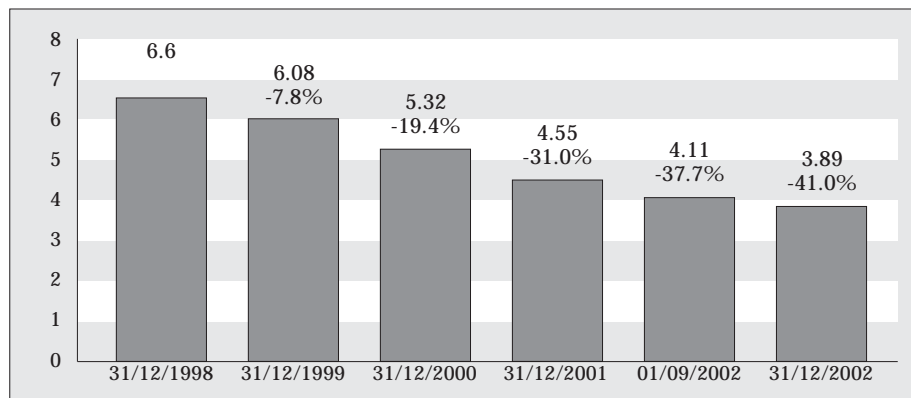
purple green parties are winners in Flanders as well as in Wallonia

An opinion poll in the French-language daily *Le Soir* shows that the Liberal/Socialist/Green coalition is in the ascendant in Flanders as well as in Wallonia. The big winner is the liberal VLD, which rises from 22.6% in 1999 to 24.4%. The socialist SP.A also gains ground and becomes the third party again, with 16.6%, whilst the Greens of Agalev more or less stagnate. The Vlaams Blok rises 0.9% to 16.2%. The splintering of the VU did not cause the havoc that was expected. Its heirs N-VA (5.4%) and Spirit (2.3%) together garner 1% less than the former VU. The major losers are the Christian-Democrats of the CD&V, the largest opposition party. The party tumbles almost 4%, ending up on 18.3%. This is an all-time low in the opinion polls for the Christian democrats, which for 41 years decided who could govern in partnership with them in Flanders. When questioned about this in *De Morgen* (17 September), the CD&V's senior figures could find no explanation. A number of anonymous CD&V members of parliament are again raising questions about the leadership of Chairman Stefaan De Clerck. But the question is how reliable this latest poll is. For this reason, there is a sense of feverish anticipation ahead of the opinion poll due to be published by *La Libre Belgique* next week. If the downward trend is confirmed, the process of reform and renewal that is under way in the party will have to be speeded up, says Chairman De Clerck (FF).

LUC STANDAERT • HET BELANG VAN
LIMBURG • 17 SEPTEMBER

For 41 years the CVP was kept together by the exercising of power. The fact that the ancient class party first had to arrive at a synthesis between the standpoints of its different wings before it sat round the table with its coalition partners was probably one of the main reasons for its success as a governing party during all those years. But this does not help it the least bit in the opposition. After all, this culture of consultation leads to standpoints that are very finely balanced and highly useful in government, but not communicable at all in one-liners. On top of that comes the fact that there is a large hole in the political market. Since SP.A, Agalev, Spirit, and even VLD are all sounding their drums on the same patch, just left of the political centre, there is a gaping hole just right of the centre that extends until you reach the Vlaams Blok on the extreme right. At the moment Geert Bourgeois's N-VA is the only party filling this gap. Should the CD&V not opt for clarity and set itself up as the representative of the 'honourable right', after the fashion of most Christian-Democratic parties in Europe? That is what a section of the party is wondering. 'No,' exclaim the others, 'because if we did that, we would be playing into the hands of the political polarisation that the Liberal/Socialist/Green coalition is striving for.'

PUBLIC DEBT OF FLEMISH GOVERNMENT (IN BILLION EURO)



SOURCE: DE STANDAARD

ENGINEERING

Seghers Better Technology and Seghers Genetics & Nutrition are bankrupt

The trustees are letting the activities start up again

The business empire of the Fleming Hendrik Seghers was declared to be in total bankruptcy by the commercial courts in Mechelen and Dendermonde. Only one company in the group, Vitamex, was able to escape bankruptcy by setting up a management buy-out a week ago. The requests for a judicial settlement were denied, since there were absolutely no prospects for any improvement. The banks have had a credit freeze in force against the Seghers Group since 1999. Since that year the company has not paid off a single euro of its debts. A loss of EUR 23 million is expected for this year, whilst the group's equity was 'zero', according to the judges. In both the engineering division, known by the name Seghers Better Technology (SBT), and in the biotechnology division Seghers Genetics & Nutrition, the death throes have lasted months. With their judgement, the judges have also brought an abrupt end to the so-called 'plan of last hope', the contribution of EUR 35 million in cash by Keppel Corporation, a subsidiary of the Singapore company Temasek, in SBT. The courts evidently did not take the plan seriously. For SBT, the court in Mechelen appointed four trustees in bankruptcy, whilst for SGN the court in Dendermonde appointed two. The trustees must in the first place ensure that the highly trained employees do not start looking for other jobs, because their knowledge and expertise are the group's biggest assets. Therefore they are letting the activities of all bankrupt companies start up again. The more than 600 employees at SBT and SGN will first be dismissed, and then taken on again. The Mechelen judge even permitted the external management firm Deha & Partners to assume the crisis management at SBT. According to trustee Luc Obbels, numerous acquisition proposals have already been received (FF).

GUY VANDEN BROEK • DE FINANCIËLE-
ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 14 SEPTEMBER

In engineering, things always revolve around large-scale projects, long-term financing and very sizeable financial guarantees. The projects that Seghers carries out generally run for between four and five years, from the moment of award of the contract through to delivery. A company has to remain solvent for the whole of that period, and that is a question of guarantees, credits (banks), and confidence. The Seghers Group had therefore already been facing a fundamental financial problem for many years, stressed the president of the Mechelen Commercial Court. The moratorium with the banks dates from 1999. The lack of a well-founded agreement with the banks eventually cooked the Seghers Group's goose.

The banks ushered in the final phase via a banking syndicate and their credit freeze. The representative of the syndicate of 13 banks, lawyer Wilfried Goris, said only that there were no winners in this judgement. However, the banks are preferential creditors and have received their assets, such as the goodwill, in pledge. They can cash that in.

The losers are well known, namely all ordinary creditors, such as suppliers, customers and employees. But at Seghers the workforce is made up of generally very highly trained employees, who will very likely have little difficulty finding another job. BBTk trade union secretary Frank Lingier said in an interview that he hoped that the trustees nonetheless wanted to safeguard the unity of the companies. "More than anything, Seghers is human capital," he stressed. What is already certain is that principal shareholder Hendrik Seghers, via his holding company the Verenigde Malderse Company (VMC), and the minority shareholders Mercator, Lesius, NIB, Rabobank and also the Flemish Environmental Holding Company (Vlaamse Milieuholding) and the Walloon Regional Investment Compa-

ny SRIW, with their subordinated convertible bond loans, have little chance of recovering any of their venture capital.

GUY VANDEN BROEK • DE FINANCIËLE-
ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 17 SEPTEMBER

What Friday's bankruptcy boils down to is that the current shareholders and the management are being set aside. 'There are attractive acquisition proposals on the table from both domestic and foreign interested parties, for almost all the company's component parts. The fact that the potential purchasers have reacted so fast proves that the assets have some value,' said trustee Obbels. 'These assets are the people who work there. Of the 600 employees, around half have the level of engineer. It is in the interests of all the parties that the workers stay on and the activities are continued. Over the next few days the trustees will be talking with the banks, which must also keep their credit lines open for the time being. Few bankrupt companies have been capitalised again so quickly,' says Obbels. Many of those involved in the case claim that 90% of the current employees will have been permanently employed again within a few weeks. Jef Dauwe, who was appointed from Dendermonde as trustee at the pig farm Seghers Genetics, says that he hopes to have finalised talks with a new buyer within as little as three weeks. Here, too, various potential purchasers - from both home and abroad - came forward.

Antwerp investment company AvH offers 1.1 billion for GIB

AvH also interested in Quick chain of hamburger restaurants

The Antwerp investment company Ackermans & Van Haaren (AvH) has made a bid of EUR 41 per share in cash for the holding company GIB. The bid values GIB at EUR 1.13 billion. In addition to cash assets to the tune of EUR 1.3 billion, GIB holds a 57% share in the Quick chain of hamburger restaurants, but also operates under commission charges and debt obligations. In recent years GIB has sold its crown jewels, such as the Super- and Maxi-GB supermarkets, Brico, Inno, and a series of other well-known chains of stores (see overview). GIB, in which the Vaxelaire and Du Monceau families and the Cobepa holding company are the major shareholders, was planning to wind itself up. However, this liquidation will be time-consuming because when it sold its subsidiaries, GIB gave guarantees that extend until 2007 and even beyond. AvH's bid offers investors an immediate liquidity. AvH is also taking advantage of the (altered) tax system. Liquidations that are started after 25 March 2002 fall under a tax system involving a 10% advance levy on income derived from securities on the capital gains. Most analysts regard the bid as being too low and a number of GIB's institutional shareholders are not in agreement with the price (FF).

PASCAL DENDOOVEN • DE STANDAARD
17 SEPTEMBER

Luc Bertrand, chairman of AvH, said yesterday that AvH was also interested in the activities still contained in GIB, and in particular the Quick chain of hamburger restaurants. 'The half-yearly results point to a recovery. There is still potential at Quick.' GIB has a 57.9% stake in Quick, which has a market capitalisation of EUR 57 million (for 100%). Furthermore, there is Disport, which can be bought by the British company Sports Soccer in 2003, the two Exki restaurants and the IT subsidiary Gegotec. Lunch Garden is being sold to Carestel, as is known. The GIB board of directors will be issuing an opinion within the next five days, and this will be included in AvH's bid prospectus. The Banking and Finance Commission has a month in which to approve the

prospectus. AvH is financing the bid via Fortis Bank, which is acting as consultant to AvH in the operation.

The bid price of EUR 41 is on the frugal side, according to analysts. KBC puts the value at EUR 42.9 in a very conservative scenario. AvH yesterday said that GIB still carried risks to the tune of EUR 318 million in the form of commission and off-balance sheet obligations, but GIB sources gave to understand that this calculation was incorrect. Analysts put this figure at around EUR 170 million. It is not certain that these risks will in actual fact materialise, either.

AvH will only keep to its offer if it acquires 90% of the shares. Cobepa holds 30.5%, and the families 13.3%. Financial funds such as FMR Corp and Wyser-Pratte hold 5.7% and 5%, respectively. Wyser-Pratte said yesterday that the offer was inadequate. 'We're not even dreaming of going along with this,' a spokesman was quoted as saying.

MARC BALDUYCK • GAZET VAN
ANTWERPEN • 17 SEPTEMBER

GIB came into being from the merger of Grand Bazar, Innovation, and Bon Marché. But the group's pride and glory, the GB supermarket chain, continuously lost market share. A confused policy and stiff trade union opposition started the decline:

1996: Shareholding in Fnac Belgium sold

1996: The Disport chain of stores passed on to French minority shareholders

1997: Sale of Sarma to the Dutch chain Hema

1998: French chain Promodès acquires minority stake in GB

1999: Internet bookseller Proxis is sold

2000: French company Carrefour acquires majority stake in GB

2001: Innovation sold to the German concern Kaufhof

2001: Real estate company GB Immo sold to the Dutch group Brenninkmeijer

2002: DIY store Brico goes to the Dutch group Vendex

Daems makes promises to the hotel and catering industry

Representatives of all sectors of the hotel and catering industry (hotels, cafes and bars and restaurants) met on 18 September in Brussels for a kind of States-General. Armed with an impressive survey recording all the complaints from the sector, they put questions to the federal Minister for the Self-employed and Retailers, Rik Daems (VLD). He promised to do something for the sector before the elections. He wants to hold talks within the government on the tax deductibility of restaurant costs and lower social security contributions for casual workers. In exchange, Daems wants the hotel and catering industry to 'play by the rules' more. A VUB (Free University of Brussels) study shows that 20% of turnover in the hotel and catering industry is still recorded in the black economy (i.e., goes undeclared) and 50% of staff costs are paid out under the table. The official annual turnover for the hotel and catering sector amounts to EUR 7 billion, and the sector employs 120,000 people, half of whom are part-time workers (FF).

CHRISTOF VANSCHOUBROEK •
DE STANDAARD • 19 SEPTEMBER

According to the VUB professor Jaak Wilrockx, the sector is facing a serious profitability problem. Officially only 60% of the companies makes a profit, as compared to 75% in the Belgian economy as a whole. In the coming weeks, Daems wants to throw three issues relating to the hotel and catering sector on the government's table. Restaurant costs must become fully tax deductible again. At the moment if you go out to lunch with your business contacts, the costs can only be deducted to the tune of 50%. He also wants to back a VLD bill to enable a manager in the sector to enlist the services of casual workers at lower social security costs for a limited number of days. Daems is convinced that this will 'launder' a part of the black economy prevalent in the sector. Finally, Daems also wants to bring the VAT rate down from 21% to 6%, but in that case Europe would first have to include the hotel and catering industry in the list of labour-intensive sectors.

IDEOLOGIES

Religious education takes largest chunk out of funds for Catholic Church

Money of church spread over 8,000 coffers

TWith the co-operation of the church authorities, theologian Geert Delbeke has for years been collecting information on the financial structure and the flows of funds within the church. The book *Het Geld van De Kerk* ('The Church's Money') is the result of this unremitting labour and immediately helps to explode a great many myths on the way the money is spent. However, when asked how rich the Church in Belgium really is now, he is forced to duck the question. The money is spread over some 8,000 cash administration offices for parishes, deaneries, and bishoprics, and in addition to these, there is also a whole host of coffers for monasteries, abbeys, and

catholic associations. Of the EUR 580 million that the authorities (state, regions, and municipalities) transfer to the ideological organisations, 80% goes to the Catholic Church, and the latter uses most of this not to pay for religious services in empty churches, as a persistent misunderstanding would have you believe, but to defray the costs of religious education, according to Delbeke (FF).

KATRIJN SERNEELS • DE MORGEN •
18 SEPTEMBER

The EUR 295 million for theological education not only goes to religious teachers, but also to moral philosophy

and inspectors. However, religious education is by far the most important. EUR 295 million seems a lot, but the amount is not that big when you consider that every Flemish child receives his portion of religious teaching at school between the ages of six and eighteen. In Flanders 783,474 children receive Catholic religious instruction, representing 85.3% of the total number of pupils. In second place come lessons in moral philosophy, which are followed by a tenth of the children (94,174 pupils). Islam is taught to 2.2% of children at school. Less popular are philosophy of culture (0.4%), and the Protestant faith and Jewish lessons (0.3%). That Catholic religious education is still so popular has to do with the fact that there is no freedom of choice in the Catholic schools. 'The debate as to whether Catholic schools should also offer moral philosophy is well underway,' says Delbeke.

EXHIBITION

Fashion Museum opens its doors

exhibition 'selection 1: Backstage' offers a look behind the scenes

On 21 September Antwerp's Fashion Museum (Modemuseum) finally opens its doors. It is housed in a stylish renovated 19th century building on the corner of the Nationalestraat and the Drukkerijstraat. The entire building in fact plays host to more than just the Fashion Museum. It also includes the Flanders Fashion Institute, the fashion department of the Antwerp Polytechnic, the art and architecture bookstore Copyright, and the brasserie National. The whole renovation cost some EUR 6 million, on top of which the province of Antwerp invested a further one and a half million euros in the building's décor and furnishings. The MoMu - for that will be the trendy name used by insiders - opens with the exhibition 'Selection 1: Backstage/Achter de schermen/Les coulisses'. It offers an initial selection from the collection and a look behind the scenes at the museum and its future policy (FF).

NICA BROUCKE • DE MORGEN •
17 SEPTEMBER

The MoMu's impressive collection consists chiefly of the legacy of the previous Textile and Costume Museum, the oldest pieces of which - clothes, patterns, samplers, a lace collection and archive documents - date from the sixteenth century. What is unique about this collection is the link with Flemish culture. For example, there are numerous items of fashionable Flemish ladies' and gentlemen's clothing from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This collection was recently supplemented with material from contemporary Belgian designers. The pioneers from the nineteen eighties, who suddenly put Flanders on the fashion map, are still being purchased: Dries Van Noten, Martin Margiela, Walter Van Beirendonck, Ann Demeulemeester, Dirk Bikkembergs, and Dirk Van Saene. But the creations of the younger generation of designers such as Lieve Van Gorp, Raf Simons, Véronique Branquinho, Jurgi Persoons, Patrick Van Ommeslaeghe, A. F. Vandervorst, Stephan Schneider, Bernhard Wilhelm,

Wim Neels, and Angelo Figus will also be archived, studied, and presented. The intention is eventually to have the entire collection digitised on The Museum System. But for the moment there is Selection 1, the first temporary exhibition, with the idea being to hold two such exhibitions per year. 'A subjective selection from the collective present and past,' says director Linda Loppa. 'Scenographer Bob Verhelst has set up the exhibition around the idea of the 'storehouse' or 'repository' - the treasure-house of every museum. We've opted to present the collection thematically rather than chronologically. Historic items are placed next to contemporary ones, so that it will not always be clear which pieces are old and which are new.' Adjoining the central exhibition area, there is an open restoration workshop where restored pieces can be viewed and where the 'backstage' of the title comes into its own. In the totally darkened exhibition rooms themselves, the visitor undertakes a journey through time, passing by dramatically lit 'theme islands' that skip from one subject to another: 'Black/White', 'Red', 'Voortman Calico Printing Works' (the Ghent textile printing works that printed the Batik fabrics of the African 'mamas'), 'Ann Salens' (the bird of paradise of Belgian fashion), 'Betet Skara' (an Antwerp

workshop that weaves according to the Assyrian method), 'Hats', 'Embroidery', 'Replicas', 'the 1920s', etc. The storehouse effect is achieved thanks to the superb design. The fashion items are presented in discarded cardboard boxes,

on headless tailor's dummies and in boxes lined with white tissue paper. The restrained scenography reinforces 'the literal and figurative unpacking of what the MoMu has in stock'. The placing of 'old' and 'new' pieces next to each

other prompts the visitor to reflect on the concept of 'in fashion' and 'out of fashion'.

www.momu.be

Diary

MUSIC, DANCE THEATRE

- 4 to 29 September: *Cirque du Soleil* with 'Saltimbanco', Heizel, Brussel; info: 0900/84.07
- 19 to 30 September: *Les Nuits Botanique with Marc Moulin & Top Secret Band, Les Rita Mitsouki, Chocolate Genius, 16 Horse Power* etc., Botanique, Brussels; info: 02/218.37.32
- 19 September to 6 October: *Il Trittico by Giacomo Puccini*, directed by Robert Carsen, Flanders Opera, Antwerp; info: www.vlaamseopera.be
- 24 September: *Alicia Keys*, Vorst Nationaal, Brussels; info: 0900/260.60
- 25 September: *Engelbert Humperdinck*, Koningin Elisabethzaal, Antwerp; info: 0900/00311
- 17 September to 6 October: *Electra by Richard Strauss*, conductor: Kazushi Ono, director: Stephane Braunschweig, De Munt, Brussels; info: 070/233.939 www.demunt.be
- Until 29 September: *Dans@tack*, dance festival in Kortrijk and Brussels with Gilles Duvivier & Estela Zutic, Pierre Rubio and Heine Avdal & Christoph De Boeck, Manuela Rastaldi, Davis Freeman & Lilia Mestre, Katrien Van Aerschoot and Philipp Gehmacher; info: www.dansinkortrijk.be
- 29 September: *Choir and Orchestra Collegium Vocale, Concerto Palatino* conducted by Philippe Herreweghe with compositions by Gabrieli and Schütz; De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28
- 3 tot 5 October: *Raymund Hoghe, Young People, Old Voices*, dance-theatre, Kaaitheater, Brussels; info: 02/201.59.59 www.kaaitheater.be
- 25 September: *Jim Rose Circus*, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: 0900/260.60 www.vooruit.be
- 28 and 29 September: *30 Castles and Fortresses open to the public*; info: www.davisfonds.be 016/31.06.00
- 27 to 29 September: *Jazz Hoeilaert Festival*; info: 02/657.31.79 www.debosuil.be
- 2 October: *Budapest Festival Orchestra* conducted by Yvan Fischer, PSK, Brussels; info: 02/507.82.00
- 4 October: *Tony Joe White & Solomon Burke*; AB, Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
- 25 September: *Joris Verdin* (organ) and *Capilla Flamenca* with music by Cornet and Bull, Sint-Baafskathedraal, Ghent; info: www.festivalvanvlaanderen.be
- 26 September: *Hesperion XXI, La Capella*

Reial de Catalunya conducted by *Jordi Savall* with C. Monteverdi, *Altri canti d'Amor* and *Gira il nemico insidioso*, Bijloke, Ghent; info: www.festivalvanvlaanderen.be

- 25 September: *Spiegel Strijkkwartet and Syrinx Ensemble* with music by Ravel, Debussy and Lekeu, CC Belgica, Dendermonde; info: www.festivalvanvlaanderen.be
- 2 October: *Renaud Garcia-Fons & Octet* with 'Navigatore'; eastern and western musical traditions, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.festivalvanvlaanderen.be
- 3 October: *Gidon Kremer & Kremerata Musica* with music by Lipatti, Mozart and Enescu, Handelsbeurs Ghent; info: www.festivalvanvlaanderen.be
- 1 to 6 October: *Opening Festival Flagey* (former BRT studios, Elsenne) with Mumadji, Carte Blanche a Soledad etc.; info: www.flagey.be 02/641.10.20
- 4 October: *Defilharmonie* conducted by Günter Pichler with *Elisabeth Leonskaja* (piano) with concerto by WA Mozart, Apollon Musagète by Stravinsky and Symphony nr. 100 by Joseph Haydn, De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.defilharmonie.be 0800/21.036
- 5 October: *Ja Rule*, Vorst Nationaal, Brussels; info: 0900/26060
- 6 October: *Patricia Kaas*, Koningin Elisabethzaal, Antwerp; info: 0900/26060
- 10 October: *Sigur Ros*, Royal Circus, Brussels; info: 02/218.37.32
- Until 6 October: *Festival Recyclart 2002*, (former railwaystation Brussels-Kapellekerk) with concerts, street theatre and performances, Brussels; info: www.recyclart.be 02/502.57.34
- 4 to 13 October: *International Festival of Mime*, Aarschoot with *Marta Carasco, Black-skywhite, Dos a Deux, Maren Strack, Antonin Novotny* etc., Aarschoot; info: www.mime.be 016/491.032

EXPO

- **Bruges 2002**: info: 070/22.33.02 www.brugge2002.be
- Until 17 November: *Closed world - Open books*, exhibition, medieval manuscripts and contemporary art in a splendid site of an abbey; Bruges; info: 070/22.33.02 www.brugge2002.be
- Until 31 October: *Station2station*, exhibition: art in petrol stations along the roads leading to Bruges; info: www.station2station.be
- From 26 May onwards: *Interactive Diamond Museum of the Province of Antwerp*; info: 03/20.2.48.90 www.diamantmuseum.be
- Until 29 September: *Een Swaere Enterprise, exhibition on the East-Indian Company in the 18th century*, Venetiaanse Gaanderijen, Ostend; info: 059/80.55.00
- Until 17 November: *Dead.lines*: War, media and propaganda in the 20th century, exhibition, Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres
- Until 1 December: *Tyndale's Last Will* (the Coverdale Bible), exhibition, Museum Plantin-Moretus, Antwerp; info: 03/221.14.50
- Until 27 October: *Aztec and Mayas*, pre-colombian art, CC Sint-Niklaas; info: 03/777.29.42
- Until December: *Festival art and equal rights*, women artists show their work in 40 places, organisation: Gynaika; info: 03/232.22.29 www.gynaika.be
- 20 September to 3 November: *ArchiLab: ecology in contemporary architecture*, exhibition, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28
- Until 17 November: *Graphical work by Max Ernst*, exhibition, Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent; info: 09/240.07.00
- 20 to 29 September: *Eurantica Antwerp*, International Antiques Fair, Antwerp; info: 0800/30.007 www.artexis.com
- Until 12 January: *Deir el-Medina and the Valley of the Kings, The artists of the Pharaoh*, exhibition, Jubelparkmuseum, Cinquantenaire, Brussels; info: 02/741.73.11
- Until 11 October: *The enchanted wood*, open air exhibition by Flor Bex, Maria-Aalter (East Flanders), info: 0495/10.09.10
- Until 5 January: *7000 years of Persian art*, exhibition, Sint-Pietersabdij, Ghent; info: 09/243.97.30
- 21 September to 16 February: *Selection 1/Backstage*, Fashion exhibition, Antwerp Modemuseum (MoMu), Antwerp; info: 03/470.27.71 www.momu.be
- Until 8 December: *Between city palaces and castles in the air*, engravings and paintings by Hans Vredeman De Vries (1526-1609), exhibition, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp; info: 03/242.04.16
- Until 8 December: *The world is a garden*, exhibition, garden architecture (prints) by Hans Vredeman De Vries, Rubenshuis, Antwerp; info: 03/232.01.03
- Until 8 December: *Magistral Middle Ages*, Miniatures and manuscripts from Charlemagne to Charles the Brave (800 - 1475), City Museum, Louvain; info: www.mm.leuven.be 016/22.45.64
- Until 13 October: *Huib Hoste* (architecture), exhibition, organised by Anno 02, Villa Eksterneest, Rumbeke-Roeselare; info: 051.24.33.88



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