

FLANDERS

THE DUTCH SPEAKING PART OF BELGIUM

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Flahaut causes a new row with the US

American Secretary of State, Colin Powell, called his Belgian colleague Louis Michel 'at the request of the White House' to express his displeasure at an interview with Defence Minister André Flahaut (PS) in the Flemish weekly magazine *Humo* (of 20 January). Flahaut confided to the magazine that if he was American, 'he would vote for a Democrat', which Washington promptly labelled 'unacceptable meddling'. Comments on the wastefulness and inefficiency of the American army also did not go down very well in Washington. On 23 November Premier Guy Verhofstadt, who wants to avoid at all costs any new row with the US, wrote a letter to his minister in which he wrapped him on the knuckles. The Flemish opposition party, the CD&V, is calling on Flahaut to resign (FF).

DE STANDAARD • 30 JANUARY

Last Friday Premier Verhofstadt was informed via the American embassy in Brussels that a new row was on the cards with Washington. Everything revolved around an interview with Minister André Flahaut in *Humo*. As is currently the custom, this was translated at the US embassy in Brussels and sent to Washington.

Reactions in the Pentagon, the State Department (Foreign Affairs) and even the White House were furious. In particular the passage on his preference for a Democrat in the White House stirred up bad feelings. But Flahaut's warnings about the 'inefficient' American army, the Genocide Act and the actions of the US in Iraq and Iran caused great resentment.

According to Flahaut 'the Americans are pouring so much money into their army that it simply can no longer function efficiently. If they have to move fifteen men from point A to point B, they will use three aircraft to make sure the operation is a success. We will send one aircraft, or better still: first check whether we can't hitch a ride with an ally,' says the Minister. American circles confirmed yesterday that Flahaut now more than ever has been declared 'persona non grata' in Washington. Premier Verhofstadt, who wants to avoid a new row with the US at any price, wrote a letter to his minister last Friday. In it he calls Flahaut's comments 'inappropriate towards an ally'. In the highest government circles the possibility of things being taken further is not being precluded.

WWW.USEMBASSY.BE

INTRODUCTION



Speculation over which coalition will assume power after election day is a favourite pastime of the press in the run-up to an election. Although there are still four-

and-a-half months until 13 June, people are already feverishly seeking clues that parties are employing strategies to prepare for this or that coalition. *De Tijd* (28 January) thus claims to have it on good authority that Christian Democrats on both sides of the linguistic border have agreed to tailor their strategy to a coalition with the Socialists of the SPA and PS. That would explain among other things why on the French-speaking side the cdH immediately rejected a request from the Mouvement Réformateur (MR) to form a 'pôle des Libertés'. At the CD&V people are convinced that both the SPA and PS are sending out signals that a change of coalition cannot be precluded. The CD&V sees one such signal in the announcement by SPA Chairman Stevaert that the jobs of all SPA ministers, including the Federal ones, are up for grabs after 13 June. The same coalition partner in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels must enable the CD&V to force a change at Federal level, says *De Tijd*. The next day *De Morgen* went a step further, advising the Liberal VLD not to deal with it like the classic pre-electoral rumour mill. The PS Social Affairs Minister Rudy Demotte, responsible for social security, is warning the Liberal coalition partner that the Socialists will never accept the government further cutting charges on labour for employers if cuts have to be made in social security. The paper points out that there is a conviction in Socialist circles that a Catholic-red coalition offers more guarantees of social security being left intact. Nor can the Liberals take any encouragement from the assessment of the Gembloux summit in this same edition by Chairman Kris Peeters of Unizo, the country's biggest organisation for the self-employed and small businesses. He flatly reproaches the Liberal ministers for having broken their promises with the paltry 100 million government contribution for social self-employed status. In this way Peeters has smashed the trophy to pieces they wanted to take to the elections. If people on both sides come to the conclusion that the Liberals are not really necessary, things may get pretty tricky for them, claims the paper. But as always with speculations, relationships of power are tacitly assumed in opinion polls and a lot can change in four-and-a-half months, as wise politicians know. You simply have to glance at the polls of January 2003 and compare them with the results on 18 May.

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief

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TAX REFORM

CD&V sees fiscal discrimination of married couples in tax reform

CD&V IS SPEAKING OF 'NATIONAL DECEPTION' AND IS ASKING THE COUNCIL OF STATE TO RESCIND THE ROYAL DECREE

Finance Minister Reynders (MR) had promised that the fiscal discrimination of married couples compared with cohabitants would finally be removed this year. It is the last phase in the Purple reform of income tax and brings the tax-free minimum for married couples in the advance tax payment (withholding tax) - the amount that is deducted from your gross salary each month and paid directly to the taxman - to the level of single people and cohabitants. It will apparently save an average family 800 to 900 euros. But for the past couple of weeks it has been clear that families will only feel that benefit in 2006, at the time the final bill from the taxman arrives. The Royal Decree of 15 Decem-

ber reveals that the government is not removing the discrimination via the advance tax payment. The opposition party CD&V is speaking of 'national deception' and is asking the Council of State to rescind the Royal Decree in question (FF).

CHRISTOF VANSCHOUBROECK •
DE STANDAARD • 28 JANUARY

'This will affect a total of 1.2 million families,' says CD&V MP Hendrik Bogaert. 'In this way these will be providing the government with an interest-free loan of 1.6 billion euros.' According to the CD&V, this intervention allows the government to make both

ends meet in the budget. 'Was it not the intention to boost consumption and therefore the economy thanks to these tax cuts?' The Royal Decree is in violation of the Constitution and is discriminating, concludes the party. After all, the Constitution stipulates that no tax can be introduced other than by an act. By deciding off its own bat, without the involvement of the legislator, to impose additional taxes on certain groups, such as married couples, by demanding more advances from them, the government is in breach of this principle. Furthermore, the stealth tax is in breach of the principle of equality, claims the CD&V. It was thus decided that married couples are not entitled to the tax relief in 2004, while legal cohabitants can claim it. The self-employed - who set the amount of their advances themselves - can also benefit from the relief immediately. The opposition party takes its arguments from earlier rulings by the Court of Arbitration and the Council of State.

WWW.RAADVST-CONSETAT.BE

DEMOCRACY

Cardinal Joos and Vlaams Blok on same wavelength as regards democracy

THE VLAAMS BLOK TABLED A BILL TO INTRODUCE MULTIPLE VOTING RIGHTS

In September last year, the completely unknown priest of Landskouter (80), Gustaaf Joos, a former church lawyer, made the headlines when he was remembered with a cardinalship by his former college friend Pope John Paul II. In the weekly *P-Magazine* the whole of Flanders has recently been able to get acquainted with the to put it mildly ultra-conservative views of the new cardinal. Thus, according to Joos only 5 to 10% of homosexuals and lesbians are actually differently inclined sexually. The vast majority are sexually perverts, he claims. The Flemish writers Hugo Claus and Jef Geeraerts are remembered with the pet name 'lechers'. He describes politicians as nitwits and has a low opinion of democracy. He finds it laughable that a 'whipper-snapper' of 18 has the same voting rights as a father of a family of seven. Indignation over the cardinal's comments was widespread. The Centre for Equal Op-

portunities and the Fight against Racism and various other organisations lodged a complaint. Cardinal Danneels and the bishops' conference openly distanced themselves from Joos' controversial opinions. Nevertheless, one party appears to agree with the priest as regards its concept of democracy. A week earlier, of all things, the Vlaams Blok tabled a bill to introduce multiple voting rights (FF).

BART BRINCKMAN • DE STANDAARD •
27 JANUARY

Last week, of all things, the party quietly tabled a bill to give parents of large families more votes. Strictly speaking it is not about multiple voting rights, but the extension of single voting rights to all underage children. That right must be exercised by the parent or guardian. For the party it is about 'a refinement' of democracy. 'By definition, politics is

concerned with the future. Families with children have more to lose in the society of tomorrow.' According to the Blok, parents with children contribute positively to society. 'It is today's children who will pay for the national debt and pensions later.' According to Blok MP Gerolf Annemans, 'families with children represent a value that deserves to be better rewarded in a demographic and cultural context.'

LABOUR MARKET

Belgium protects job market against migration from Eastern Europe

IN THE NETHERLANDS THE BAR HAS BEEN SET AT 22,000 WORKERS A YEAR.

The expansion of the European Union in May will not bring about a mass migration of cheap labour from Central and Eastern European countries. To prevent this, the fifteen EU Member States have introduced a transitional period during which they can keep their borders closed to workers from the ten new Member States for up to seven years. Germany, Denmark and recently also the Netherlands decided to impose a restriction on the number of permitted Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, etc. In the Netherlands the bar has been set at 22,000 workers a year. In Belgium there is even still a ban on migration. The Flemish business community finds this absurd (FF).

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In Belgium the current ban on migration will remain in force for at least another two years and a work permit will only be issued to workers from the new Member States in exceptional cases. The Flemish Employment Minister, Renaat Landuyt (SP.A), defends this strict approach. 'A work permit can only be issued if the company has demonstrated its economic need for this. The company and VDAB must first try and fill the vacancy from the domestic market, from local job-seekers. If need be after providing extra training for Flemish unemployed.'

Landuyt will hear nothing of an extension of the existing exceptions to the ban on migration. These currently apply to horticulture (requirement of 45,000 seasonal workers each year), inland shipping and freight traffic.

The Flemish employer's umbrella organisation VOKA is, however, calling for a review of the strict Belgian and Flemish policy concerning labour migration.

Flemish businesses are being placed at a competitive disadvantage, says Mark Andries of the VOKA research division. 'Dutch and German firms can recruit in Hungary or Poland. They will even be able to come and work in this country with these foreigners. Even Polish firms will be perfectly able to come here and work on a subcontracting basis, for example in construction. With Polish workers. But a Flemish firm can't hire Polish construction workers. This contradiction is untenable. Just to be perfectly clear: this is not about cheap labour, because they are covered by all the applicable pay and work conditions in Belgium.' According to VOKA, our country must follow the Dutch example of a permitted quota. 'We must not prevent a great many technical key jobs for which there are no or insufficient Flemish candidates from being filled.'

WWW.VOKA.BE

WWW.VDAB.BE

Flemish Government has scoreboard

At the Employment Conference at the end of December the Flemish Government approved a whole list of measures intended to boost the Flemish economy. Employers' organisations such as Unizo and VOKA immediately announced that they did not want to wait for an 'even longer queue of unimplemented measures'. Minister-President Somers (VLD) reacted to this criticism by announcing an on-line scoreboard. This would allow everyone to monitor the progress of decisions as they were implemented. The scoreboard has been in operation on the website www.ondernemingsconferentie.be since 27 January. In this way Bart Somers wants to gain the trust of the people and social partners (FF).

BART HAECK • DE TIJD • 28 JANUARY

The decisions of the meeting are spread over six domains at www.ondernemingsconferentie.be: administrative simplification, economic action, employment, innovation, education and energy. For each measure the website gives a brief explanation of the content, shows what was planned and what has actually been implemented and adds the details of the cabinet employees working on the dossier. If everything is going according to plan, there will be a smiling face next to the measure. If the implementation is taking longer than planned, the face will look sad.

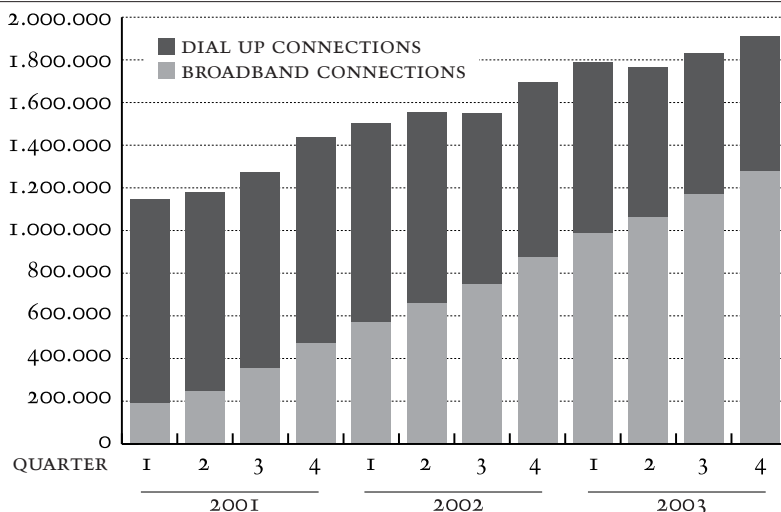
'We're putting ourselves in a very vulnerable position with this scoreboard,' says Somers, 'but it's necessary to gain the trust of the people and social partners. They often complain that it takes ages to implement an agreement. Such criticism is occasionally justified.'

According to Somers, the scoreboard is an 'example of how the government should function'. The Minister-President therefore supports the idea of also using the system to monitor the coalition agreement and September's policy statement.

Of the measures adopted by the government at the Employment Conference, 22% will not be finished before the elections. Half the decisions must be tangible on the ground before the elections of 13 June.

WWW.ondernemingsconferentie.be

At the end of 2003 Belgium numbered 1.89 million internet connections of which 1.27 million were broadband



SOURCE: ISPA | TIJD GRAPHICS

NEW YEAR'S RECEPTIONS OF PARTIES

Groen! and N-VA go for electoral threshold

Last weekend all the Flemish parties, apart from Spirit and the Vlaams Blok, held their New Year's reception. Obviously these all focused on the coming Flemish and European elections on 13 June. For the small parties Groen! and the N-VA, the electoral threshold of 5% is the target.

The N-VA is aiming for five seats in the Flemish Parliament and Chairman Bourgeois has already announced that his party will not join a Flemish government with SP.A-Spirit.

Groen! Chairwoman Dua labelled the Purples without the Greens the definitive choice for centre politics and Groen! the only progressive vote in Flanders (FF).

KOEN VIDAL • DE MORGEN •
26 JANUARY

We need Groen!' was the central message of Groen Chairwoman Vera Dua at her party's New Year's reception. To support this statement, Dua repeated the list of achievements of the last Purple-Green government that have been

removed by the current Purple government: the Eco-Bonus Act, the pesticide reduction plan, the dismantling of the development co-operation budget, the regionalisation of the Arms Act, and so on.

According to Dua, voters who want to avoid such progressive subjects languishing on the sidelines of political decision-making have only one choice on 13 June. In this sense she has optimistically announced that Groen! will easily clear the new electoral threshold 5%. Groen! is going to the polls with three themes: a human-scale economy, a healthy life and good, cheap housing for all.

WWW.GROEN.BE

ILSE DE VOOGHT • DE TIJD •
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The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie does not intend collaborating in a majority with the Socialists. 'The VLD wants to continue with SP.A-Spirit. However, the CD&V also wants to govern with SP.A-

Spirit. Well, the N-VA does not intend to help form a majority with the Socialists,' said Chairman Geert Bourgeois at the New Year's lunch. Bourgeois once again lashed out sharply at electoral reform in general and the introduction of the electoral threshold in particular. 'Changing the rules so soon before the elections is scandalous.' The N-VA is to ask the Court of Arbitration to suspend the electoral threshold. The election campaign of the Flemish-nationalist party is focusing on five themes and is aimed at the 'Flemish hardworking middle classes'. 'We are talking about families who pay a lot of taxes and get too little back in return. They are the victims of the Socialist's freebie-policy,' said Bourgeois. A first theme is the application of a separate Flemish policy. 'Flanders must be able to apply its own fiscal, labour, family, health and transport policies.' Education, a better combination of work and family, more Flemish jobs and reliable government are the other themes. The N-VA's election campaign begins on 1 February with a conference in Hasselt.

WWW.N-VA.BE

NEW YEAR'S RECEPTIONS OF PARTIES

Successful CD&V candidates must accept mandate

FORMER CHAIRMAN STEFAAN DE CLERCK IS CALLING FOR NEW PEOPLE AT THE TOP OF THE CD&V'S ELECTION LISTS

At the New Year's reception of the Christian Democrats in Anderlecht's Market hall Chairman Yves Leterme outlined the main aspects of his party's election campaign. A few days before the conference, former chairman Stefaan De Clerck had again cranked up the tension between young and old in the party by calling for new people at the top of the CD&V's election lists. He called on former minister-president Luc Vanden Brande, former Flemish minister Eric Van Rompuy and former European leading candidate Miet Smet to move aside in the interests of the renewal of the party. At least Luc Vanden Brande was not pleased with De Clerck's call. CD&V Chairman Leterme reacted

with the announcement that the lists were a mix of experience and youth. However, the maxim is that whoever is elected on 13 June, both in the Flemish and European Parliament, will not send a successor, but will accept their mandate themselves. Leterme himself is taking part in the Flemish elections and will therefore leave the Federal Parliament if elected (FF).

BART HAECK • DE TIJD • 24 JANUARY

Through his comments Leterme is contrasting himself with Premier Verhofstadt. Earlier the latter announced that in the European elections he wanted to know whether voters valued his efforts

as head of the Belgian government for Europe. If he is elected to the European Parliament, however, Verhofstadt will not take up his mandate, but will remain Prime minister.

CD&V will only join a Flemish government if there is further state reform, reiterated Leterme. The party wants Flanders to be given greater control over labour, transport and family policy. 'Only in this way can the CD&V make the difference in a government,' he said. With the Flemish elections on the horizon, the CD&V is calling for investments in education and the care sector. 'We want no part of the inducement of tax cuts,' said Leterme in a swipe at the VLD. And he also lashed out at the SP.A with the comment 'we don't use the endless inducement of phantom freebies'.

'Promising heaven on earth where taxes are concerned sounds attractive, but we stand for good community facilities in terms of care, culture and education,' he said. The CD&V is in favour of a thirteenth month for child benefit.

WWW.CDENV.BE

NEW YEAR'S RECEPTIONS

SP.A reshuffles ministerial posts after 13 June

At the SP.A's New Year's reception Party Chairman Steve Stevaert surprised supporters and opponents with a strategic move par excellence. He announced that all SP.A ministers - both the 3 Federal ministers, the state secretary and the government commissioner and the 2 Flemish ministers - would resign the day after 13 June. On that day the party chairman will if necessary reshuffle all ministerial posts. In his own words, Stevaert is doing this to 'keep ministers on their toes' and prevent them from taking their positions for granted. With this move Stevaert has the right explanation ready for also deploying his Federal ministers in the Flemish elections. If a federal SP.A excellency is asked why he appears on a list for the Flemish Parliament, he can answer quite simply that he is in his period of notice. However, *De Morgen* is taking the SP.A chairman's lesson in humility with a large pinch of salt (FF).

Opinion

RUUD GOOSSENS • DE MORGEN •
26 JANUARY

Are we really too paranoid if we suspect that the SP.A chairman is gradually beginning to prepare a way out for (Federal ministers) Frank Vandenbroucke or Johan Vande Lanotte if the Socialists become the biggest Flemish party on 13 June? And if the SP.A has to find a minister-president in its ranks? In other words, in contrast to the official spin on

modesty, is there a little hubris in the SP.A ranks? Who still believes that Freya Van den Bossche (Federal Environment Minister) or Kathleen Van Brempt (Federal State Secretary for Labour Conditions) will remain where they are?

Not that the Socialists should receive many lessons from their political rivals. For this we simply have to refer to the large-scale switch made by the VLD last year in the Flemish Government (Dewael and Van Hengel were replaced by Somers, Ceyssens and Keulen, ed.). Or to Premier Verhofstadt, who will head the VLD's European list 'to let the voter judge his work of the past five years in the European Council'. And who believes that Jean-Luc Dehaene (probable leading candidate on the CD&V's European list) will actually give five years' diligent work in the European Parliament?

This still means that since yesterday we have had a Federal Government in which a quarter of the ministers have just begun working their notice. Should we really believe that this Purple government is seriously concerned with the problems of 'the people' in these economically hard times if half the team already seems to be concentrating on its next assignment? The need for a year or so without elections is beginning to become great. Let these Flemish and Federal elections be held at the same time again, as a matter of urgency.

WWW.SP.BE

VLD: safety net for trapeze artists

At the VLD's New Year's reception the party chairman drew extensively on the terminology of the circus to shower criticism on his Socialist government partner in guarded terms. The SP.A and Stevaert were compared with trapeze artists performing stunts. The VLD with the safety net that ensures that they don't break their necks. For the Liberals, further tax cuts is the central topic (FF).

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'Let's get rid of the habit of solving each problem with a tax cut, the tendency to introduce cheques for everything, of the instinct to make as many things as possible free. We know nothing is free and that at the end of the day someone, usually hardworking dual-income couples, has to foot the bill,' said De Gucht. After Stevaert's surprise move on Sunday with the announcement that he would consider all SP.A ministers to have resigned after the regional elections, De Gucht simply said: 'I don't believe putting ministers on notice is the right way to motivate them.'

Noteworthy: the VLD has qualified its interest in becoming the biggest party in Flanders on 13 June. 'Move forward again' is the ambition. De Gucht also defended his collaboration with Vivant. He admitted that Vivant was too small to make a difference, but it was about promoting the idea of 'securing our long-term welfare by in future taxing products instead of working people'.

WWW.VLD.BE

FINANCE

Mortgage lending grew, consumer credit stagnated in 2003

FF EDITORIAL TEAM

Between January and October the Belgians borrowed around 13 billion euros in mortgages. That is 56% more than over the same period last year, according to the annual report of the Professional Credit Association (Beroepsvereniging van het Krediet, BVK). However, of that, 2.8 billion or 21% goes towards refinancing, where an existing more expensive mortgage is swapped for a cheaper one. Around 6 billion or 45% of loans were taken out to buy property, only

15.2% for a new house.

The consumer credit market (purchases of cars, household appliances, etc.), conversely, stagnated in the first half of 2003. However, the BVK expects that this will get going again this year because the consumer confidence index has risen and consumer credit normally follows this index. Nevertheless, the BVK is complaining that consumer credit is becoming less and less profitable for credit suppliers due to the ever-stricter regulations. In particular, the imposition of a maximum interest rate and cost

percentage by the government is a thorn in the BVK's flesh.

The credit centre of the Nationale Bank has also published its figures. These show that around 507,000 loans (7.9% of the total), which were taken out by 353,000 people (8%), are struggling with payment arrears. All together this comes to a record amount of 1.976 billion euros, some 3% more than at the end of 2002. 14% of that amount are overdraft facilities (credit card, mail-order companies and chains offering credit facilities), 45% instalment loans and 36% mortgages (*De Standaard*, 28 January).

WWW.UPC-BVK.BE/ WWW.NBB.BE
WWW.NBB.BE

Anciaux expects DHL to behave more seriously

If DHL is unable to increase the number of night flights at its European hub in Zaventem to 34,000 in 2008, the courier firm will leave Belgium. So said Peter Kruse, boss of DHL Europe, to *De Tijd* on the fringe of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. If the expansion in Zaventem fails, Bierset or Chièvres in Wallonia are not viable alternatives. Splitting activities between two airports is not an option, according to Kruse. On the contrary, East Midlands in the UK and Cologne and Leipzig in Germany are feasible candidates. The growth of DHL, which incidentally is a subsidiary of Deutsche Post, in Zaventem can create 5,400 new jobs and an investment of 100 million euros by 2012. By adopting this position Kruse has trashed the government's proposal put forward at the summit in Gembloux in which a different location in Wallonia is suggested as an alternative. Federal Mobility Minister Anciaux expects DHL, which two weeks ago promised Premier Verhofstadt that it agreed with the government's proposal, to behave more seriously. According to DHL spokesman Xavier De Buck, for Kruse Zaventem remains an absolute priority, but as soon as alternatives have to be sought, foreign locations will also be considered (FF).

SUE SOMERS • HET LAATSTE NIEUWS •
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'The importance of thousands of jobs demands more seriousness than DHL

has shown up to now,' says Anciaux. 'DHL wants a blank cheque, without being clear about its own efforts and undertakings. The government can never give such a blank cheque.' Anciaux is calling on DHL to sit down round the negotiating table with the airport operator BIAC during February with a clear dossier. DHL spokesman Xavier De Buck is in turn astonished by this. 'It's rubbish that we haven't yet submitted a clear dossier,' claims De Buck. 'We sent it to BIAC in 2003.'

KATRIEN VERSTRAETE • DE TIJD •
27 JANUARY

Over to DHL to come up with commitments on a quieter fleet, a restriction on noise pollution and a possible relocation of night flights to day flights. Then we will see if and how employment and respect for the environment can be reconciled. Only then will the Brussels and the Flemish Region join in the talks.

The Flemish Region is responsible for the environmental licence for airport operator BIAC. The current licence is valid until 2005 and limits the number of night flights to 25,000. DHL wants to increase this to 34,000 night flights in the period 2008-2012. BIAC has already submitted an application for a new environmental licence to the permanent deputation of Flemish Brabant.

WWW.BIAC.BE
WWW.BERTANCIAUX.BE
WWW.DHL.BE

Jams cost 114 million euros a year

In 2002, Belgian motorists spent 9.2 million hours in traffic jams. That is costing us 114 million euros a year. The environmental damage even amounts to 361 million euros a year. This is evident from the study by the Leuven agency Transport & Mobility, which made the calculations on the basis of the 26.2 billion kilometres of traffic recorded by counters and cameras on Belgian motorways (FF).

TOM YSEBAERT • DE STANDAARD •
27 JANUARY

T&M calculated that private cars lose 8.3 million hours through jams, and HGVs 900,000 hours. These lost hours do not mean that everyone is always late. 'People get to work on time but that is because they leave home earlier and so lose out on their own free time,' explains Griet De Ceuster of T&M. Queues are lost time, and since time is money, the loss value can be calculated.

For this T&M used the following rate: for an HGV one hour costs 46 euros, for a business traveller 22 euros, for a commuter 6 euros and for all others 4 euros. This gives 114 million euros in queue costs. Three quarters of all queue costs are incurred around Brussels and Antwerp, and 92% in Flanders.

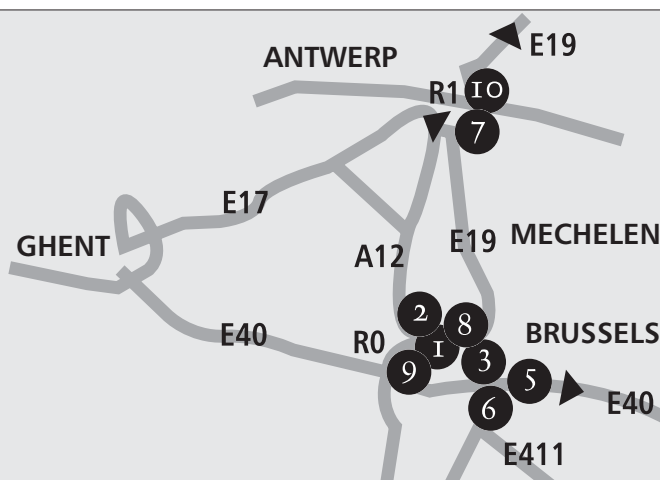
Apart from the grief of queuing, the mass of traffic also causes damage to the environment. Each year 22,000 tonnes of nitrogen oxides and 3,800 tonnes of volatile organic substances are released into the air. To this can be added 1,300 tonnes of fine dust. This emission gives people asthma and other disorders of the airways, causing several premature deaths. Taking aspects such as medical care and sick leave into account, this gives a cost of 360 million euros. 80% of this is due to fine dust, which is much more harmful gram for gram.

STEFAN VANDER STRAETEN •
HET LAATSTE NIEUWS • 27 JANUARY

Conclusion of the investigators: 'During peak evening times our motorways are packed. The solution is road-pricing. There is no alternative other than to make half the drivers - who do not belong on the motorway at that time - pay, so that they stay away at these peak times.'

WWW.TMLEUVEN.BE

Main traffic jam spots on Belgian roads in 2002



SOURCE: TRANSPORT & MOBILITY LEUVEN | GRAPH DE MORGEN

TOY SHOPS

Blokker takes over Christiaensen toy shops

Blokker Holding is taking over the Belgian chain of toyshops, Christiaensen. In so doing, the Dutch group is consolidating its position in the toys market, since it is already active in Belgium with Bart Smit and Maxi Toys. It is taking over 9 stores and the name of the chain from Limburg entrepreneur Marc Collett. The other 24 stores will continue to be operated by independent franchise-holders who had a contract with Collett's Christiaensen company. The current franchise contracts allow the independent operators considerable freedom, for example in putting together the range and setting prices. However, the question is whether Blokker Holding, which is known for its rather aggressive commercial policy, will leave this freedom intact (FF).

RUBEN MOOIJMAN • DE STANDAARD •
24 JANUARY

Blokker has apparently committed itself to leaving the formula unchanged and to investing in new stores. Collett says he has sold the chain because a stronger structure was needed, for example for IT systems and the use of the Internet. He also had difficulty with his dual role: he acted simultaneously as franchise-provider and franchise-holder of the formula. 'That wasn't always easy to combine.' This dual role dates from 1998, when Collett took over the Christiaensen name from GIB.

Also the fact that Blokker holds a strong financial position played a part. 'After all, it easily costs 300,000 euros to open a new store.' Christiaensen still has expansion possibilities, but it was too much for Collett. 'Especially since

the toy business is not doing as well as a couple of years ago. Profit margins are under pressure.'

Apart from Blokker, the Colruyt-formula Dreamland was also in the market for Christiaensen. According to Collett, the fact that it went to Blokker has to do with the speed at which the Dutch reacted.

With the 34 Christiaensen stores, Blokker now has by far the largest number of retail outlets in the Belgian toy market. With the 27 Maxitoys sites and 20 Bart Smit stores the group has a total of 81 toy shops, compared with 22 for the number two, the Fun chain of the Mitiska group and 18 for the number three, Dreamland, a full subsidiary of Colruyt. Nevertheless, in terms of sales the three groups pretty much balance each other out, estimates Dreamland Director Johan Geeroms.

WWW.DREAMLAND.BE
WWW.CHRISTIAENSEN.BE
WWW.BLOKKER.BE

TELEVISION

Jambers sells television production company

EYEWORBS BOSS REINOUT OERLEMANS SAYS THAT BOTH PARTIES HAVE REACHED AN AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE.

Paul Jambers is a familiar appearance in the world of Flemish Television. Like no other he has the knack of making popular human-interest programmes. Jambers learned the style with public broadcasting company VRT, set up his own production company 'Jambers Television Productions' and in 1992 went to work exclusively for the commercial competitor VTM. There his 'real-life human interest reports' on farmers desperately looking for a wife, prostitutes, S&M couples, mistresses and other 'Flemings with mediagenic traits' ensured record viewing figures. In 2002 the production company 'De Televisiefabriek' took over all the activities of Jambers Television Productions. Jambers himself took a majority share of 51.2%. Now the sixty-year-old Jambers has announced that he is selling De Televisiefabriek ('The television plant') to the Dutch production company Eyeworks. In 2002 De Televisiefabriek turned over 7.81 million euros. Its net profit came to 2 million euros. In addition to human-inter-

est programmes, De Televisiefabriek also produces talk shows, infotainment, documentary series and even a financial-economic magazine for VRT. Yet Jambers is apparently holding talks with commercial channel VTM on an exclusivity contract (FF).

MICHAËL SEPPIHA • DE TIJD •
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Paul Jambers confirms that talks with Dutch production company Eyeworks on the take-over of De Televisiefabriek have already been going on for several months. Eyeworks boss Reinout Oerlemans says that both parties have reached an agreement in principle. He praises De Televisiefabriek's corporate culture and sees 'many chances and opportunities' in the collaboration with the Flemish production company. The two production companies know each other. De Televisiefabriek recently began producing the Eyeworks programme 'De Tien' in Belgium. Eyeworks makes programmes for both

public and private broadcasters and is also established in Germany. Oerlemans says that Eyeworks will take over a 'large majority' of the shares and that De Televisiefabriek's management will receive the remaining shares.

Jambers also confirms that De Televisiefabriek is negotiating with the commercial broadcaster VTM over an exclusivity contract. 'These exclusivity negotiations have nothing to do with the sale of De Televisiefabriek and this agreement will certainly not take effect this year,' says Jambers. He wants to base himself on the seven-year contract that fellow production company Woestijnvis signed with VRT. Admittedly, the exclusive agreement only takes effect when the contracts between the De Televisiefabriek and the other Flemish broadcasters expire.

WWW.TELEVISIEFABRIEK.BE
WWW.EYEWORBS.TV
WWW.WOESTIJNVIS.BE

Diary

MUSIC, DANCE THEATRE

- 17 January to 4 February: *Connexive#1: Vera Mantero*, concerts, performances, workshops, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: www.vooruit.be 09/267.28.28
- 3 February: *Symphonieorchester der Bayerischen Rundfunks* conducted by *Mariss Janssons*, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- 4 February: *Alfred (piano) and Adrian Brendel (violin)* with van Beethoven, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- 4 February: *Orchestre national de jazz de France*, Marni Theatre, Elsenne, info: 02/217.48.00
- 4 February: *Unheimliche Geschichten*, silent movie with live music, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- 4 to 7 February: *Walter Hus @ Frederic Rzewski, Preludes and Fugas*, Kaaithheaterstudio's, Brussels; info: www.kaaithheater.be
- 5 February: *Bart Schneemann Duo's* with music by Bittova, Piazzolla, Brugers, Morini, Andriessen, Britten and Bartok, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- 6 February: *Dolores Agujetas (flamenco)*, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- 5 February: *Jewish singers with Liturgical music in the Muslim world*, De Bijloke, Ghent; info: www.debijloke.be 09/269.92.92
- 6 and 7 February: *Charles Linehan, Grand Junction/New Quartet, dance*; Kaaithheater, Brussels; info: www.kaaithheater.be
- 6 February: *Lassus and Petrarca by Huelgas Ensemble* conducted by *Paul Van Nevel*, De Bijloke, Ghent; info: www.debijloke.be 09/269.92.92
- 6 and 7 February: *Defilharmonie* conducted by *Philippe Herreweghe, Alessandro Moccia* (violin) with WA Mozart, van Beethoven and Schubert, Koningin Elisabethzaal, Antwerp and De Bijloke, Ghent; info: 0800/21036 and www.debijloke.be 09/269.92.92
- 6 and 7 February: *Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz with Der Meister und Margareta* (German spoken) directed by *Frank Castorf*, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- 7 February: *Alksandar Madzar (piano) with Schönberg, Haydn, Rameau and Ravel*, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be

- Until 8 February: *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse, Ricerca Consort and Handspring Puppet Company*, director: William Kentridge, De Munt, Brussels; info: 070/23.39.39 www.demunt.be
- Until 10 February: *Alceste by Christoph Willibald Gluck*, director: *Robert Wilson*, De Munt, Brussels; info: 070/23.39.39 www.demunt.be
- 4 February: *Quatuor Diotima @ Noriko Kawai*, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
- 4 and 5 February: *De Farra, Het Net, Mercat de les Flors*, dance, Concertgebouw, Brugge; info: www.concertgebouw.be
- 5 February: *Dublabb, Up our sleeve*, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: 09/267.28.28 www.vooruit.be
- 6 February: *Fulgeria @ Mahala Gipsies; Boban Markovic Orkestar @ guest Esma Redzepova* Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
- 8 February: *Orchestre Baobab (Senegal)* Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
- 9 February: *Koninklijk Concertgebouworkest Amsterdam* conducted by *Ricardo Chailly* with 9th symphony by Mahler, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- 10 February: *Maria Joao Pires and Ricardo Castro (piano)* with Schubert and Chopin, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- 10 and 11 February: *Needlapb, Need Company*, theatre, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: 09/267.28.28 www.vooruit.be
- 12 February: *Roby Lakatos, Myriam Fuks, Patricia Kopatsjinskaja @ Viktor Kopatsjinski* Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
- 12 February: *Spectra Ensemble* conducted by *Filip Rathe* with *Christina Ascher (mezzosoprano)*, compositions by Luciano Berio, De Bijloke, Ghent; info: www.debijloke.be 09/269.92.92
- 16 February: *Defilharmonie* conducted by *Daniele Calegari* with *Stravinsky and Strauss*, Koningin Elisabethzaal, Antwerp; info: 0900/00311
- 12 to 14 February: *Marten Spangberg (Sw) with All All Over Over All All/Artists'-talk*. Kaaithheaterstudio's Brussels; info: 02/201.59.59 www.kaaithheater.be
- 12, 13 and 14 February: *Flanders Symphony Orchestra* conducted by *Etienne Siebens* with *Schubert, Sibelius and Bartok*, Concertgebouw Brugge, Conservatory Brussels and De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.symfonieorkest.be 050/84.05.87
- 13 to 16 February: *Pina Bausch with Tanztheater Wuppertal, Der Fensterputzer*, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248/28/28 www.desingel.be
- 14 February: *José Mercé @ Pepe Habichuela, Flamenco*, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248/28/28 www.desingel.be

EXPO

- Until 28 March: *Genovanversaevicaversa*, exhibition about Fashion, Antwerp and Genova, Fashion Museum, Antwerp; info: 03/470.27.70 www.momu.be
- Until 29 February: *Vietnam*, Art and culture from prehistoric times to today, exhibition, Royal Museum of Art and History, Jubelpark, Brussels; info: www.kmkg-mrah.be
- Until 1 February: *Europalia, Italy: a particular Renaissance, Ferrara and the dukes of Este*, exhibition, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- Until 10 March: *Icons of Flemish Design*, Lokettenzaal, Flemish Parliament, Brussels; info: www.vlaamsparlement.be
- Until 1 February: *Venus Unveiled*, PSK, Brussels; www.europalia.be, www.bozar.be
- Until 30 May: *Human, all too human*, photo exhibition on psychiatry, Museum Dr. Guislain, Ghent; info: www.museumdrguislain.be
- Until 31 March: *Undercover, The Prinzhorn Collection*. The collection was abused by the Nazi's to build the exhibition 'Degraded Art'; exhibition, Museum Dr. Guislain, Ghent; info: www.museumdrguislain.be
- Until 25 April: *The art of the Islam*, exhibition, Museum of the Cinquante-naire, Parque du Cinquante-naire, Brussels
- Until 9 May: *Fernand Khnopff*, retrospective exhibition, KMSK, Brussels; info:
- Until 21 March: *Dream extensions with Mariko Moro, Jane @ Louise Wilson, Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven, Georgina Starr, SMAK*, Ghent; info: www.smak.be
- Until 29 February: *Once upon a time*, Belgian art in the nineties, MUHKA, Antwerp; info: www.muhka.be
- Until 29 February: *Stalking Hiëronymus* with works by *Hans Vandekerckhove, Anselm Kiefer and AR Penck*, PMMK, Ostend; info: www.pmmk.be
- Until 23 March: *Henry Lacoste, Art Deco*, exhibition Museum for Architecture, Elsenne (Brussels)
- Until 8 February: *Da Pompei a Roma* (Europalia), Museum of the Cinquante-naire, Brussels
- Until 29 February: *100 years, 100 objects*, Design Museum, Ghent
- Until 14 February: *l'Eau et les Rêves*, exhibition with Israeli and Palestinian artists; Witte Zaal, Ghent; info: 09/225.42.90
- 6 to 15 February: *Antiques Fair*, Brussels; info: 02/513.48.31 www.antiques-fair.be
- 13 February to 4 April: *B-Architects*, exhibition De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248/28/28 www.desingel.be



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