Hefty traffic fines in the offing

The Federal Inner Cabinet has taken a decision that will shortly see hefty fines introduced to punish serious traffic offences. Drivers who drive 20 km/h too fast will pay a EUR 250 fine, and driving at 30 and 40 km/h above the speed limit will land the offender a fine of EUR 500. The fines are more than twice as high as in other European countries. Driving licences will be withdrawn in the event of more serious offences, such as driving under the influence or driving at speeds in excess of 40 km/h over the speed limit. Although the drastic but unpopular measures are a federal competence, they have come into being chiefly as a result of pressure from the Deputy Minister-President of the Government of Flanders Steve Stevaert (Sp.a). Apart from this, Stevaert also has reason to feel satisfied on another account, for 100 unmanned cameras are to be installed on Flemish regional roads before the year is out. However, everyone is in agreement that the draconian measures will only bring about the intended change of mentality among drivers if more controls are actually carried out. Reinforcing the traffic police is therefore an urgent priority (FF).

The Belgian Institute for Road Safety (IVB) and the automobile organisation VTB-VAB reacted with scepticism. ‘If the government does not also increase the chance of being caught, there’s little point in it. Drivers must have the feeling that there is a possibility of them being caught, otherwise a number of them will carry on hitting the floor with the accelerator, according to traffic psychologist Ludo Kluppels of the IVB. Maarten Matienko of the VTB-VAB is of the view that the new system only increases the inequality among drivers: between those who slip through the net and those who get caught. ‘People will feel unjustly treated if they are caught,’ says Kluppels. ‘They are one of the many who commit an offence.’ The difference has little to do with actual conduct on the road.

THEA SWIESTRA
DE MORGEN • 8 FEBRUARY

The introduction of hefty traffic fines is a significant step in the fight against serious traffic offences. The fines, which are more than twice as high as in other European countries, are intended to reinforce traffic police and encourage drivers to act responsibly on the road. The decision taken by the Federal Inner Cabinet is a federal competence, but it is hoped that the introduction of these measures will bring about a change in mentality among drivers. The Belgian Institute for Road Safety and the automobile organisation VTB-VAB have expressed scepticism about the effectiveness of the measures if more controls are not carried out. Reinforcing the traffic police is therefore an urgent priority.
Federal Agency for Food Safety found wanting

There has been a nasty sting in the tale in the case of the PCB contamination in the animal feed company Hamekop in Roeselare. Thirty-three samples that were taken on 2 and 3 January were only analysed by the Federal Agency for Food Safety on Thursday 31 January. In one of the samples a high level of PCB was detected. Minister for Public Health Magda Aelvoet ‘thought she hadn’t heard correctly’ when she was given the news. She assumed that all the samples from the circumscribed risk period between 2 and 15 January had already been analysed. Aelvoet immediately had the seven pig breeding farms where the contaminated feed had been received embargoed, but analyses of the pigs showed that there was no contamination. Aelvoet is now having an inquiry carried out to find out how it had happened. According to the Minister in the meantime had an internal inquiry carried out on older samples ‘because’ the instruction for no further analyses to be performed on samples taken prior to 4 January. An inspector in the field, Etienne Cobbaert, reportedly chose to disregard this instruction, and went ahead with the analyses. However, it is also possible that Cobbaert himself was in the wrong for not immediately sending all the samples together for analysis. Still according to De Morgen and Het Laatste Nieuws [2 February], there are indications that general consultant Houins of the ‘Raw Materials Inspectorate’ had given the instruction for no further analyses to be performed on samples taken prior to 4 January. An inspector in the field, Etienne Cobbaert, reportedly chose to disregard this instruction, and went ahead with the analyses. However, it is also possible that Cobbaert himself was in the wrong for not immediately sending all the samples together for analysis. Still according to De Morgen (4 February), Houins reportedly announced at a meeting that no further tests were to be carried out on older samples ‘because the (animal feed) industry had already suffered enough’. Aelvoet has in the meantime had an internal inquiry carried out at the Federal Agency for Food Safety, which was set up in the wake of the dioxin crisis in 1999.

When on the evening of Tuesday 6 February Aelvoet was told that a further 26 samples of doctored animal feed (with dewormer) from the animal feed concern Hanekop had been discovered that had not been checked, it was the last straw for her. She immediately suspended Aelvoet, who herself retained the government’s trust, gave audit firm Andersen the job of looking into what had gone wrong. The opposition is alerting the minister to her political responsibility, whilst the civil servants are calling for inspector Cobbaert, who has the reputation of being very upright and honest, to be reinstated as soon as possible.

Opinion
IWAN BROECKMEYER • DE FINANCIEEL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 7 FEBRUARY

Ten days after the so-called mini PCB crisis flared up, the debate is finally nearing the core of the issue. Just two years after it was officially set up, the Agency for Food Safety is still nothing more than a flimsy gauze screen. He who takes the trouble to look behind it finds the age-old Public Health and Agriculture administrations, complete with their bigwigs. The Agriculture departments, in particular, are making little effort to adapt to the new corporate culture. The agency’s senior executive, Luc Beernaert, has to take the rap for the consequences, together with a lower-ranking official. Aelvoet said yesterday morning that his suspension was a reaction not only to the latest incident, but also to a lack of initiative over a whole period. In the trade unions, the word is also that Beernaert had never managed to take a hard line against the barons who still maintain their department behind the scenes. But if Beernaert has been found wanting structurally, people must at least venture to raise questions as to the political responsibility of the minister under whose aegis he operated. Aelvoet and Prime Minister Verhofstadt had hitherto held the Agency for Food Safety up as one of the great achievements of the Purple/Green government. But the agency is the umpteenth confirmation that a nice blueprint alone is not enough to bring about change in the field.

Unemployment registers a slower rise in January
FF EDITORIAL TEAM
The unemployment figures for January have been released, and admittedly show a rise of 0.9% vis-à-vis December and of 1.1% vis-à-vis January 2001. However, the rate of the increase has slowed compared with the figures for the previous month, December 2001, when a rise of 2.4% was recorded vis-à-vis November and of 12.5% vis-à-vis December 2000. At the end of January there was a total of 181,140 registered unemployed persons in search of work. This category is made up of those in full unemployment and entitled to benefit, jobseekers in the qualifying period (the large numbers of people who have just completed their studies), and those who freely register with the Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Agency (VDAB). It is this latter group, in particular, that has seen its numbers swell appreciably. The Flemish Labour Minister Landuyt [Sp.a] is optimistic about the immediate future. The figures for temporary employees show that we are over the worst, according to the Minister in De Financieel-Economische Tijd (2 February). Moreover the number of vacancies fell by barely 0.2% in 2001, although one difficulty remains the fact that just 77% of the jobs are actually filled. It is striking that the policy for reducing the numbers of the long-term unemployed is proving successful. This group has shrunk by 13.6%, whilst over the last year a large number of new unemployed persons (+25%) has joined the ranks, and the number of highly-skilled jobless has risen sharply (+19.9%).
Honorary doctorate for prince Philippe causes controversy

FF EDITORIAL TEAM

The presentation of the honorary doctorates at the Catholic University of Leuven (KU Leuven) was followed with more than the usual degree of interest on 4 February. The reason was the award of an honorary doctorate to crown prince Philippe. Others honoured in the same way included Carla Del Ponte, chief prosecutor at the Yugoslav war crimes trial, Domenico Lenarduzzi, the founding father of the Bologna declaration for European education, and Lord Browne of Madingley, who as group chief executive at BP is trying to reconcile environment and economy. The KU Leuven has a tradition of awarding royal honorary doctorates, as both King Albert and his predecessor Baudouin had also received such honorary titles from the Leuven university. But the last few weeks have seen a lively controversy stirred up in the press surrounding Philippe’s honorary doctorate. Considerable coverage was given to the doubts surrounding Philippe’s intellectual capacities, and to the half-hearted manner in which he attained his university degrees. Two hundred and fifty academics from the Leuven university lodged an official protest. Over the past few weeks the rector of the KU Leuven, André Oosterlinck, has squirmed in order to defend the honorary doctorate. In an interview with De Standaard, he explains that it is not the man, but the institution that is being honoured - an institution that is of incalculable value as a binding agent for this country. The rector also puts the whole to-do down to the timing of the award, coming as it does after a public debate in which practically all Flemish political parties pronounced themselves in favour of a curbing of the monarchy’s power. The award was improperly branded as a counter-manoeuvre, according to Oosterlinck, who is inviting the politicians who are angry at the honorary doctorate to take constitutional legislative initiatives in that direction. His university is always prepared to undertake political academic research into whether or not, and to what degree, the monarchy serves a purpose, he added. The students who had expressed their dissatisfaction in large numbers evidently felt that the award did not warrant any large-scale mobilisation. The only protest during the procession and awards ceremony came from Flemish nationalists and a few extreme right-wing NSV members.

ALEXANDRA DE LAET
DE STANDAARD • 5 FEBRUARY

The commotion did not ruffle Philippe’s feathers. ‘On account of the difficult moments of the last few weeks, I had actually half expected a doctorate doloris causa,’ was how the crown prince began his acceptance speech. ‘But now that I am standing here before you - before this packed hall - I feel strong and genuinely honoured.’ And while, moments before, rector Oosterlinck and former rector Dillemans had emphasised the fact that everything did not revolve solely around the person of Philippe, but also around the monarchy ‘which had rendered so many services to this country’, Philippe said that he was happy because he could ‘also speak in a personal capacity and not merely as a representative of that institution.’ In his speech the prince pleaded for recognition of all persons, ‘not just as representatives of mankind but also because everyone has valuable characteristics.’ For, the prince said, only when you are recognised by others can you have respect for yourself. Philippe also made reference to all the fuss of the preceding weeks. In his plea for recognition and a multicultural society, he briefly spoke of the media, which does not hold the monopoly on public recognition. ‘The fact that the criticism of the honorary doctorate has nonetheless irked the Leuven university was evident from the explicit statement made by rector Oosterlinck, explaining that an honorary doctorate is not an academic degree, like other doctorates, but a recognition of services to society.

Opinion

PETER VANDERMEERSCH
DE STANDAARD • 4 FEBRUARY

The incident raises questions about the Belgian interpretation of the monarchy, and its future. Is it normal that every time Prince Philippe steps into the spotlight - his wedding, the birth of his daughter, his honorary doctorate - questions are raised as to the intellectual capacity of the forty-year-old who will accede to the throne before long? The importance of the royal family ought not to be underestimated, but it should not be overestimated either. It is accepted that the moral authority of the royal family, which was undoubtedly high under King Baudouin, is clearly crumbling. In this sense the honorary doctorate for the crown prince comes at a bad time for the monarchy. The honorary doctorate has not led to a higher regard for the future king of the Belgians, but to (muffled) jeering. The palace and the university are deaf if they can’t hear it.
The tail end of an adventure in Kazakhstan

In its weekend edition (2 February) De Morgen produced the first instalment of a special report on Tractebel, the French-Belgian power company from the Suez holding company. Tractebel (turnover: EUR 18.7 billion in 2000) has allegedly been fined EUR 148.7 million by the Belgian tax authorities. The whole story leads to Kazakhstan in 1996. The young republic announced that it would be privatising its energy sector. Power companies pressed for negotiations with the local politicians on the purchase of gas and oil interests. Tractebel secured the purchase of an electricity company, a coal power station, and a hydroelectric power station. A year later it acquired a 20-year concession for the operation of a network of gas pipelines. In order to land the contract, Tractebel paid a secret commission of 55 million dollars in Kazakhstan, to three close associates of president Nazerbaiev. The payment was effected through all kinds of offshore companies. Later it was to emerge that 5 million dollars flowed back to Belgium. For complete clarity, the Kazakh partners were businessmen, not civil servants. There can therefore be no talk of corruption, according to Tractebel’s senior executives. In 1999 it was already clear that the whole project in Kazakhstan was going to be a major disillusionment for the company. The operation was proving to be unprofitable. A crisis manager, Pierre Bocquet, was sent to Kazakhstan, but was shown the door a year later on account of ir-regular management. In 2000 the Belgian company withdrew and transferred its activities to the state-owned company Kaztransgaz.

The loss run up by the whole adventure amounted to EUR 90 million. In that same year Tractebel received an initial additional levy of EUR 150 million from the Special Tax Inspectorate (BBI). The levy on secret commission payments, such as those made to the Kazakh ‘partners’, amounts to 309%. In addition the Swiss (the renowned Swiss specialist in fraudulent and criminal transactions Daniel Devaud) and Belgian judicial authorities suspect the three former Kazakh business partners of having used the commission payments to help buy out influential local politicians. Furthermore, the men had already been the subject of an investigation into money laundering, too. Tractebel has in turn instituted legal proceedings against Nicolas Atherinos, who led the whole project until 1998 and for this purpose was able to count on the unconditional support of the then Managing Director Philippe Bodson and against the crisis manager Pierre Bocquet.

The latter appears as the ‘crown witness’ in De Morgen’s special series on Tractebel. In the edition of 4 February, he reveals that 10 million dollars in ‘bribes’ was also paid to former President Fujimori of Peru via the offshore subsidiary Aluminium Atlantic. ‘Bribes’ had reportedly also been paid for a contract in Oman. All this led to the Special Tax Inspectorate ordering an additional investigation to be carried out. At a press conference, the Chairman of the management committee Jean-Pierre Hansen gave his version of the facts (FF).

WALTER DE BOCK/WALTER PAULI
DE MORGEN • 5 FEBRUARY

Hansens’ first argument was that De Morgen was publishing ‘nothing new’ and had spun a ‘deliberate amalgam’ out of known facts. The company criticises the paper for having made ‘a series of mistakes and half mistakes’. ‘We know the sources’, replied Tractebel. ‘They are people whom we have removed from the company. That explains the tune they are singing in the media (e.g., former crisis manager Bocquet). Incidentally, Tractebel has in the meantime brought legal action against Bocquet. ‘What is Tractebel’s position?’ ‘We started up the judicial inquiries in Geneva and Brussels. We then decided to act with the greatest discretion. In that context, we instituted legal proceedings against a number of people. The rest is work for the judiciary. For more than a year, now, we have therefore adopted a reserved approach and refused to make any comments. Now the time for keeping quiet is over.’

He also attacked De Morgen, a newspaper that ‘amazed’ him with the carelessness with which it reported on this company, which employs ten thousand people. Tractebel operates at world level. We are amongst the leaders in our sector in various continents and countries […]. Bocquet wanted to stop the whole Kazakhstan project dead in its tracks, without negotiating any compensation. We did not do that. The general manager Van Innis managed to limit the scope of the financial damage as far as possible. We then took measures. Our position was one of total transparency. We brought three legal actions: one against x, one against Bocquet, and one against Atheniros. In addition, we cleaned up a whole range of irregular or illegal situations with certain subsidiaries, such as Aluminium Atlantic. We have also developed new rules and regulations to ensure that we are more careful in the future with the partners we choose.’

He also inveighed bitterly against De Morgen because the newspaper had made a song and dance about ‘a treasure-fleet’ of offshore companies that Tractebel had built. ‘Offshore companies are necessary for a good company. You just have to make sure you don’t confuse them with tax havens.” Hansen concedes that the payments made via offshore companies were ‘secret commission payments’, but adds that ‘there are other bodies that dispute that’.
Talks on the Iron Rhine ticking over

On 5 February the Flemish Minister for Transport Steve Stevaert (Sp.a) and his Dutch counterpart Tineke Netelenbos were due to meet for talks in Vlissingen on the deepening of the Western Scheldt and the reactivating of the IJzeren Rijn (the ‘Iron Rhine’), an old railway line that should link the port of Antwerp with the German Ruhr area and pass through a part of Dutch territory. However, the meeting was called off, because discreet top-level consultations had failed to bring about a breakthrough in the negotiations. The Hague continued to be obstructive, and now more so than ever, since elections are due in the Netherlands in May. In a letter to the Dutch parliament Netelenbos recently revealed that she was not a supporter of the ‘Iron Rhine’. Stevaert therefore decided to call off all talks. That did not fall on deaf ears in The Hague. At the request of Minister Netelenbos, a meeting was arranged with Belgian ambassador Johan Swinnen on 5 February. Netelenbos reiterated that she recognised Belgium’s right to follow the historic route straight through Dutch Limburg. The sticking point, according to her, remains who will bear the costs for the works, Belgium or the Netherlands. She denies having suspended the preparatory work (FF).

Opinion

JOHAN VAN GEYTE - GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 4 FEBRUARY

Both the deepening of the Scheldt and the re-opening of the ‘Iron Rhine’ are of vital importance for the port of Antwerp and for the Flemish economy, but it is still a matter of waiting for permission from the Netherlands to enable a start to be made on the work. Both projects call for work to be carried out on Dutch territory. Flanders might just as well sit things out until after the Dutch elections in May, for until then any meaningful talks with our northern neighbours appear to be out of the question. Waiting until after the elections does not mean that legal steps should not be examined now. Flemish politicians believe that the international treaties give us the best trump cards. But legal procedures can be long and drawn-out, and a postponement plays more into the hands of The Hague than Antwerp. Flemish politicians should also be asking themselves questions about the lack of support coming their way from the Federal Government. Evidently French-speaking ministers feel that support for Antwerp is too Flemish. Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs Louis Michel (PRL) prefers to mediate in inter-African conflicts. Despite its competencies for treaties, it is not the Government of Flanders, but Michel, who can ask for support in Berlin. Arguments are there for the picking. It is not very likely that the Germans are keen to have their products transported out of the Ruhr region via just one modern railway line - the Dutch Betuwe line. For them it would be more advantageous to play this off against a rival ‘Iron Rhine’ line from Antwerp.

Red tape reduced for the regularisation of building offences

Last week the Town and Country Planning Committee of the Flemish Parliament approved a draft decree in which the regularisation of a building offence is made no longer dependent on a settlement with the urban development officer and the payment of a ‘trans- action fee’. The settlement procedure involved the owner who wanted to obtain the necessary legal permits for extensions that he had already made to his home, being landed with a whole lot of red tape, which could drag on for ages before the actual regularisation procedure began. Sometimes, as in the case of houses built in areas not earmarked for residential purposes, there was not even the possibility of any settlement, and therefore regularisation. From the moment this decree enters into force, a municipality will be able to regularise a building offence without a prior settlement, and will also be able to do so for houses built in non-residential areas. (FF).

KURT TUERLINCKX • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 4 FEBRUARY

The regularisation permit is disconnected from the criminal court proceedings. Those who want to regularise a building offence must therefore make an application to the municipality. The owner no longer has to approach the urban development inspector. However, those who are granted a regularisation permit do not yet escape a penalty altogether. For a large number of activities the parties will come to an amicable settlement. In exchange for payment of a transaction fee ranging from EUR 50 to EUR 25,000, the offender will be given the assurance that he will not be prosecuted. But if the public prosecutor deems that the offence is too serious, he can prosecute, explains the Minister for Town and Country Planning Dirk Van Mechelen (VLD). According to the minister, the amendment that this decree introduces means that the urban development inspectors can now concentrate on the serious building offences. (FF).

GENERAL OPINION OF BELGIAN EMPLOYERS ABOUT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

focus on FLANDERS • 2 February - 8 February 2002 • Number 5
Five thousand jobs saved at Sabena

The round of bidding for Sabena’s catering, ground handling, and cargo divisions has come to a successful conclusion. Christian Van Buggenhout and a team of five receivers have detached the business units from the Sabena whole and customised in order to be sold as separate businesses. In order to keep their value high the units were kept as operational as possible. After three months of inventorying and restructuring the sale has thrown up some excellent offers. Van Buggenhout is a satisfied man. With the 2,100 jobs at the full Sabena subsidiaries, and the jobs at the subsidiaries Technics (1,400), DAT (1,000), SSES (300), and Sobelair (300), some 5,000 jobs from the former Sabena have been safeguarded. Not yet included in this computation are the hotels and the flying academy, which together account for a further 500 jobs. Sabena’s bankruptcy is thus entering its final phase. (FF).

Sabena’s subsidiaries have been saved. ‘It’s a real success, with excellent prices,’ said Van Buggenhout yesterday. The receivers still have to determine who the acquiring companies will be. On each occasion, though, it is foreign bidders that are involved, who are offering many times the value of the assets alone.

There is also a guarantee of employment, since no further austerity measures are necessary. ‘After all, the fat had already been cut away,’ says Van Buggenhout. After the selection of the best offer for each department, there will be social negotiations, it is true, but no more jobs will be axed. ‘It’s now already at daggers drawn. Actually additional jobs should be created.’

The whole assignment should be completed this month. Sabena handling in Zaventem means check-in, lounges, baggage handling, and the cleaning service. Catering prepares meals for some thirty airlines, and Cargo provides for cargo transport. These business units from the bankrupt n.v. Sabena together accounted for 4,335 jobs (2,823, 1,021, and 491) according to the most recent official figures. Today these figures are much reduced, with the receivers having kept some 2,100 people at work here. Sabena chief executive Christoph Müller had drastically restructured the units in order to transfer them to Swissair. Thereafter they were for sale, until 31 January. GlobeGround, the Lufthansa subsidiary, which today already has 159 employees in Zaventem, is being tipped as the leading candidate for handling. Another Lufthansa subsidiary - LSG - is likely to have the best chances of taking over Sabena catering. Preussag/TUI was sitting in conclave yesterday to decide whether or not to take over Sobelair. Since social peace seems to have returned to the charter airline, a formal offer appears a lot more plausible again. If TUI, Sobelair’s largest client, were to pull out, the receivers have another alternative solution up their sleeve, namely the bid by Sobelair’s pilots.

Flemish woman to head up socialist union

Maria De Vits is writing history. She is set to become the first woman in Belgian history at the head of a trade union. As current general secretary of the socialist trade union ABVV and chairperson of the union’s Flemish wing, she is the only candidate to succeed Michel Nollet as federal chairperson. Her candidacy is receiving such much support within the ABVV that the official election, to be held during a congress at the end of May, will be no more than a formality. For years De Vits has worked zealously on improving the position of and impact made by women in that male bastion that is the trade union. Therefore her election to the position of chairwoman has a very significant symbolic value, also outside the ABVV(FF).

In 1995, after the sudden death of Janssens, there was also talk of De Vits being appointed to the top job, but on that occasion her handicaps - Flemish, a woman - were still too great to be accepted by her Walloon comrades. There is already a candidate to succeed De Vits as general secretary: André Mordant of the civil servants trade union ACOD. This means that the linguistic balance at the union’s top echelon will be maintained.

After her election, De Vits will undoubtedly become the most powerful woman in the Rue de la Loi, and far beyond. She will be able to use her power to modernise the way the ABVV operates and is organised. This is an assignment she in part inherits from Nollet, who has written down his vision of the socialist union in a memorandum to the statutory congress. Unity in diversity is the motto. Nollet sees the ABVV as ‘a guardian of the solidarity between all employees in federal Belgium’. Labour law, the conclusion of collective labour agreements and social security should remain federal. ‘The ABVV cannot yield on this point,’ goes the message. But also: ‘If we do not want to end up in interminable conflicts, we must keep to a simple rule: respect for the division of competencies in our federal state.’
A damming environmental report

SYBILL DECOO • DE MORGEN 6 FEBRUARY

‘Actually you should really compare Belgium with Germany’s Ruhr region or the greater metropolitan areas of Paris and London,’ says Dua, in an attempt to put things in perspective. In her mind, the fact that Belgium trails behind the rest of the pack in environmental matters has much to do with the high population density in Flanders. ‘We live in a densely populated region with much industry, intensive farming, and a lot of traffic. The United Kingdom can more or less compensate the poor situation of the London metropolitan area with the far better situation offered by Scotland. We have nothing against which to do any offsetting.’ Dua also maintains that the use of a number of outdated figures in the report has led to a less than accurate picture being painted. The latest environment and nature report produced by the Flemish Environment Company (VMM) shows that there has been an appreciable improvement in air quality in recent years. The number of heavy metals in the air fell by a quarter, the emission of dioxins by a good 60%, and suspended matter - the air pollutant that occasions most harm to people - by a third. The international comparison ignores this result because figures dating from 1994 and 1996 have been used. The water company Aquafin noted that a large part of the figures date from 1992, whereas recent figures show an improvement, albeit very modest. There is one point on which Dua does not quibble about the conclusions: as far as biodiversity is concerned, the situation in Belgium presents a very sorry state of affairs. However, another conclusion shows that Belgium is in the top twenty as regards environmental policy, which reflects the observation that we have all manner of environmental laws in place. The minister cannot escape the conclusion that the Netherlands [a comparable country] systematically does better. Dua: ‘Yes, indeed, but then the Netherlands initiated a catching-up operation much earlier.’ The positive trend in air quality is the only good news in the environmental report. For practically all other parameters, our environment still scores abominably. Hence the Green minister is seizing upon the report in order to make the coalition partners face the facts. ‘I always get a roasting when I want to combat overfertilisation by demarcating a good number of vulnerable areas, whilst the figures in fact demonstrate that the whole of Flanders is a vulnerable area.’

Architect Luc Deleu’s ‘non-conformist city’

ANTWERP ARTISTS LUC DELEU AND PANAMARENKO have much in common, in the opinion of De Morgen. The two inventively butter both sides of their bread. Panamarenko uses science in his plastic art and constructs self-developed theories for this. Luc Deleu is an architect who eagerly samples the plastic arts. He positions himself at the cutting edge of architecture, urban development and art, and more than once does ‘conservative architecture’ a bad turn. In the Mercator gallery in Antwerp, Deleu is exhibiting a number of scale-models and computer drawings of his ‘non-conformist city’. His city looks like a line into which are slotted all the city’s functions (FF).

LUK LAMBERT DE MORGEN • 7 FEBRUARY

Deleu has always intelligently and playfully manoeuvred in the field of the encrusted, standardised, and sometimes patronising conventions that are peculiar to the profession of architect and urban planner. The ‘non-conformist city’ project came into being in the mid nineteen nineties, as the result of a draft study for the city of Vienna. It is Deleu’s job to ascertain what a modern-day city needs and how all those requirements can sensibly be fitted into a city. Deleu [provisionally] presents a number of (beautifully produced) scale-models that reveal a linear city. ‘His’ city looks like a line along which a whole host of small plots ‘look out’ onto the place where all the city’s functions converge as though in a line. The handsome associated computer drawings are to be regarded, in Deleu’s words, as scores to which he adds rhythm. The many functions of a city [hospital, schools, academy, museum, shops, etc.] are given form in an interplay of lines that is given rhythm. Visually it is very infectious, and the paradoxical beauty of the models and drawings serves to take the edge off its arith-
metrical complexity. One model is made in ‘De Stijl’ colours, which not coincidentally are also the colours of little Lego blocks. This is ‘a quiet reference to my earlier architectural works with Lego,’ says Deleu. In this way we come to fully cyber and in Deleu’s vision, architecture is once again approached from an all-embracing perception, and not solely on the basis of the ‘commercial shopping mall notion’, such as the ‘capitalist publicity architecture’ of Dutchman Rem Koolhaas, which, in Deleu’s view, is so garish.

Until 12 April: Luc Deleu, De onaangepaste stad, Mercator Gallery, Antwerp

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MUSIC, DANCE THEATRE

• 6 to 17 February: 21st Cartoon Film Festival, Passage 44, Brussels, info: 02/503.11.58
• Until 26 February: Buiten categorie, festival of the experimental film, Stuk, Leuven, info: 016/520.300 www.einemazed.be
• Until 14 February: Flanders Symphony orchestra, Valentine’s concert with music by Prokofiev, Mahler and Lutoslawski in Bruges, Antwerp, Sint-Niklaas and Ghent, info: 09/266.70.40
• Until 20 February: Ballett in action, exhibition, Museum of Natural Sciences, Brussels, info: 02/627.42.52
• Until 17 March: Europe in Euphoria (1851 - 1913), exhibition, Royal Museum of Art and History, Jubelpark, Brussels, info: 02/741.72.11 www.europaeforie.be
• Until 24 March: Woman’s business - Business Women, exhibition, St-Pietersabdij, Ghent, info: 09/243.97.30
• Until 31 March: Frans Oilbrechts – in search of art in Africa, photo exhibition, Etneographical Museum, Antwerp, info: 03/220.86.00
• Until 24 February: Antiques Fair Has sel, info: 0800/30.007 www.artexis.com
• Until 24 March: Hundred houses for hundred European architects, exhibition, De Singel, Antwerp, info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• Until 21 April: Paris 1900, exhibition, Museum Elicse, info: 02/515.64.21
• Until 12 April: The non-conformist city by Luc Deleu, exhibition on urban design, Mercator Gallery, Antwerp, info: 02/247.24.19

Diary


EXPO

• Until 24 February: Körperwelten, an exhibition of anatomy by Prof. Von Hagens (Germany), Kelders Van Cureghem, Anderlecht, info: 02/528.19.00
• Until 2 June 2002: Brains in action, exhibition, Museum of Natural Sciences, Brussels, info: 02/627.42.52
• Until 17 March: Europe in Euphoria (1851 - 1913), exhibition, Royal Museum of Art and History, Jubelpark, Brussels, info: 02/741.72.11 www.europaeforie.be
• Until 2 June: About the Head, exhibition, Museum Dr.Ghislain, Ghent, info: 09/216.35.95 www.fracarita.be
• Until 24 March: Woman’s business - Business Women, exhibition, St-Pietersabdij, Ghent, info: 09/243.97.30
• Until 31 March: Frans Oilbrechts – in search of art in Africa, photo exhibition, Etnological Museum, Antwerp, info: 03/220.86.00
• Until 3 March: cartoons, exhibition: the art of Alex Raymond, Belgian Centre for Cartoons [BCB], Brussels, info: 02/219.19.80
• Until 15 February: The Jewish Resis- tance 1939-1945, organised by B'nai B'rith, the Army Museum, Jubelpark, Brussels, info: 02/737.78.78
• Until 3 March: van cloth, interior textile in Western Europe 1600 - 1900, exhibition, Hessenhuis, Antwerp, info: 03/206.03.50