Telenet must downsize in order to get financing arranged

The Flemish telecoms company Telenet (telephony and fast Internet connections) is shedding 139 jobs, out of a workforce of 932. In the meantime principal shareholder Callahan is continuing to negotiate with the banks on a loan to the tune of EUR 1.35 billion. The funds are to be used to replace a bridging loan and to defray the cost of the company’s continued growth, but also to buy out the mixed cable companies, which are jointly owned by the Flemish municipalities and electricity producer Electrabel. The company that still posted a negative cash flow of EUR 19.8 million in 2001 appears to be in dire financial straits, and that is causing alarm (FF).

All the parties involved appear to be fearful of a Telenet crash. Telenet is a highly politically charged matter. A large number of Flemish municipalities have gambled on their cable network being purchased by the Flemish telecoms company, and the capital gains that they would rake in as a result. Telenet is in danger of finding itself in financial difficulties on two fronts. With the mass redundancy of 139 employees, it is aiming to stem the ‘mounting cost structure, which is reaching excessive proportions,’ in the words of CEO Duco Sickinghe. With measures such as higher prices for the customers and the announcement that the tariffs for through-connection to another operator would be raised, Telenet is endeavouring to boost its income. Secondly, Telenet’s principal shareholder, the American telecoms company Callahan, frankly concedes that it is finding it extremely difficult to get an absolutely vital loan arranged, given the poor situation on the financial markets. A first deadline for paying the mixed public/private cable companies – intermunicipal companies in which the Flemish municipalities and Electrabel are the shareholders – was not met. The deal is still awaiting completion. Telenet’s financial problems are also causing considerable anxiety among the 500 or more employees of Electrabel, who maintain the mixed intermunicipal companies’ cable network. Meanwhile, the electricity trade unions yesterday informed Electrabel that they could not agree to the transfer of these people to Telenet going ahead. ■

ECONOMIC AFFAIRS DESK • DE STANDAARD • 22 FEBRUARY

CONTENTS

- Economy: 300 jobs lost in diamond industry 2
  - Terca Bricks and De Simpel in merger 2
  - DAT becomes SN Brussels Airlines 2

- Justice: Emergency law for youth delinquency policy 3
  - Agusta II trial has taken off 7

- Education: More money for underprivileged, says SPA 4

- Social Policy
  - Vogels doesn’t want to reduce her budget 5
  - Discord on Immigrants voting rights 6

- Civil service: the Houins case 5

- Employment: agreement on Flemish premiums 6

- Culture: Brugges 2002 7

INTRODUCTION

On 22 February the large-scale roundtable conference on Flemish education gets underway. Some 150 participants from 50 organisations will be taking part in the debates: political parties, education umbrella organisations, trade unions, parents’ associations, governing boards, pupils, and schools inspectors. Debates will be conducted in five working groups, on equal opportunities, quality education, funding, freedom of education, and the role of teachers in nursery schools and in primary and secondary schools. The conference is the brainchild of Minister-President Patrick Dewael (VLD). The aim is for a consensus to be reached on each issue. The Flemish Minister for Education Marleen Vanderpoorten (VLD) expects the first results by the end of June. These results should eventually lead to a ‘blueprint for the school of the future’. The major political groups have already disclosed their respective visions on repeated occasions over the last few months. The VLD of Dewael and Chairman De Gucht advocates cross-network co-operation. They feel that society has become pluralist and that the rigid division into networks has therefore become anachronistic. They ask themselves why lessons on moral philosophy should not be given in schools in the Catholic system. The Catholics have greeted the Liberals’ initiative with suspicion. In their view, the VLD is attempting to impinge on their education system intrinsically and organisationally – when the system had always guaranteed quality anyway. Give parents the option to make choices without restrictions, and let schools take initiatives freely; in short, let freedom of education predominate, goes their message. The Socialists, traditionally the Liberals’ allies when it comes to defending pluralism, are on this occasion no longer profiling themselves ideologically, but are focusing on the first theme: equal opportunities. SPA Chairman Janssens is not being thanked for that either by a number of liberal politicians or by the Socialist teaching union. The SPA wants to have the entire budget for primary education (EUR 2 billion) distributed on the basis of the education level of the children’s parents (see page 3). Finally, Education Minister Vanderpoorten herself also places equal opportunities at the top of the agenda. Together, that is, with financing, for she feels that more funds have to be released for education. It will be interesting to see what the end result of it all is in June.

Frank Vandeveeye | editor in chief
300 jobs to be lost in diamond industry

The South African diamond concern De Beers is discontinuing the sale of cut diamonds via its marketing department Diamond Trading Company (DTC). From now on De Beers wants to concentrate on its core activities, namely the extraction and sale of rough diamonds. The consequences are serious for the Flemish subsidiaries of DTC, Lens Diamond Industries (LDI) in Berlaar and Belsort in Antwerp. There are 255 jobs in the balance at LDI, and a further 40 to 50 at Belsort. DTC sold cut diamonds in viewing boxes. The cutting, the initial machining of the polishing process was carried out at LDI, the evaluation, sorting, and packaging at Belsort (FF).

GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 16 JANUARY

De Beers in London controls a large part of diamond production internationally. The concern sends rough diamonds to its own machining companies and to third parties. The company also controls a large share of the trade. De Beers had previously already announced that it would be concerning itself solely with trading in the future, and would discontinue the machining of rough diamonds. In the framework of this new strategy, both Lens Diamond Industries [LDI] in Berlaar and Belsort and Gem Services in Antwerp are being disposed of. The decision is painful because De Beers built LDI into a technologically advanced company in the 1980s. ‘It’s a disaster,’ concedes Peter Meeus of the High Diamond Council [HRD] in Antwerp. ‘Admittedly the decision isn’t definitive yet, but the consequences are irreparable.’

The disappearance of LDI could in the long run signal the definitive kiss of death for Antwerp’s moribund diamond industry. In the last few years, the number of people employed in the sector has plummeted from 22,000 to a maximum of 1,500.

Terca Bricks and Desimpel under one roof

The Austrian building materials group Wienerberger is acquiring the brick activities of its British rival Hanson on the continent, for EUR 64.5 million. The purchase concerns 23 companies, including 17 Hanson Desimpel establishments in Belgium and the Netherlands. Only in 1996 Hanson forked out EUR 141 million for the brick group owned by the West Flanders entrepreneur Aimé De Simpel. Wienerberger is the largest brick manufacturer in the world. With its 30 plants and a turnover of EUR 240 million, Terca Bricks [also from West Flanders] forms part of the Austrian concern. In a roundabout way, the acquisition of Hanson Desimpel has actually resulted in the merger of the two most important Flemish brick groups being sealed. Furthermore, Koramic, Terca Bricks’ parent company, is the reference shareholder in Wienerberger with a participating interest of 25%. According to De Financiën-Economische Tijd (20 February), Wienerberger is even virtually run by Koramic. The news led to Koramic’s share gaining 4.11% on the Brussels Euronext stock exchange. The deal does still have to receive the approval of the European competition authorities, but Koramic’s chief executive Christian Dumolin does not fear any problems arising. The takeover means that the group controls roughly 50% of the brick market in Belgium.

Finally, ‘SN Brussels Airlines’ is to be the name of the Belgian airline that will be Sabena’s successor. The airline had been temporarily operating under the name of the former Sabena subsidiary DAT, but that name is now to disappear as well. Even if a merger were to go ahead with Virgin Express, the name SN Brussels Airlines will be retained, according to a statement made by chief executive Rob Kuypers. The first aircraft with the new look will be landing at Zaventem airport on 25 February (FF).

LUK DEWILDE • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 16 FEBRUARY

‘Unlike Belgium, Brussels does ring a bell with people all over the world,’ said Kuypers, in defence of the choice of name. He was referring to the large number of international institutions and company head offices that are established in the Belgian capital. SN is a reference to the Sabena flight numbers that were taken over by DAT. Together with the code, the blue ‘S’ on the tail fin of the Sabena aircraft is also being kept. According to the Dutch chief executive, it is the ambition of SN Brussels Airlines to become the reference airline for air traffic to and from Brussels. At the moment Brussels Airlines flies to 34 destinations in Europe. The airline wants in particular to strive for punctuality and quality of service. At the beginning of February the planes were flying at 50% capacity, which, according to Kuypers, is above expectations. In the meantime, it is not yet known which partner SN Brussels Airlines will operate flights to Africa with. Will it be British Midland [BMI], Sabena subsidiary Sobelair or VG Airlines [the airline owned by Flemish businessman Freddy Van Gaever] that will make available the planes and the flight deck crew? As regards a possible merger with Virgin Express, Kuypers says that the talks are proceeding ‘constructively’. The decision is expected at the end of this month.
An emergency law for a new juvenile delinquency policy agreement

In an interview in Het Laatste Nieuws (16 February), Minister Vogels was unhappy about the Federal Government’s dawdling in the approach to juvenile delinquency. If the federal Prime Minister Verhofstadt (VLD) does not succeed in getting his new detention centre in the former barracks of Everberg open by 1 March, she wants to take over the institution herself, as the competent Flemish minister. This institution is urgently needed, since there is a dearth of institutional accommodation for juvenile delinquents. The critical situation was laid bare for all to see when young offenders had to be released recently, in both Antwerp and Liège, due to a lack of establishments to take them in. Up until 1 January 2002, it was possible for them to be placed in ordinary prisons, but as of that date this is no longer possible. On 18 February, the parliamentary leader of the majority parties signed the text of a draft ‘emergency law’, which allows judges sitting in juvenile courts to lock up young offenders for a short period in the Everberg detention centre. According to the Purple-Green schedule, Parliament will already approve the bill on 28 February, so that Prime Minister Verhofstadt meets the deadline that he himself laid down. However, the law may not yet be in force at that point, since the opposition party CD&V is in favour of an adaptation of the law and the establishment of a firm juvenile criminal law. The French-speaking parties are not yet on the same wavelength. Since the Prime Minister promised that it would be possible for young offenders to be confined from 1 March onwards, agreement must now very hurriedly be reached on a minimum legal basis for this, an ‘emergency law’, in other words. An emergency law follows the philosophy of preventive custody. A youth may not be confined in the detention centre for more than two months and five days. This detention centre serves as a kind of buffer for the closed youth protection institutions. It is still the intention that these communities be given greater capacity.

L uk Van Eylen/Guy Tegenbos • De Standaard • 19 February

The Purple-Green coalition’s haste is based on the compromise that it reached when judges were forced to release a number of obviously delinquent youths. However, the Youth Protection Act, which dates from 1965, does not permit detention centres. According to this act, for that matter, there is no such thing as juvenile delinquents and youths may not be punished either. The Flemish parties are in favour of an adaptation of the law and the establishment of a firm juvenile criminal law. The French-speaking parties are not yet on the same wavelength. Since the Prime Minister promised that it would be possible for young offenders to be confined from 1 March onwards, agreement must now very hurriedly be reached on a minimum legal basis for this; an ‘emergency law’, in other words. An emergency law follows the philosophy of preventive custody. A youth may not be confined in the detention centre for more than two months and five days. This detention centre serves as a kind of buffer for the closed youth protection institutions. It is still the intention that these community institutions be given greater capacity.

F F Editor

Should the federal government be unable to keep its promise of having the new federal youth institution at Everberg ready by 1 March, there will be no problem on the Flemish side, at any rate, according to a statement made by the Minister of the Government of Flanders Mieke Vogels during a debate in the Flemish Parliament on 20 February. After all, by 1 March twenty extra places will have been made available in the community institution of Ruiselede. During the debate, Vogels also stressed that there was a pressing need for juvenile criminal law, and in this she was supported by all the democratic parliamentary parties in the Flemish Parliament, according to De Standaard (21 February). In the meantime federal minister Verwilghen and Vogels are continuing to blame each other for the lack of reception places. Verwilghen claims that the federal government had to intervene because the Communities were not assuming their responsibility. Vogels reproaches Verwilghen for still not having provided for a federal juvenile criminal law, something which he had nonetheless announced would be in place by 1 January.

### SCHOOL POPULATION (SEE P. 4)

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<th>NURSERY SCHOOLS</th>
<th>PRIMARY EDUCATION</th>
<th>SECONDARY EDUCATION</th>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>240,582</td>
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**BUDGET OF EDUCATION IN 2001**

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<th>PRIMARY SCHOOLS</th>
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<td>Total</td>
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SP.A: more money for the underprivileged in education

The Flemish schools system is ripe for a round of comprehensive cost cutting. The education budget - some EUR 7.5 billion - which gobbles up something like 40% of the Government of Flanders’ budget, is under pressure. Therefore Minister-President Devaet (VLD) organised a large-scale roundtable conference on the Flemish education system, which is due to kick off on 22 February. His party, the VLD, which is also the largest party in office, sees much good in far-reaching co-operation between the various networks of schools (the Catholic network, and the provincial, municipal, and community education systems). VLD Chairman Karel De Gucht is going a step further and declares himself to be in favour of moral philosophy being offered in the Catholic education system, if necessary with this being encouraged financially. The Catholic education network has already reacted with alarm. It fears that a forced co-operation will attack the Catholic education system's indiviudality. What is more, as was revealed recently in a study, it is already systematically receiving fewer working subsidies than the Community education network.

Just before the large-scale roundtable conference, SP.A Chairman Patrick Janssens surprised both supporters and opponents in the education debate, by approaching the distribution of the education funds from a totally new standpoint. Janssens proposes linking the funding of primary education to the level of education of the pupils’ parents. For his party, the equal opportunities policy must become the priority of the roundtable conference on education. All studies indicate that the level of education of the parents is a decisive factor in a child’s lagging behind, according to Janssens. However, with his proposal, Janssens is poaching on the preserve of the equal opportunities policy of Education Minister Marleen Vanderpoorten (VLD) (FF).

The SP.A Chairman had already indicated on a couple of occasions that the possibilities to reduce the inequality in education had not yet been exhausted with the equal opportunities decree that Education Minister Marleen Vanderpoorten (VLD) has prepared, as far as he was concerned. Approximately EUR 75 million is being earmarked for that decree and with that, according to Janssens, you can carry through nothing more than a ‘minor social correction’. Therefore he wants to lead a discussion on the distribution of the entire education budget. The SP.A education specialist is getting the debate under way with a new financing mechanism for primary education. When the EUR 1.9 billion is distributed for primary education, account is currently taken of the pupils’ characteristics. Nonetheless children in kindergarten and primary education often build up a sizeable initial backlog, which they can usually not make good later on. Numerous studies have shown that the mother’s level of education is a decisive factor. Therefore Janssens wants to lift this criterion from the equal opportunities decree and use it as a parameter for the redistribution of the basic resources.

In concrete terms, when it comes to the financing the SP.A is proposing attributing one point to children whose parents went through higher education. For children whose parents only completed secondary education, or did not even manage to complete that level, a higher weighting would be allocated: 1.3 and 1.8, respectively. A simulation for primary education shows that the new calculation method will lead to a sizeable shift between the schools. Thus, in an ‘underprivileged’ school, where 80% of the parents did not complete secondary education, the number of lessons turns out to rise by about a quarter. Privileged schools, where 60% of the parents went through higher education, would see their lessons decrease drastically. According to Janssens the change will only be substantial for schools with a very selective population. Through this proposal, underprivileged schools would have more teachers at their disposal per number of pupils. However, in his view this does not necessarily mean that there will be smaller classes everywhere. ‘The extra support can also be used for specific projects. In this way the additional teachers could be deployed as bridging figures with the parent. In Ghent this has been shown to bear fruit’.

In a communiqué, Ludo Sannen and Frans Ramon of the Agalev parliamentary group in the Flemish Parliament called Janssens’ proposal simplistic. They say that the proposal’s attractiveness and simplicity are directly proportional to the threat that it represents for quality and equal opportunities in education. In their view, a child should be entitled to the same quality of education, irrespective of the level of education of his or her parents. The Flemish-National N-VA also feels that the SP.A’s proposal is wholly at odds with the equal opportunities principle. Education is a right to which all children are entitled. It is up to the authorities to try to guarantee that every child receives the same education and is therefore given the same opportunities, regardless of the education network and irrespective of the parents’ incomes or diplomas, said chairman Geert Bourgeois in a statement.

MARK DEWEERDT • DE FINANCIEEL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 20 FEBRUARY

In a communiqué, Ludo Sannen and Frans Ramon of the Agalev parliamentary group in the Flemish Parliament called Janssens’ proposal simplistic. They say that the proposal’s attractiveness and simplicity are directly proportional to the threat that it represents for quality and equal opportunities in education. In their view, a child should be entitled to the same quality of education, irrespective of the level of education of his or her parents. The Flemish-National N-VA also feels that the SP.A’s proposal is wholly at odds with the equal opportunities principle. Education is a right to which all children are entitled. It is up to the authorities to try to guarantee that every child receives the same education and is therefore given the same opportunities, regardless of the education network and irrespective of the parents’ incomes or diplomas, said chairman Geert Bourgeois in a statement.
The Flemish Green Minister for Welfare and Health Mieke Vogels (Agalev) did not spare her Liberal and Socialist coalition partners in the interview that she gave in the weekend edition of Het Laatste Nieuws. She does not tolerate the fact that they are increasingly turning a deaf ear to the rising demand for care, and criticises them for only being concerned with pampering people. ‘The Liberals want lower taxes and the Socialists want everything to be free of charge. The Liberals are serving a poisonous cocktail that threatens to produce citizens who arespoilt rotten and who can no longer provide for solidarity,’ says Vogels. She is concise and clear on the matter of the Government of Flanders' budget control. She maintains that in her department no further cuts can be made. These utterances fell on stony ground with Minister-President Patrick Dewael (VLD). Flanders has to find EUR 320 million. According to the Flemish Budget Minister, Dirk Van Mehelen (VLD), the government still has a nest egg of EUR 200 million in the Fund for the Financing of One-off Expenses. But a further EUR 100 million still has to be found among the Flemish ministers and the fact that Vogels appears to be vetoing this is not to Dewael’s liking at all. In his view, there can be no talk of reversing the tax cut in order, for example, to keep care insurance for non-medical services affordable in Flanders (FF).

BART ECKHOUT/RUUD GOOSSENS • DE MORGÈN • 18 FEBRUARY

‘We shall continue with tax cuts for quite some time yet,’ says Dewael. ‘Does Mieke Vogels really think that we have already done enough on the tax front? I look at the figures. They show that in tax matters we still don’t have a very enviable position in Europe. So, whether the Greens like it or not, we shall therefore have to continue with tax cuts for some time yet. You could say that the quality of life has to be financed, but you need wealth to make that concrete. I think it is dangerous to say that now that a certain easing of the tax and premium burden has been implemented, we should once again start thinking about a tax hike.’ The leader of the Government of Flanders even wants to reduce the costs and charges incurred by companies by means of administrative simplification. ‘The costs for self-employed persons and entrepreneurs as a result of all the red tape are estimated at EUR 8 billion. That is an enormous figure.’ Dewael hits out at Vogels on the theme of budget control, too. ‘I would be really astonished,’ says the Minister-President, ‘if there was nothing more that could be reoriented in the whole of the Welfare budget, which has risen exponentially in recent years. You do not set about budget control like that. I do not stand for that from any minister at all. In the space of five years, we must succeed in reorienting the entire Flemish Government budget, department by department.’

Gilbert Houins, senior civil servant at the Ministry of Agriculture and the officer responsible for devising Consum, the programme aimed at tracking PCBs and dioxins in the food chain, has had his detention extended. Houins is suspected of having kept a contaminated PCB sample dating from 31 December out of the ministry’s database. His lawyer denies that there is any question of a criminal offence having been committed. He goes on to say that it was a policy decision taken to save the country’s reputation and protect the economic interests of the animal feed sector. On the basis of a number of testimonies, Knack reckons that it can deduce that Houins is the victim of a crude settlement of accounts, which is being directed from within the Christian government trade union CCOD. Yet the case illustrates a civil service culture in which civil servants appropriate policy decisions for themselves, rather than carrying them out, in Knack’s opinion (FF).

Opinion

MARC REYNEBAU • KNACK • 20 FEBRUARY

The mini PCB crisis demonstrates why it is not as easy as one might think to merge the departments of the ministries of Agriculture and Public Health, which together are due to form the Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain. The Houins case should thus ring a bell with anyone who is wondering why the Copernicus reform (of the federal civil service) or the police reform are also turning out to be so difficult, and why the government’s critics can so easily predict that it will all end in a fiasco. The case brings to light the distorted relations between the civil servants and their political guardians (who are still surrounded and protected by ministerial offices). For a long time the civil service served as little more than a political province for the sharing out of jobs or as an instrument for the granting of political favours. So it is that Houins can be counted as belonging to the ranks of the Christian-Democrats, which is logical in a department that for many years was little more than the civil service arm of the Christian-inspired Farmers’ Union. It is not enough to want to do things in a different way in order for things to actually change - an illusion of which the Liberal/Socialist/Green coalition has still not been cured. The public service still carries this inheritance with it. There are therefore two hypotheses possible in the Houins case. Either he felt that he was obliged to take the decisions because minister Aelvoet did not have the guts, or he regarded it as normal to place a private interest (the animal feed companies) above the public interest (public health).
**MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS**

**Immigrants' voting right leads to discord**

Some 125,000 non-European foreigners are eligible for the right to vote in municipal elections in Belgium, according to a calculation made by the Minister of the Interior Antoine Duquesne (PRL). They have all lived in Belgium for more than five years, but are choosing not to adopt Belgian nationality. On the other hand, some 203,000 foreigners who have lived here for more than five years have opted, 'of their own free will', to become naturalised Belgians and already have the right to vote. Meanwhile, although this therefore concerns the voting right for a relatively small group of immigrants, the debate is raging in the Senate committee and in the press. The issue will be voted on in the Senate committee by 12 March. The Flemish Liberals (VLD) and Christian-Democrats (CD&V), together with the Flemish-National party N-VA are against the introduction of voting right, as is - of course - the Vlaams Blok. The VLD is turning it into a state affair, with chairman De Gucht saying that if the right to vote were approved in the Senate, there would no longer be a government. He states that the VLD grassroots does not accept the immigrants' right to vote. The misinformed chairman of the VLD parliamentary party in the House, Hugo Covieliers, added further fuel to the fire last weekend, when he threatened a motion of no-confidence if the committee were to approve the voting rights for immigrants the following day. In fact no vote took place on that day at all. The Flemish Socialists and French-speaking Liberals (PRL) do not regard the immigrants' suffrage issue worth a government crisis. What is more, deputy prime minister Louis Michel does not want to leave the Flemish Liberals in the lurch. Although he himself is a declared advocate of immigrants' right to vote, PRL figurehead Louis Michel will have his faction vote against in the committee, if necessary, in order to save the government. In that case those in favour (Socialists, Greens, and Spirit) will be in the minority and will be left empty-handed, according to De Standaard. But Michel would prefer above all else to have the whole debate in the Senate committee suspended and not to have it lead to a vote at all. This latter option is totally unacceptable for the Greens, who tabled the proposal. That this second track puts the

**Opinion**

A negative verdict will not spirit away the voting right from the agenda. SPA chairman Janssens has already announced that the subject should be included in the next coalition agreement. If that happens, however, it is inconceivable that the debate will be launched before the elections to the Flemish Parliament in June 2004. Then the municipal elections of 2006 - with the city of Antwerp in a star role - will be terribly close. Thus there is a risk of a situation arising which the SPA has been afraid of all along: if the voting right for immigrants is not regulated before the end of 2001, it will simply never happen.

**EMPLOYMENT**

**Flemish-walloon agreement on additional premiums time credit**

An agreement has been reached between the Flemish and Walloon Government on the granting of extra Flemish premiums over and above the federal time credit premiums. The payment of premiums was recently suspended at the request of the Walloon Government, which claimed that Flanders was exceeding its powers and which wanted to prevent the premiums from being linked to collective labour agreements. The Flemish premiums for a 1/5-career break and for phasing-out jobs are generalised at federal level. The Flemish premiums granted for training, care and restructuring remain solely applicable for Flemish employees (FF).

An inter-ministerial cabinet working group worked out a three-part compromise. The Flemish premiums that are granted in the event of a 1/5 reduction in working time or in the event of development jobs are worked out at federal level. That means that all employees, irrespective of whether they are employed in the Brussels, Flemish or Walloon Region, are entitled to an extra premium of EUR 50 on top of the existing federal time credit premium, which ranges from EUR 76 to 506. The Flemish premiums granted in the framework of training, care, and restructuring remain unchanged. They are paid out by the Government of Flanders, and are only granted to employees employed in the Flemish Region. The trade unions had previously indicated that they agreed with this federal solution, which was suggested by ABVV Chairman Michel Nollet. The employers’ organisations are less happy about the compromise. Secondly, the inter-ministerial cabinet working group also agreed to organise pro-active consultation between the federal and regional entities when inter-professional and sectoral agreements are concluded. This should prevent problems such as the issue of the time credit premiums from arising. A third part of the agreement is the most sensitive. It was agreed that regional premiums could be encapsulated in collective labour agreements via addenda.
Agusta-II trial has begun

**FF EDITOR**

The proceedings have begun in the Brussels tribunal correctionnel in the trial against four former leading lights of the SP. The lawsuit is an offshoot of the bribery scandal, in which the helicopter builder Agusta, the aircraft constructor Dassault and the Flemish and Walloon socialist parties were involved. The scandal and the trial wrought havoc in the upper echelons of both parties at the end of the nineteen nineties. Among other things, it cost NATO boss Willy Claes his job. The then SP treasurer Etienne Mangé declared at that trial that he had given part of the BEF 51 million in bribe money to the then party secretary Carla Galle. According to Mangé, she had allegedly used this money to pay the undeclared bonuses of party workers. Galle, who, together with the then SP party bookkeeper Guido Van Biesen, Mangé himself and the study department bookkeeper Guido Triest, is now on trial for forgery, money laundering practices, and doctoring of the accounts, claims that Mangé had distributed that money among the party trustees and the party federations. The current case deals with a number of dubious financial transactions, including four cheques to the value of hundreds of thousands of euros, the destination of which is unclear, and the good EUR 124,000 in black money that was found in a SP safe at the Codcep Bank. According to Etienne Mangé, that was a balance of the Agusta-Dassault surpluses.

The public prosecutor is asking for a one-year’s suspended prison sentence for Carla Galle and a six-month suspended sentence for bookkeeper Van Biesen. In the case of both, he is asking that they be deprived of their civil rights for five years. The public prosecutor has only asked for an admission of guilt from Mangé and Triest, because in their case the reasonable term had been exceeded. Galle’s and Van Biesen’s lawyers, on the other hand, have all along called into question the legal proceedings. They are of the opinion that the deeds in question have long since become outdated. In order to prove that they were in the right, they have pursued a long-drawn-out legal battle up until this trial.

Brugges 2002 gets underway

**JUSTICE AND CULTURE**

This week Bruges exuberantly celebrates the opening of its cultural year. As Cultural Capital of Europe, it wants to throw off its image as a mediæval open-air museum. Bruges wants to be more than its past. Contemporary architecture has been given a fresh impetus here with Toyo Ito’s pavilion and the new Concert Hall. The programme for Brugge 2002 offers the local range of museums, theatres, performance venues and the new Concert Hall a unique opportunity to shine in the spotlight, although a good number of local cultural figures and artists are moaning that the programme devised by manager Hugo De Greef contains too many ‘imports’. For mayor Patrick Moenaert, the kind of city marketing that Brugge 2002 provides is the stuff of dreams. Last week, accompanied by Hugo De Greef, he completed an international promotional tour. They sang the praises of Brugge 2002 in Hamburg, Cologne, Tokyo, London, Vienna, Madrid, Paris, Lille, Milan, and Rome (FF).

GEERT VAN DER SPEETEN/KAREL VERHOEVEN • DE STANDAARD • 16 FEBRUARY

It has to be a success, and Bruges will be measuring its cultural year on the basis of figures. The city has to be a magnet. The advance sales for the event are going fantastically well. At the booking department, 170,000 reservations have been made, with an absolute preference for the major historical exhibitions. Almost 6,500 Bruggelinge have bought themselves a Poorterspas (citizen’s pass), which entitles them to discounts. Perhaps a million extra tourists will be calling in at Bruges - almost a third more than last year. For mayor Patrick Moenaert, the year is already a success before it has begun. The long-standing frustration that this city was not assessed at its true worth has evaporated. Bruges is in the spotlight at home and abroad, and the image of mediaeval amusement park is being refined. ‘I have repeatedly insisted on well-considered choices that mobilise a broad public,’ says Moenaert. ‘Let the culture freak out say that it’s not art but commerce. Bruges will never be the same again after this year’. Brugge 2002 is creating a distinct profile for itself with new architecture. The cultural year demonstrates, with delicate interventions and a robust building in the shape of the Concert Hall (Concertgebouw), that contemporary architecture is most certainly possible in Bruges. ‘Brugge 2002 is a party. The party will come to an end, but the new architecture will remain standing,’ says architect Gery Vandenabeele, who oversaw the renovation of the Stadsschouwburg [municipal theatre] and, with the architecture association Archipel, put forward Toyo Ito’s pavilion. ‘Of course the interventions are still modest. You can’t set about things with grand gestures here. This is a conservatory city, which is imbued with a very rich past. There is always sharp criticism of contemporary architecture in Bruges. People react nervously. They regard some recent buildings as ugly and say that Bruges should quite simply stop experimenting with contemporary architecture. But with the Concert Hall, Ito’s pavilion and the bridge over the Coupure, we are showing that Bruges is not standing still.’ In the last year and a half, organisations involved in the preservation of monuments and historic buildings have completed renovation work, at great speed, on 20 different sites. In normal circumstances that would be 10 years’ work, representing EUR 18.5 million. The gold and turquoise of ‘Het Vrye’ on the Burg are glittering, the tower of the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk has been re-mortared and looks stunning, the Conservatory has been restored, and the cracks in the Municipal theatre have been filled.
Diary
MUSIC, DANCE THEATRE

28 February: Spiegel Kwartet with compositions by Bartok and Janacek, Concertgebouw. info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
1 March: Maria Cristina Kiehr (soprano) with passion concerto. info: 09/269.29.10 www.caermersklooster.be
2 March: Classtas and Eternia conducted by Jos Van Immerseel. info: 09/221.17.03 www.smak.be
28 February: Anima Eterna conducted by Piet Van Doren (Deputy Director, Vlaams Economisch Trends), Francis Decoster (Information Officer, Focus on Flanders) and Jef Van Imschoot, Steven Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle. info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
28 February and 1 March / 6 to 15 March: Jan Lauwereyns Needcompany. Images of Affection, theatre, in English. info: 02/201.59.59 www.kaaithetater.be
8 to 16 March: Jan Ritsema Bojanica Cveje, Today Ulysses, theatre, Kaaithetheaterstudio's. info: 02/201.59.59 www.kaaithetater.be
8 March: Das Pop Deluxe, De Vooruit, Ghent, info: 02/267.24.24 www.vooruit.be

EXPO

Until 2 June:Brains in action, exhibition, Museum of Natural Sciences, Brussels, info: 02/627.42.52 www.natuurwetenschappen.be
Until 17 March: Europe in Euphoria (1851-1913), exhibition, Royal Museum of Art and History, Jubelpark, Brussels, info: 02/741.72.11 www.europaeuforie.be
Until 2 June: About the Head, exhibition, Museum Dr. Ghijslain, Ghent, info: 09/216.35.95 www.fracarita.be
Until 31 March: Frances Oldbrecher - in search of art in Africa, photo exhibition, Etnographical Museum, Antwerp, info: 05/220.86.00
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Until 5 March: cartoones, exhibition: the art of Alex Raymond, Belgian Centre for Cartoons (BCB), Brussels, info: 02/219.19.80
Until 5 March: vain cloth, interior textile in Western Europe 1600 - 1900, exhibition, Hessenhuis, info: 05/320/03.50
Until 28 February: Treasures from Spain, enamel art from the Benedictine Monastery Santo Domingo de Silos, BBL-CC, Brussels, info: 02/547.22.92 www.uvacomex.be

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 Elsenbe, info: 02/515.64.21
Until 12 April: The non-conformist city by Luc Deley, exhibition on urban design, Mucem, info: 03/247.24.19
Until 11 March: I mode you in red, exhibition, Fashion museum, Hasselt, info: 011/23.96.21
Until 24 March: Fashion Show, exhibition, Belgeosite, info: 03/230.39.70

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CULTURE

Now that the UNESCO has proclaimed the entire city centre to be a world heritage site, the wave of restoration is the crowning glory. The Concert Hall is the pièce de résistance of Brugge 2002. International ambition, long-term vision, and the filling in of a regional void, plus that touch of megalomania that typifies dream projects - it’s all there.

Is Hugo De Greef, the event manager of Brugge 2002 and a native of Brussels, more a strategist than an iconoclast? An image that pursues him is that of a gardener who carefully plants seeds in the hope that something can germinate quickly. He has just one season in which to do this. De Greef: ‘You work with what is present in the city, but always on the assumption that you should not do the same as what is already being done elsewhere. Bruges is not an island in Flanders. There are local Bruges players on the playing field, such as the museums, the Concertgebouw, De Werf (arts centre) and the Net (theatre). This year they will be given a different, more pronounced role.’ But from the outset De Greef had to deal with the lamentation that Brugge 2002 above all had to display the city’s individuality and should be clad in overtly Bruges colours. For the organisers of Brugge 2002, that meant treading lightly and ensuring plentiful communication.

Editor in chief: Frank Vandecaveye
Advisory panel: Luc Deomezter (Lannoo), Rik Van Cauwelaert (director Knack), Koen Clement (Managing director, De Morgen), Frans Croes (Director, Trends), Francois Decoster (Information Officer, Flemish Community), Mark Deweerdt (Journalist, Financieel-Economische Tijd), Michael Stabenow (Correspondent, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung), Luc Van Doren (Director, De Regenboog, De Morgen), Jan Vandenbulcke (Director, Vlaams Economisch Verbond).

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Telephone: 011/41.42.99
Fax: 011/41.40.52
E-mail: frank.vandecaveye@lannoo.be