How strongly does Rotterdam resemble Antwerp?

The historic victory of right-wing populist Pim Fortuyn in the Dutch municipal elections in Rotterdam caused a flood of comment in the Flemish press. The Netherlands, a country typified by its politically-correct reasoning and which had always thought that such ‘Flemish situations’ were not possible, has received a dressing down the likes of which have never been seen before. There were comparisons galore with the electoral appeal of the Vlaams Blok in that other great port city, Antwerp. The recognition of the reactions of Dutch politicians was clear for Flemish observers who witnessed a series of ‘black Sundays’ in recent years. But how has Fortuyn managed to do in a few weeks what the Vlaams Blok twenty years to do? And what will happen now to the cordon sanitaire around the Blok if Fortuyn immediately captures a stake in government (FF)?

Opinion

BART STURTEWAGEN • DE STANDAARD • 8 MARCH

The theory that there is something terribly wrong with the Flemish national character can be consigned to the wastepaper basket. But how is it that Fortuyn has succeeded overnight in doing what the Vlaams Blok has still not managed to do in twenty years? As a kind of intelligent clown, he incarnates a populist discourse that plays on current frustrations but has no connection with historical right-wing traditions. That makes him almost intangible for any riposte. The media has welcomed him with great acracy. Fortuyn is a political comet. He has nothing much in the way of organisation or programme. Compare this to the central and authoritarian structure of the Vlaams Blok, which continues to reinvent itself by hanging its colours on ethical conservatism. But let there be no illusions – Fortuyn’s success again brings the Blok a little closer to the mainstream of Flemish politics.

YVES DESMET • DE MORGEN • 8 MARCH

Up until recently buisloads of local Flemish politicians would travel to Rotterdam to find out how you could govern a large multicultural city without having any trouble from the right-wing protest vote. Perhaps we will soon be able to organise a return fixture.
**PARTIES**

**Spirit uses inheritance leap to profile itself**

These days, due to the high life expectancy, offspring often only inherit when they are into their sixties and on the verge of retirement. At that point they no longer really need the money, so they opt to invest it. The solution for making this transfer of estate more profitable is the so-called ‘inheritance leap’, according to Spirit, the party of Flemish ministers Anciaux and Van Grembergen.

The idea is to let the grandchildren (the active generation) also receive part of the inheritance. They can better use the money, and can put it towards starting up a business of their own, buying a house or carrying out renovations, for example.

Four young Spirit MPs - Vincent Van Quickenborne, Sven Gatz, Jan Roegiers, and Els Van Weert - are tabling a bill to this effect. In short, the essence of the proposal is that when a grandparent dies, two-thirds of the inheritance would go to the grandchildren and a third to the widow or widower. When the latter also dies, that third would go to the children. The idea is not an original one, having already been launched by the CVP Youth in the nineties, and the youth supplement of the new spaper De Morgen also claims to have put the idea forward. But with this proposal, Spirit is clearly choosing to profile itself in the political landscape as a young persons’ party, opines De Standaard (FF).

**BART BRINCKMAN • DE STANDAARD • 6 MARCH**

The four youngest Spirit MPs - Vincent Van Quickenborne, Sven Gatz, Jan Roegiers, and Els Van Weert - have banded together under the name M4. M4 is aimed at the M Generation, the generation born after 1970 and that characterises itself as a middle generation with quality of life rather than ambition. Van Quickenborne makes no bones about it; M4 wants to win over young people. According to the senator, that is the only way of really making the difference. So Spirit finally has its own unique selling proposition. What the environment is to Agalev, young people are to Spirit.

These political M Kids yesterday launched an initial proposal for winning over young people: the inheritance leap, under which grandchildren inherit directly from their grandparents. In the near future there will be more proposals, such as tax benefits for those living alone. The path being taken by M4 fits in perfectly with the profile adopted by the Minister of the Government of Flanders for Youth Affairs Bert Anciaux (also Spirit). He had already criticised the fact that the Zilvervloot (ed.: a savings scheme for young people aged between 15 and 21) generation - in a nutshell, today’s young people - were being excluded from the debate on solidarity between the generations. But at the time he did not make any concrete proposals himself. M4 wants to do just that now, in the hope of finding an electoral gap in the market. It will not be easy. Relatively speaking, young people constitute an increasingly smaller part of the electorate. What is more, Spirit will have to compete with the Vlaams Blok and Agalev, in particular. But first and foremost the party will have to take care not to get entangled within its own ranks. Spirit senator Patrick Vankrunkelsven, for example, saw the better-situated double-income households, in particular, as a target group for Spirit - people for whom solidarity is important, and who are looking for ‘the best elements of the Green, Socialist, and Liberal ideologies’. And let alone that it is now precisely that group that M4 is hitting in its purse via the inheritance leap. ‘We have to be bold enough to speak out for things that could run counter to our own personal interests,’ said Els Van Weert, herself a potential victim of the inheritance leap. It will be interesting to see whether the voters also adopt such a generous view.

**GOVERNMENT**

**The purple green coalition wants to continue in office**

After the top-level talks between parliamentary party chairmen and party chairmen, everyone appears to be looking in the same direction again in the Purple/Green coalition. The emphasis will be placed on implementing work during the fifteen months remaining before the next elections. Promises made have to be fulfilled. The manner in which consensus was reached smoothly in matters such as the juvenile detention centre of Everberg, the ABX parcel service of the National Railway Company (NMBS) and the closure of the nuclear plants, provided for a fine series of achievements, in the view of De Morgen (2 March). Deputy Prime Minister Louis Michel (PRL) confirmed it again on Flemish television on 3 March. After the next elections he wants a re-run of the purple-green coalition, preferably with Guy Verhofstadt as Prime Minister and with the Greens in office. Even Louis Tobbak, who was the strong man of the Flemish Socialists in the previous government and originally a self-declared opponent of the purple-green combination, has changed his mind. He also thinks that the present coalition should continue in office. In the pronouncements made by the major figureheads of the purple-green coalition, the largest opposition party CD&V deciphered a tacit electoral pact to continue with a ‘Verhofstadt II’ government after the elections. Yves Leterme, opposition leader in the House, thinks that the statements made by the Purple-green coalition saying that they want to carry on with what he calls ‘this show’, represents a real gift for the CD&V (De Morgen, 5 March). His fellow parliamentary party-member Pieter De Crem realises that his party will only be able to form part of the next government if the CD&V wins the elections.
Opinion

YVES DESMET • DE MORGEN • 5 MARCH

Last weekend, all members of the Purple-green coalition were pretty much in unison: if the elections allow, we are heading for another Purple-green coalition government. Those are declarations that are not received lightly in the Rue de la Loi, because people there are by nature keen to keep their hands free when it comes to coalition talks, but also because the opposition eagerly seizes upon such a pronouncement in order to turn it into the election stakes. The fact that the bigwigs of the Purple-green coalition are nonetheless already advocating the continuation of the current coalition means two things. It means that the harmony within the coalition has been restored, and that the coalition members are not really afraid of the opposition. Indeed, they do not really have any cause to fear the opposition, since for the moment the CD&V is still not managing to come across as a particularly credible force. What is more, the CD&V has not succeeded in putting forward a leader capable of credibly engaging in the debate with the big guns of the Purple-green coalition. Stefaan De Clerck, Pieter De Crem, and Yves Leterme undoubtedly all have their good qualities, but they have still not worked out, even within their own party, who is best in which role.

Agalev glows with self-confidence again

FF EDITOR

The Greens have had a hard time of it over the past few weeks. Ecolo Minister for Transportation Isabel Durand was placed under severe pressure by Steve Stevaert on the issue of road safety and was forced to make substantial concessions to Railways boss Etienne Schoupe on the fate of the ABX parcel service. The Flemish Minister for Agriculture Vera Dua (Agalev) came under fire from farmers’ organisations because she wants to have more than half of all farming land declared to be vulnerable areas, and Federal Minister for Health Magda Aelvoet (Agalev) was forced to conclude, in the wake of the PCB crisis, that the Food Safety Agency, for which she is responsible, operated poorly, to put it frankly. The Greens also had to back down on the issue of immigrants’ voting rights, although together with the Socialists they were able to force a vote in the Senate. Since the French-speaking PRL of Louis Michel is voting against, out of solidarity with the Flemish sister party VLD, a majority for the voting right is as good as inconceivable. However, just recently the Greens have once again been able to count on a good deal of leniency from the coalition partners. For example, Michel declared that he was prepared to have the matter of voting rights for immigrants included in the next government policy statement, and that he wanted to continue to govern with the Greens. At the members’ meeting in Ghent, self-confidence within Agalev was once again high, since the closure of the nuclear plants had signified a notable victory. And that has done a lot of good.

BART EECKHOUT • DE MORGEN • 4 MARCH

The voting right for immigrants, which in all probability, if not certainty, will not become a reality in the current period of office, was one of the leitmotifs at Agalev’s Green Light meeting day. ‘Louis Michel (PRL) has bailed out the VLD,’ conceded Magda Aelvoet. Flemish Minister Mieke Vogels was not yet losing heart: ‘I still believe in parliament’s self-respect. I am counting on the members of parliament demanding their rights again. I invite the PRL’s elected representatives to follow their own ideology and vote in favour of the voting right for immigrants.’ ‘We keep up, even if things get tough,’ said party secretary Jos Geysels, referring to the stormy weeks that his party had endured. Rapturous applause from the 850-odd members of the audience proved that the Green grass roots still supports minister Aelvoet after the PCB affair. Aelvoet called it ‘intolerable’ that the opposition blamed her for mistakes every time something was found in animal feed. ‘If and when something is found, that does not constitute the proof that we have to go after someone’s scalp. I’ve now got a lawsuit brought by Vandennavene (an animal feed company) on my plate, but that doesn’t bother me. I want to get these “guys”.’ The ‘guys from the press’ were also given what for, but in that case ‘because they throw away people’s reputations with unbelievable light-frivolity.’ Mieke Vogels also felt that the press was ripe for self-examination. In her own words, she has received at least five offers to appear on a magazine cover in a swimsuit to defend her ‘plus-size’ campaign (which she wants to use to attack the compulsory ideal of beauty). ‘I certainly want to trumpet my ideals, but not in a swimsuit’. However, the bad news was shaved to the background in Ghent, with some ease, by the recent government decision to withdraw from nuclear energy. ‘Some of us will still remember that we demonstrated against the plans for one additional nuclear plant. Now we can announce that all the plants will be closing,’ Geysels said proudly. ‘We’re not tilting at windmills, we’re in favour of windmills.’ The Greens’ leader again urged for an energy levy. The fact that the Flemish Socialists were also in favour of this had not escaped Geysels’ notice, and he called upon them to work out a proposal together in parliament. Agalev also wants to see the recent government commitment to increase the budget for development co-operation enshrined in a law. The Greens will be tabling a bill in the House which will lay down a growth path designed to arrive at the promised 0.7% of GNP by 2010.
Agreement between Flanders and the Netherlands on the Western Scheldt

The Western Scheldt is of vital importance for the port of Antwerp, since for seagoing vessels this most westerly arm of the Scheldt is the only access to the port of Antwerp. However, the Western Scheldt also flows through the Dutch region of Zeeland Flanders for quite a considerable distance, and also has two Dutch ports on its banks: Vlissingen and Terneuzen. Agreements between Flanders and the Netherlands are therefore essential for a sound management of the Western Scheldt. Antwerp has long asked for the channel to be deepened so that the port of Antwerp could also become accessible to larger seagoing vessels, whilst the Netherlands wants guarantees for the transportation of hazardous substances such as ammonia. Furthermore, the Netherlands also wants the prices for piloting to Antwerp to be unlinked to those for piloting to its great rival Rotterdam. On 4 March the Flemish Minister for Transport Steve Stevaert (Sp.a) signed two memorandums on this with his Dutch counterpart Tineke Netelenbos (Sp.a). In a first memorandum the two ministers agreed that a recommendation would be forthcoming within two years on how deep the Western Scheldt to Antwerp should be: 11.85 metres, 12.80 metres, or 13.10 metres. In another memorandum, restrictions are imposed on the transportation of ammonia and other hazardous substances. On the Flemish side, people are now hoping that progress can also be made in that other thorny matter, that of the Iron Rhine. The Iron Rhine is an old railway link between the port of Antwerp and the German Ruhr region that runs through the Dutch province of Limburg (FF).

BERT WILDENBURG • DE FINANCIËL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 5 MARCH

Last Friday Antwerp was still demanding that the decision had to be made within two and half years. Earlier the Flemish Minister for Mobility Steve Stevaert had again said that the negotiations with the Netherlands were stuck fast and that it was not very probable that an agreement would be signed. Last Friday, to everyone’s amazement, the Minister said that his Dutch colleague Tineke Netelenbos was prepared to make concessions. And so, on Monday evening, there was a meeting after all, and the agreement was signed. The agreements on the limitation on ammonia transport boil down to an arrangement whereby safety on and around the river will be monitored under the supervision of the governor of Antwerp, Camile Paulus, and the Zeeland Royal Commissioner, Wim van Geldser. Originally, interested parties in Antwerp did not want to hear anything of a limitation to the transport of ammonia, since it would cost the Antwerp chemical sector too much money. In the Netherlands, it was asserted that a limitation was necessary for the development of the port of Vlissingen. So, the limitation is to be established after all. Checks will be made not only on safety on the river, but also on that of the inhabitants in Flanders and Zeeland.

Minister Netelenbos also wants a roundtable conference on the Antwerp and Zeeland ports. The competition between the ports should remain, she argued, and it was not the aim to arrive at the formation of a cartel. The unlinking of the piloting fees between 2003 and 2008 should lead to nautical management. There has long been debate on this point. The Netherlands wants the piloting tariffs to Antwerp to be gradually unlinked from those to Rotterdam. However, the Antwerp port lobby is afraid that the prices for Antwerp will end up being more expensive than those for Rotterdam.

Governor Paulus recognises that the work for the coming two years will constitute a hellish job, but he said that with everyone together around the table it would be seen that the deepening of the Western Scheldt was vitally important not only for Antwerp, but also for the whole of Flanders. Stevaert was of the view that the storm that had been kicked up in Antwerp over the last few days would later be seen to have been nothing more than a storm in a teacup.

Finally, both Governor Paulus and Minister Stevaert made an emphatic appeal to the Dutch minister, saying that the Western Scheldt was not the only thing of vital importance to Antwerp: the Iron Rhine was as well. In turn, they both asked for a time scale to be agreed on.

BEL20-INDEX AFTER REARRANGEMENT OF 1 MARCH

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SOURCE: TIJD GRAPHICS
An extinction scenario with no alternative?

State Secretary for Energy Olivier Deleuze (Ecolo) has granted a second domain concession for a windmill plant at sea to the combination of electricity producer Electrabel and dredging company Jan De Nul. A concession had already previously been granted to C-power, a joint venture between Interelectra and the dredging company Dredging. Electrabel’s new plant will have a capacity of 100 megawatts. At the same time Electrabel put another windmill plant into operation that has been established along the Bruges-Zeebrugge canal. The plant is made up of fourteen windmills and has a capacity of 8.4 megawatts. On account of the recently approved bill on the closure of nuclear plants, wind energy, and other forms of renewable energy (processing of biomass, total energy) are being placed in the spotlight. After all, the closure of the nuclear plants, which generate 55% of Belgium’s electricity, will lead to a huge shortage in energy capacity. And there is still not a single detailed plan outlining how this shortfall is to be made good. State Secretary for Energy Deleuze (in De Morgen, 4 March) is pinning high hopes on renewable energy, but this only represents 0.13% of electricity production at the moment, and will only be able to supply 10% of electricity, at most, by the year 2020. However, Deleuze strongly believes in the liberalisation of the electricity market and the solutions investors will come up with. Among other things, this should boost the more rational use of energy and attract investors. According to Deleuze, even Electrabel, which currently holds a quasi-monopoly position on the market, will also change the way it goes about producing electricity, since its shareholders no longer want to invest in nuclear energy because it is too risky. Should there still not be sufficient energy capacity in 2025, then ‘force majeure’ can still be invoked by energy producers, network managers, and regions, or when the indicative plan for the electricity sector is ignored. Opponents of the extinction scenario have two strong arguments. Renewable energy will lead to a price hike in users’ bills, according to their calculations, and there will be a drastic increase in CO2 emissions because gas-fired plants are the most suitable alternative forms to nuclear plants from a market-economy point of view. In this way it will be extremely difficult to respect the Kyoto convention (FF).

Pascal Sertyn • De Standaard • 2 March

Electrabel warns that the current proposals for electricity production using renewable energy, such as wind power, come with a high price tag. Chief executive Willy Bosmans spoke in unambiguous terms yesterday: renewable energy will push Belgium’s power bill up by 400 million euros by 2005. The Belgian electricity producer also calculated that EUR 10 billion in investments will be needed in order to attain 10% renewable power production by 2020. This figure of ten percent was put forward by the Ampère commission, which looked into how Belgium’s electricity supply could be guaranteed in the future, in a study carried out two years ago. By the year 2005, energy buyers in Belgium will have to purchase at least 3% of their electricity supply from producers operating renewable power plants. In exchange for the more expensive power that they would be buying from these producers, they will be given ‘Green’ certificates. Those unable to present enough certificates will be fined. Electrabel has calculated that the power suppliers will have to spend 400 million euros more, on account of these green purchases or fines, in order to buy electricity. Willy Bosmans left no doubt that these additional costs would be billed on to the end user of the power. According to Bosmans, it will be Belgian companies, in particular, that will be affected by this price hike. He estimated that it could result in energy costs rising by 10 to 15%.

Electrabel records a fall in profit in 2001

FF Editor

Group profit at the Belgian electricity producer Electrabel (turnover: 12.58 billion EUR) fell by 11.5% to EUR 798 million in 2001. It is the first time that Electrabel’s group profit has fallen since the company came into being further to the merger of the electricity companies Elec, Unerg and Intecom, reports De Financieel-Economische Tijd (6 March). The poor economic situation, but in particular the increased competition in Belgium as a result of the advancing liberalisation of the electricity market are the cause, explains Willy Bosmans, the chairman of the Belgian electricity producer’s management committee. Electricity consumption in Belgium did rise by 0.6% in 2001 compared with 2000, and Electrabel’s sales of electricity to the inter-municipal companies also rose, by 0.9%, but sales to industry fell back by 3.5% as a result of the further opening-up of the Belgian market from the beginning of 2001. As of that date, all companies using more than 20 million kWh per year have been able to choose whom they buy their electricity from. Meanwhile, as of the beginning of 2002 the threshold in the Flemish Region has been lowered to 1 million kWh and, in terms of consumption, 52% of the Belgian market is now open to competition. Electrabel’s sales of electricity outside Belgium record ed strong growth of 55% thanks to the expansion of activities in various European countries. The most important market after Belgium is the Netherlands, but Electrabel also sells electricity to Luxembourg, Germany, Hungary, Italy, and France.
National Climate Plan comes in for criticism

Belgium's federal and regional ministers have prepared their National Climate Plan, 2002-2012, a plan with which the country fleshes out the Kyoto Protocol. According to the Protocol, Belgium must reduce its emissions of greenhouse gases - chiefly CO2, but also methane and hydro-chlorocarbons - by 34 million tons by 2012. However, the Climate Plan only trims the volume of emissions by 14 million tons through a combination of non-fiscal measures and the introduction of a CO2 tax. For the remaining 20 million tons, Belgium wants to buy emission rights, probably from Russia, reports De Standaard (7 March). The trade in emission rights is a loophole in the Protocol for countries that do not manage to bring down their CO2 emissions through energy savings - a loophole vehemently contested by Europe's Green parties. Industrialised countries such as Belgium can buy emission rights from countries such as Russia, which release less CO2 into the atmosphere and have immense forests, and therefore a 'surplus'. According to De Standaard (7 March), the plan shows that the environment ministers - federal: Deleuze (Ecolo) and Aelvoet (Agalev, Health), regional: Dua (Agalev, Flanders), Gosuin (PRL, Brussels), and Foret (PRL, Wallonia) - do not know what to do about the Kyoto Protocol. The Flemish Association for a Better Environment (Bond Beter Leef Milieu) called it a 'shamefully weak approach, and this despite the fact there are so many Green ministers in the governments'.

ILSE DE VOOGHT • DE FINANCIEL- ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 7 MARCH

The Flemish Association for a Better Environment (Bond Beter Leef Milieu) called the Climate Plan 'a national disaster' and a '3 Suisses catalogue devoid of any cohesion'. The umbrella organisation of the Flemish environmental associations suspects the government in particular of resorting to the flexibility mechanisms (trade in emission rights, joint-venture projects with other industrialised countries, 'clean' investments in developing countries). According to spokesman Bart Martens, the plan in fact even represents a step backwards. 'The plan states that Belgium will introduce an energy tax itself if the European talks decide on this. Now the introduction of that tax is being put back on the back burner once again, since everything has to be 'further studied'.' Nonetheless, studies from the Planning Office show that ploughing back the revenue from this kind of tax has positive results for the reduction of wage costs, for GNP and for employment.

ANTOON WOUTERS • DE STANDAARD • 7 MARCH

If there is one policy that cannot be comprehensible and clear enough for the population, it is the fight against the greenhouse effect: tips on lower power consumption in the home: using more energy-saving lights; turning the light off when it is not needed; setting the central heating a degree lower; ensuring a good insulation of the home; using the car less; doing a little more manual work in the garden... There are so many little things that can be done to bring about a change of mentality. However, there is nothing inspiring to be found in the deadly dull Climate Plan.

Punch takes over core business of Xeikon

The digital printing press manufacturer Xeikon from Mortsel is being wound up. The company has been operating since November under a judicial settlement because it was no longer able to pay the EUR 40 million it owed in debts. Four potential buyers came forward, two of which were serious candidates: the German firm MAN Roland and the electronics group Punch from Ghent. In the end Punch was the only remaining contender, but the negotiations got bogged down on the issue of the staff and the debt burden being taken over. However, Punch was still interested in buying the core of Xeikon (the colour printing press division in Mortsel and the toner plant in Heultje) after the bankruptcy. Xeikon, once a world pioneer in the field of digital printing press technology, employs 900 people worldwide (FF).

MARC BALDUYCK • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 7 MARCH

Tough negotiations were held with the potential buyer Punch over several days, but in the end the company's indebtedness and the number of employees proved to be insurmountable stumbling blocks. Punch was not longer guaranteeing that it was prepared to take on 240 of the 400 employees in Mortsel in the deal, whereupon the negotiations finally fell through. The settlement of the Xeikon dossier is now in the hands of three receivers. They will try to sell the bankrupt company's assets to potential buyers, and in this respect Punch is again in the front line. The Ghent company has not yet determined a price. The receivers also still have to work out what to do with Xeikon's French subsidiary. For the time being Xeikon France is continuing in business under a French judicial settlement.

FF EDITORIAL STAFF

Then, after all, on 8 March came the news that Punch International would be buying Xeikon's core assets for EUR 20 million (De Financieel-Economische Tijd, 8 March). Punch is taking on 235 of the 430 employees in Mortsel, and is also taking over the toner plant in Heultje.
KBC: the first fall in profits in years

The Flemish provider of combined banking and insurance services KBC posted a net group profit in 2001 of EUR 1,022 billion, down 12.3% on the 2000 figure. This decrease in profits is chiefly attributable to the banking division, and for that matter is not unexpected, either. The entire financial sector is suffering from the slack share market, and so too, therefore, is fund management. The securities subsidiary KBC Securities and KBC Financial Products were no exception to this scenario. Last year the two subsidiaries still accounted for a profit of almost EUR 150 million, but this time round they have together posted a loss in the region of EUR 35 million. What is more, due to the disappointing economic situation, KBC was also forced to raise its provisions for bad credit risks by EUR 330 million - a measure made necessary by loans extended to bankrupt companies such as Enron and Lernout & Hauspie at home. Results were also disappointing on the second domestic market, that of Central Europe. In Poland, the local subsidiary Kredyt Bank granted a lot of bad loans, which meant that substantial provisions had to be made. For the rest, the Czech bank CSOB was the only Central European subsidiary that recorded a profit. All other KBC subsidiaries made a loss, reports De Standaard (5 March). KBC’s insurance business line did keep its footing, and even managed an increase in profit of 12.2%. KBC chairman Remi Vermeiren declared himself to be satisfied, all things considered, and regarded the result as respectable, given the difficult economic year.

www.kbc.be

KBC RESULTS 2001

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A Flemish Council for Journalism to monitor ethics

On 6 March, the Flemish Association of Professional Journalists (VVJ), the federations of newspaper and magazine publishers, and the management teams of the audio-visual media signed the Articles of Agreement of an association that will organise a Council for journalists. The Council will be made up of six journalists, six representatives of the media, management teams, and six ‘external’ members. Its principal task will be to keep a close eye on journalistic ethics. The setting up of the Council has taken some doing. The VRT originally had a number of reservations about a ‘sanctioning organ’ in the current competitive environment (the commercial battle with the VTM news service) and pointed out that it already had a professional code of ethics that was far stricter than that of other media editorial offices. A good number of editorial offices in the media apply their own rules as regards news gathering, correct information, source confidentiality and respect for privacy, which go back to the Declaration of Rights and Obligations of the Journalist (Munich, 1974) and a Belgian code of ethics (FF).

PATRICK MARTENS • KNACK • 6 MARCH

The Council will not be a court or a disciplinary tribunal. One of its key tasks will be to refine journalistic ethics. In addition, an ombudsman (or ombudswoman) will endeavour to mediate in complaints from readers, listeners, and viewers. If this arbitration is of no use, the Council for Journalism will pass a judgement, which may have to be published by the medium concerned. That is in keeping with the line taken by the Belgian General Association of Professional Journalists (AVBB) since 1995. At that time, alarmed at the resentment felt in the political world and among the judicial authorities, at the reporting on much talked-about subjects such as the Agusta affair and the murder of PS heavyweight Cools, the AVBB was able, with an Ethics Council, to prevent the government from imposing restrictive rules on journalists. The AVBB opted resolutely for self-regulation in order to make the application of journalists’ rights and obligations clear for the media sector and for the public. This Ethics Council, with a few journalists, has since given an opinion on some ninety questions and complaints. But its power and function have been a matter for discussion at regular intervals. In the sector itself, some saw it as an additional repressive instrument against journalists, who find themselves having to answer for themselves in court far more often than before. Outside the...
media, it was said that the self-control would only explain away the work of journalists. In a context characterised by commercialisation, mergers and competition, the Ethics Council showed above all that the matter of professional ethics is no longer simply an issue for the individual journalist, but also for the managers of editorial offices and the media company management. Various incidents have underlined this. Recently, even, there was the uproar surrounding the visit paid by a VTM journalist to Marc Dutroux in the Aarlen prison, in the tracks of VLD senator Jean-Marie Dedecker. The organisation, composition, and tasks of the new Council already offer an answer to these sticking points, on paper at least. The plan can also bear comparison with the Dutch Council for Journalism. The Flemish media are immediately taking a different route to the French-language press, where the media company management feels that the editorial offices are best off each forging their own professional code of ethics.

**Diary**

**MUSIC, DANCE THEATRE**

- **20 February until 17 November**: Brugges 2002, Cultural Capital of Europe; info: 070/22.33.02 www.brugges2002.be
- **20 February** - 23 March: Jan Fabre, The Swan’s Lake, Concertgebouw, Bruges.
- **22 March**: Jazz; Greetings from Mercury, De Werf, Bruges.
- **6 to 15 March**: Jan Lauwers & Needcom- pany, Images of Affection, theatre, in English, Kaaitheaterstudio’s Brussels; info: 02/201.59.59 www.kaaitheater.be
- **27 March**: La Petite Bande conducted by Sigiswald Kuijken, Johannes-Passie and Grattoria by H. Schütz; De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- **26 to 29 March**: William Forsythe and Ballett Frankfurt, Artifex, dance; De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- **15 March and 22/23 March**: Zuiderpershuis Antwerp: Nikos Papazoglou (Greece) and Steely Pan (contemporary music) info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
- **13 March**: Until 2 June: Images of Affection, exhibition, Museum of Natural Sciences, Brussels; info: 02/627.42.52 www.natuurwetenschappen.be
- **21 March**: Jazz; Greetings from Mercury, De Werf, Bruges.
- **8 to 16 March**: Jan Ritsema & Bojana Cvejić, Today Ulysses, theatre, Kaaitheaterstudio’s Brussels; info: 02/201.59.59 www.kaaitheater.be
- **13 March**: Pieter Wispelwey, Cello with 6 suites by JS Bach, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- **18 March**: Zehetmair Quartett, Conservatorium, Antwerp; info: 03/240.70.20
- **20 March**: Spiegel Strijkkwartet with Teodorano Anzelotti (accordeon) with compositions by Pintscher, Vermeersch and Sciarino, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- **14 to 24 March**: Cinema Novo Festival, Bruges; info: 050/33.54.86 www.cinema nov o.be
- **13 March**: Heather Nova, De Velinx, Tongeren; info: 02/39.38.00
- **21 March**: Ictus with compositions by Carter, Morett, and Manes, Kaaitheater, Brussels; info: 02/201.59.59 www.kaaitheater.be
- **23 March**: Tendersticks, Stadsschouwburg, Kortrijk; info: 0900/26060
- **20 to 22 March**: Pina Bausch and Tanztheater Wuppertal, Kontaktkoh, dance; De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- **25 March**: Prazak Quartet and Quirine Viersen (Cello), F. Schubert, Der Tod und das Mädchen and Quintet in C, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- **26 to 30 March**: Vooruit Geluid Festival, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: 09/267.24.24 www.vooruit.be
- **15 March and 22/23 March**: Zuiderpershuis Antwerp: Nikos Papazoglou (Greece) and Steely Pan (contemporary music) info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
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**EXPO**

- **Until 2 June 2002**: 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.europaeurorie.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 Olbrechts - in search of art in Africa, photo exhibition, Etnografisch Museum, Antwerp; info: 03/220.86.00
- **Until 14 April**: Jan Van Imschoot, Steven Aalders and Yashal Judsiman, SMÅ, Ghent; info: 09/221.71.03 www.smak.be
- **Until 31 March**: Focus 1: a special meeting with works by Edgar Tjytgp, Ossip Zadkine, Floris Jespers, Marc Chagall, Frits Vanden Berge, Gustave De Smet, Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, www.museummd.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 Eisele; info: 02/515.64.21
- **Until 12 April**: The non-conformist city, exhibition, MUHKA, Antwerp; info: 03/238.59.60 www.antwerpen.be/culture/kmska
- **Until 26 March**: Ruik Wouters, exhibition, PSK, Brussels; info: 02/507.84.66 www.pskpba.be
- **Until 12 May**: Mukha exhibitions: Guy Mees, Dimitri Vangrunderbeek and Paul de Vree, Antwerp; info: 03/238.59.60 www.antwerpen.be/culture/kmska
- **Until 26 March**: Ruik Wouters, exhibition, PSK, Brussels; info: 02/507.84.66 www.pskpba.be
- **Until 12 May**: Ruik Wouters, exhibition, PSK, Brussels; info: 02/507.84.66 www.pskpba.be
- **Until April**: Erwin Olaf, Paradise 2001, Photo Exhibition, CC Scharpoord, Knokke-Heist

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