Agreement on electoral law

After a full night’s discussions, the six Federal majority parties reached a draft agreement on the reform of electoral law. The main sticking point was the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde district. Flemish parties feared falling below the hurdle of 5% there, and there was disagreement over the question of whether Francophone voters from that district could also vote for a candidate such as Louis Michel, who is standing in Walloon Brabant. By 8:30 the problem had been sorted: Flemish residents of Brussels can vote for candidates from the whole of Flemish Brabant, Francophone residents of Brussels can only vote for candidates from their district, Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde. And Flemish parties no longer have to fear the hurdle, because this is calculated on the number of votes cast in each language community separately (FF).

DE STANDAARD • 26 APRIL

Premier Guy Verhofstadt spoke of a ‘thorough reform of the democratic system’. The agreement plans for the introduction of provincial constituencies, as is already in the case in places such as Limburg. In these electoral definitions a hurdle of 5% applies. In this way 150 MPs will be elected. To these can be added the 50 MPs standing in a Flemish and Francophone electoral definition. This will probably involve 30 Dutch-speakers and 20 French-speakers. The reform also stipulates that the system of successors be reintroduced.

The Senate will be composed equally of delegates from the communities and regions. The assembly will consist of 35 Dutch-speakers and as many French-speakers, including one German-speaker. The Senate will become a meeting place for the communities and will be given authority over the Constitution and special acts. In addition, a number of other matters were clarified. This will extend the task of the Court of Arbitration further in the direction of a genuine constitutional court. For the 2003 elections, the provincial electoral definitions will already be a reality, but the Chamber will still consist of 150 members. The Senate will continue to have 71 members, 40 of whom will be directly elected.
Towards a co-operation between VLD and NCD

The liberal VLD of Karel De Gucht wants to join forces with the Nieuwe Christen Democratie (NCD) after the elections in 2003. With the NCD, a group of Christian democrats based around Johan Van Hecke, Karel Pinxten, Reginald Moreels, Annemie Turtelboom, John Taylor, and Luc Willems, who split from the CD&V, De Gucht has for months been sounding out the possibilities of a far-reaching co-operation. Together, both parties already have a number of study days behind them, but for Euro MP Johan Van Hecke the co-operation must take on a more concrete form, and soon.

The NCD wants to know as quickly as possible where it stands, preferably before the lists of election candidates are put together. But within the VLD De Gucht has been heavily criticised by the right wing of the VLD for his expansion operation. This right wing feels that it is time that the VLD adopted a more right-wing stance. However, by expanding with the NCD they fear that the party will drift further towards the centre. This internal discussion within the VLD is making Van Hecke nervous. De Gucht, however, does not want to allow himself to be hurried and is now suggesting that five members of the NCD be included in the VLD party executive as observers. But that is coming up against resistance from the Jong VLD, which would remind its chairman that according to custom, the party executive is elected directly by the members. Flemish MP André Denys is also adopting a suspicious position. He would rather not see any factions appear within his party (FF).

De Gucht asked the VLD executive for a mandate to initiate the merger of the VLD and the NCD via a declaration of intent. That goes hand in hand with the co-opting of five NCD members into the party executive. Finally, a joint working party must be established to prepare the programme conference in November. Last weekend, the leaking of this co-option question created animosity within the Jong VLD. They denounced the ease with which Van Hecke, Luc Willems, Annemie Turtelboom, Karel Pinxten and Reginald Moreels, or John Taylor can enter a party executive that under normal circumstances is elected directly. Hence their proposal: first make each NCD member a VLD member and then hold new executive elections. Straight away everyone knows whether the NCD members are bringing the necessary ‘baggage’ with them.

On Friday evening, however, it emerged during an NCD meeting that the movement did not simply want to let itself be consumed by the VLD. People are not prepared to go below a certain limit. And Van Hecke wants to keep the group together, whatever the cost.

At the same time, the declaration of intent which Political Director Dirk Achten has to get down on paper as quickly as possible is being eagerly awaited. The NCD will also carefully scrutinise the social, Flemish, and ecological accents. Also the place of the centre-field in the ideology of the new people’s party also remains a tricky point. Van Hecke has agreed to go to the voter under the VLD flag. He is, however, asking for permission to conduct the campaign in groups with a VLD-NCD badge.

For De Gucht that is not a problem, provided the NCD behaves itself. At the same time, Van Hecke is trying to keep the pressure on. Without a conclusive agreement, a number of NCD members are threatening to quit politics or even to sit round the table with Spirit. The threat is intended to make the VLD chairman realise that the NCD’s stamina is not endless. If he does not pay attention, he can put away his idea for a new people’s party and will be left with only a handful of defectors.

Minister-President publishes the French version of his book

The timing could not have been better. Just as the success of Le Pen in the first round of the presidential elections in France is sending shock waves through Francophone Belgium, the Flemish Minister-President Patrick Dewael (VLD) has launched the French version of his book ‘Mutual Respect. The Hazards of the Vlaams Blok’. According to Dewael, Le Pen’s success shows that no country or federal state is immune to the far right, including Wallonia. PS Chairman Elio Di Rupo, who was present at the launch, in particular praised the book’s educational value. Both politicians share the same view of the far right, but their opinions differ as to how the phenomenon should be tackled. Dewael prefers direct confrontation with the far right, e.g. in television debates or by making voters face up to their responsibility in direct mayoral elections.
Municipal taxes rose sharply in 2001 and 2002

FF EDITOR

In 2001 and/or 2002, a good 68% of Flemish municipalities increased taxes, according to an overview by the Union of Flemish Local Authorities (Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten, VVSG). The average rate of municipal tax rose from 6.59 to 7.01% over this period, while the average rate of the surcharge on property tax also rose sharply. An increase in municipal tax in the year after the elections is a tradition, often because the tax cuts before the elections have to be corrected. But it is striking that the average increase is now much higher than during the previous legislative period and that many more municipalities are making use of it. According to the VVSG, there are also other reasons than the electoral cycle. There are the costs of police reform and, in particular, the expected drop in income of the intermunicipal energy companies following the deregulation of the Flemish electricity market on 1 July 2003. In 2000, the Flemish municipalities took 549 million euros from the distribution of gas and electricity, which accounted for 10% of their income. After this date, all the municipalities are left with is a fee for distributing gas and electricity and a small profit margin on sales. But according to Trends (25 April), corporation tax must then be paid on this, which means tens of millions of euros will move from the municipal coffers to the Federal Treasury. The estimated fall in energy dividends is between 250 and 400 million euros. The Flemish Region is making the pill slightly less bitter for the municipalities by introducing a fee (charge) for the use of municipal roads, for example if cables or electricity lines are laid along these roads. All together that would provide the municipalities with 75 million euros (Trends). However, surcharges on personal income tax or property tax are likely to fill in the rest of the gap (table page 2).

Christian Heinzman becomes new railways boss

Will Etienne Schouppe again manage to hang on to his place at the top of the NMBS, the country’s largest company? That was the question that occupied many commentators for a whole week. There were several calls for his resignation in the past. From train passengers, trade unions, and politicians. But each time he was able to hold his own. But not this time, apparently. Transport Minister Isabel Durant (Ecolo) wanted CD & V member Schouppe out of the way and that is what has finally happened.

The new railways boss is Christian Heinzman, top man at Luxair and an Antwerp. Heinzman is familiar with corporate restructuring, but within the aviation sphere (Vlaamse Luchtvaart Maatschappij, Luxair). What is more, Luxair has barely 3,000 employees, whereas the NMBS has 42,000. Schouppe will get a consolation prize. He may head up the parcel service, ABX. ABX is to steer its own course independently of the NMBS. The Board of Directors of the NMBS was also entirely replaced. The new chairman is Alain Deneef, former Belgacom manager. Last week, Deneef was pushed to the fore again by Transport Minister Isabel Durant as Schouppe’s successor, but the other senior ministers felt neither Deneef nor either of the two other candidates was the right person. A new call for candidates was made in a great hurry, because under the new NMBS legislation the whole management must be replaced by 26 April. The government achieved this with the help of a selection committee. The new Board of Directors is known, the Managing Director has been appointed. Whether Heinzman is the right man in the right place, only time will tell (FF).

Opinion

STEFAN HUYSENTRUYT • DE FINANCIEEL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 26 APRIL

Schouppe undoubtedly has the socialists to thank for the fact that he is being given a consolation prize, as they have continued to support him for all manner of reasons. But the Federal Minister for Transport and Guardian Minister of the NMBS, Isabelle Durant (Ecolo), should and would have the CD & V member’s head. Not so much because fundamental green tenets were at stake, but because she had developed a virulent personal allergy to Schouppe. It was difficult for her to dispute his ability, but his headstrong and often condescending manner made him a persona non grata in her eyes. The search for the new manager for the biggest company in the country barely lasted a few days. But if we are to believe the Government, haste, and speed have, in this rare case, proved beneficial, because they supplied the right man in the right place. Whether that is the case will soon become evident. The challenges facing the new railways boss are considerable. European competition is on the way, the railways unions are still omnipresent and the company is threatening to collapse under its rising mountain of debt, which has not stopped Purple-Green from imposing yet another ambitious investment plan on the railways, the financing of which has only been partly agreed. Heinzman Superman?
Antwerp: disorder teams for problem districts

Prime minister Verhofstadt is continuing his campaign against crime prevention. After earlier visits to Charleroi and Ghent, it was the turn of Antwerp on 23 April, where together with Mayor Detiège (SP.A), Safety Alderman Grootjans (VLD), Justice Minister Verwilghen (VLD), Minister for Internal Affairs Duquesne (MR), and the heads of the local police and justice he toured the problem district ‘De Seefhoek’. With a set of measures his Federal Government wants to help the city make this more livable and above all safer. In each district, Disorder Managers with disorder teams will have to tackle problems such as safety, the cleanliness of the streets, empty housing and social assistance. The Federal Government is also taking over a number of tasks from Antwerp’s police, allowing these to devote more time to tackling street crime. Finally, measures will be taken to reduce the number of asylum-seekers in Antwerp. Specifically, the Government wants to take measures against Public Social Assistance Centres (OCMWs) from smaller municipalities that simply send their asylum-seekers to the city (FF).

JOHAN VAN BAELEN • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 24 APRIL

Prime minister Verhofstadt (VLD) wants disorder in urban districts to be tackled in a vigorous and integrated manner. As in Amsterdam, where safety, cleanliness, social problems, and rack-renting are tackled in a structured way, under the leadership of a district manager. For this, the City of Antwerp is concluding a new safety contract with the Federal Government, which will foot the bill.

OCMWs that lapse will pay, promised the First Minister, who after his first tour of De Seefhoek concluded that the dumping of asylum-seekers had to stop. Four thousand two hundred asylum-seekers for De Seefhoek is still too many, Verhofstadt also realises. Together with Minister Vande Lanotte (SP.A), Verhofstadt set up a system whereby OCMWs that continued to dump asylum-seekers were dealt with severely. They were given just half the subsidy for accepting an asylum-seeker. ‘That provided 12 million euros for the treasury, but we are taking even more from the guilty OCMWs.’ The Federal Government also wants to investigate whether rack-renters’ houses cannot be dealt with more quickly. To allow the police to work more efficiently, the corps is being assigned several external advisers from the Federal Government. ‘This reorganisation is necessary as a readjustment measure,’ says Brice De Ruyver, who advises the Premier. The police will no longer get more units, but must optimise its operations with the existing people and resources. And yet federal aid is being given on several levels. A safety corps of 158 men will be responsible for the transportation of prisoners. The railways police is getting an extra 76 officers and there will be 40 auxiliary officers for parking policy and six investigators for drug research.

Opinion

KURT TUERLINCKX • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 24 APRIL

Although the local police corps is not being expanded, Mayor Detiège said she was satisfied with the talks. The Federal Police is taking over tasks, allowing the city to deploy 60 of its officers against street crime and disorder. This is what the Prime minister wants. He does not need officers sitting behind desks. They must be visible to Antwerp’s inhabitants. The Prime minister also outlined the main aspects of tackling the problems in Antwerp-North. For ten years the Government has been trying to change things for the better in areas such as De Seefhoek. Will it succeed this time?

Lower registration fees give extra boost to Flemish property market

The introduction of lower registration fees when buying a house and the portability of registration fees already paid when buying a second house have hit their target. Since the measure took effect in Flanders, the banks have granted significantly more mortgage loans. There is even talk of a recovery in the market of housing credits. In the first two months of the year, growth amounted to 25% compared with the same period last year. In addition to registration fees, an improved economic climate is also having a positive effect, reports the Professional Association of Notaries (FF).

DIRK MICHIELSEN • DE FINANCIEEL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 20 APRIL

Karel Tobbback, Chairman of the Royal Federation of Belgian Notaries confirms the recovery. ‘In particular, the buying and selling of existing houses is on the up. One the one hand this is thanks to the upturn in the economic climate, and on the other to the lowering of Flemish registration fees. In the last six weeks in particular, lower registration fees have had a clear positive effect on the mortgage and property market,’ says Tobbback. In mid-January the Flemish Parliament approved the draft decree that cuts registration fees in Flanders from 12.5 to 10% and for smaller houses from 6 to 5%. The cut was backdated to 1 January. For first-time buyers the first instalment of 12,500 euros is exempt from registration fees. The decree also provides for the portability, up to a maximum of 12,500 euros, of registration fees already paid. The Flemish Building Federation (Vlaamse Confederatie Bouw, VCB) expects that over the next few months the lower registration fees will speed up the buying and selling of existing houses. ‘The renovation sector will also benefit greatly from this,’ says Director-General Marc Dillen.
Coastal mayors organise resistance to wind farms

Two wind farms at sea have been granted a concession by the State Secretary for Energy, Olivier Deleuze. The Seanergy consortium for a project of 50 windmills off the coast at Knokke-Heist (east coast) and C-Power for a farm of about the same size on the Wendeuine bank off the coast at Wendeuine/Blankenberge. A third project involving TotalFinaElf is still waiting for a concession for 40 turbines off Zeebrugge. For the Seanergy farm the Environmental Administration has already submitted a positive environmental effects report, in spite of protest from environmental associations and coastal fishermen. Conservationists fear that the ecological balance on and around the sandbanks will be upset, but the report denies that. Coastal fishermen have been promised compensation. If the farm is granted an environmental licence by Federal Environment Minister Aelvoet (Agalev), construction can begin next year. But also the mayors of coastal municipalities have organised resistance. They are waging war against the pollution of the horizon. They want Flemish Minister for Internal Affairs Paul Van Grembergen (Spirit) to have the sea view protected as a valuable landscape. The leaders in this are the Mayors of Knokke-Heist and De Haan, Leopold Lippens and Ivan Catsysses (FF).

ISA VAN DORSSELAER • DE STANDAARD • 23 APRIL

Two weeks ago Lippens had said that he was turning to the Council of State ‘to ask to whom the horizon belongs, to Ar Doevor or to all Belgians’. ‘We want the sea view to be recognised as an inheritance,’ says Lippens. ‘The horizon has already been polluted by that wind farm at Zeebrugse. With even more of these things, 65 kilometres of coast will be entirely closed off. If we allow this, everyone will soon be hammering posts into the water.’ ‘I’m all for alternative energy. But put these windmills alongside the motorway. The faster we drive, the more wind. Great, isn’t it? Now they are getting rid of nuclear energy, they’d better think about the alternatives.’

Lippens is mainly concerned with the visual aspect. ‘Would you go on holiday to a port, unless you’re mad about boats?’ Hence his call for protection. But the Landscape Decree (Landschapsdecreet) imposes criteria: aesthetic, historical, socio-cultural, and scientific value are a must. ‘The lawyers are already at work on the reasons.’ The procedure lasts at least a year. But first it must be determined who is authorised with regard to sea views, says the office of Flemish Minister for Monuments and Landscapes, Paul Van Grembergen. The border of the Flemish Region stops at the ebb line, the water is federal. The Federal Government does not have a minister able to protect landscapes.

Nor can Lippens find an objective ally in the environmental umbrella organisation Bond Peter Leefmilieu, which supports the windmills ‘with a hard heart’. ‘They are bad for marine life, but good for energy production, and we have to move forward. It is a shame, however, that more is not being done about solar energy or energy-saving. But the mayors must not complain. They are not making any efforts to find alternatives.’ On 25 June a decision will be taken on the farm for Knokke, and on 4 August for De Haan. ‘We will have to wait and see whether the protection dossier thwarts the plans,’ says Aelvoet’s office.

Former Think-Media boss arrested

Maurice De Velder, former boss of the media group Think-Media, has been arrested on suspicion of manipulating the stock market and money-laundering. De Velder hid from investigators in France for five days, but handed himself in to Antwerp police on Monday 22 April. The examining magistrate believes there is sufficient evidence of suspected money flows between De Velder and the former owner of Antwerp’s Zillion discotheque, Frank Verstraeten, who is already under investigation. According to the current chairman of Think Media, the arrest has few repercussions for the group. Think-Media owns the Vrije Pers, which publishes the men’s magazines P-Magazine and Ché. In addition, Think-Media owns half the shares in the radio broadcaster 4FM and is a partner of the public transport company De Lijn in the advertising firm Streep, responsible for advertising campaigns on buses and trams. One week ago De Velder resigned as Director of Think-Media, but is still the group’s major shareholder (FF).

STEPHAN VERHEYDEN • DE FINANCIEEL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 23 APRIL

Following the examination, the examining magistrate decided to lock De Velder up. The judge has evidence that De Velder omitted to inform the Stock Exchange authorities that the interest of Zillion boss Frank Verstraeten in Think-Media exceeded the threshold of 5%. The judge also believes that Maurice De Velder laundered money, committed forgery, and manipulated the stock market price by trading with inside knowledge. The possible price manipulation preceded the granting of a national licence to the private radio broadcaster 4FM, of which Think-Media owns half the shares. In the days before the announcement of the granting of the licence, the Think-Media share rose by 40% with unprecedentedly large volumes. The court will examine whether this was the work of, among others, Frank Verstraeten. De Velder claims that the price increase was the work of speculators. On 22 April the Think-Media share rose 9.7% to 20.85 euros. After the stock market closed, the group announced that one of its subsidiaries, the events firm Dijngo Productions, was closing its books.
Every two years the American Chamber of Commerce in Belgium commissions a survey on American investments (1995-1999) in Belgium. The study, carried out by the University of Antwerp, shows that while in real figures investments have grown, this growth is significantly lower than in other European countries. It is true that compared with 1990, the amount of investments in 2000 doubled, but in the Netherlands that amount increased sixfold and tripled in the whole of the European Union. The Netherlands receives around 20% of all American investments in Europe, while Belgium has to be satisfied with 2.86%. That is even less than the tiny state of Luxembourg, which receives 3.4% of all American investments in the EU. Furthermore, it is American industry in particular that chooses Belgium as a base. The American service sector is heavily under-represented. Amcham attributes the low appeal of Belgium mainly to the high rate of corporation tax and high wage costs (FF).

Josse Abrahams • De Morgen • 23 April 1999

In 1999 companies from the US accounted for 142,000 jobs in Belgium, or approximately 8% of all jobs. In particular, the chemicals and transport sectors are well represented. According to this same study, American firms spend 14% of the total amount spent on R&D and are good for 15% of Belgian exports. Leonard Schrank, Chairman of Amcham, sees an explanation in the costs of labour and in Belgium's competitive position at European level. The high wage costs must be reduced. According to Amcham, Belgium also has to be able to maintain the system of co-ordination centres, which is under strong pressure from the European Union. Martin Hinoul, Principal Private Secretary to Flemish Minister for Economic Affairs Jaak Gabriëls (VLD) and for years active as trade attaché in the US, is affected even more than most by the poor figures.

Over the next few months Hinoul will be the driving force behind restructuring of Flemish export and investment policy. One of the most important components of this is the streamlining of Flemish efforts to promote exports and attract investments. Both departments will ultimately merge. Last week Hinoul was in New York, together with, among others, Pol Verhaegen, Head of the Flanders Foreign Investment Office (FFIO). There they met with the four representatives of the FFIO in the US and the five export-promoters who work there on behalf of Flanders. Together they will all come under one roof. The Flemish Government is basing the new structure on the English model. 'Where does investment begin and where do exports stop?' Hinoul wonders. On the domestic front, the administration will also be modified. There will be one representative per region, who will retain a view over the whole. Another new feature will be the introduction of a bonus. Export and investment-promoters will have to submit quantifiable results. Alongside the reorganisation, the Flemish Government will also have to consider the way in which the 'Flanders product' must be sold. Last Friday, the Federal Government presented investors and export-promoters with a major tool. In New York Pol Verhaegen concluded that American investors mainly needed a low and transparent taxation system. A tax rate of 40% coupled with all sorts of exceptions to reduce this rate gives Americans the impression that they constantly have to use back doors and they do not like that. The Government formally decided to lower corporation tax and close a number of 'back doors'. Hinoul and Verhaegen are convinced that the American investment figures will be higher for the next study.
Sobelair take-over falls through again

The future of Sabena subsidiary Sobelair remains uncertain. Until recently it looked as if the Brussels businessman Aldo Vastapane would take over the company, but the deal has fallen through. Vastapane had attached two conditions to the take-over: that the staff would give up 25% of the wage bill and that the leasing company DSF would grant lower hire rates for two Boeings. The management staff and pilots, however, refused to take part in a vote on the sacrifice, because Vastapane was not prepared to agree to their demand for 42 million euros to be set aside for a social plan in the event that the company went bankrupt. This is the second time a take-over of Sobelair has fallen through due to resistance from staff. Earlier that had been the case in February when the German tour operator Preussag/Tui showed interest in a take-over. According to Sabena’s receiver, Christian Van Buggenhout, who is charged with selling off the subsidiary companies, Sobelair now threatens to slip into liquidation (FF).

GUY MEEUS • DE FINANCIËL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 24 APRIL

According to one pilot, Vastapane used the vote to get out of his purchase agreement. The question then is why the businessman signed in the first place. The same source says that over the weekend, talks were held between Belgian World Airlines (Vastapane’s company, ed.) and SN Brussels Airlines. It was Vastapane’s ambition to begin flying to, among others, Johannesburg and Istanbul with Sobelair. Still according to the pilot, time is running out for Sobelair because the company is still making a loss due to the costly leasing contract with DSF. By September, the money will have run out. According to a member of the Works Council, receiver Christian van Buggenhout is again going to discuss the sale of Sobelair. According to the trade unions, there are still two candidates. The Dutch Melrich International and a West Flanders businessman, who, however, would act as an intermediary for an investor from the United Arab Emirates. In addition, a PBO or personnel buy-out is still on the table, but that proposal has never appealed to the receiver. According to the press agency, Belga, the ground and cabin staff of Sobelair are angry about the results of the referendum. These employee categories do not agree with the decision of pilots and management.

Flemish film policy and its Francophone counterpart

Jac o Van Dormael (Toto le Héros), Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne (La Promesse, Rosetta), Benoît Poelvoorde (C’est arrivé près de chez vous), Benoît Mariage (Les convoyeurs attendent) and Frédéric Fonteyne (une liaison pornographique) have already won several prizes at international film festivals. Belgian film has become a concept for the foreign cinephile. But surprisingly enough these are mainly French-language films, despite deserving Flemish films such as Daens (Stijn Coninx), Manneke Pis (Frank Van Passel), or Pauline en Paulette (Lieven Debrauwere). Brand-new Flemish film manager and former Green Euro MP Lucas Vander Taelen have an explanation for this. Together with a larger Film Fund of 12 million euros he is the new hope for Flemish filmmakers (FF).

SHAHEDA ISHAQUE • KNACK • 24 APRIL

There is talent aplenty on both sides of the linguistic divide. But what do the Francophones have that the Flemings do not? Firstly, a film policy that is not controlled by politics. Flemish politicians have always wanted to involve cinema too much in the process of nation forming. Literary films such as ‘De Leeuw van Vlaanderen’, ‘De Vlasschaard’, or ‘De Witte Van Zichem’ were intended to express ‘Flemish identity’. And yet Stijn Coninx with Daens and his Oscar nomination proved that even that genre can attract international attention. But by and large, Flemish film has as a result sought and found fewer connections with international trends.

The Flemish film selection committee consisted of bankers, lawyers, journalists, and representatives of ministerial offices. These ploughed with great enthusiasm through mountains of screenplays. On the Francophone side the committee members were mainly people from the film sector, who operated a transparent policy and gave new filmmakers the chance to defend their projects. Another crucial factor is closer co-operation between the film and television sectors, with the public broadcaster RTBF as a dedicated partner. On top of this the RTBF-ARTE partnership offers the possibility of showing more difficult films in co-production on ARTE. In Flanders the boss of the public broadcaster VRT, Bert De Graeve, lets slip that he found the whole film sector a waste of time, although recent talks point towards a change in climate. Vander Taelen is still keeping his policy plans quiet, but does want to emphasise that it will be a politically devolved film policy. That for the first time in years the fund will again fall under Culture is also positive; hard figures of takings and television sales had Flemish film in a stranglehold. Co-operation with the French community is certainly one of Vander Taelen’s priorities. He himself spent three years making documentary films for RTBF and admires the Francophone approach. ‘In terms of supervision
and training. Francophone film-makers are way ahead,' says Vander Taalen. In production studios they can experiment with creative documentary and short films. Under the supervision of an experienced filmmaker they can develop several projects. In the best cases, Flemish filmmakers from the film school have shot one short film. Vander Taalen also has a psychological explanation for the backlog of Flanders. ‘Francophone Belgian film deals with what life is actually like in the south of the country. That appeals to people. If a foreigner sees La Promesse or Rosetta, he immediately feels that this film has hit the nail on the head. But no one makes films about modern life in Flanders. And yet this is the path we must take. We must make films about what really appeals to people. That is just strong cinema.'

Diary

MUSIC, DANCE THEATRE

• 30 April and 1 May: Kaash, Akram Khan Company, dance, Vooruit, Ghent; info: 09/267.28.28 www.vooruit.be
• 1 to 5 May: European Youth Music Festival, 200 bands and orchestras from 35 countries; info: 011/66.23.39 www.emj.be

• Until 17 November: Bruges 2002, Cultural Capital of Europe; info: 070/22.33.02 www.bruges2002.be
• 26 April to 26 May: Be fry Happening, Aalst, guest country: Ireland with Eimear Quinn (10 M ay), Dervish (5 May) and Tom Hannes with Lifefly (dance, 11 May); organisation C.C. De Werf; info: 053/73.24.24
• 1 to 3 May: King of Pain, directed by Luc Perceval, King Lear adaptation in English; Bourla, Antwerp; info: 03/224.88.44 www.toneelhuis.be
• 4 May: Soft Cell, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
• 6 May: POD, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
• 6 May: Concert: Les Nuits d’Été (Berlioz) and Symphony nr. 3 by F. Schubert, Beethoven Academy Christopher Hogwood/Koen Kessels; mezzosoprano: Sarah Conolly. De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• Until 10 May: Transreligiosa (early music): Sint-Antoniuskerk, het Muziekinstrumentenmuseum and BSBbs; info: 02/513.82.90 and www.beurschouwburg.be.

• 3 to 25 May: Kunstfestival des Arts, Brussels; info: 070/222.1999 www.kunstfestivaldesarts.be
• 7 to 10 May: Petit pâsa du matin, Josef Nadj/Domaine M ercy, dance, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• 8 May: Dee Dee Bridgewater sings Kurt Weil, PSK, Brussels; info: 02/507.82.00 www.psk_pba.be
• 10 May: Mari Boine, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
• 11 May: Supertramp, Sportpaales, Antwerp; info: 0900/09991
• Until 5 May: Op doek, Film festival, Focus on the South, Turnhout www.opendoek.be

EXPO

• Until 5 May: Week of hobby arts, exhibitions by non-professional artists all over Flanders; info: www.amateurkunst.be
• Until 12 May: Landscape, exhibition, Botanique, Brussels; info: 02/226.12.11
• Until 26 May: World Press Photo exhibition, CC Knokke-Heist; info: 050/630.430
• Until 23 June: Retrospective exhibition Jannis Kounellis, SMAK, Ghent; info: 09/211.17.03 www.smak.be
• Until 2 June 2002: Brains in action, exhibition, Museum of Natural Sciences, Brussels; info: 02/627.42.52 www.natuurwetenschappen.be
• Until 2 June: About the Head, exhibition, Museum Dr. Ghislain, Ghent; info: 09/216.35.95 www.fraccartea.be
• Until November: Living Tomorrow, where visions meet, the house of the future, Vilvoorde; info: www.livutom.be
• Until 30 June: Jan Van Eyck, 2002, The Flemish Primatives and the South, Groeningemuseum, Bruges
• Until 13 May: exhibition, Attachment + contemporary art, Normaal school
• Until 26 May: Ricky Wouters, exhibition, KM SK, Antwerp; info: 03/238.78.09 www.antwerpen.be/cultuur/kmska
• Until 26 May: Rik Wouters, exhibition, PSK, Brussels; info: 02/507.84.66 www.pskpba.be
• Until 12 May: Muhka exhibitions: Guy Mes, Dimitri Vangruberdeek and Paul de Vree, Antwerp; info: 03/238.59.60
• Until 25 June: Photo Festival Knokke-Heist with Eric Olaf, Paradise 2001, Photo Exhibition, CC Scharpoord, Knokke-Heist
• Until 18 July: Rubens and the Flemish Baroque painters, exhibition, City Hall, Brussels; info: 02/279.64.34
• Until 14 July: James Welling: Abstract, exhibition, PSK, Brussels; info: 02/507.84.66 www.pskpba.be
• Until 14 July: Silver work by the De Vosch Family, Provincial Museum Sterckshof-Zilvercentrum, Antwerp; info: 03/360.52.50
• Until 23 June, The Brueghel Firm, exhibition, Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Brussels; info: 02/528.32.11
• Until 16 June: Surrealism with Emile Salkin (Bel), Desmond Morris (GB), Ergin Inan (Turkey) and Clovis Trouille (Fr), exhibition, PMKM, Ostend; info: 050/59.81.18 www.pkmk.be
• Until 16 June: Affinity and Individuality, exhibition Holland-Belgium between 1890 and 1945, Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent; info: 09/240.07.50
• Until 9 June: After sprawl, the contemporary city, exhibition; De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• 2 to 6 May: Art Brussels, 20th contemporary art fair, Expo-palace 3 & 4, Brussel; info: 0800/30.007 www.artexism.com
• Until 23 June: Desire in a cage, Jane Graverol, Rachel Baes and surrealism, KM SK, Antwerp; info: 03/238.78.09
• Until 8 June: A glance at pianos, 60 pianos from the historical collection of Chris Maene, Bijloke, Ghent with concerts, Bijloke, Ghent; info: 09/266.70.40
• Until 2 June: Viewmaster, video-art, exhibition, NICC, Antwerp

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"That is just strong cinema. That is what people want. That is what we must start doing, because if we don’t, we will never make films about modern life in Flanders. And that is the path we must take. We must make films about what really appeals to people. That is just strong cinema."