

# focus on FLANDERS

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## Opel invests EUR 500 million in Antwerp plan

**Opel will be investing EUR 500 million in the modernisation and expansion of its Antwerp plant over the coming five years. Opel had earlier already announced that it would be investing EUR 50 million in the expansion of its press-house. On top of this, there will now be a further EUR 450 million for machines to build the new model Opel Astra and a derived volume type, and for an extension of the bodywork department. Thanks to this investment, Opel Belgium is now 'more solidly established than ever', according**

**to Managing Director Eddy Geysen. Geysen says that after the current downsizing operation, which will cost nine hundred jobs, there will be job security for the remaining 5.500 employees (FF).**

JEROEN LISSENS • DE FINANCIËLE-  
ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 21 JUNE

Opel Belgium is investing more in its bodywork department than is necessary solely for the assembly of cars manufactured in situ. The Antwerp plant's bodywork department will thereby become an important supplier of bonnets, doors, and car floors for other European plants where the new Astra model is to be built.

It had already been known for some time that the Antwerp plant would be able to build the Astra's successor, but the investment amount of EUR 500 million is higher than expected. According to Managing Director Eddy Geysen, this confirms the faith that the American group General Motors (GM), Opel's parent company, has in its Antwerp plant. Despite the substantial investments, Opel Belgium is nonetheless a company undergoing restructuring, with slightly less than a thousand of the 6,500 employees to be laid off from January 2003. The current annual production will be brought down from 318,000 to 264,000 cars. Opel is suffering from the low demand for cars in Europe.

### INTRODUCTION



The Purple-green government's open-debate culture does it no harm at all when it comes to media attention. This would probably have been surmised by anyone who follows the media, but now it

has been demonstrated in black and white by two researchers at the University of Antwerp, Knut De Swert and Stefaan Walgrave, who have screened some 35,000 front-page articles in the Flemish newspapers *De Morgen*, *De Standaard*, and *Het Laatste Nieuws* from the last decade. But there are slight differences according to what is meant by Purple-green. The federal government led by Guy Verhofstadt (VLD) garners 42% of all newspaper coverage of domestic political issues, which is clearly considerably more than the 32 and 33% achieved by the previous Dehaene governments. The current Government of Flanders headed by Patrick Dewael also does considerably better than its predecessors, but still remains the weak younger brother in comparison with the Federal Government. Its share is barely a third of the federal government's newspaper coverage, despite the increased importance of the Flemish policy level. The same trend has been seen among the government leaders. Federal Prime Minister Verhofstadt receives 9.6% of the media attention, as opposed to just 2.6% for his Flemish counterpart Patrick Dewael. However, the considerable media interest in the cabinet level has a less pleasant side effect for the Purple-green grouping; it is at the expense of the Purple-green MPs and parties, according to the researchers' conclusions. The comparison between media interest in the majority parties and in the opposition is certainly frustrating for the latter. VLD and Agalev politicians have seen their number of mentions increase threefold and even sixfold since they entered the governments. The opposition only receives 20% of media attention, as compared to 80% for the majority grouping. For that matter, it has always been like that. And the question remains as to whether frenetic attempts to score points, such as those made by Carl Decaluwé, member of the opposition party CD&V in the Flemish Parliament, do not have a rather counter-productive effect. Decaluwé demanded an inquiry into the possible payment of slush money for the award of a licence to the Flemish radio station 4FM and the involvement of a number of VLD ministers in this. However, Decaluwé had heard the accusations from a witness with a dubious reputation, who had heard it from a cellmate who was not beyond reproach and who moreover subsequently denied everything. The press is therefore pretty unsympathetic towards this kind of 'gutter politics' (*De Morgen*, 20 June), which 'besmirches not only the VLD ministers, but also the CD&V itself and the whole political establishment' (*De Standaard*, 20 June).

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief

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FLEMISH CIVIL SERVICE

## *Flemish Info Line proves to be a success*

*The Flemish Info Line (0800/30201) is proving to be a success. In three years, the number of inquiries has grown from 60,000 to almost half a million. At the 'Contact Center Awards 2002', it was acclaimed as the second best information service in the country, behind the customer service department of Dexia Bank Belgium. The panel especially praised the 'very good degree to which the service can be accessed, both by telephone and by e-mail, and the very swift response'. The Flemish Info Line was set up in March 1999 and is currently manned by ten officials who are backed by 44 telephone operators from the Sitel call centre. Anyone can call free of charge between 9 a.m. and 7 p.m., with their questions, provided that these relate to matters falling under the competency of the Authorities of Flanders (FF).*

FILIP ROGIERS • DE MORGEN •  
19 JUNE

Brilliant in its simplicity—that is more or less the story of the Flemish Info Line. It was started up in 1999, and thus actually rather late, since it had been known for a number of years that there were gaps in the political knowledge of the average Fleming. And it was also known that people often did not (and do not) know where to turn with their questions and inquiries, in the confusing jumble of authorities and administrations. In the coming weeks the Info Line will be putting the finishing touches to its annual report. It does not really want to give this much publicity, as extra advertising is not really needed. Someone may not know who the CD&V, SP.A or NV-A (political parties with new names, ed.) are, but he'll know the Flemish Info Line. The service began in 1999 with a modest 59,567 inquiries. In 2000 the number had risen to 167,519, and in 2001 to 430,122. And the ceiling has not yet been reached, by any manner of means. 'In the first half of this year, we have again received double the

number of calls in comparison with the same period last year', says project leader Mireille Van Pollaert. The growth is not only down to people's familiarity with the Info Line thanks to a whole range of campaigns. 'We are increasingly acting as a front-line help desk for many Flemish government services, which themselves also have an info line,' says Van Pollaert. Indeed, a number of the 15 specific info lines will be integrated into ours. The education info line, for example, will be shut down in the autumn. One of the info lines that receives most inquiries, the line dealing with study grants, is also to be incorporated under ours'. It is striking that, despite the exponential growth in the number of inquiries, the problem-solving rate is very high. The Info Line can immediately give an adequate answer to 84% of the nigh-on 2,000 inquiries it deals with every day. 'The Info Line's success is undoubtedly down to the fact that from the very outset we secured all the material and human resources needed for us to work seriously and conscientiously. That is not always the case in other countries,' says Van Pollaert. 'For that matter, we are increasingly receiving visits from foreign authorities who come to examine our experiences.'

The bulk of the inquiries dealt with in 2001 concerned the working of the government itself (54%) and education (21%). The share of these subjects has doubled since 1999. Remarkably, the number of inquiries on the environment and residential issues has dropped sharply, from 15% to 2% and from 10% to 3% respectively. So Flemings do not find the environmental and town and country planning legislation so obscure after all. More inquiries (8%) are being received on welfare, health, and social security than three years ago.

The people making the inquiries are also satisfied—to the tune of almost 9 out of 10 callers or writers, if we are to believe the Info Line survey.

TRAVEL BUSINESS

## *TUI becomes leader in Belgian business travel*

***As of 1 January 2003, the German TUI Group will be the leader in the business travel sector in Belgium. This is the result of the merger of TUI Business Travel and VIP Travel, respectively the numbers three and five in the business travel segment. TUI has two activities in Belgium. The tour operating arm is subsumed under Jetair. The distribution and sale of travel services is split into holiday travel (TUI Travel Centres or TTC) and business travel (TUI Business Travel). Business travel services are sold under the brand name TQ3 Travel Solutions (FF).***

GUY MEEÛS • DE FINANCIËL-  
ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 19 JUNE

Patrick Culot, general manager of VIP Travel and his colleague Luc Wellens of TUI say that the two companies 'are very complementary'. The merger will not provoke any reorganisation operation. On the contrary, it forms 'the basis for further growth and an increase in the market share', the two say. 'It is our express aim to keep on board all the know-how at VIP and TUI Business Travel'.

The largest shareholder in VIP Travel is currently the French company Protravel, which holds a 76% stake, whilst founder and manager Patrick Culot holds 13%, as does financial manager Paula Vanzurpele. Protravel is buying out the two individual shareholders. In exchange for bringing in the whole of VIP, the French group will receive 22% in TUI Business Travel Belgium. The holding company TUI Belgium holds 78%.

Last year VIP Travel recorded a BSP turnover of EUR 37.57 million. BSP refers to sales of flight tickets on regular scheduled services. That figure earned the company fifth place, a long way behind the inaccessible top three, made up of Carlson Wagonlits (EUR 211.29 million), American Express (EUR 187.58 million) and TUI (EUR 187.10 million). The TUI/VIP combination thus becomes the new number one as of 2003.

RAILWAYS

## Karel Vinck to become new CEO at Belgian railways

**A** consensus appears to have been found in the Rue de la Loi regarding the post of managing director of the Belgian Railways. The Federal Government has cast its eye on Karel Vinck. Vinck has successively restructured the Italian subsidiary of the building materials group Eternit, the West Flanders steel wire manufacturer Beckaert and the non-ferrous metals company Umicore. For a while Vinck was also chairman of the Flemish employers' organisation VEV. The opinion in the government but also in senior management circles is that someone with a track record of this stature scarcely has any rivals. Trade union leaders, who negotiated with Vinck during his tenure at Beckaert and Umicore, also extol his readiness to enter into dialogue and his diplomatic skill. However, unlike 129 other candidates, Vinck did not submit an application for the job. In order to avoid his appointment being challenged, the government decided to launch a new selection procedure, which was published in the Belgian Bulletin of Acts, Orders and Decrees (Staatsblad) on 14 June. This is now already the fourth call for applications. For Karel Baeck, the chief executive at the National Office for Employment (RVA), the government's decision comes as a rude awakening. Baeck is the public-sector manager of the year and emerged as best candidate from the previous recruitment procedure. He was backed by Transport Minister Isabelle Durant (Ecolo), but she had to give way to the senior Liberal ministers who supported Vinck's candidacy. However, Baeck is determined to take part in the next selection procedure as well, although he stands little chance, since the procedure looks as though it is only being launched for appearance's sake in order to give Vinck the chance to apply again. Nonetheless the government has deemed it necessary to bring in a new consulting firm, De Witte & Morel, which will have to scrutinise all the applications (FF).

### Opinion

STEFAN HUYSENTRUYT • DE FINAN-  
CIEEL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 15 JUNE

*The federal cabinet had resolved not to let itself get caught out by procedural errors again in the aftermath of the Heinzmann affair. Things would go strictly by the book this time. But when it comes to the crunch the book is rewritten, since that is the only way of getting Karel Vinck into the top job at the national railways company.*

*The deadline for the submission of applications had already lapsed when the Umicore chairman was sounded out about his interest in the job. Of course, captains of industry of Vinck's calibre do not make applications themselves; they are approached. But if the Purple/Green government had approached him earlier, he would have been able to submit his application in time, and the current procedure could have been respected. Now it is being discontinued, and yet another procedure has to be started up again. That is what the 129 candidates have got for their trouble.*

*Incidentally, it is striking that what was not possible for Heinzmann suddenly is possible for Karel Vinck. Vinck will allegedly be given rock-hard guarantees that the controversial double signature (the requirement that the signature of general manager Vincent Bourlard accompany that of the managing director) will be removed from the NMBS/SNCB Act, and that the managing director will be able to appoint the members of his management committee himself.*

*The question remains as to whether Vinck's appointment will legally stand for long. At least one of the 129 candidates that will have been passed over in the process will undoubtedly lodge an appeal with the Council of State. If he or she can demonstrate having 'incurred a disadvantage that is difficult to redress' as a result of the new appointment procedure, or can prove that the new procedure*

*was drafted in such a way as to be cut out for one person, the Council will suspend the appointment.*

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

## Dirt-cheap tram and bus travel for Flemings

FF EDITOR

From 1 July, not a single Fleming will have to pay more than half a euro per day for unlimited travel on as many Belgian buses and trams as he or she wishes, reports *Het Laatste Nieuws* (19 June). At least, that is if he or she takes out an annual season ticket with the public transport company De Lijn. At the moment the over-65s and children under five already travel free of charge. The Flemish Minister for Transport Steve Stevaert (SP.A) recently launched the 'buzzy pass' for young people under 25, and this has been a huge success. Now the last age categories, those aged between 25 and 59 and between 60 and 65, are also gaining access to an economical season ticket, the so-called 'omni pass'.

*Het Laatste Nieuws* calculated what a day's travel by tram and/or bus would cost for all age categories. The under-5s and over-65s do not pay anything; those aged 6 to 24 pay 41 euro cents; those aged 25 to 59 pay 52 euro cents; and those aged 60 to 64 pay 46 euro cents. What is more, all these season tickets are also valid on Walloon (TEC) and Brussels (MIVB) trams and buses.

## Flanders scarcely has any labour reserve

**T**wo thousand and one was a respectable year for the Belgian labour market. Forty-six thousand jobs were created last year, but since the working population also grew by 44,000, the unemployment rate barely fell at all. However, the 'structural' problem on the labour market remains the low activity level. Our country has fewer working people than the European average: barely 60.9% (as compared to the European average of 63.1%). This phenomenon has been recognised for some time, and the Liberal/Socialist/Green government had made it a point to boost this activity rate. According to the European objective, working people should account for 70% of Belgium's population by 2010. But, as the High Council for Employment (Hoge Raad voor Werkgelegenheid) points out, the government is faced with an almost insurmountable handicap. The labour reserve of people looking for work is only 6.2% here, as opposed to 10.2% throughout Europe. The High Council concludes that it will never be possible to reach the objective with this 6.2% added to the 60.9%. In order to fill vacancies in the coming years, our country will have to draw on the group of unemployed persons (or other non-active persons) - who together account for 32.9% of the working population - who currently declare themselves to be unavailable for work. In Flanders the situation is even critical, as the labour reserve is extremely small (FF).

JOHAN RASKING • DE STANDAARD •  
18 JUNE

According to Jan Smets, deputy chairman of the High Council for Employment, companies initially cushioned the effects of the slackening economic climate by limiting overtime and introducing temporary unemployment. For this year, the prospects are less rosy. The report by the High Council for Employment reveals that the number of young people with a temporary job has doubled in the last ten years. Twenty-eight percent of

young people have a temporary job today, whereas in 1980 the figure was just 14%.

According to the High Council, Belgium has an activity level of 60.9%. As is often the case in labour market statistics, the national figure conceals substantial regional differences. For example there are, in proportional terms, appreciably more working people in Flanders (64.2%) than in Wallonia and Brussels. Flanders does indeed have more working people than the Belgian (and European) average, with 64.2%, but it has a labour reserve of scarcely 3.8%. In Brussels the labour reserve stands at 13%, and in Wallonia the figure is 8.4%. Filling vacancies in the so-called 'pressure-point professions' in Flanders will not get any easier.

The flattering image for Flanders is not applicable when it comes to the older age groups. In the age bracket of 55-65 year olds, barely 24.4% of Flemings are still actively working or available on the labour market as jobseekers. The figures for Brussels (37.2%) and Wallonia (25.6%) are a lot more positive in this respect. Flanders accounts for 62% of all people on early retirement and older unemployed persons (285,000 in the whole of Belgium). No less than 21% of all men over fifty have withdrawn from the job market, or been pushed out of it.

A European comparison shows that on average Belgian men stop working at the age of 59, and Belgian women at 55. The European average is 60 and 59, respectively. The labour situation of women differs enormously depending on whether or not they have children. So it is that 82% of all Belgian women who do not have children have a job; in the case of women with children, the percentage drops to 70 to 75%. For many employers motherhood

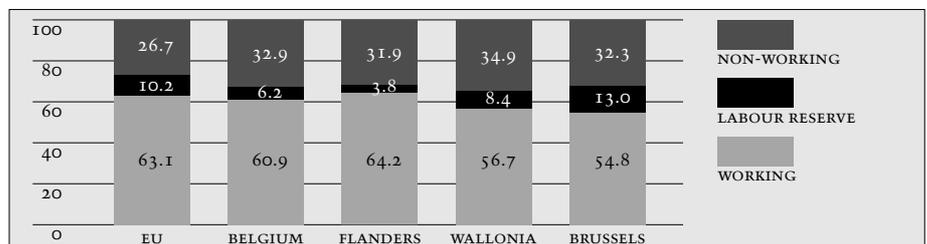
still appears to be a (non-legal) obstacle to the recruitment of young women. Jan Smets: 'In small companies, in particular, this barrier is sometimes difficult to overcome.' Belgium has 175,000 women who work at home. ■

## Turnover in the construction sector falls

FF EDITOR

Construction fell by 3.7% in Belgium and by 4.7% in Flanders in 2001, in comparison with 2000. There were 3% fewer building permits issued. But *De Standaard* points out that 2000 was an exceptionally good year, with a growth in turnover of as much as 6%. What is more, in October 2000 there were local elections, and these are traditionally preceded by frenzied activity in the building of new roads, and the laying of new sewers and gas and electricity pipelines. Sixty percent of the growth in 2000 was attributable to these civil engineering works. Nonetheless, the downturn of which notice had been given came a little sooner than predicted, according to the Building Confederation (Confederatie Bouw - CB), because the economic downturn was greater than expected. But the CB's annual report holds out hope for recovery in the second half of 2002. The construction barometer is pointing to recovery. The order books are filling up nicely, at least in Flanders and Brussels, although a lot less in Wallonia. Despite the crisis, employment rose by 1% to 185,367, with the 48,000 self-employed persons taking the total figure to 233,350. In order to reduce the temptation to take on workers in the black economy, the CB advocates a cut in wage costs, and more especially a reduction in the charges for the employer. ■

LABOUR MARKET IN THE REGIONS AND BELGIUM



SOURCE: HIGH COUNCIL FOR EMPLOYMENT

LABOUR MIGRATION

FROZEN FOODS

## Flanders plays for time on labour migration

**A**fter the defeat of the left in the parliamentary elections in the Netherlands and France, a more right-wing wind is undeniably blowing across Europe again. The Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar announced that the issue of asylum and immigration would again top the agenda at the EU summit of government leaders in Seville on 20 June. Under the influence of these electoral results, the call for Europe's borders to be bolted shut is resounding louder than ever. Meanwhile, immigrants in Italy risk being deported if they do not have a job, and in Denmark marriage to a foreigner will probably no longer be possible under the age of 24. The debate on labour migration started in 2000, in the middle of the technological boom. Countries such as Germany tried to find a solution to the shortage of highly skilled workers. Temporary work permits for highly skilled ICT specialists from outside the European Union (the so-called green cards) offered a way out. In Flanders, the employers of the VEV also argued in favour of similar measures at the time. Ive Marx, a researcher at the Antwerp Centre for Social Policy (UFSIA), carried out a study on European labour migration for the Flanders authorities and came to the conclusion that worker migration needs a political basis more than anything (FF).

JOËL DE CEULAER/CHRISTINE ALBERS •  
KNACK • 19 JUNE

Ive Marx: 'The actual labour migration policy in Belgium is a lot more liberal and flexible than in Germany. We probably have one of the most flexible systems in Europe. In theory there is a freeze on immigration, which has been in force since the 1970s, but of course there is a work permit system. All kinds of conditions have to be fulfilled in order for an individual to obtain a work permit. For example, there has to be an agreement with the worker's country of origin. And in theory a labour market check has to be carried out beforehand, as

you can only bring in someone from a third country if there is no one available on the EU labour market who could do the job, even after appropriate training.

Obviously that is very strict, but in practice there is also a whole range of exception categories, for whom the labour market check is not obligatory: those who have followed a course of higher education and management staff earning in excess of a particular gross wage. This wage ceiling is not terribly high, and many people meet the criterion with ease. The Flanders authorities issued around 3,000 work permits for people with a high level of training alone, in 2000. Now that the economic boom is over and the shortage on the labour market is less acute, the employers' voices are less easily heard. But they are not retracting their demands: Partly because the vacancies in so-called pressure-point professions—specialised welders, lorry drivers, barge masters—are still not being filled,' says Marx. 'But the Flanders authorities are playing for time. Their position is that there is still a huge labour reserve here for semi- and unskilled workers. They do not want to open the gate for social dumping, either. If you can easily import people for this heavy, often underpaid work, there is little incentive for companies to improve working conditions.' Marx is of the view that the number of immigrants that Europe can assimilate depends entirely on the conditions under which they are allowed in. 'If they stay here and become naturalised and thus gain entitlement to everything, that is something very different to the issuing of temporary work permits. The number of immigrants that Europe can absorb is not an economic but a political issue. It depends on the public's willingness to see the labour market and the social security system shared with people from parts of the world where conditions are worse. It is doubtful that there is much support for that, if you follow public and political discourse in Europe'.

## Pinguin takes over Fisher Frozen Foods for EUR 2.8 million

FF EDITOR

Pinguin, the listed West Flanders vegetable processing company, is acquiring all the assets from the compulsory winding-up of Fisher Frozen Foods, the largest British producer of frozen vegetables, reports *De Financieel-Economische Tijd* (19 June). Pinguin is paying EUR 2.8 million for machines and equipment. Fisher Frozen Foods is a division of the Albert Fisher Group, which has been operating under a compulsory winding-up order since 23 May. Fisher Group was for many years a leading listed foodstuffs concern, which owned the Ostend fish companies Morubel and La Couronne in Belgium. With the takeover, Pinguin acquires a vegetable production department with a capacity of 100,000 tons per year, including the largest deep-freeze packing department in Europe. The British market for frozen vegetables represented a turnover of EUR 468 million in 2001. Of the 400,000 tons consumed, only 266,000 tons are produced at home. The UK consumes twice as many frozen vegetables per capita as Belgium. Imports from the European Union amounted to 140,000 tons in 2000, and 68% of this came from Belgium. Pinguin and Fisher have known each other for a long time. The British company was Pinguin's representative in the United Kingdom for more than twenty years, and a shareholder (with a 30% stake) in the French company Legum'Land Surgelés (LLS), established in the south of France. Pinguin acquired this participating interest in April, thereby gaining a 60% holding in LLS. The new British department is being subsumed into a new company, Pinguin Foods UK, in which the listed Hungarian concern Globus may also take a 25% stake. As of last week, Pinguin and Globus together hold a majority interest in the Polish company Elsner, the second largest Polish producer of frozen vegetables and fruit.

## Dua simplifies environmental conditions for companies

**T**he Flemish Minister for the Environment Vera Dua (Agalev) has prepared a draft decree that simplifies and clarifies the system of environmental conditions with which companies have to comply. Among other things, it concerns emission, construction, installation, and operation norms and safety distances. The environmental conditions are listed in *Vlarem II*, the environmental rules and regulations of the Authorities of Flanders. With her draft decree, Dua is laying a uniform legal foundation for the general, sectoral, and integrated environmental conditions. General conditions are applicable to all companies, whilst sectoral conditions are applicable to a particular branch of industry or another specific group of potential polluters. Integrated environmental conditions are applicable to companies or activities that can only disrupt the environment to a limited degree, or the environmental disruption of which is homogenous in character. The general and sectoral conditions do not apply to these companies. Companies fal-

*ling under the integrated conditions are not obliged to obtain a permit, but only have to report in advance what their activity is (FF).*

MARK DEWEERDT • FINANCIEEL-  
ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 18 JUNE

In order to find out what environmental conditions his company should meet, the owner of the company now has to plough through the thousands of pages of *Vlarem II*, the environmental rules and regulations of the Authorities of Flanders. In the system of integrated conditions the authorities themselves have produced a brochure, of several dozen pages, listing all the environmental conditions that a particular category of company should comply with, on a per-sector basis.

In the Netherlands, where the system has been in operation for some fifteen years and where Minister Dua found inspiration for her draft decree, such 'all-in' packages of standard regulations exist for bakers and confectioners, office buildings, chemical laundries, wood-pro-

cessing companies, and storage and transport companies, for example. According to the draft decree, integrated conditions can only be applied to companies that can only disrupt the environment to a limited degree, or whose disruption is homogenous in character, and provided that there are resources available to remedy the environmental disruption. Companies falling under the integrated conditions are not obliged to obtain permits. However, they must first report in advance that they want to start up a particular activity. In addition to the companies in *Vlarem* category III, which currently are already only obliged to report their activity, some of the category II companies who are obliged to secure permits, may fall under the integrated conditions. Dua is making every effort to bring 50% of companies, if possible, within the framework of the integral conditions. For the companies, this means a lot less red tape and a major financial saving. Dua is aiming to begin pilot projects in two sectors before the end of this year. From 2004 the system of integrated conditions can then gradually get under way, in most cases subject to a transitional arrangement. ■

## Liberalisation of the energy market will cost people money

**A**t its general meeting, the senior management of Intermixt, the association of mixed inter-municipal companies, expressed a very negative view of the financial consequences that the liberalisation of the energy market would have. Intermixt groups together all the municipalities which, together with electricity producer Electrabel, operate the distribution of electricity and gas in an inter-municipal company. The liberalisation might lead to lower prices for the consumer, but the municipalities risk being deprived of EUR 300 million in income from 2004, as soon as they lose their monopoly on electricity and gas distribution. The municipalities will inevitably have to raise their taxes, and then the consumer will have to use the money saved thanks to the lower energy

*prices to pay for higher taxes, according to Intermixt Chairman Jos Ansoms. Ansoms proposes that the federal treasury should pay a part of the 21% VAT on the sale of energy to the municipalities by way of compensation. As for other proposals for compensation, such as the Flemish Government proposal for the levying of a roadside tax on pipelines that the energy companies have laid in the ground, or the suggestion that the municipalities be allowed to take a stake in the high tension company Elia, Ansoms regards these ideas as 'pseudo-compensation' schemes (FF).*

PASCAL SERTYN • DE STANDAARD •  
20 JUNE

Ansoms did not pull any punches when it came to rounding on the re-

gional authorities and the federal authorities. He spoke of 'the biggest "hold-up" of local municipality income,' and in this respect he feels that the Government of Flanders takes the cake. 'It is unacceptable that the region that wants to liberalise the energy market most quickly and most comprehensively, should completely disregard the consequences for the municipalities.' The expectation is that revenue will drop sharply from 2003 onwards because the mixed inter-municipal companies will in the future only have the certainty of a management fee for their electricity and gas network. Up until now the sale of electricity and gas has yielded a much larger profit, but the liberalisation puts an end to the combination of network management and energy sales. The sales activities are now being spun off. The inter-municipal companies in Flanders are having to sell a large part of their interests in the sale of electricity to private companies. ■

HARBOURS

## Liberalisation does not affect dock workers' rights

**T**he EU's fifteen transport ministers reached an agreement in Luxembourg on the directive concerning the liberalisation of port and harbour services. In so doing they proved not to be insensitive to the demonstrations by dockworkers in Belgian and German ports. The ports are to retain their exclusive right to have ships loaded and unloaded by recognised dockworkers. Shipowners may load and unload their ships themselves in European ports if the Member State where the port is located grants permission for this. The Belgian Law-Major dating from 1964, which reserves ship handling activities for recognised dockworkers, thus remains intact. The pilots are also satisfied. The liberalisation of pilotage services will only come into force in ten years' time, so they do not have to fear any competition before the year 2012 (FF).

### Opinion

MARC BALDUYCK • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 18 JUNE

From a purely technical standpoint, Europe cannot accept this latent market protection. After all, this smacks of non-transparent corporatism whereby the interests of a generally tough pressure group are given precedence over efficiency and profitability. But of course there is also something to be said for the argument that only recognised dockworkers can load and unload ships in complete safety. After all, technically unqualified persons are not allowed to work in the production processes of chemical concerns or software companies, either. Those who have undergone training as dockworkers can see to it that the job gets done quickly and effectively. When Europe advances that it wants to see goods flowing through the ports ef-

ficiently and at the lowest cost price, this also has a lot to do with the quality of the dockworkers. It therefore looks as though the compromise text on port and harbour services that has been drawn up in Luxembourg is quite acceptable for all the parties concerned.

The theory and practice of the liberalisation are assimilated into the text in a mature fashion. The loading and unloading of ships can remain reserved for recognised dockworkers. And in the event of the self-handling of ships, technical norms and standards will have to be met that are of such a level and nature that official authorisation will not be issued lightly. This appears to be the perfect balance, in which the European technocrats, the dockworkers, and the employers can all find something to bear out their respective positions.

EXHIBITION

## A confrontation in the Permeke Museum

**I**n addition to the Bruges, Cultural Capital Year and the Vlaams Feest! Year, 2002 is also the Permeke Year, since it marks precisely half a century since the death of this ultra-Flemish expressionist. The expressive force and worldliness of the Flemish farmers he painted are unequalled in Flemish painting. Many of his paintings, charcoal drawings and sculptures have already been on display for years in the Permeke Museum in Jabbeke, the house where he lived and worked before 1952. This summer the museum has invited sculptor Johan Tahon to exhibit in the master's house. The result is a confrontation between two generations, opines De Standaard (FF).

JAN VAN HOVE • DE STANDAARD ZIPP  
• 19 JUNE

The recently restored Permeke

Museum is a jewel of its kind. Called 'The Four Winds', the house was built by Permeke himself in Jabbeke in 1929, and was where he lived and worked until his death in 1952. On display here are 150 or so of the artist's works, including a series of masterly charcoal sketches featuring farmer figures, hung in his studio and in the rooms where he lived. In the garden there are a few sculptures by Permeke, including a reclining nude that speaks volumes about the power of his vision. 'Actually Permeke could not sculpt,' says Johan Tahon. 'He began sculpting when he was 55, at a time when his paintings were coming in for a lot of criticism. Although he did not have the training or technique of a sculptor, he nonetheless soon began producing genuine masterpieces. He set about his work totally instinctively, just as he did with his paintings. Perme-

ke was a primal force, a man who worked directly from his feelings. His proportions are never correct, but it is precisely this awkwardness and these distortions that give his sculptures an expressive tension. Permeke's sculptures are human through and through. What more can you expect of an artist?' Johan Tahon knows what he is talking about, as he himself is a sculptor who struggles with his material every day in his studio. Tahon made an eye-catching debut with giant sculptures in plaster of Paris, which Jan Hoet selected for his first exhibition in De Rode Poort in Ghent. Like Permeke, Tahon loves transforming the human figure in the service of maximum power of expression. Apart from plaster of Paris, he also works in bronze and polyester, where colour adds an extra dimension to his figures. A number of the works that Tahon is exhibiting in the Permeke Museum portray androgynous figures, in which the male and female elements blend to create a higher entity. Although Tahon feels he has a bond with Permeke since he comes from the same area, his work has no

affinity with the markedly earthly subject matter of his predecessor. Tahon is more attracted to the world of the alchemists and their search for a higher truth. Tahon:

'For me, a successful work of art is a concentrate into which very considerable power is compressed. It is the tangible manifestation of something that goes beyond us.' The

confrontation between Tahon's sculptures and the treasures from the Permeke Museum's collection gives rise to one of this summer's better exhibitions. ■

## Diary

### MUSIC, DANCE THEATRE

- 25, 26, 28 and 29: 'Jérôme Bel' and 'Le dernier Spectacle' by Jérôme Bel, dance, Kaaaitheater-studio's and Kaaithheater (28 and 29 June), Brussels; info: 02/201.58.58 [www.kaaithheater.be](http://www.kaaithheater.be)
- 25 June: Marie Nicole Lemieux (alt soprano) with Daniel Blumenthal. Songs by Scarlatti and Poulenc, Conservatory, Brussels; info: 02/375.31.89
- 26 to 29 June: *Improvisation evenings* by Rosas (AT De Keersmaecker), Malibranzaal, De Munt, Brussels; info: 070/23.39.39 [www.demunt.be](http://www.demunt.be)
- Until 17 November: **Bruges 2002, Cultural Capital of Europe**; info: 070/22.33.02 [www.brugge2002.be](http://www.brugge2002.be)
- Until 30 June: *Fables de la Frontière*, theatre at the French-Belgian Border in Rekkem; info: 056/24.08.87
- 27 to 30 June: *Jan Fabre, The Swan's Lake* Flanders Opera, Antwerp with orchestra; info: [www.vlaamseopera.be](http://www.vlaamseopera.be)
- 26 June: *Pet Shop Boys*, Royal Circus, Brussels; info: 0900/26060
- Until 30 June: *La damnation de Faust* by Hector Berlioz with *Jose Van Dam*, conducted by Antonio Pappano, De Munt, Brussels;
- 27 to 30 June: *International Festival of Humor* with *Cie Cahin Caha, Cie 111* (Fr.), *Peepolykus* (GB), *Les Sanglés* (Fr), *Circo Imperfectos* (Sp), *Linsey Pollok @ Jessica* (Aus), *Les têtes du vainqueurs* (Fr), *Tomas Kubinek* (Can), *Boom Chicago* (VS) etc. Marke-Kortrijk (West Flanders); info: 056/21.74.44 [www.humorologie.be](http://www.humorologie.be)
- 1 July: *Caetano Veloso (Bra)*, PSK, Brussels; info: 02/507.82.00 [www.psk\\_pba.be](http://www.psk_pba.be)
- 5 and 6 July: *Patrick Bruel* in Casino Ostend and Ancienne Belgique Brussels; info: 059/70.76.18 and 02/548.24.24 [www.abconcerts.be](http://www.abconcerts.be)
- 7 July: *UB40*, Ancienne Belgique Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 [www.abconcerts.be](http://www.abconcerts.be)
- Summer Festivals**
- 28 and 29 June: *Grenrock*, Menen; info: 056/51.84.74 [www.grenrock.be](http://www.grenrock.be)
- 28, 29 and 30 June: *Rock Werchter with The Chemical Brothers, Nelly Furtado, Bush, Rammstein, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Heather Nova, Lamb, Coldplay, Faithless and many others* (more than 50 bands and dj's); info: 0900/26060 [www.rockwerchter.be](http://www.rockwerchter.be)
- 28, 29 and 30 June: *Couleur Café*, Festival of world music, funk and soul, Thurn & Taxis, Brussels; info: 0900/26025 [www.couleurcafé.be](http://www.couleurcafé.be)

- 5 and 6 July: *House Torhout* with Llorca, Ian Pooley and Tiefschwarz, Torhout, West-Flanders; info: [www.housetorhout.be](http://www.housetorhout.be)
- 6 and 7 July: *Seat Beach Rock* with David Bowie, Jamiroquai, The Prodigy, Garbage, The Muse and Paul Weller, Wellingtonrenbaan, Ostend; info: 02/456.04.89 [www.seatbeachrock.be](http://www.seatbeachrock.be)
- 4 to 6 July: *Polé Polé*, Son, Salsa and Reggae Festival, Oostakker (Ghent); info: [www.polepole.be](http://www.polepole.be) 09/356.67.00
- 3 to 12 July: *Klinkende Munt* with Armenian Navy Band, Paradox Trio, Vernon Reid, DJ Logic, Orchestra Baobab, Muntplein, Brussels; info: 02/513.82.90 [www.beursschouwburg.be](http://www.beursschouwburg.be)

### EXPO

- Until 15 September: *Lost Past 2002 - 1914*, exhibition, Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres; info: 070/22.50.02
- Until 18 August: *Bernard Frize*, exhibition, SMAK, Ghent; info: 09/221.17.03 [www.smak.be](http://www.smak.be)
- Until 15 September: *100 years - 100 chairs*, exhibition Design Museum, Ghent; info: 09/267.99.99
- Until 15 September: *Johan Tahon* (sculptures) and *Permeke*, Permekeuseum, Jabbeke (West-Flanders); info: 050/81.12.88
- Until November: *Living Tomorrow*, where visions meet, the house of the future, Vilvoorde; info: [www.livtom.be](http://www.livtom.be)
- Until 30 June: **Bruges 2002: Impact, 1902 Revisited**: The Flemish Primitives at Bruges, exhibition, Arentshuis, Bruges; info: 070/22.33.02 [www.brugge2002.be](http://www.brugge2002.be)
- Until 30 June: *Jan Van Eyck, The Flemish Primitives and the South*, Groeningemuseum, Bruges; info: 050/81.12.88
- Until 15 September: *In situ*: exhibition on different locations with Manon De Boer, Messieurs Delmotte, Robert Devriendt, Job Koelewijn, Ugo Rondinone, Joe Scanlan and Joëlle Tuerlinckx; Until 21 July: *The modular museum and Schone Aussicht 2*, Kolenkaai, Brugges; Until 15 September: *Home theatre*, Concertgebouw, Bruges; Until 8 September: *Hanze@Medici*, exhibition, Bruges; info: 070/22.33.02 [www.brugge2002.be](http://www.brugge2002.be)
- Until 15 September: *.WAV, sound sculptures and sound installations* in the city centre of Bruges; info: [www.brugge2002.be/wav](http://www.brugge2002.be/wav)
- Until 25 June: Photo Festival Knokke-Heist with *Erwin 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: *Silver work by the De Vecchi Family*, Provincial Museum Sterckshof-Zilvercentrum, Antwerp; info: 03/360.52.50
- Until 31 August: *Kunst-sto(f)f*: exhibition on contemporary art and design, Broelmuseum, Kortrijk
- Until 28 July: *The ritual art of the Lega, ethics and beauty in het heart of Africa*, exhibition, KBC gallery; info: 02/429.85.68
- Until 18 August: *The Illias and the Odyssea*, exhibition by *Mimmo Paladino*, Museum Elsen; info: 02/515.64.22
- From 26 May onwards: *Interactive Diamond Museum of the Province of Antwerp*; info: 03/20.2.48.90 [www.diamantmuseum.be](http://www.diamantmuseum.be)
- Until 25 August: *Atelier Van Lieshout, the Franchise unit*, Open Air Museum Middelheim, Antwerp; info: 03/827.15.34 [www.antwerpen.be](http://www.antwerpen.be)
- Until 6 July: *SMAK and Museum of Fine Arts*, Ghent: *Jan De Cock, Randschade* Fig. 7, exhibition; info: 09/240.07.00 [www.smak.be](http://www.smak.be)
- Until 29 June: *The Rustin Foundation*, exhibition (about Jean Rustin), Modern Art Center Belgium, Antwerp; info: 03/281.34.47
- 9 June to 1 September: *International Cartoon Festival Knokke-Heist*; info: 050/63.04.30
- Until 18 August: *The Retina Diamond by Fred Eerdekens, Au Paradis by Thé Van Bergen, White Out by Guy Van Bossche and Light Scores by Lucia Romualdi* (It.), exhibitions MUHKA, Antwerp; info: 03/238.59.60 [www.muhka.be](http://www.muhka.be)
- Until 29 September: *Een Swaere Enterprise, exhibition on the East-Indian Company in the 18th century*, Venetiaanse Gaanderijen, Ostend; info: 059/80.55.00
- Until 17 November: *Deadlines: War, media and propaganda in the 20th century*, exhibition, Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres
- Until 15 September: *Being Young in ancient times*, exhibition Gallo-Roman Museum, Tongeren
- 14 June to 18 August: *Master drawings from Jan Van Eyck to Hiëronymus Bosch, Rubenshuis*, Antwerp; info: 070/23.37.99 [www.heerlijkeprimitieven.be](http://www.heerlijkeprimitieven.be)
- Until 15 July: *Allias, performances of contemporary art*, Taverne PSK, Brussels; info: 02/507.82.00 [www.psk\\_pba.be](http://www.psk_pba.be)
- Until 1 September: *Group exhibition 'Humanism II' with Wim Delvoye, Berlinde De Bruyckere and others*, Orion Gallery, Thermen, Ostend; info: 059/51.19.52
- Until 30 June: *Blend*, 11 Belgian photographers, Caermersklooster, Ghent ■



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