Anchoring no longer a priority of economic policy

A few years ago the concept of Flemish anchoring ('verankering') cropped up in pretty much every 11 July address. The previous Minister-President, Luc Vanden Brande (CD&V), was a passionate supporter of this principle of keeping as many corporate decision-making centres as possible in Flanders. Now, anchoring appears to have run its course as a priority of Flemish economic policy. According to Martin Hinoul, Principle Private Secretary to Minister for Economic Affairs, Jaak Gabriëls (VLD), the present government is mainly focusing on retaining sectors in which we are doing well: cars, chemicals, food, and textiles. All means, including subsidies, must be used to defend the jobs we have. Foreign investment must be encouraged, although we must not forget to strengthen our own companies, Hinoul says.

HANS BROCKMANS/AN GOOVAERTS TRENDS • 11 JULY

Remi Vermeiren, chair of the major Flemish bank and insurance company, KBC: ‘In the future there will be European groups without real headquarters. Even companies that were originally active in Flanders will take on a European character over the coming years through mergers and takeovers. I am against anchoring for anchoring’s sake, to retain a majority whatever the cost. Most Flemish shareholders will only invest in a company that is competitive and forward-looking.’

Ex-Minister-president Luc Vanden Brande (CD&V) can live with the fact that the concept of Flemish anchoring is ‘tainted’. ‘What I have a problem with is that principles to strengthen economic independence are being thrown overboard. It is a misconception that the previous Flemish government was anti-foreign companies. We need a mix between multinational groups and companies whose decision-making centre is in Flanders.’ Hinoul supports this view: ‘We need strong Flemish companies because investments are then less dependent on factors over which we have little control. The Flemish Government wants to contribute to the international growth of our companies. The proper way to do this is to develop an efficient network of foreign employees who look out for in-company interests. I am against anchoring for anchoring’s sake, to retain a majority whatever the cost. Most Flemish shareholders will only invest in a company that is competitive and forward-looking.’

INTRODUCTION

Flanders is celebrating the 700th anniversary of the Battle of the Spurs and few Flemings will have failed to notice. Two weeks of festivities took place across the whole of Flanders, with free concerts and shows and local government-subsidised barbecues in the neighbourhoods. And the grand finale was in Brussels on 11 July with a large-scale closing celebration in the Grote Markt. The Flemish government, and Minister-president Dewael (VLD) in particular, wanted a popular celebration for all Flemings. 11 July should no longer be the high day of Flemish nationalism with its corny beligerent rhetoric, its parades, and banner-waving.

The festive song ‘Vlaanderen Boven’ (Up with Flanders) by Raymond van het Groenenwoud was typical of the light tone of the whole event: an exuberant song about Flanders and the Flemings with a healthy dose of mild self-mockery. In the press the celebration inevitably led back to the demythology of the Battle of the Spurs in articles by historians (De Morgen, De Standaard). Indeed, in 1302 citizens of Brabant and Antwerp fought on the side of the French King and the (Walloon) Count of Namur fought on the side of the citizens of Bruges.

The mythical distortion has its origins in the novel ‘De Leeuw van Vlaanderen’ (‘The Lion of Flanders’) by the romantic novelist Hendrik Conscience from 1840. The book was intended to arouse Belgian feelings of nationhood and not Flemish feelings of independence. What is more, the Flemish geographical entity in its current form dates from the nineteenth century. Before that Flanders contained the current provinces of East and West Flanders and French Flanders. In short, if 1302 had any significance, it is that since then the French kings have never again considered annexing Flanders to France. But even though historical claims are being dismissed and even though the beligerent rhetoric against the French speaking part has been buried, the hunger of politicians to operate a proper Flemish policy is greater than ever. To be able to govern more effectively, the Flemish Government needs its own policy in the fields of social security, wage policy, and taxation, claims Minister-president Dewael. That’s why on 11 July he invited the Walloons to strive together towards more regional autonomy, because as he emphasises, it is their interest too (Gazet van Antwerpen, 11 July).

Frank Vandeaveye | editor in chief
Banks grant loan of eur 1.25 billion to Telenet

The Directors of Telenet have officially confirmed that the financing deal for the Flemish telecommunications company is complete. The banks are prepared to provide EUR 1.25 billion over a period of nine years. This puts an end to the second period of uncertainty in a matter of months. In February and March the first Telenet crisis erupted when it emerged that majority shareholder Callahan Associates was not able to come up with the promised injection of capital. The other shareholders, the Investment Company for Flanders (GIMV), a Financial Consortium of banks and the electricity producer Electrabel, also the private partner of the mixed intermunicipal cable and energy companies, reached an agreement on 17 March to step in financially. A few months later the municipalities within these intermunicipal companies began to act particularly nervously. In March 2000 the intermunicipal companies had sold their cable to Telenet for EUR 930 million, but the firm kept postponing payment, threatening the municipalities with budgetary problems (FF).

PASCAL SERTYN
DE STANDAARD • 6 JULY

The Telenet partners must quickly have realised that they had been over-optimistic regarding the financial promises of the banks. A bank consortium had agreed to provide Telenet with a loan of EUR 1.35 billion, but the rapidly worsening stock market and credit climate around telecoms and technology shares cast the bank loan into doubt. The agreement of 17 March had to be renegotiated, while difficult negotiations began with the banks over the loan for Telenet.

Three shareholders - the GIMV, the Financial Consortium and Callahan - finally agreed to inject more capital into Telenet. At the same time the shareholders decided to release Telenet from a heavy debt by converting debts into shares. The mixed intermunicipal companies appeared prepared to spread the payment for taking over the cable even further over time. At the same time, within the mixed intermunicipal companies it was arranged that the municipalities would be given absolute priority for payment by Telenet of the first installment of EUR 303 million. At the end of June there was cautious optimism. All the obstacles that could stand in the way of a definitive sale of the cable had been removed. The banks committed themselves to lending EUR 1.25 billion.

Flemish shares doing well, VLAM-21 rises by 1.31%

The American and European stock markets have had their worst first six months in 30 years. The American S&P500 index lost 13.8%, the European Stoxx 50 fell 17.7%. The Bel-20 index of the 20 largest Belgian shares was able to limit the loss and fell only 8.9%. Against this background, the VLAM-21 index performed remarkably well. The index of Flemish shares rose by 1.31%, according to Bank Corluy. Among other things, that is a consequence of the increased attractiveness of small caps, shares of smaller companies to the detriment of large firms’ shares. But that is not the only reason (FF).

JOS STERK
HET BELANG VAN LIMBURG • 6 JULY

According to Colruyt, it is no coincidence that many shares from the ‘old economy’ are among the top 10 growth shares. Loom manufacturer Picanol, number one in the hit parade, was recently awarded the ‘Award of the Flemish World player’. This prize is awarded to a Flemish company with a clear offensive international growth strategy. Picanol was awarded the distinction at an academic session in Kortrijk, which formed the prologue to the ‘Flanders celebrates’ campaign. Food companies generally scored highly. The top 10 of winners includes Ter Beke, Pinguin, Miko, and Lotus. These performances are in stark contrast to the losses that were again recorded in the technology sector. In the first six months, shares such as Keyware technologies and Briccsnet lost more than 80% of their value. According to Bank Corluy, Flemish shares are today much less hyped than during the high days of mid-1998. The valuations are more interesting, which also immediately reduces the downward potential. The price/profit ratio for the VLAM-21 index is only 12.6 for 20000 and the gross dividend return 2.3%. The bank’s analysts calculated that Flemish shares are undervalued by some 20%.

VLAM-21 INDEX: TOP-10 OF THE WINNERS

1. Picanol [loom manufacturer] +114%
2. Ter Beke [food] +68%
3. Belgische betonmij (concrete) +64%
4. Pinguin [food] +49%
5. Miko [food] +45%
6. Electrorail +38%
7. Photo Hall [distribution] +36%
8. Lotus Bakeries [food] +36%
9. Concentra [press] +35%
10. Ontex [hygiene] +33%
Sugar waste and pharmaceutical waste in food chain

A new food scandal has come to light in Arendonk, in the province of Antwerp. In the now bankrupt Flemish firm Bioland, which was run by Dutch owners, sugar waste was incorporated into glucose and saccharose syrups. These syrups were in turn incorporated into animal feed, but the firm also sold them to soft drinks companies. The first signs of contamination were found in feed for pigs in the Netherlands. This was found to contain traces of MPA, a banned growth hormone. The feed appeared to have been produced using syrup from Bioland. The firm’s business manager was arrested. The company did have a licence for the processing of waste from the sugar industry from the Public Flemish Waste Company (OVAM), but not to process glucose syrup as a raw material for feed. OVAM, which in a letter in 2000 declared itself unqualified to rule on the use of such syrup in animal feed, failed to inform the qualified body, the Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FAVV), of this. In the meantime the FAVV also found traces of the banned growth hormone in two of twenty-one samples of glucose syrup that was supplied to Belgian soft drinks manufacturers. The soft drinks that were made using this glucose syrup are no longer in circulation (FF).

ANTOON WOUTERS
DE STANDAARD • 9 JULY

The Public Prosecutor and the FAVV have begun a large-scale investigation into manufacturers of soft drinks and pig feed. This investigation has been extended to the sectors responsible for processing residual waste from sugar products. Bioland appears to have a licence for this. The Public Flemish Waste Company (Openbare Vlaamse Afvalstoffenmaatschappij, OVAM) did not inform the FAVV of this. By working with residual waste from sugar products, Bioland’s glucose syrup was up to 30% cheaper than that of the competition, which use wheat as a raw material.

In European Commission circles there is criticism of this ‘Belgian combination’. People cannot understand how Bioland was able to obtain a licence to process waste from sugar products and to produce glucose syrup as a raw material for the feed industry. Bioland did not have a licence to deliver raw materials to the animal feed industry. The company certainly did not have a licence to process waste from the pharmaceuticals industry. And yet at this firm a vat was found with a half-torn label bearing the words ‘Waste MPA’. That trail leads to Ireland. ‘There were in fact contacts between Ireland and Bioland,’ said Piet Vanthemsche of the FAVV. The Institute for Veterinary Inspection (Instituut voor Veterinaire Keuring) is constantly on the lookout for MPA. Magda Aelvoet (Agalev), Minister for Public Health and Consumer Affairs, stressed yesterday that the activities of the hormone unit of the FAVV had never been scaled down. Searches for MPA were permanently being made. To date, none had been found.

The samples that the FAVV took from Bioland are positive. Large concentrations of MPA and oestradiol were found. The samples taken from pig farmers have thus far all proved negative. Our country imported piglets and pigs for slaughter from suspected Dutch companies. Some of the slaughtered pigs were re-exported to the Netherlands and Germany. Although the whole MPA chain is a Dutch matter, the German media are lashing out against Belgium ‘and its long hormone tradition’.

CATHY GALLE/TOM COCHEZ
DE MORGEN • 11 JULY

An investigation by De Morgen reveals that the MPA in sugar syrup from the company Bioland has its origin in pharmaceutical waste from the Irish pharmaceuticals giant, Wyeth. This was confirmed by the spokesman for Cara Environment, the waste-processing company from Dublin that passed the waste on to Bioland. According to Cara, Wyeth delivered its sugar waste with some leftover pills. […] According to the spokesman, the presence of a small dose of hormones would not present a problem. ‘Bioland has always maintained it uses a process in which the sugar waste is processed with enzymes that break down all organic matter, including hormones…’ I can only say that Bioland has not performed the enzymes process that it should have carried out.

BUDGET CONTROL

Budget Minister and Socio-Economic Council disagree over 2003 Flemish budget

FF EDITOR

In September the Flemish government has to complete its budget for the following year. However, the Socio-Economic Council of Flan- ders (SERV), on which both trade unions and employers’ organisations sit, has already put forward its recommendation. And it is anything but rosy. There is no room for new policy initiatives, and according to the SERV there is a risk of a deficit of EUR 327 million if the government wants to continue its policy (De Standaard, 10 July). The SERV accuses the government of excessive optimism and imprudence. Thus, it grossly overestimated the recovery effect of the cut in registration fees for house purchases and is not taking sufficient account of the accumulation of debt by the water treatment company, Aquafin. According to the SERV, however, the deficit cannot be a reason to relax budgetary standards. The budget talks will therefore mainly centre on where cuts can be made, says the SERV. According to Budget Minister Van Mechelen (VLD), the SERV is underestimating income and overestimating expenditure. In his several-year budget that he submitted to the Flemish Parliament a few months ago, Van Mechelen saw policy space of EUR 16 million.
Social assistance offices criticize asylum policy

The three regional umbrella organisations of Flemish, Brussels and Walloon OCMWs (local social assistance offices) are closing ranks against the asylum policy of the Minister for Social Integration, Johan Vande Lanotte (SP.A). The minister wants to force the social assistance offices to provide accommodation for asylum-seekers within their own municipality. However, the OCMWs do not accept the circulars which Vande Lanotte sent them on 24 June. The first was aimed at 58 OCMWs where fewer than 5% of the asylum-seekers sent to them were given accommodation in their own municipality. In it, Vande Lanotte threatens to withdraw all federal support for OCMW assistance to asylum-seekers. All other OCMWs also received a letter stating that they had to provide good reasons why some asylum-seekers did not find accommodation in the municipality. Without legitimate reasons, they risked losing half of their support. These measures are costly, unlawful and not implementable, claim the OCMWs. The minister is saying that he is always prepared to talk. But he does not seem prepared to adjust his measures. Vande Lanotte’s main aim with this measure is to alleviate the burden on the larger towns and cities. At present, these have to provide shelter for a large number of asylum-seekers that are actually assigned to smaller, regional municipalities. However, the two largest cities in Flanders, Antwerp and Ghent, reject the harsh criticism expressed by the three regional OCMW umbrella organisations. According to Antwerp OCMW Chair Monica de Coninck, the standpoint of most smaller Flemish municipalities is also more nuanced than that of their Brussels and Walloon counterparts (FF).

The OCMWs argue that the government is unjustly punishing them for something over which they have no say. After all, asylum-seekers are free to choose where they live. For a series of obvious reasons (presence of fellow countrymen, proximity of schools and own cultural institutions, better public transport, etc.), most asylum-seekers choose a larger town over a rural municipality. Some OCMW chairmen of rural municipalities were yesterday allowed to explain that they had in fact organised reception initiatives for asylum seekers, but that these houses stood empty through a lack of interest.

The OCMWs are also chafing on the fact that the circulars will take effect with retroactive force and that they have to demonstrate that they have in fact made an effort. In their view that is a reversal of the burden of proof. Furthermore, the circular is too vague about what exactly the government now expects of them. As far as the fundamentals of the situation are concerned, they feel that the Federal Government must stop shifting the less pleasant aspects of asylum policy onto them. They are hoping that Vande Lanotte will be receptive to these objections when they meet next Monday (15 July).

The spokeswoman of Minister Vande Lanotte said yesterday that the door had always been open and that this week representatives of ten OCMWs had already visited the minister’s offices. But she did not hold out much hope of a far-reaching change to the measure. ‘Those municipalities that fail to accommodate anyone in their own territory will have to explain how it is that at the same time there are small municipalities in the heart of Limburg and Luxembourg that house up to 75% of the asylum-seekers assigned there themselves. Also, the best stories of integration come from there, and not from the large towns, where these asylum-seekers sometimes have to live in dreadful conditions. But as a municipality you naturally have to do something about it, for example organise a Local Reception Initiative [Lokaal Opvanginitiatief, LOI]. And we are certainly not going to let the OCMWs shirk their responsibility. Such an LOI is subsidised up to 100%.’

IVAN BROECKMEIER • DE FINANCIEEL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 11 JULY

Ghent City Council and OCMW announced that ‘they can only applaud the fact that Vande Lanotte is making every OCMW aware of its obligations’. ‘Only through a reasonable distribution of asylum-seekers across the entire country can we avoid the large cities having to bear almost the entire burden’, said Mayor Frank Beke (SP.A) and OCMW Chair Rita Uyttenhaele. Antwerp OCMW Chair Monica de Coninck also said that she would continue to support Vande Lanotte. However, De Coninck finds herself in what she herself describes as ‘schizophrenic situation’. After all, she is also Chair of the Flemish OCMW umbrella organisation. ‘The smaller municipalities make up the majority. But because I fundamentally disagree with that point of view I did not want to address that press conference.’ De Coninck is nevertheless emphasising that most other Flemish OCMWs have a much more nuanced viewpoint than was suggested at the press conference, where mainly Francophones spoke. ‘In the 13 Flemish regional towns and cities there is fairly widespread support. But many smaller municipalities, that are making efforts to house asylum-seekers, feel that something must be done to encourage OCMWs of rich municipalities that are doing nothing. These municipalities are also resentful, because they have the feeling that yet again, Brussels is taking decisions over their heads.’
Opinion

YVES DESMET
DE MORGEN • 10 JULY

According to the OCMWs, they have done their work: as many as 5,000 people have been accommodated in 240 local reception initiatives. That sounds good, but there are 580 municipalities in this country. Vande Lanotte has himself created 15,000 new places at federal level. Three times as many as the local authorities.

You can blame the Purple-Green government for many things, but one thing is certain: the monthly influx of asylum-seekers has fallen from 6,000 to 1,300 a month. Of these 1,300 applications, no more than 130 are accepted and only these 130 get through to the OCMWs. Each year, therefore, there are no more than 2,000 for 580 municipalities, or an average of one family of asylum-seekers per municipality.

Local OCMW stunt is misplaced joke

The Minister for Social Integration, Johan Vande Lanotte (SP.A), recently sent two circulars to the municipal Public Social Assistance Centres (OCMWs). In these he threatened with sanctions any OCMW that did not make sufficient efforts to house asylum-seekers. This has already happened to nineteen Flemish OCMWs. This circular gave Brasschaat OCMW Chairman Jo Casaer (CD&V) and OCMW Secretary Bruno Van Mengsel (CD&V) an idea. They promptly wrote an official letter to 180 Brasschaat families telling them that their home, 'on the basis of their social commitment would be considered for compulsory purchase' and would provide accommodation for asylum-seekers. As a joke, you understand. Even the members of the Municipal Council received the letter. When this report reached Minister Vande Lanotte, he immediately called for both men to resign. Agalev and the VLD also called on the chairman to resign. The CD&V openly distanced itself from the initiative of its local representatives. Casaer, who was given a fright by the strength of the reactions, promptly wrote a second letter in which he offered his apologies to the 180 families concerned and explained that the letter was part of an awareness campaign intended to draw attention to the shortage of accommodation for asylum-seekers. As a joke, you understand. Even the members of the Municipal Council received the letter. When this report reached Minister Vande Lanotte, he immediately called for both men to resign. Agalev and the VLD also called on the chairman to resign. The CD&V openly distanced itself from the initiative of its local representatives. Casaer, who was given a fright by the strength of the reactions, promptly wrote a second letter in which he offered his apologies to the 180 families concerned and explained that the letter was part of an awareness campaign intended to draw attention to the shortage of accommodation for asylum-seekers. According to Casaer, in the ‘wealthy’ municipality of Brasschaat, which nonetheless is not one of the nineteen ‘affected’ municipalities, it is difficult for asylum-seekers to rent a house because rents are too high, as a result of which they look for and find accommodation in Antwerp. Brasschaat Public Social Assistance Centre does not take any initiative in this connection. The VLD party in the Flemish Parliament is demanding an explanation of the incident from the Minister responsible for the Municipalities, Van Grembergen (Spirit). The VLD opposition in Brasschaat has already filed a complaint against Casaer with the province for abuse of his mandate and forgery. The Bench of Aldermen (CD&V, Agalev, Spirit) openly distanced itself from the initiative but could not find sufficient reason to demand the resignation of the OCMW officials (FF).

Opinion

DIRK CASTREL
GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 9 JULY

The OCMW Chairman of Brasschaat has dropped a real clanger. Scaring the living daylights out of residents with the compulsory purchase of their homes is no longer a joke. Not even a bit of fun. It is simply misplaced and tasteless. The bounds of decency have far been exceeded. The reception and housing of asylum-seekers create serious problems in many municipalities. If the OCMW Chairman of Brasschaat is making an effort to push these problems high up the agenda of the Federal Government, no one can hold that against him. But the means he employed to do this threaten to shift the focus of attention entirely onto the incident that he brought about. According to the most recent calculations, the payments of subsidies for asylum-seekers in Flanders have fallen behind by EUR 100 million. Under these circumstances, mature consultation between the local representatives and the Federal Government is essential. The extremely unfortunate and totally misplaced initiative of the Brasschaat OCMW chairman must not be a reason to submerge the problems in party-political intrigues.
‘Zone-alien’ companies are released from straightjacket

Until recently, ‘zone-alien’ companies, which according to the Country and Town Structure Plan for Flanders were situated in a zone that is not intended for industrial activity could not obtain a building permit for structural alterations, rebuilding or extensions. Sometimes, even an environmental licencence was refused. On 9 July the Flemish Parliament approved a drastic relaxation in the form of a number of basic rights for the estimated 23,000 ‘zone-alien’ companies (FF).

MARK DEWEERDT • DE FINANCIEEL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 10 JULY

There are now two instruments available to resolve these problems: the sectoral special design plan (SBPA) and the planning certificate (planologisch attest - PA). With an SBPA a municipality can amend a regional zoning plan for different companies. A major restriction of an SBPA is that it can only be used for companies of local interest that need an environmental licence. Via the PA a ‘zone-alien’ company can take the initiative itself. In a PA the municipality, at the request of the company manager, indicates whether and under what conditions the company can carry out structural alterations, rebuilding, or extensions. If the municipality gives a favourable PA, it is obliged at the request of the company to draw up an SBPA for the company concerned. As with an SBPA, only companies of local interest that are required to have an environmental licence can apply for a PA. Because in practice the SBPA and PA hardly work, the Flemish Parliament has now worked out a structural solution for all ‘zone-alien’ companies, provided they are licensed and therefore not illegal.

Firstly there will be a permanent basic right to run or maintain a licenced ‘zone-alien’ company, within the existing building capacity. That right will apply in all zoning areas, but is not absolute. If the authorities nevertheless refuse an urban development permit, they are obliged to purchase the building. Secondly there will be a basic right to structurally alter or rebuild a ‘zone-alien’ company, which has a main licence, within the existing building capacity. This right will apply in all zoning areas. In principle, it will also apply in the case of destruction by storm or fire, except for buildings in green-belt areas, conservation areas, wooded areas, and valley areas. Finally, ‘zone-alien’ companies with a main licence will be able to expand under certain conditions. This basic right will only apply in spatially non-vulnerable areas, and therefore not in green-belt areas, conservation areas, valley areas, farming areas of ecological value or interest, and farming areas of special value.

Eighty-two campsites to close for good in Flanders

Together with Minister for Town and Country Planning, Dirk Van Mechelen (VLD), Flemish Minister for Tourism, Renaat Landuyt (SPA) has found a solution for campsites that are entirely or partially ‘zone-alien’. In 1998, Flanders had 480 such campsites. A year later it appeared that 398 of these did not have a suitable licence. Of these 398 campsites, 42% appeared to be situated in a zone that does not allow camping sites, while others did not possess adequate toilet facilities and still others failed in terms of fire safety. By creating a ‘zone for open-air recreation’ in the Town and Country Structure Plan for Flanders (Ruimtelijk Structuurplan Vlaanderen), some campsites were able to be regulated. But others, such as the infamous Camping Cosmos in the dunes of the coastal municipality of Westende, which contravenes every conservation decree, are threatened with permanent closure (FF).

SUE SOMERS • DE MORGEN • 6 JULY

Of the 398 campsites without a suitable licence, 196 were granted a full licence after certain changes; 56 campsites closed of their own accord and 44 were regulated by creating zones for open-air recreation. Twenty cases are still outstanding, but will probably receive a positive assessment. ‘Regulation takes account of elements that affect nature and town and country planning as well as tourism,’ explains cabinet employee Van Praet. ‘What’s more, we have always collaborated with municipal and provincial authorities. Eighty-two campsites are threatened with permanent closure. There is no longer any room for the Camping Cosmos’s of this world,’ declares Van Praet.
Poetry in the parliament

The Flemish festival feeling will reach a crescendo on 11 July, the commemoration of the seven-hundredth anniversary of the Battle of the Spurs in 1302. At the government’s expense, local parties are being organised all over Flanders. In Kortrijk, where it all happened 700 years ago, the Spurs Splash took place. An overwhelming contemporary spectacle with modern dance, spectacular fireworks, acrobats and special effects attracted thousands of spectators. Things were a little more modest in the Flemish Parliament on 9 July. Twenty-four poets read from their own work to add lustre to the thirty years of the Flemish Parliament (FF).

WILFRIED EETEZONE • DE MORGEN
10 JULY

Spread over two locations, the poets held the large audience spell-bound with their work and added a little colour to the official buildings. The Flemish Parliament had this to celebrate: 30 years of the Flemish Parliament, the opening of the House of Flemish Representatives and, of course, the 11 July celebrations. During the break, visitors could also get to know the semicircle. For the title of the evening a conscious choice was made in favour of ‘Flanders and co’, because poetry does not take account of community borders and so in addition to the ten Flemings there were also eight Dutch, an Antillean, a Surinamese and a South African, not to mention two Francophones and a German-speaking Belgian.

Artist gets fully-fledged social status

There has been a political breakthrough in the social status of the artist. Discussions on a new status have dragged on for a full 33 years. A preliminary draft has now been prepared within the Federal Government. Henceforth, artists will have to choose between the status of employee or self-employed. If the preliminary draft becomes law, the principle that artists are employees will apply, except where they choose the status of self-employed and can demonstrate that they are active as such. Social contributions will fall. A proper ruling will come into force with regard to artists’ holiday pay, child benefit and accidents at work. To date, the artist (musician, sculptor, painter, actor) was always seen as an employee, even though that led to insurmountable practical problems. A friends’ club that hired a singer one time to perform at a party, promoted itself to employer for an hour and had to meet all the necessary social obligations. The artist sometimes had three such employers a day. The rule was therefore largely evaded, ignored or skirted round. Masses of artists worked illicitly or as illegal self-employed. The person mainly responsible for the new status is the Minister for Social Affairs, Frank Vandenbroucke (SP.A), says the Minister for the Middle Classes, Rik Daems (VLD) and after lengthy negotiations was also able to convince Laurette Onkelinx (Labour, PS) (FF).

PETER VAN TYGHEM
DE STANDAARD • 6 JULY

By way of a reminder: artists already have a status (they are employees), but this has no relevance to artistic reality. A simple example: a teacher who prepares a lesson is working. A musician who prepares a concert is not. Someone who rehearses does so in an unoccupied capacity. Someone who executes something, however, is deemed to be working. In any case: who is the employer? Such a rigid law requires considerable administrative effort on the part of the artist. Many therefore register as unemployed or looking for work. This made every professional activity automatically liable to punishment, leaving the law hanging like a sword of Damocles above the heads of (especially less well-off) artists. A Royal Decree from the beginning of this year did something about this: henceforth artists may pursue an additional artistic activity whilst out of work. It was a first sign that this government was serious about its plan to resolve the persistent problem of this status. ‘This is particularly important for young people,’ says the Flemish singer Johan Verminnen. ‘If this preliminary draft gets through, it will be easier for artists to sign on. The rules will be more flexible. Rehearsal days will now count as work days. In short, many more people will be protected, which is something to which everyone is entitled. Access to the social fabric will be increased. And for me politics has gained respect as a result.’

GUY TEGENBOS
DE STANDAARD • 6 JULY

Since the 1970s, but especially in the 1990s, numerous attempts were made to issue a more realistic regulation. But the contrasts were too great. These were primarily ideological in nature. The trade unions and socialist parties felt that nothing need be changed. Artists are employees, period. In recent years things took on a more community twist. Flemish Socialists have long accepted that artists can also be self-employed, but not the Francophones. The reasoning given by most Francophone politicians, apart from the Liberals, ties in with the ‘French concept’ of the artist. Anyone who says they are an artist is immediately Someone in France and its dependencies. Thus, someone must be supported. Without asking questions. North of the linguistic border people see things differently. Anyone wanting to become an artist must be sure they can make a living from it, is the view there. The communities regularly claimed the right to be able to regulate the social status of artist themselves. That would have been
a solution, but the Francophones could not accept it because they see labour law and in particular social security as absolutely ‘inseparable’. The Federal State also insisted on retaining its authority in this area. The matter also became entangled in a conflict between institutions.

Employees’ social security offices did not want to lose the artists as customers, and the offices of the self-employed took the artists on, even though the law prohibited them from doing so. The major setback for the artists was that for many years they had not had any strong organisations that had any skills in formulating a standpoint and which could lobby and negotiate in a more or less professional manner. This time the government managed to guide its preliminary draft through this minefield intact.

**Diary**

**MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE**

- 3 to 12 July: Klinkende Munt with Armenian Navy Band and eletro electronic music, De Logie, Orchestra Baobab, Mumtjleen, Brussels; info: 02/513.82.90 www.heureschouwburg.be
- 5 July to 31 August: Donnie Edwards Drive-In Movies on Friday and Saturday evenings, Jubelpark (Cinquantenaire), Brussels www.dedi.be
- Until 1 September: The Summer of Antwerp with Music for the neighbourhood on 12 squares, street theatre performances and circuses, Antwerp; info: 03/213.86.66 www.zomervanantwerpen.be
- Until 1 September: Summer Festival Flan- ders in different Flemish cities, info: 03/22.19.10 www.zomerfestival.be
- 12, 13 and 14 July: Cactus Festival with St Germain, Roberto Menescal, Michael Fran- cish, Spearhead; info: 050/33.20.14
- 20 to 27 July: Blue Note Festival (jazz) with Stefano di Battista Quartet, Elvin Jones & Peace, Nathalie Loriers & Extensions, Brussels Jazz Orchestra & Paul Michiels, Stacey Kent, Don Byron, Abdullah Ibrahim, Toots Thie- man, Joe Lovano/John Scofield/Dave Hol- land/Foster, Orlando Cachalot, Groove Cael, Buscemi, Maceo Parker, Ghent; info: www.bluebessa.be
- 19 to 29 July: 10 Days Off (previously called Ten Days Of Techno) is a ten day indoor festi- val featuring prominent DJ’s and musicians from house, deejay, techno, de Vooruit, Ghent; info: www.10daisoofi.org
- 20 to 29 July: Gentse Feesten, 33rd edition, with international youth circus festival, concerts, dance workshops www.tredpuntvzw.be; 09/03.26.76

**EXPO**

- Until 15 September: Lost Past 2002 - 1914, exhibition, Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres; info: 07/02.50.02
- Until 15 August: Bernard Frize, exhibition, SMAK, Ghent; info: 09/221.17.03 www.smak.be
- Until 15 September: 100 years - 100 chairs, exhibition, Design Museum, Ghent, info: 09/267.99.99
- Until 15 September: Johan Tahon (sculp- tures) and Permeke (sculptures), Permeke Museum, Jabbeke (West-Flanders); info: 051/81.12.88
- Until November: Living Tomorrow, where vi- sions meet, the house of the future, Vilvoorde; info: www.livtom.be
- **Bruges 2002**:.info: 07/02.33.02 www.brugge2002.be
- Until 15 September: In situ: exhibition on different locations with Manon De Boer, Messieurs Delmote, Robert Devriendt, Job Koelweijn, Ugo Rondinone, Joe Scanlan and Joëlle Tuer- inckx, Until 21 July: The modular museum and Schone Aussicht 2, Kolenkai, Bruges, Until 15 September: Home theatre, Concertgebouw, Bruges; Until 8 September: HanseMedici, exhibition, Bruges; info: 07/02.33.02 www.brugge2002.be
- Until 18 July: Rubens and the Flemish Baroque painters, exhibition, City Hall, Brussels; info: 02/279.64.34
- Until 31 August: Kunst-stof(f): exhibition on contemporary art and design, Bremuseum, Kortrijk

**Focus on Flanders**

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**Culture**

- 28 July: The ritual art of the Lega. ethics and beauty in het heart of Africa, exhibition, KBC gallery, info: 02/429.85.68
- 18 August: The Illus and The Odyssey, exhibition by Mimamo Paladinio, Museum Elsene, 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
- 25 August: Atelier Van Lieshout, The Franchise unit, Open Art Museum Middel- heim, Antwerp; info: 03/927.15.34 www.antwerpen.be
- Until September: International Cartoon Festival Knokke-Heist; info: 050/63.04.30
- 18 August: The Retina Diamond by Fred Eerdekens, At Paradis by The Van Kemenen. White Out by Guy Van Bossche and Light Scores by Lucia Romualdi (It.), exhibi- tions MUIKA, Antwerp; info: 03/238.59.60 www.mukha.be
- Until 29 September: Een Sweare Enterprise, exhibition on the East-Indian Company in the 18th century, Venetiëaanse Gaanderijen, Ostend, info: 059/80.55.00
- Until 17 November: Dead lines: War, media and propaganda in the 20th century, exhibi- tion, Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres
- Until 15 September: Being Young in ancient times, exhibition Gallo-Roman Museum, Tongeren
- Until 18 August: Master drawings from Jan van Eyck to Hieronymus Bosch, Rubenshuis, Antwerp; info: 070/23.37.99 www.heer- lijkprimitieven.be
- Until 1 September: Group exhibition ‘Hu- manismus II’ with Wim Delvoye, Berlinda De Bruyckere and others, Orion Gallery, Thurmen, Ostend, info: 059/51.19.52
- 1 July to 31 August: The Antwerp Ashpit Construction, exhibition by Panamarenko, Antwerp [Karel Geertstraat 2b, Borgerhout]; info: 03/216.93.80
- Until 21 July: Pottery from Paterna. Institute Cervantes, Brussels; info: 02/757.01.90
- Until 15 September: Grimbergen 2002 - Open Air exhibition, Meering Point Museum Oude Technieken, info: 02/263.03.43

Dear subscriber, The next issue appears after the summer break. Focus on Flanders 27 covers the week from 17 to 23 August.