VLD makes turn in traffic policy

For greens and socialists there can be no question of postponing the bill.

If the Flemish Liberals have their way, the extremely high traffic fines contained in Transport Minister Isabelle Durant’s bill will not see the light of day. Although a consensus had already been reached within the government on this proposal, the VLD now regards these fines as being unrealistic and asocial. The party has come up with its own ten-point plan, which also introduces - please note - variable speed limits on motorways. This is a toned-down version of a proposal by VLD senator Jean-Marie De Decker, who had previously advocated 150 km/h as a night-time speed limit. It is also striking that the party is now speaking with one voice.

The new VLD member Patrick Vankrunkelsven (formerly of Spirit), who recently proposed reducing the speed limit on regional roads to 70 km/h, has to back down. In the VLD proposal, the maximum speed on regional roads becomes 90 km/h, with the speed limit on local roads remaining at 70 km/h. For the Green and Socialist coalition partners, the Liberals’ about-turn is an unmentionable subject (FF).

DOMINIQUE MINTEN
DE STANDAARD • 4 OCTOBER

‘We’re not going to go back on our word. Not unilaterally, anyway’. Such were the words used by VLD Chairman Karel De Gucht to calm the unrest within the coalition over the new traffic proposals tabled by the Liberals.

Why does the VLD consider the fines to be too high? De Gucht is unambiguous on the matter: ‘Flanders is saying that we’ve gone too far with high fines. The subtle distinction to the effect that we are talking about maximum amounts, which the judges should not impose, is being lost’.

Both Agalev and SP.A fear that the VLD basically wants to delay the Traffic Act, because the Liberals have internal divisions. ‘There can be no question of a postponement. This has been worked on for long enough, and a States General for Road Safety has even been devoted to it. Now let’s quickly get the matter approved in parliament,’ says SP.A MP Daan Schalck. Schalck says he does not understand the VLD’s traffic policy at all any more. But in actual fact he understands full well what is going on: election fever is increasing. And evidently the VLD feels that it will derive benefit from profiling itself as being against the monstrously high fines. The opposition party CD&V supports the VLD in that protest. As a matter of fact, the row is not a one-off. On Wednesday, the VLD and SP.A were making a fuss about a more innocent issue, namely the European Union.
**Vinck wants greater productivity at Belgian Railways**

**NEW MANAGEMENT TEAM CONTAINS MUCH RAILWAY EXPERIENCE**

Karel Vinck, the new chief executive of the Belgian Railways, presented his new management committee to the press on 27 September. It is striking that not a single director has been sacked and that Vinck is reverting to the structure that was in place before the transformation into business units. Antoine Martens, who was also number two in the national railway company under former railway boss Etienne Schouppe, becomes operations manager and Vinck’s right-hand man. Vinck himself will chiefly take care of the major strategic decisions. Another old hand, Leo Pardon, assumes responsibility for all passenger traffic. It is clear that Vinck is expressly opting for railway experience. The only notable newcomer is Marc Descheemaeker. He is being given the difficult task of restructuring freight transport (B-Cargo) and Inter Ferry Boats (the operator of the port terminals) and preparing them for the liberalisation of goods traffic in March 2003. There is no longer a place for the NMBS/SNCB organisation chart for ABX, the parcel service, which has become an independent subsidiary run by Etienne Schouppe. Only a financial participating interest is retained in ABX. Vinck feels that two conditions must be met in order for the NMBS/SNCB to be turned into a sound business again: productivity must increase and the Belgian Government must assume part of the loan burden (EUR 4 to 5 billion) [FF].

**GEERT SICT • DE MORGEN**

‘Currently 8% of all Belgians who commute to work every day travel by train. That is far too little. We are environmentally friendly, we don’t create traffic jams and we’ll be investing in excess of EUR 18 billion in the next ten years to improve our service,’ says Vinck. The fact that the answer offered by Belgian Railways to the traffic-jam problem is only used sparsely proves, in Vinck’s opinion, that the trouble is the image of the country’s largest public enterprise. ‘We shall be working on that,’ he promises. ‘We have to do away with the civil service mentality. Customer friendliness and flexibility are the order of the day, and the 42,000 employees want to play their part’. Something also has to be done with the railway company’s financial situation. Vinck is asking for the government to assume responsibility for the NMBS/SNCB’s indebtedness. ‘We shall be making efforts within the NMBS/SNCB, but I am also expecting help from the government in making up lost ground.’ He also wants the government to step in to make good the operating deficit. A loss of EUR 123 million was recorded in the first half of the year. Vinck does not expect an improvement immediately. In the meantime, prices will be raised by 2.5% next year. The six-million-dollar question is whether Vinck wants to keep on 42,000 employees. He does not want to talk of redundancies, but internally many have got the message. His motto is ‘no overlapping of work’.

**Dua has fishery policy plan**

**MINISTER WANTS TO GUARANTEE A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR FISHING FLEET**

With 128 fishing boats, 34 of which are for coastal fishing, Flanders has the smallest fishing fleet in Europe. But there are large-scale European reforms for the sector in the pipeline, aimed — among other things — at combating over-fishing. With a view to this reform, the Minister for Agriculture Vera Dua (Agalev) appeared in Ostend to present her plan for nonetheless guaranteeing a sustainable future for the Flemish fishing fleet. Investment support for sustainable fishing techniques and the demarcation of an exclusive coastal fishing zone are measures that should lend a helping hand to Flemish fishermen (FF).

**MARK DEWEERDT • DE FINANCIËL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 1 OCTOBER**

First of all, the Flemish Government is continuing to give the fishing sector financial backing in order to guarantee competitiveness at European level. The regulations governing the support are being adjusted. Thus, there will now be a 10% environmental bonus for investments in sustainable fishing techniques and subsidies for trial projects for the protection of particular fish populations. With her support policy, Dua also wants to strengthen the firm establishment of the Flemish fleet, in order to prevent foreign takeovers. Following on from the European objectives, a second package of measures aims at promoting sustainable fishing. This concerns adapted fishing methods, fuel savings, improvement in safety and hygiene on board, tackling the ship refuse problem, and the check on the fleet’s total engine power. For coastal fishing, Dua wants to pursue an offensive policy to increase the diversity of the fishing fleet, to increase the possibilities for young ship owners and fishermen joining the sector, and to exploit the tourist value of fishing. Dua will be consulting with her Dutch counterpart on the possibility of extending the three-mile coastal exclusion zone, in which only small boats are allowed to catch sole, to include all types of fish. She is considering introducing a separate fleet segment for coastal fisheries, and adapting the decree on licences to protect vessels with a smaller engine power. She wants to discourage or even prevent the combination of engine power between the large and small fleet segments, in order to protect coastal fishing against ‘selling out’. To counter over-fishing and pollution of the marine environment, Minister Dua feels that fleet reduction and diversification should occur at European level. However, the minister does not see an even smaller Flemish fleet as feasible. ‘In the event of a further reduction our fleet would risk disappearing,’ she says.
Liberalisation of electricity market claims its first casualty

Sourcepower quite unexpectedly stopped the supply of electricity to its 74 Belgian customers

The independent electricity supplier Sourcepower quite unexpectedly stopped the supply of electricity to its 74 Belgian customers during the night of Sunday 29 September. The power company Elia hastily had to look for another emergency supplier for the customers, which included a hospital in Ostend. The VREG, the regulator that oversees the smooth functioning of the Flemish electricity market, immediately withdrew Sourcepower’s supply licence. After all, according to the VREG the company had committed a serious fault, having omitted to notify various customers and the managers of the distribution networks. On Sunday Sourcepower had issued a press release in which it blamed Elia for its financial problems. Sourcepower buys cheap electricity in Europe and imports it to its Belgian customers via Elia’s high-voltage network. The company blames Elia for the inadequate transmission of the electricity from France. The principal shareholder in Elia is Electrabel, which had an absolute monopoly on the production of electricity in Belgium prior to the liberalisation of the electricity market. Sourcepower had a market share of 2.25%, making it the fourth largest power supply company on the deregulated Flemish market (FF).

Pascal Sertyn • De Standaard
1 October

The VREG, the regulator of the Flemish liberalised electricity and gas market, had given Sourcepower until noon on Monday 30 September to prove that it was solvent. The Flemish regulator had placed the supplier’s supply licence in the scales. ‘Sourcepower’s decision on Sunday evening proves once again that the continuity of the company was no longer guaranteed,’ declared VREG president André Pictoel. On 30 September the VREG gave the go-ahead for the distribution network managers to look for an emergency supplier who was prepared to supply electricity to Sourcepower’s customers from 1 October. The electricity supplier’s fate had already been sealed at the end of last week, when it became clear that the company’s bank accounts would remain frozen until 9 November. There may be a long legal aftermath to Sourcepower’s suspension of activities. The electricity company said that it had been forced to compete against obstacles and ‘harassment’ from Elia on a regular basis over the past few months. Sourcepower accuses the power company of unfair competition.

The electricity supplier is presently embroiled in a number of legal and competition disputes. Elia and Sourcepower have been fighting each other in the Brussels Commercial Court since the beginning of this year. Sourcepower has also lodged a complaint with the Belgian regulating agency for the liberalised energy market, the CREG (the Commission for the Regulation of the Electricity and Gas Sector). Sourcepower accuses Elia of manipulating the prices for the importation of electric current from neighbouring countries. Sourcepower claims that this is done by blocking the importation of cheap electric current from France without any reasonable explanation. The electricity supplier sees Electrabel’s hand at work here. Sourcepower calls the Belgian electricity market ‘a farce of liberalisation’.

Wattplus, another new power supply company, agrees with the observation that the liberalisation of the Belgian electricity market is suffering from defects, but regards the regulators - CREG and VREG - as responsible. ‘For one obscure reason or another, the CREG is not succeeding in assuming its arbitral function,’ states the managing director of Wattplus, André Jurres. In a reaction, Elia said that all network users are treated on an equal footing. The power company pointed out that Sourcepower wanted to shirk a number of essential obligations from the moment it started up business. As regards the capacity on the high-voltage network, Elia stressed that all market players had the same possibilities for access.

Opinion

Luc Vander Keelen
Het Laatste Nieuws • 1 October

The question is whether the people or companies really care very much whether private company X buys cheap electricity somewhere abroad with a view to bringing that electricity to the customer in Belgium, without making any investment in the network and production. The only difference is that part of the suppliers’ profit used to go to the municipalities and now disappears into some foreign financing company or other, whilst consumers have to pay for the savings on their electricity bill in the form of higher municipal taxes. The customers are forced to be resourceful, from one day to the next. This brings to mind California, where many companies want to sell electric current but no one felt like investing in power stations, which only yield returns after about ten years. The consequence of the privatisation was that some day there was a power cut - and power cuts are still common. Basic services, such as power, should not simply be left to considerations of immediate profit and quarterly results.

Market shares of electricity supply

Source: NB-Infografiek
Ubizen lands electronic identity card project

On 27 September the Federal Government awarded the contract for the project for an electronic identity card (e-ID) to the national telecom company Belgacom. The subcontractor for this project is the tandem formed by the companies Ubizen and GlobalSign. For the Leuven network protector Ubizen, the contract represents a major windfall (FF).

Bruno Leijnse • Trends 3 October

A contract value was not attached to the assignment, but according to a Ubizen spokeswoman, the project could in the long run involve the manufacture and management of 16 million certificates. After all, there will be two certificates for every identity card, one for identification and one for the digital signature. The certificates will be issued by GlobalSign. However, in July Ubizen bought out Vodafone and a number of other shareholders in GlobalSign, with the result that the Leuven company now controls more than 90% of the company. Ubizen itself will take care of the management of the certificates. The contract, one of the first of its kind in Europe, will breathe fresh life into the languishing industry based on digital certificates and the associated ‘public key infrastructure’ (PKI).

Baltimore Technologies, the permanent PKI supplier in Belgacom’s E-Trust department, missed out on the prizes. ‘We did not have any agreement with Baltimore for this project. Ubizen was cheaper and their technology is better suited to large-scale applications,’ goes the explanation in Belga-com circles.

Socialists put clichés behind them

While the CD&V drew attention to itself last weekend with its socio-economic conference, this weekend it was the turn of the Liberal VLD and the Socialist SP.A to step into the spotlight. The four Socialist heavyweights Patrick Janssens, Johan Vande Lanotte, Frank Vandenburgroucke, and Steve Stevaert went on a high-profile train journey right across Flanders, from east to west, from Hasselt to Ostend, taking in Leuven, Antwerp, and Ghent - on the ‘Train-Tram-Bus Day’, of all days. The newspapers reckoned that they were launching their election campaign very early with this media offensive. Each of the ‘Teletubbies’, as the quartet is scornfully referred to by its own grass-roots, spoke out for a particular social issue. Vande Lanotte broke a lance for a single university area, Stevaert argued in favour of the introduction of a ‘good driver’s licence,’ Janssens advocated free education up to 18, and Vandenburgroucke wants all-in bills with no supplements for the residents of rest homes (FF).

Wim Winckelmans • Het Nieuwsblad • 30 September

Flemish Socialists have put their party manifesto in for ‘major repairs’ over the last few months. The SP.A wants to do away with the caricatures that exist surrounding the party. The SP.A members will be able to have their say on the matter at a conference at the end of November. There are a few clichés that Chairman Patrick Janssens wants to be done with. ‘You can’t delude all people with the same ideal goals in life. The individual’s free choice is important. However, everyone must be given the same opportunities, irrespective of origin, sex, colour, health, or intelligence. But people also have to dare to assume their responsibility. Together you go further then on your own. We turn away people who want to move forward at the expense of others,’ says Janssens. ‘Everyone being equally poor is not a socialist principle. A poor health care system results in everyone having an equal chance of becoming ill. That is not a step forward, either. Socialism should therefore have the ambition to supply the best quality.’ He also regards the view that Socialists pin all their faith on the public service as being outdated. ‘For Socialists, the public service used to be the means to an end. Subsequently the public service has turned too much into a goal in its own right. But it is not true that the public departments’ extreme bureaucracy is countered by extremely efficient private companies. Private companies are sometimes poorly managed and fold very efficiently indeed. And on occasion the hunger for profit takes on unhealthy proportions.’ Janssens says that it is not true that Socialists take tax money out of people’s pockets, either. ‘SP.A advocates fair taxes, where everyone pays according to their means. Those who earn most pay most. Some basic needs are so vital that we want to offer them free of charge, and taxes in which everyone pays the same amount should be abolished’.

Poll in La Libre Belgique brings something to cheer about for CD&V

FF Editor

At last there was some good news for the CD&V. The quarterly opinion poll published by La Libre Belgique showed that the Flemish Christian-Democrats had risen by 0.4% compared with June 2002. In so doing, they have performed twice as well as the majority parties and the Vlaams Blok, all of whom saw their popularity rise by exactly 0.2% in comparison with the June figure. Only the Greens of Agalev (-0.7%) and the Flemish Nationalist N.V.A (-1%) recorded a fall. The Christian-Democrats had fallen to an all-time low of 18% in a poll published earlier by Le Soir.
‘The fourth wave’ aims at cranking up internal debate on people’s party

A ll the prominent figures in the VLD were present at Ghent’s Museum for Contemporary Art, the SMAK, for the presentation of Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt’s new book ‘The Fourth Wave’. Verhofstadt wrote the book this summer at his country house in Tuscany and it is intended to fuel an internal debate about the enlargement of the VLD into a people’s party (FF).

BART EECKHOUT • DE MORGEN
30 SEPTEMBER

The Fourth Wave begins with an investigation into the ‘cramping’ of people’s attitudes (Verhofstadt refuses to utter the word ‘souring’, the expression launched by the socialist Steve Vervaert). As Verhofstadt sees it, citizens complain because they are not given enough involvement. And therefore the Prime Minister pulls some more political reform out of the hat, with the right to vote in municipal elections at sixteen and obligatory national referenda via the Internet. The ‘centrefield’ (trade unions, interest groups and associations) are also given a role in the new Verhofstadt’s view of society, albeit outside the decision-making process where the primacy of politics must hold sway. On other points, too, The Fourth Wave takes the form of a ‘Citizens’ Charter – light version’ (in the much discussed Citizens’ Charter, Verhofstadt advocated more direct participation of the population in order to narrow the gap between politics and the man in the street, and argued in favour of limiting the power of the ‘centrefield’). Less patronizing and less nationalising is the order of the day. In their place comes ‘a stimulating government’ that maintains the dignity of its citizens - in tax matters, too. Verhofstadt wants to go still further with tax cuts. The highest tax rate should be cut from 50% to 40%, whilst the lowest rates should be brought down to 15%. Verhofstadt also tackles the issue of immigrants. The matter of voting rights is only dealt with between the lines, but the Premier shows himself to be firm when it comes to ‘expelling policy’. ‘It is important that immigrants who cannot accept the rules of the game or are only interested in criminal activities are thrown out of the country without mercy’. Then there are the short chapters on the environment and traffic, which are Green of theme but Liberal-inspired. Verhofstadt wholeheartedly backs the Kyoto agreement, but recalls the emission credits, whereby Western countries obtain credit by financing environmental projects in developing countries. The Prime Minister also refuses to forswear nuclear power permanently, but then a solution has to be found for the processing of nuclear waste. For Verhofstadt, traffic jams, rather than road safety, remain the biggest traffic problem. He devotes the final chapter to the government’s accomplishments. ‘This cabinet may have dropped a few more clangers than previous governments, but that was probably inevitable since it has also taken far more initiatives than the previous ones did’.

Nabholz resolution sours Flemish-Walloon relations

T he Flemish Minister-President was nowhere to be seen at the celebration of the French-speaking Community’s public holiday on 27 September. Has an end come to the pacification between Flemings and Francophones, now that the Council of Europe has approved the report by the Swiss expert Nabholz-Heidigger, wonders Het Belang van Limburg (28 September)? In fact, the reason for the absence was that on that day all senior members of the Liberal VLD were attending the funeral of VLD MP and noted entrepreneur Aimé De Simpel. In the resolution in question, special protection is requested for the French-speaking minority in Flanders, especially in the Flemish communes around Brussels. On the French-speaking Community’s public holiday, the resolution was presented as a major victory for Francophones. Minister-President Hervé Hasquin (MR) had declared the RTBF the previous evening that there was now nothing stopping the French-language cultural associations in the Flemish municipalities in the Brussels periphery from receiving subsidies again. Federal Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt consigned Hasquin’s comments to the wastepaper basket. According to Verhofstadt, the judgement handed down by the Court of Arbitration in this matter is much more important than the resolution. In recent years the Court of Arbitration has repeatedly annulled the granting of a subsidy for the French-language paper Carrefour by the French-speaking Community to two French-speaking associations in Flanders. According to Flemish Minister-President Patrick Dewael, the resolution does not have any consequences from a legal standpoint. However, he is concerned about the triumphalism of the French-speaking politicians (FF).

Patrick Dewael (VLD) said that the triumphalistic reactions on the French-speaking side had put a major damper on his willingness to arrive at an agreement on a definition of the term ‘minority’ at the inter-ministerial conference on foreign policy. The ratification of the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities depends on such an agreement. Dewael said that the Nabholz resolution did not have any legal value whatsoever, given that the Manzella amendment stipulates that the Framework Convention does not have any consequences for Belgium’s constitutional order. The Francophones’ triumphalism is giving him a ‘sour feeling’ and is souring the good community relations. Dewael also pointed out that the resolution stipulates that French-speakers who settle in Flanders should know the language of the region.
The Belgian Euthanasia Act came into force on 23 September, and for 39-year-old Mario Verstraete from Ghent, this was a relief. As an MS patient, he had long been planning to put an end to his suffering in a totally legal manner. Now it was possible. On 30 September, his doctor administered the injection that released him from his misery. According to Herman Nys, professor in medical law at the Catholic University of Leuven, the physician who assisted Verstraete runs the risk of prosecution. Seeing as Verstraete was not terminally ill, the doctor should have given him at least thirty days to think the matter over, and from a legal standpoint Verstraete could only make his request from the end of September. There is also quite a good chance of action being taken against the doctor by the Order of Medical Doctors, since this was a case of assisted suicide and Verstraete was not terminally ill. According to the Order, this is still a punishable offence. Verstraete’s decision to put an end to his life and the message that he wanted to convey through the media with this deed unleashed a wide variety of reactions. Questions were raised in particular about the fact that Verstraete was not terminally ill. Het Volk, Het Nieuwsblad and Gazet van Antwerpen all presented Multiple Sclerosis patients who declared that the idea of euthanasia had not even occurred to them, even though they were at a much more advanced stage of the illness. A report in The weekend edition of De Morgen, but especially the emotionally charged coverage by the commercial broadcasting company VTM and the public broadcasting company TV1, verged too closely on bad taste and voyeurism, in the view of some commentators (FF).

Opinion

YVES DESMET • DE MORGEN 28 SEPTEMBER

Perhaps more effectively than all parliamentary annals, theories, and arguments for and against euthanasia taken together, this story provides the ultimate argument for welcoming the new Euthanasia Act, because it finally gives the individual the opportunity to say a dignified farewell, in the close company of friends and family, to a life felt as being worthless and painful. Because such a choice falls solely and exclusively to the individual concerned. Because the doctors who help the patient in this should not be summoned before the courts but, on the contrary, should fulfil their Hippocratic oath to the best of their ability by doing precisely what the word euthanasia etymologically means: granting a good death.
For qualified young people it is tougher finding work

The stock market is taking one sock on the jaw after another. International concerns are restructuring, and companies are going bankrupt. So it should come as no surprise that Flemish employment is also bearing its share of the brunt. It is exactly a year ago, in September 2001, that the unemployment figures began to rise again for the first time in five years. A year later there is still no change for the better in sight. Employment Minister Renaat Landuyt (SP.A) sees cyclical unemployment in particular on the rise. It is predominantly young people (unemployment up 10% on an annual basis) and the highly skilled (unemployment up 23%) who are not finding jobs. 

HET VOLK • 2 OCTOBER

A year after the shift in trend of September 2001, the crisis in the trade cycle has resulted in a 6.4% increase in the number of people looking for work. This translates to 141,424 fully unemployed persons entitled to benefit, 32,858 unemployed school leavers, and 16,096 freely registered job seekers. Taking these figures into account, the unemployment rate in Flanders now stands at 7.61% (6.21% for men and 9.45% for women). One positive aspect is the 8.4% year-on-year fall in the number of long-term unemployed, to 37,612. One in five unemployed persons has been out of work for more than two years. However, a negative aspect is the rise in the number of short-term unemployed (those who have been jobless for less than a year). According to Minister Landuyt, the fact that the new unemployed are young and well qualified is especially worrying. ‘There is no problem as regards training among the new unemployed,’ says Landuyt. ‘These people are not finding jobs because companies are postponing or scrapping their recruitment campaigns since they lack confidence in the economy. This also goes for young people with adequate qualifications. Unemployment in Flanders follows the business cycle like a shadow.’ Nonetheless, employment did not fall back in Flanders. In net terms, 6,300 new jobs were created between March 2001 and March 2002.

29th Ghent Film Festival

Ghent is one of the ten most important European film festivals

The twenty-ninth edition of the International Film Festival of Flanders in Ghent, which kicks off on 8 October, once again offers a sample of films from all over the world. Among the 169 full-length feature films, there are well-established names as well as new talent, world and European premières, and also a number of Flemish films. The latter include ‘Hop’ by Dominique Standaert, the festival’s opening film, ‘Goldfish Game’ by Needcompany director Jan Lauwers, who makes the crossover from theatre to film, Danny Deprez’s children’s film ‘Science Fiction’, and ‘Hide and Seek’ by Gerrit Miessemaen and Robert Visser about a weird triangular relationship with the Internet. True to annual tradition, a jury chaired by Gerard Mortier (currently manager of the Ruhr Triennale 2002-2004) will award prizes for best film, best film score, best screenplay, and best direction. There are twelve films in the competition section. But there are also the fringe activities, such as concerts, events, a retrospective, and cartoon films from Asia. And as at any self-respecting film festival, the organisers have not forgotten to add a touch of glamour provided on this occasion by none other than Juliette Binoche. 

STEFAN DE FOER
ZIPP-DE STANDAARD • 2 OCTOBER

Managing Director Jacques Dubrulle is pleased. Things are going well for the festival. ‘Even the BBC is coming’. Dubrulle puts the festival together by viewing a large number of films beforehand. ‘We get sent between six hundred and eight hundred cassettes every year,’ he says. ‘We also scour the major international festivals, since it’s certainly nice to have European or even world premières, but we cannot rule out films that have already been screened at other festivals. That would be a shame. And anyway, it’s by no means easy to get your hands on the very latest productions. The competition is tremendous, so we have to try to persuade them that Ghent is more important than all those other festivals. And that’s proving quite successful. There are something like four hundred film festivals in the world. About ten percent of those are recognised by the Federation of Film Distribution Associations, and we are among those happy few. I think that Ghent is even one of the ten most important film festivals in Europe now. Obviously we are no competition for Cannes, Berlin, and Venice, but we figure in the leading group behind those three.’

This year the Festival will be presenting its special awards to Juliette Binoche and Jean Reno, who will both be in Ghent to promote a film. Binoche has been at the top of Dubrulle’s wish list for quite some time. ‘The Canal Plus producers offered us the premiere of her new film ‘Jet Lag’, and of course I wasn’t about to say no. With Binoche we’ve got guaranteed coverage by the general press, without us having to feel embarrassed. I’m not averse to a broad programme, and a little glitter and glamour. They’re not in Cannes, Berlin, or Venice, either. Even Rotterdam makes commercial concessions. Film is at the point where culture and entertainment meet, and a festival should be bold enough to concede that, too.’

This year, for the first time, the presentation of the Joseph Plateau Awards (the Belgian Oscars) will not be taking place at the Ghent Film Festival for community reasons, apparently. Dubrulle goes on: ‘If we talk about film internationally, we talk about Belgian film. But if we organise something in Ghent or Antwerp, or in Namur or Mons, then it is clearly difficult to range the entire sector behind the idea. We created the Plateau Awards and they are national awards, but the French-speakers continue to say ‘Gand, c’est loin’ (‘Ghent’s a long way away’). As a gesture of goodwill towards French-speaking Belgium, we have moved the Plateau Awards to Brussels, in February.’

The presentation of the awards for the best film score is intended to catch the eye internationally, and to give a festi-
Focussing on the Flanerdorff: An ex-territorial exhibition

Peteris Vasks and Nicolet Fonte, Koninklijk Ballet van Vlaanderen, Antwerp, info: www.koninklijkballetvanvlaanderen.be
• 15 October: The mighty mighty Bosstones, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels, info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
• 17 October: The last Butterfly: Il Fiamminghi with Rosas, exhib. at station2station, Bruges, info: 09/269.92.92 www.bijlboke.be
• 20 October: Brainpower, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels, info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
• 22 October: Maria João Pires e Augustin Duy- nuy, PSK Brussels, info: 057/508.80.02
• 11 to 20 October: Die Tippa Erasmus a programma di musicisti contemporanei with conterpuozi- tions by Mendelssohn, Brahms and Rihm, De Singel, Antwerp, info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• 21 to 30 October: The mighty mighty Bosstones, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels, info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
• 11 October: Tord Gustner, Osman classical music, De Bijloke, Ghent, info: www.audiassa.be
• 14 October: Suedo, Ancienne Belgique, Brus- sels, info: www.abconcerts.be 02/548.24.24
• 16 October: ZZ Top. Vorst National, Brussels, info: 0900/009999
• 18 October: Recital Elena Prokina, Flanders Opera, Ghent, info: 09/225.24.25 www.vlaamsopera.be
• 18 October: Verner Klawitterio with composi- tions by Mendelssohn, Brahms and Rihm, De Singel, Antwerp, info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• 23 October: Dave Douglas New Quintet, Flagey, Brussels, info: 0900/00565 www.audiassa.be

Diary

MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE

• 4 to 13 October: International Festival of Mime, Aarschot with Maria Carasco, Blacksky- white, Dos a Deux, Maren Strack, Antonin Novotny etc., Aarschot, info: www.mime.be 016/491.032
• 8 to 19 October: Flanders International filmfes- tival, info: www.3725225.be www.filmfestival.be
• 9 to 12 October: Rosas with ‘If a look should April me’, dance, De Singel, Antwerp, info: 03248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• 10 October: The Beethoven Academy con- ducted by Roy Goodman, violin concerto by Brahms and symphony by Schubert, De Singel, Antwerp, info: 03248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• 11 October: Arto Lindsay, De Vooruit, Ghent, info: www.audiassa.be
• 11 October: Kudi El Engagement, Osman classical music, De Bijloke, Ghent, info: 09/269.92.92 www.debijlboke.be
• 14 October: Suedo, Ancienne Belgique, Brus- sels, info: www.abconcerts.be 02/548.24.24
• 16 October: ZZ Top. Vorst National, Brussels, info: 0900/009999
• 18 October: Recital Elena Prokina, Flanders Opera, Ghent, info: 09/225.24.25 www.vlaamsopera.be
• 18 October: Verner Klawitterio with composi- tions by Mendelssohn, Brahms and Rihm, De Singel, Antwerp, info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• 23 October: Dave Douglas New Quintet, Flagey, Brussels, info: 0900/00565 www.audiassa.be

EXPO

Until 11 November: Closed world - Open books, exhibition, photos by Tswaledi Thobejane and theatre play Fanon’s children by Lesego Rampokolong, Zuiderepshuis, Antwerp, info: 03/248.01.00 www.brugje2002.be
• 11 October: Wayn Wash I: Maria Do- lores by Wayne Thawb, De Vooruit, Gent, info: 09/267.28.28 www.vooruit.be
• 11 October: Patricia Kaas, Royal Circus, Bruss- sels, info: 0900/26060
• Until 12 October: Philocitees by Paul An- tipas multimedia theatre, Bruges, info: 070/22.50.05
• From 3 October onwards: Three for the road, three ballets by choregraphes Mauricio Weiszrot,

Focus on Flanders provides a weekly overview of articles from the Flemish press and appears in English, French and German. This newsletter is published by Uitgeverij Lannoo nv, Kasteelstraat 97, 8700 Tielt and can also be obtained by e-mail.

• Until 11 October: The enchanted wood, open air exhibition by Flor Bex, Maria-Aalter (East Flanders), info: 0495/10.09.10
• Until 5 January: 7000 years of Persian art, exhibition, Palais des Beaux-arts, Ghent, info: 09/243.97.30
• 21 September to 16 February: Selection 100, exhibition, jubelparkmuseum, Cinquantenaire, Brussels; info: 02/741.73.11

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