Agalev digs its heels in over the Nepal affair

Will the party reconcile itself to the path outlined by Louis Michel (MR) or will it follow its principles?

The Flemish Greens of Agalev now appear not to be simply reconciling themselves to the way in which the Nepal affair has been handled in the Federal Government. In particular, the way in which the whole operation for the export of machine guns was insured for EUR 15 million by the National Decredere Service further to a decision by the latter's board of directors without even the necessary quorum, is unacceptable in the opinion of the Green state secretary for development cooperation, Eddy Boutmans. He stated in the House that the insurance was not legally valid. At a meeting on 19 October Agalev will be laying down the lines of force for its election campaign. Will the party reconcile itself to the path outlined by Louis Michel (MR) or will Agalev's members opt to follow their principles? (FF)

INTRODUCTION

Jef Roos, chairman of the Flemish employers' Association (VEV), was quite sharp in his address at the congress of that organisation last week. Maybe it is true, acknowledged Roos, that Flanders is one the most thriving regions in the world and that the average Flemings' confidence in business is greater than in other institutions such as trade unions, the media, or politics, as a recent marketing study revealed. But we cannot deny that the business enterprise has to cope with a negative image in public opinion. He concluded. This is anything but reassuring, since other studies show that Flanders suffers from a distressing lack of enterprise culture. Barely 2.4% of Flemings are actively involved in entrepreneurship. We have not been able to count on much support from the Liberal/Socialist/Green government in order to encourage entrepreneurship, says Roos. His list of complaints is long, and includes: too much red tape, too many financial charges for companies, a lack of industrial sites and a lack of incentives for entrepreneurship in education. He feels that the Liberal/Socialist/Green government has done little or nothing in these areas. On the contrary, there is even one minister, Renaat Landuyt (Employment, SPA) who does not balk at accusing employers of irresponsibility and a lack of ethics - in a government brochure to boot, Roos adds. This degree of contempt is enough to make him despair, he claims. Obviously, that contempt need not necessarily come from a socialist minister. On the day of the VEV's conference, the Fortis Chairman, Maurice Lippens, undoubtedly the most important Belgian banker, proclaimed in Knack that many companies were run by stuffed shirts in the field of financial scandals, long before Enron and WorldCom bit the dust. Suddenly handcuffs were being slapped on managers who had been worshipped by the entire Flemish establishment and by the public. According to Lippens, small investors wrongly placed their trust in these people, and by the public. According to Lippens, small investors wrongly placed their trust in these people, and by the public. According to Lippens, small investors wrongly placed their trust in these people, and that trust cost them dear. Whereupon Knack zooms in on the hearings of the committee of inquiry, which is examining the circumstances in which the Sabena board of directors left the airline in ruins. A similar story. At no time did any member of that board of directors consider it opportune to lodge a complaint about the comedy that was being acted out before their eyes, says Knack. What was behind it all? A complete lack of accountabili-ty, in the banker's view. Enough, it seems, to make Lippens despair as well.

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief
Michel: no reason to suspend arms shipment

Neither the poor democratic character, nor the human rights violations can make him change his mind.

On 15 October, in the Parliament’s parliamentary foreign affairs committee, the Foreign Affairs Minister Louis Michel (MR) reported on the mission effected by four Belgian observers, who had gone to Nepal to gauge the current regime’s democratic character and respect for human rights. Michel read out the report and decided that, for the time being, he did not see any reason why he should suspend the export licence for the sale of 5,500 machine guns by the Liège weapons factory FN to Nepal. That the king had sent his government packing, sidelined political parties, and dissolved parliament, could not make him change his mind. Neither the fact that the elections have been postponed, and a prime minister loyal to the king now leads a transitional cabinet, nor the observers’ conclusion that both the government army and the Maoist rebels had been guilty of widespread human rights violations, constituted a reason for Michel to suspend the arms shipments. The Greens present made it perfectly clear that they did not agree with Michel, but they had evidently received instructions from the senior ranks of their party so as not to unleash a government crisis. MP Peter Van Houtte (Agalev) pointed out that the first arms shipment is only scheduled for the end of December and that it can therefore still be stopped. The Flemish Socialists also remained conspicuously quiet and comforted themselves for the time being with the new Arms Act. The Flemish press commentators are almost unanimous in their rejection of the conclusions that Michel draws from the report (FF).

Opinion

BART STURTEWAGEN • DE STANDAARD • 16 OCTOBER

From a legal standpoint, the issue of the shipment of FN machine guns to Nepal is crystal clear: it is not possible. After all, we do not supply arms to countries where an armed conflict is raging and human rights are being violated. If the transaction nonetheless has to go ahead at all costs, then other motives are at play. It is therefore quite foolish to put a lot of energy into drawing up a new Arms Act, if we do not apply the old one. After the return of the observation mission, Foreign Affairs Minister Louis Michel sees no reason, here and now, to change his standpoint. That is quite simply staggering. According to Michel, there is hope of improvement. After all, that is what the Nepalese army commanders have promised. And the new government, appointed by the king after what can only be described as a coup, is still planning to hold elections. And another thing: a new mission will shortly be going to Nepal to monitor the progress. Excepting the fact that he should not obstruct what is a contract of vital importance for the Walloon arms factory FN, the postponement has another advantage for Michel. If the shipment is suspended, the scandal-within-a-scandal will become critical. The way in which the transaction received insurance cover for export risk from the Delcredere Service is a travesty of transparent management (it was not approved by the required majority in the Service’s board of directors, see FF 34, p. 5). If the transaction does not go ahead, FN will nonetheless receive up to EUR 15 million in tax money. That decision was not lawful, but the policy was sent nonetheless. A great deal, if not everything, is possible when it comes to supporting Wallonia’s arms industry.

Municipal councils can play judge themselves

The weekend before the presentation of the CD&V’s security plan, Justice Minister Verwilghen (VLD), Minister for Metropolitan Policy Charles Picqué (PS) and Minister for the Interior and Duquesne have now worked out a plan aimed at putting an end to this immunity from punishment. The cities and municipalities will soon be able to deal with petty thieves and vandals themselves. Only crimes without physical violence and one-off offences are eligible. The income from the fines will go to the cities and municipalities, who must themselves invest in staff for the administrative settlement of the fines.

A great many acts of petty crime are never prosecuted by the public prosecutor’s office, let alone fined. The perpetrators are waging scot-free because of a shortage in staffing and a lack of time. Federal Ministers Picqué, Verwilghen, and Duquesne have now worked out a bill aimed at putting an end to this immunity from punishment. The cities and municipalities will soon be able to deal with petty thieves and vandals themselves. Only crimes without physical violence and one-off offences are eligible. The income from the fines will go to the cities and municipalities, who must themselves invest in staff for the administrative settlement of the fines.

Brussels 4th business city

THE BEST EUROPEAN BUSINESS CITIES

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SOURCE: DS-INFOWEB
CD&V launches incentive plan for more security

The Flemish Christian-Democratic opposition (CD&V) has prepared its own security plan and presented this to the press on 14 October. It is not the party's intention to make security the most important election issue, as according to Chairman Stefaan Clerck, it is the voter who will decide what the most important issue is. The CD&V feels that exemption from punishment is too great, and that proportionally far fewer crimes are solved here than in neighbouring countries. The party says that it can back this assertion with figures - something that Justice Minister Verwilghen (VLD) greeted with disbelief. The party has now prepared a detailed alternative. It wants to speed up the inefficient court procedures by halving the estimated 15,000 to 20,000 penalty clauses in our laws and decrees by the year 2005. To this end CD&V party secretary Jo Van Deurzen is proposing resorting to ordinary administrative penalties for minor transgressions such as crimes against the environment or traffic offences. This will give the public prosecutor's office more time to devote to serious cases (FF).

LUC STANDAERT • HET BELANG VAN LIMBURG • 15 OCTOBER

The classic examples are traffic offences. In Belgium these keep many public prosecutor's offices occupied on a full-time basis. In the Netherlands, in the first instance the public prosecutor does not step in at all. The fine is imposed by the police and collected by a collection agency. It is only in the event of a dispute that an appeal is made to the public prosecutor's office. The party also wants to draft "final attainment levels" for security, after the fashion of education, where the final attainment levels represent a minimum level that a pupil must have attained at the end of a course of training. In all, CD&V party secretary Jo Van Deurzen presented twelve priorities. The most important are:

An alert administration. The various authorities should gear their policies to each other and also pass on information to the press on 14 October. It is not the party's intention to make security the most important election issue, as according to Chairman Stefaan Clerck, it is the voter who will decide what the most important issue is. The CD&V feels that exemption from punishment is too great, and that proportionally far fewer crimes are solved here than in neighbouring countries. The party says that it can back this assertion with figures - something that Justice Minister Verwilghen (VLD) greeted with disbelief. The party has now prepared a detailed alternative. It wants to speed up the inefficient court procedures by halving the estimated 15,000 to 20,000 penalty clauses in our laws and decrees by the year 2005. To this end CD&V party secretary Jo Van Deurzen is proposing resorting to ordinary administrative penalties for minor transgressions such as crimes against the environment or traffic offences. This will give the public prosecutor's office more time to devote to serious cases (FF).

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An alert administration. The various authorities should gear their policies to each other and also pass on information to the Financing Law, with a view to greater autonomy in tax matters." There are two other matters that Dewael wants to broach in the Consultative Committee. A VAT arrangement has still not been found for the water treatment company Aquafin. The Government of Flanders cannot accept the VAT rate for Aquafin having been raised from 6% to 21%. The increase is costing Flanders some EUR 50 million. Dewael wants to put another thorny issue on the table, namely the claiming back of the government aid to the carpet manufacturer Beaulieu, under pressure from Europe. This concerns a substantial sum of EUR 40 million that was placed in a blocked account but which has now been included in the federal budget "by mistake". According to Dewael, the money belongs to Flanders, because the Flemish region has competence in respect of support for economic expansion. The Court of Arbitration already confirmed this earlier, too, according to Dewael.

WIM VANDE VELDEN • DE FINANCIËSEL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 12 OCTOBER

The message was that if the reviewed GNI figures were correct, Flanders would accept them. Dewael felt that the business of having to find an additional EUR 210 million during the budget audit would be a difficult task, but not an insurmountable one. For the rest, Dewael will be going to the Consultative Committee with an agenda of his own. According to Dewael, greater fiscal autonomy is the best way of making the federal states less dependent on the federal allocation system. "After the Lambermont agreement, autonomy in tax matters has already increased, but we want to go further in that direction. At a subsequent opportunity, we must again talk about an amendment to the Financing Law, with a view to greater autonomy in tax matters." There are two other matters that Dewael wants to broach in the Consultative Committee. A VAT arrangement has still not been found for the water treatment company Aquafin. The Government of Flanders cannot accept the VAT rate for Aquafin having been raised from 6% to 21%. The increase is costing Flanders some EUR 50 million. Dewael wants to put another thorny issue on the table, namely the claiming back of the government aid to the carpet manufacturer Beaulieu, under pressure from Europe. This concerns a substantial sum of EUR 40 million that was placed in a blocked account but which has now been included in the federal budget "by mistake". According to Dewael, the money belongs to Flanders, because the Flemish region has competence in respect of support for economic expansion. The Court of Arbitration already confirmed this earlier, too, according to Dewael.

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THE FLEMISH BUDGET

Flanders has to find an additional 210 million euro

The Flemish Minister-President Patrick Dewael (VLD) fears that his Government will have to cough up an additional EUR 210 million when the next budget audit is carried out. The downward review of the growth in Belgium's gross national income (GNI) in 2001, 2000, and 1999 means that the federal authorities will transfer EUR 210 million less to Flanders in 2003. Like the Governments of Wallonia and Brussels, Dewael is asking that this review of the GNI figures be verified. But unlike Wallonia and Brussels, Dewael will not be asking, in the governments' Consultative Committee, for any review of the agreements on the budgetary efforts to be made by the different governments (federal states, federal) (FF).

WIM VANDE VELDEN • DE FINANCIËSEL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 12 OCTOBER

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The Flemish employers of the Flemish Employers’ Association (VEV) held their conference in Ghent on 16 October. Although the VEV has been arguing for years in favour of more political decision-making at Flemish level, this year it was striking how the association had toughened its demand for greater Flemish autonomy, even to the point of confederalism. The employers feel that a new round of state reform should be organised after the federal elections, since in their view the current form of government is constantly demonstrating its inefficiency. Chairman Jef Roos said that he felt that the confederal model already existed in people’s minds, and both Minister-President Patrick Dewael (VLD) and the CD&V Chairman Stefaan De Clerck shared that point of view. The Socialists (SPA) reacted a lot more stand-offishly. Their Chairman Patrick Janssens felt that a look had to be taken to see what was feasible. But actually the conference was devoted to the theme of ‘entrepreneurship’. Chairman Roos called for an open debate on entrepreneurship. Studies have shown that in comparison with other European countries, Flemings are not exactly very enterprising. Let us begin by ridding entrepreneurship of the negative undertone, say Roos.

Let us begin by ridding entrepreneurship of the negative undertone, says Roos

The current form of government is constantly demonstrating its inefficiency. One government obstructs the work of another. One minister blocks the initiatives of another.’ On the basis of this, the VEV has decided that a new round of state reform is inevitable. According to Flemish employers, the only really good solution lies in the country being organised along confederal lines. In this model the federal states would have all competencies except those that they agree, in mutual consultation, to hand over to the confederal state of Belgium. ‘The basic responsibility then clearly lies with a single authority: the federal state.’

With its argument in favour of a confederal state, the VEV is hardening its standpoint on autonomy. Up until now Flemish employers had worked hard for greater autonomy, homogenous packages of competencies and differentiation, without uttering the word confederalism. Roos also revealed that the alliance talks between the Flemish chambers of commerce and the VEV were in their final phase. ‘The organisational structure is as good as complete. It will be an alliance based on equality, but it will not be a merger.’
On 15 October, the debate on a new draft decree for the ‘settling-in’ of newcomers got underway in the Flemish Parliament. The draft decree is the work of Minister for Welfare Mieke Vogels (Agalev) and comprises a course with a package ‘Dutch for beginners’, a basic course on public institutions and guidance on the job market. Approximately 12,000 non-EU citizens speaking other languages are eligible. Their status can range from asylum-seekers or recognised refugees, to immigrants who have come to Flanders to settle long term on account of a marriage or a family reunification. At the moment newcomers are not obliged to follow these ‘settling-in’ classes, although 3,000 attend the courses in the Flemish integration centres voluntarily. At the weekend the liberal VLD, through its chairman Karel De Gucht, called for the settling-in process to be made obligatory and wants financial sanctions to be applied to those newcomers failing to attend the course. Mieke Vogels is not against such an obligation, but - together with the socialist SP.A -, points out that this kind of obligation would require a fourfold increase in the present course and reception budget of EUR 9.2 million, and that the integration centres already have long waiting lists of course participants who are unable to get started because of a lack of course availability. However, Patricia Ceyssens, Flemish VLD MP, stated in the Flemish Parliament that the government does not have to wait as regards the introduction of the obligation. She claims that six out of seven course participants drop out, and quotes a figure of just one in six (FF).

MARK DEWEERDT • DE FINANCIÈLE-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 16 OCTOBER

The draft of the decree on the settling-in of immigrants obliges the municipalities to refer newcomers registered in the municipal register to a reception office. The newcomers are expected to report there within one month. The target group consists of foreigners with characteristics of disadvantage, which could lead to them being permanently underprivileged. Vogels also pointed out that the offering of settling-in courses for newly arrived immigrants does not relieve Flanders of its duty to invest further in immigrants who have already been living here for years and still have not learnt Dutch.

The minister opposed having the settling-in scheme linked to an employment quota for immigrants, as Federal Minister Vande Lanotte (SPA) did, or to the withdrawal of unemployment benefits, as VLD Chairman De Gucht recently suggested. The draft decree does not oblige newcomers to attend a settling-in course, but Vogels invited the Flemish Parliament to pursue a ‘thorough, open, fair, critical but also serene debate’ on this obligation and on the conditions and sanctions that could be attached to it. The VLD parliamentary section announced that it was tabling an amendment to oblige newcomers to register with a reception office. Agalev will be proposing that the decree be supplemented by a financial growth path, so as to raise the budget for settling-in courses from EUR 10 million to 39 million by 2005, in order thereby to offer a basic package to the 13,000 newcomers from the target group.

ISABEL ALBERS • DE STANDAARD • 17 OCTOBER

‘Flemish MP Patricia Ceyssens (VLD) does not know what she is talking about when she claims that six out of every seven immigrants quit their Dutch course prematurely. Those working in the field know that the reality is very different,’ said Ignace Fermont, a member of staff with the Flemish Centre for Minorities.

‘Everyone who is familiar with this field greets the figures with disbelief. In the year 2000-2001, 415 of the 1,962 newcomers in a settling-in course dropped out early, which translates to one in five. The interim evaluation for this year points to a dropout rate of just 14%,’ says Ignace Fermont, who thereby confirms the figures given by Mieke Vogels, Equal Opportunities Minister (Agalev).

The argument about the figures has put the search for the reasons behind the dropouts into the shade. Fermont: ‘Every person who quits is one too many. As a rule it does not have much to do with motivation, but rather the range offered, which is not suitable. There are intensive basic courses, but these are not sufficiently custom designed. Then there are the bottlenecks. Sometimes people also quit because they are no longer able to combine the course with a job that they have since found, or because of a lack of crèche facilities.’

UNEMPLOYMENT RISES MORE QUICKLY AMONG IMMIGRANTS FROM OUTSIDE THE EU

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SOURCE: DE MORGEN
Lappersfront wood cleared amidst large media interest

On 16 October Minister Dua made a realistic offer for the wood

Green activists of the so-called Lappersfront have been occupying a 30-hectare wood to the south of Bruges for over a year now, living in camps and tree huts. Their aim was to prevent a third of the wood being dug up to make way for a road-widening project and an industrial estate. According to a Development Plan approved in the Bruges city council (CD&V/SPA), two-thirds of the wood is to become parkland and the other third an SME zone. Their highly original form of campaigning led to the members of the Lappersfront attracting regular media interest in their protests, with the result that they have been able to count on increasingly broad support from all kinds of organisations and politicians of different parties. The owner of the wood, Fabricom, was anything but happy about the occupation. The company asserted that the sit-in was frightening off potential buyers. In July of this year it delivered an ultimatum. When the occupiers paid no heed, Fabricom took legal action. At the beginning of September a justice of the peace decided that the wood had to be cleared. On 14 October the police enforced the judge’s court order, on orders from the Bruges city council. Bulldozers and police assault vans were brought in to clear the wood. The occupiers were picked up and the encampment and huts were razed to the ground. The Green Belt Front, an umbrella solidarity movement comprising 76 organisations, used the Internet to call upon people to come out and demonstrate. Sympathisers from all over Flanders turned up and held spontaneous demonstrations in various places in Bruges, leading to skirmishes with the police. Dozens of campaigners were picked up. The owner Fabricom has already announced that it will pass on the costs of the eviction to the occupiers. The Green Environment Minister Vera Dua (Agalev), who was sympathetic to the action, had previously declared that she was prepared to have the wood bought by the Flemish Community, but she found the price set by the owner Fabricom (EUR 5 million) to be too high. She had already held negotiations on two occasions with the owner and the Mayor of Bruges Patrick Moenaert (CD&V), but was unable to arrive at an agreement. Dua strongly denounced the eviction, whilst the Mayor of Bruges shifted the blame for the eviction onto Dua’s shoulders. (FF).

DOMINIQUE MINTEN • DE STANDAARD • 15 OCTOBER

With the eviction, Mayor Moenaert was enforcing a court order pronounced by the justice of the peace of Bruges. ‘I had been able to prevent the eviction until last week,’ says Moenaert. ‘Of course it’s frustrating, though I was determined to implement this decision. I’m not a masochist. I would have liked nothing better than for the matter to be resolved in a different way, but if the owner asks for a strong hand in getting the order enforced, as head of the police I have to deliver. Those are the rules.’ Moenaert is very unhappy about the way the Environment Minister Vera Dua reacted. She let it be understood, before the police action had really begun in earnest, that she felt it to be the wrong signal, both from owner Fabricom and the Bruges CD&V-SPA city council. ‘Talks will again be held this week with Fabricom on the possible purchase of the wood,’ said Dua.

‘I had urged for any action to be delayed until after those talks had taken place. The fact that that did not happen is outrageous. Apparently there are people who are not striving for an honourable solution. We want to buy the wood and thereby give Bruges an urban wood.’ Moenaert is far from convinced of the minister’s readiness to buy the wood. ‘After the pronouncement by the justice of the peace, I invited Dua and Fabricom for talks. Twice the minister came along empty-handed.’ According to Moenaert, a deadline for the sale was set for Wednesday 9 October. ‘I shifted that back to the evening of Friday 11 October. Then, because there still had not been any progress made, I decided to proceed with the eviction.’ ‘Nonsense’ was the reaction that came from the office of Minister Dua. ‘There was no deadline at all.’ According to Moenaert, there is a lot of disinformation about the wood. ‘In 2000, the entire Bruges council - including the local Development Plan approved in the Bruges city council. Bulldozers and police assault vans were brought in to clear the wood. The Green Belt Front, an umbrella solidarity movement comprising 76 organisations, used the Internet to call upon people to come out and demonstrate. Sympathisers from all over Flanders turned up and held spontaneous demonstrations in various places in Bruges, leading to skirmishes with the police. Dozens of campaigners were picked up. The owner Fabricom has already announced that it will pass on the costs of the eviction to the occupiers. The Green Environment Minister Vera Dua (Agalev), who was sympathetic to the action, had previously declared that she was prepared to have the wood bought by the Flemish Community, but she found the price set by the owner Fabricom (EUR 5 million) to be too high. She had already held negotiations on two occasions with the owner and the Mayor of Bruges Patrick Moenaert (CD&V), but was unable to arrive at an agreement. Dua strongly denounced the eviction, whilst the Mayor of Bruges shifted the blame for the eviction onto Dua’s shoulders. (FF).

DOMINIQUE MINTEN • DE STANDAARD • 15 OCTOBER

With the eviction, Mayor Moenaert was enforcing a court order pronounced by the justice of the peace of Bruges. ‘I had been able to prevent the eviction until last week,’ says Moenaert. ‘Of course it’s frustrating, though I was determined to implement this decision. I’m not a masochist. I would have liked nothing better than for the matter to be resolved in a different way, but if the owner asks for a strong hand in getting the order enforced, as head of the police I have to deliver. Those are the rules.’ Moenaert is very unhappy about the way the Environment Minister Vera Dua reacted. She let it be understood, before the police action had really begun in earnest, that she felt it to be the wrong signal, both from owner Fabricom and the Bruges CD&V-SPA city council. ‘Talks will again be held this week with Fabricom on the possible purchase of the wood,’ said Dua.

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BEN BLEYS • DE MORGEN • 17 OCTOBER

On 16 October Minister Dua made a realistic offer for the Lappersfort Wood. This is reportedly lower than Fabricom’s original asking price (EUR 5 million), but higher than the normal price for a piece of woodland in a scenic area. Fabricom has promised to give an answer within one week. ‘The Government of Flanders has declared itself in agreement as regards providing Flanders with sufficient woodland, but at the same time I want to guarantee that tax money is well spent,’ the minister said after the third round of talks on the wood. The Fabricom management promised to present Dua’s ‘realistic offer’ to the board of directors, and the owner is to give an answer within a week. In the meantime, a Fabricom trade union delegation expressed its indignation. ‘During the entire occupation not a single metalworker lost any sleep over the events, but we don’t understand why our management had the order carried out while the negotiations were still under way,’ a union secretary was quoted as saying.
Duty Doctors at emergency ward

Some eighty general practitioners have been working out a solution, on their own initiative.

In the spring the Catholic hospitals protested that their emergency services (A&E) were all too often being used ‘improperly’ at weekends. At least half of the patients that they received came in with injuries or complaints for which they consulted their GP during the week: a minor case of flu, a cut, stomachache, and so on. The hospitals threatened to charge an extra EUR 25 for such treatments, but Social Affairs Minister Frank Vandenbroucke (SPA) refused to go along with that. Some eighty general practitioners in the Antwerp sub-municipalities of Borgerhout and Deurne however have been working out a solution, on their own initiative, since the beginning of this year. They themselves have gone along to the A&E ward to take up their place there. Minister Vandenbroucke is enthusiastic about the scheme (FF).

Guy Fransen • Het Volk • 14 October

This initiative is not just about a ‘good cause’. The doctors are also thinking about their wallet and their quality of life. ‘At the moment we often do a rotating weekend duty shift, without much work. When we are on duty, we’d rather have our hands full for 24 hours. We also feel that a doctor who is not on duty should be genuinely free. As things stand at the moment, doctors who are theoretically free are receiving calls all the time,’ according to general practitioner Renders, one of the initiators of the project. The doctors take their places in the OCMW (Public Social Welfare Centre) Hospital of Borgerhout. There are always two of them, and there is also a medical secretary and a driver. One doctor remains in the department, whilst the other goes out on calls. The driver not only steers his way deftly through the traffic, but also keeps a lookout in difficult neighbourhoods and at suspicious addresses. If the doctor feels insecure, he can go in with him. ‘A doctor is a person, too, and he feels that same feeling of insecurity just like anyone else. Sometimes you are confronted with a patient who asks you quite coercively to prescribe a substitute for drugs. In those cases you can do little else and you feel uneasy. Having that extra man there gives you that feeling of security. We have around 25 female colleagues, and they sometimes get frightened.’ The project costs EUR 200,000 a year, and Minister Vandenbroucke (SPA) is providing the financing. In the Netherlands, there are already some 80 GP duty services. Vandenbroucke would like to see the Antwerp initiative extended. In addition to Antwerp, trial projects are being set up in Charleroi and Brussels, including protection by a driver.

Flemish children's books in the spotlight at Buchmesse

Illustrated books from Flanders are very much in vogue

The Frankfurt Book Fair (Frankfurter Buchmesse) ended on 14 October. Publishers from countries throughout the world (but especially from host country Germany) gather there with the main aim of concluding international contracts. They come to present the most interesting publications from their new lists, and try to sell the rights to fellow publishers from other countries. Or conversely, they buy the rights to books in other languages, in order to give the translated versions of these a chance on their home market. This year the number of publishers (6,400) and titles was down somewhat, due to the recession on the German book market, but the Flemish publishers of children’s books would barely have noticed that. They were able to rejoice at growing interest, in line with the trend that has been evident for some years now. It appears that illustrated books from Flanders are very much in vogue, as are art books (FF).

Karel Verhoeven • De Standaard • 14 October

European publishers discovered the quality of Flemish illustrated children’s and juvenile books some years ago. At the Frankfurt Book Fair, Japanese and Korean publishers have now also pushed their way to the fore. Even the hugely popular comic strip Suske en Wiske has been sold to the Japanese. It must be the Flemish pictorial tradition, thinks Bart Desmyter, publisher with De Eenhoorn. ‘Japanese publishers discovered us a couple of years ago, and now we are also beginning to do business with Koreans. It’s becoming a very important market. We produce lovely, artistic picture books, with high-quality artistic drawings and little text. Apparently the drawing style dovetails quite closely with Oriental culture.’ Contracts have also almost been finalised with American and even Brazilian publishers, for books such as Sleep well, Rosalie by Brigitte Minne and An Vanderauweke. ‘And there, we’re not talking about 3,000 copies, but ten to twenty thousand copies.’ Flemish publishers are taking advantage of the hype in the Far East surrounding everything that is exotically European, suspects Philippe Werck of the Clavis publishing house. Clavis has already sold more than sixty translation and sales contracts. Apart from European partners, it was chiefly Korean publishers that bought a lot. Korea has some 8,000 publishing houses. ‘This was one of our best Buchmesse ever, and we have had our own stand here for fourteen years.’

Foreign interest is vital for a publishing company such as Clavis, which records between 45 and 50% of its turnover abroad. Clavis sells 420,000 books in Flanders and the Netherlands, and 1.2 million books in the rest of the world. Along with Bologna, the Buchmesse is their most important trade fair for international contracts. Last week, Clavis dotted the i’s and crossed the t’s on 180 sales agreements. ‘Flemish publishers have done some
good business,' says Jan Vanderheyden, secretary of the Flemish publishers' association. This is because art books, that other mainstream of Flemish publishing companies, also continue to be in the ascendancy internationally. Publishing companies such as Lannoo, Stichting Kunstboek (Art Book Foundation) and Ludion cheaply plan joint editions and joint productions in Frankfurt, with authors from different language areas and markets.

CULTURE

Diary

MUSIC, DANCE THEATRE

• 23 October: Dave Douglas New Quintet, Flagey, Brussels; info: 0900/00565 www.audijazz.be
• 23 October: Hooverphonic, Hof ter Lo, Antwerp; info: 03/543.90.30
• 24 October: ADD N TO, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
• 25 October: Maxim Vengerov, PSK, Brussels; info: 02/507.82.00
• 26 and 27 October: Gonzales, Muziek-Op-Droom, Hasselt and Monty, Antwerp; info: 0900/00600
• 27 October: Madredeus and the Flemish Radio Orchestra, Vorst National, Brussels; info: 0900-0900
• 28 October: Moreno Veloso (Br), Botanique, www.audijazz.be
• 29 October: Udit Drzler, Boris Charmatz with hélèr-délivres, Installation, Kaaitheater, Brussels; info: 02/201.59.59 www.caaitheater.be
• 26 October: Boulevard: Film, Workshops (sampling, vjing, phhop, guided tours (atel- lour), Residency) theatre and dance perfor- mances (Ultima Vez), concerts (ltus) in Brussels; info: 02/203.02.00 www.cip.be
• 27 October: Portrait of a city, exhibition, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: www.abconcerts.be 0900/26060
• 29 October: Jean-Louis Murat, Ancienne Bel- gique, Brussels; info: www.abconcerts.be 0900/26060
• 30 October: The Leveliers, Ancienne Bel- gique, Brussels; info: www.abconcerts.be 0900/26060
• 30 October: Toto, Vorst National, Brussels; info: 0900/26060
• 3 November: Coldplay, Vorst National, Brussels; info: 0900/26060
• 2 to 24 October: Rose by Ugo Dehaes, dance, DSBis, Brussels; info: 02/513.82.90
• Until 26 October: Angels festival, contemporary video-art and audiovisual experiments in Brussels www.argosarts.org 02/220.00.03
• 23 to 25 October: Sonic Square, Out of the bedroom; info: www.kaaitheater.be

EXPO

• Until 17 November: Closed world - Off books, exhibition, medieval manuscripts and contemporary art in a splendid the splendid site of an abbey; Bruges; info: 070/22.33.02 www.brugge2002.be
• Until 17 November: Dead lines: War, media and propaganda in the 20th century, exhibition, Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres
• Until 1 December: Tyndale’s Last Will (the Coverdale Cover), exhibition, Museum Plantin- Moretus, Antwerp; info: 03/221.14.50
• Until December: Festival art and equal rights, women artists show their work in 40 places, organisation: Gynaika; info: 03/232.22.29 www.gynaika.be
• 20 September to 3 November: ArchLab: ecology in contemporary architecture, exhibition, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28
• Until 7 November: Graphical work by Max Ernst, exhibition, Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent; info: 09/240.07.00
• Until 12 January: Deir el Medina and the Valley of the Kings, The artists of the Pharaoh, exhibition, Jubelparkmuseum, Cinquantaine- na, Brussels; info: 02/741.73.11
• Until 5 January: 7000 years of Persian art, exhibition, Sint-Pietersabdij, Ghent; info: 09/243.97.30
• 21 September to 16 February: Selection 1/Backstage, Fashion exhibition, Antwerp Modemuseum (MoMu), Antwerp; info: 03/470.01.11 www.momu. be
• Until 8 December: Between city palaces and castles in the air, oils, engravings and paintings by Hans Vredeman de Vries, De Vries (1526-1609), exhibition, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp; info: 03/242.04.16
• Until 8 December: The world is a garden, ex- hibition, garden architecture (prints) by Hans Vredeman De Vries, Rubenshuis, Antwerp; info: 03/232.01.03
• Until 8 December: Magistral Middle Ages, Miniatures and manuscripts from Chartes- magne to Charles the Brave (800 - 1475), City Museum, Louvain; info: www.mmu.evemueen.be 016/22.45.64
• Until 17 November: CIVIL, Honoré d’O and Franciska Lambrechts, exhibition, Vleeshuis, Antwerp; info: 03/232.01.03
• Until 1 December: Oscar Niemeyer, archi- tect, survey of his work, exhibition at the CIVA, international centre for town, architec- ture and landscape; info: 02/642.24.50 www.civa.be
• Until 17 November: Portrait of a city, Bruges 1847-1918 photographed, Arenshtins, Bruges; info: 02/222.57.37
• Until 5 January: portraits of the artist, exhibition, Dexia Gallery, Brussels; info: 02/222.57.37
• Until 27 October: Japanese designers: textile, jewels, ceramics, leaded windows, exhibition, Vizo Gallery, Brussels; info: 02/227.49.05

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