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**focus on FLANDERS**

**THE DUTCH SPEAKING PART OF BELGIUM**

**PRESS REVIEW**

weekly, does not appear in July • NUMBER 3 • 18 JANUARY – 23 JANUARY 2003

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**INTRODUCTION**

 Barely four months before the federal elections in Belgium, it is interesting to see how Flemish politicians and editorialists are commenting on the results of the Dutch parliamentary elections and what conclusions they are drawing for use at home. For CD&V Chairman Stefaan De Clerck, the victory of CDA’s Balkenende is the confirmation of what Christen-Democraten (CD&V) feels dead. The Liberal VLD’s Chairman Karel De Gucht cannot be rejoicing at the mediocre result achieved by Gerrit Zalm’s Liberal VVD. De Gucht attributes this result to the considerable mediagenic effect played its part. In his view, the overwhelming success of the mediagenic PVDA figurehead Wouter Bos is nothing more than a new Pim Fortuyn effect. The leader of the Flemish Socialists Steve Stevaert (SPA) does not agree. He feels that with its 19-seat gain, the Dutch sister party PVDA has simply recovered from the setback it had suffered a year ago due to the success of the Pim Fortuyn List a year ago. Stevaert thinks that in the Netherlands it has been proven that right wing and left wing still exist. Jos Geytsels, leader of the Flemish Greens, can hardly be effusive about the Green Left having lost ground in the Netherlands, but points to the gains made by the progressive camp overall. After all, the left wing has rallied to win a total of 65 seats – the same number it held prior to the Fortuyn “wave” in 2002. For De Morgen (23 January), the result demonstrates how unpredictable the behaviour of the electorate has become and how important the image of the leader is. The voter no longer wants to be convinced on the basis of the content of the message, but lets himself be seduced by purely psychological stimuli: style, charisma, and the ability to speak the people’s language. Het Laatste Nieuws (24 January) also views the election outcome from a mass-psychology standpoint. After the chaos of the Fortuyn era, the Netherlands has opted for stability and is therefore reverting to the traditional parties, and to figures like Bos and Balkenende who have an air of reliability about them. From the conclusion that Balkenende is now unable to govern with the VVD, as he would have wanted, and that it is virtually impossible for him to avoid the PVDA, Gazet van Antwerpen draws the lesson that party bigwigs ought not to say beforehand who they prefer as future partners in office. The voter does not swallow it. According to the same paper, another lesson is that small parties should be wary of elections that turn into duels between two individuals or parties (such as Verhofstadt vs. De Clerck for the premiership for example), for in such cases they end up getting clobbered. N-VA, Agalev and SP.A-Spirit are warned. And finally, the messenger may have become more important than the message in such media-hyped elections, but politics has suddenly become a hot item, De Morgen (24 January) and De Financieel-Economische Tijd notice. This is apparent not only from the high television ratings but also from the high turnout for turnout on polling day. Thus, politics has once again become a thing of the people can only be a positive conclusion.

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief

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**focus on FLANDERS** • 18 January - 24 January 2003 • Number 3

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**Liberal Appeal fishes in the VLD pond**

IN DEURNE THE CORDON SANITAIRE AROUND THE VLAAMS BLOK HAS BEEN BROKEN

According to Het Laatste Nieuws, Ward Beyesen, the Antwerp VLD dissident who stands for a ‘sensible right-wing’ line with his new party Liberal Appeal (Liberal Appeal), is fishing with a will in the VLD’s pond and thereby causing some nervous shuffling on the right-wing. After district councillor Joke Vermeulen in the Antwerp borough of Deurne, half of the VLD department in the municipality of Boechout is now also defecting to the Liberal Appeal, including Mayor Mariën. In Deurne itself a Vlaams Blok councillor has been elected chairman of the council committee, which means that the so-called cordon sanitaire around the extreme right-wing party has been broken. However, the attempt made by Beyesen and the Brussels VLD dissident Leo Goovaerts to form a joint list together has foundered. The two will now each submit their own list for the elections to the Senate (FF).

LUC VANDER KELEN • HET LAATSTE NIEUWS • 24 JANUARY

Last week Beyesen and Goovaerts said that it would be unwise to launch two separate lists. But it soon appeared that Beyesen was not especially warm to the idea of co-operation with the Brussels senator, since the latter had hit the news with his stories about a loan or a gift to Prime Minister Verhofstadt [see FF 1]. Beyesen is opposed to the cordon sanitaire around the Vlaams Blok, whilst Goovaerts does not want to have anything to do with any kind of co-operation with the extreme right. They are now going their separate ways, probably chiefly because the two are disputing the leadership of the new movement. Beyesen has had more success in the Antwerp municipality of Boechout, where his Liberal Appeal has fetched in one mayor, two local councillors and four of the eleven committee members in one fell swoop. The mayor of Boechout has been at odds with the party for some time. According to VLD Chairman Karel de Gucht, Mariën failed to keep his promise to give up his seat on the provincial council when he became mayor, and was therefore excluded from the party. He stressed that the conflict with the VLD was purely personal. It is doubtful whether this will help to improve the mood at the VLD’s party headquarters, for there are other dissatisfied VLD members who are not being given a good place on the list. There is grumbling among a number of mandato- ries in West Flanders, in particular. Karel De Gucht’s worries are not over yet.
Elections become suspenseful again due to dissidence of Beysen

When Leo Goovaerts announced that he would be running on an independent list, the party hardly felt that this could pose any kind of threat. Things are very different in the case of Beysen’s initiative. Beysen is an electoral heavyweight in Antwerp and wants to run on a Senate list and at least one list for the Lower House in the province of Antwerp in the elections on 18 May. This could cost the VLD a lot of votes and even a seat in the province of Antwerp. His participation in the elections causes the lead that the VLD has built up in the polls over its immediate rival CD&V, to shrink markedly (FF).

MARK DEWEERDT • DE FINANCIEEL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 22 JANUARY

Only on 18 May will it become apparent whether the votes won by the Liberal Appeal are decisive in the result of the struggle for market leadership between the VLD and CD&V. A major factor in this is the scope of Beysen’s initiative. Will the Liberal Appeal only be taking part in the parliamentary elections in the provincial constituency of Antwerp, or will there also be a parliamentary list in one or more other provinces? Will Beysen receive the support of Leo Goovaerts or will the two ‘dissidents’ go to the polls as rivals? The greater the electorate that Beysen can appeal to, the greater the number of votes he will be able to poach from the VLD. In the elections of 13 June 1999, the VLD and the then CVP were involved in a neck-and-neck race. For the Lower House (politically speaking the most important elections), the VLD won with 888,861 votes, ahead of the CVP with 875,455 votes, a difference of a little over 13,000, which meant one seat more (VLD: 23, CVP: 22). In the Senate and the Flemish Parliament, the CVP remained the largest party. In the Libre polls that have been held since then, the VLD has invariably been ahead. In the most recent poll [December], the difference amounted to 1.6 percentage points, or roughly 57,000 votes. Only in the VRT-De Standaard poll [at the beginning of November] has CD&V been on top. It is not very probable that the Liberal Appeal will be able to attain the electoral threshold of 5 % and take part in the distribution of seats even in the province of Antwerp. The question is whether Beysen can garner enough votes to cause the VLD to lose seats. The VLD won five parliamentary seats in the province of Antwerp in the last elections. The fifth seat would be jeopardised if the VLD were to lose approximately 33,000 votes. It is difficult to quantify the exact size of Beysen’s electoral support. In the last elections he received 30,190 preference votes as first candidate successor on the VLD’s list for the elections to the European Parliament.

Ward Beysen has sights set on municipal elections

In his view, the VLD is pursuing an overly left-wing course and has fallen back to become an ‘electoral association with conflicting views’.

FF EDITORIAL TEAM

Flanders’ largest party, the VLD, is having a hard time of it of late. After former treasurer Leo Goovaerts left the party last week and senior VLD members were forced to call the party’s populist senator Jean-Marie Dedecker to order when he organised a campaign against the new traffic law on his own initiative, the Antwerp MEP Ward Beysen announced last weekend that he would be re-elected in the elections to the European Parliament in 2004. De Beysen’s decision. In 2000 he was voted out of office as the leading candidate on the list in the VLD and the then CVP were in a neck-and-neck race. For the elections in 13 June 1999, the VLD and the then CVP were involved in a neck-and-neck race. For the Lower House (politically speaking the most important elections), the VLD won with 888,861 votes, ahead of the CVP with 875,455 votes, a difference of a little over 13,000, which meant one seat more (VLD: 23, CVP: 22). In the Senate and the Flemish Parliament, the CVP remained the largest party. In the Libre polls that have been held since then, the VLD has invariably been ahead. In the most recent poll [December], the difference amounted to 1.6 percentage points, or roughly 57,000 votes. Only in the VRT-De Standaard poll [at the beginning of November] has CD&V been on top. It is not very probable that the Liberal Appeal will be able to attain the electoral threshold of 5 % and take part in the distribution of seats even in the province of Antwerp. The question is whether Beysen can garner enough votes to cause the VLD to lose seats. The VLD won five parliamentary seats in the province of Antwerp in the last elections. The fifth seat would be jeopardised if the VLD were to lose approximately 33,000 votes. It is difficult to quantify the exact size of Beysen’s electoral support. In the last elections he received 30,190 preference votes as first candidate successor on the VLD’s list for the elections to the European Parliament.

MARK DEWEERDT • DE FINANCIEEL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 22 JANUARY

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VLD not throwing in its lot with continuation of ‘purple-green’

At the VLD’s New Year’s Reception on 20 January, party chairman Karel De Gucht sounded a lot less sure of victory than in previous weeks. Whilst the VLD had propounded a continuation of the ‘purple-green’ (Liberals/Socialist/Green) coalition as its absolute preference, De Gucht stressed in his address at the reception that the VLD was not linking its fate irrevocably to a continuation of the ‘Purple-Green’ coalition. Evidently the formation of a new government after 18 May could once again take on any manner of shades and hues, whereas just last week various commentators were still putting their money on the purple-green coalition coming through again. [FF].

WIM WINCKELMANS • HET NIEUWSBLAD • 21 JANUARY

For once Chairman Karel De Gucht showed something of his soft side: ‘Just when we are able to present the record of the excellent work we have done in office, one of our own number - of all people - is leaving us in the lurch. I have the reputation of being a tough cookie, but I have to confess: that hurts’. De Gucht fears that his party will not emerge as the largest party in the elections because of the competition posed by the Liberal Appeal. ‘Somebody who wants more liberalism, so to speak, is threatening only to bring about Guy Verhofstadt’s removal from the Rue de la Loi’. This was anything but a combative electoral speech. For a start, there was absolutely no criticism of other parties. However, the Liberals are no longer saying that they want to continue with the ‘Purple-Green’ coalition after the elections. The VLD is no longer throwing in its lot with a continuation of the Purple-Green coalition,’ says De Gucht. ‘As far as we are concerned, these elections are about one thing: strengthening the VLD’. In a subsequent government, the VLD wants to continue working on reducing taxes and wage costs for companies. The fight against abuse in the social security system and new steps in the state reform are also high on the agenda.

CD&V wants to break ‘Purple-Green’ majority

Speaking on the occasion of his party’s New Year’s reception, CD&V Chairman Stefaan De Clerck said that breaking the ‘Purple-Green’ majority was the main issue in the forthcoming elections. De Clerck is firmly convinced that the ‘Purple-Green’ parties (Liberals, Socialists and Greens) are planning to carry on together after 18 May, even though they are now saying that they are heading into the elections as free agents. The defence of private Catholic education against the ‘uniformity’ of the pluralist education system is one of the most important campaigning points, and as a family party, the CD&V is proposing a thirteenth-month child allowance payment. If it were up to Chairman Stefaan De Clerck, Inge Vervotten, the young candidate heading the Antwerp list who made a name for herself as a Christian trade unionist with Sabena, will be the new star of the campaign. If it comes to it, he can also call on the unparalleled charisma of former Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene (FF).

BOUDEWIJN VAN PETEGHEM • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 23 JANUARY

‘We are not an electoral association like the VLD, or an electoral alliance like SP.A and Spirit. CD&V wants to offer inspiration, perspective and reliability - with calm and resolute determination,’ said the party leader. As leader, he is faced with the awkward task of embodying that image. But his party colleague and former Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene best epitomises that reliability within CD&V. Alas the mayors Marc Van Peel did four years ago, and his ‘Liberal Appeal’. Beysen is strengthening CD&V’s chances of becoming the largest Flemish party again. However, the CD&V Chairman did not sneer at the VLD rival, as his predecessor Ward Beysen did years ago, when he referred to the ‘broken reed’. For CD&V, becoming the largest party again does not automatically mean a return to office. There is a good chance that the Liberals, Socialists and Greens will continue together if they can. They are no longer saying so as emphatically as before, but they had previously shown such intentions. And conspicuously enough, SP.A big gun Louis Tobbback, the ‘Purple-Green’ coalition’s exceptionally cool devotee, says that he does not want to govern with this CD&V because it is too right-wing, smacks too much of Pieter De Crem and is no longer the CVP of Dehaene.

COLRUYT: ALMOST DEBT-FREE AND STABLE SHARE PRICE (See page 5)

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SOURCE: JAARVERSLAG COLRUYT - VISION2000

focus on Flanders • 18 January - 24 January 2003 • Number 3
A fifth of all Belgian assets are located abroad

Luxembourg banks will be obliged to charge a 15% advance levy

Fifty billion euros in savings accounts, 80 billion in bonds and 44 billion in investment funds - all told a fifth of all financial assets held by Belgians are located abroad, according to De Financieel-Economische Tijd (23 January), which has the Ministry of Finance’s figures. They are thereby evading the 15% advance levy on income derived from securities that they have to pay on their savings in Belgium. But the EU agreement on the taxation of savings (21 January) puts an end to this. The agreement provides for a transitional arrangement for Luxembourg, Austria and Belgium. For the time being these countries are not taking part in the cross-border exchange of information on savings held by foreigners, but will tax those savings themselves. In the short term this will bring a large amount of capital back to our country and generate greater tax revenue. But the question remains as to whether Belgium will be able to make the 1 January 2004 starting date (FF).

DIRK MICHELSEN/KURT VANSTEELAND • DE FINANCIËL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 23 JANUARY

According to figures from the National Bank of Belgium itself, the financial assets held by members of the Belgian general public in Belgium totalled EUR 726 billion at the end of 2001. This also includes assets connected with insurance products, which are not included in the figures for foreign holdings. As a result Belgians have placed at least a fifth of their financial assets abroad, primarily in Luxembourg. From 1 January next year, Luxembourg banks will be obliged to charge a 15% advance levy on income derived from securities on interest-bearing Belgian holdings in the Grand Duchy. They will have to pass on 75% of the tax revenue to the Belgian tax authorities, as stipulated in the European agreement on the taxation of savings. The question is whether Belgium will be able to apply the European regulation from 1 January next year. The terms of the European agreement still have to be couched in a European directive, and will subsequently have to be incorporated into Belgian law. ‘With the election in sight, this will be no easy task,’ is the reaction from the ministry. Belgian banks say that they still have an enormous amount of work to do in order to adapt their administration and computer systems so that they follow European lines. For example, they have to put all their customers from other EU countries in a separate file because these now also have to pay tax in Belgium, and they have to set up an information system with the tax office.

www.nbb.be

Indonesia wants ransom money for Flemish dredgers

Deloitte & Touche and HEP will be pocketing 10% of ransom money

Thirteen dredgers, three of them Flemish, have been held under arrest in Western Indonesia since 26 July last year. The Indonesian navy accuses the dredgers of forgery and the theft of sand for large-scale land reclamation projects in nearby Singapore. On 9 October the court of Karimun acquitted the dredgers of theft, but imposed a fine of 30 million rupiah (US$ 3,000) because documents were missing. Despite the payments, the Indonesian Ministry of Maritime Affairs and the navy are refusing to let the ships leave and are now claiming US$ 19 million for the ships ‘Vasco da Gama’ and ‘Alexander von Humboldt’ belonging to the Jan De Nul dredging company, and US$ 4 million for the ‘Lange Wapper’ owned by Dredging International. According to De Financieel-Economische Tijd the accountancy firm Deloitte & Touche and the lawyers’ firm Harry Elias Partnership had advised the Indonesian government and will be pocketing 10% of the ransom money themselves (FF).

DE FINANCIËL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 22 JANUARY

In October 2002, by order of the Indonesian government, Deloitte&Touche made an estimate of the ransom money to be demanded for the thirteen dredgers, three of which are Flemish, that have been held under arrest in Western Indonesia since 26 July last year. The firm of accountants advised the government to demand 15% of the estimated value of the dredgers. As a fee for its work as an independent auditor, Deloitte&Touche is to receive 10% of the sum demanded. The firm is refusing to comment. The advice of Deloitte&Touche and HEP is remarkable because there are no legal grounds for it. Last week the Belgian minister attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Anne-Marie Neyts (VLD), again called upon the Indonesian ambassador Abdulmanan Suleiman to release the Belgian ships immediately. However, the Indonesian authorities are determined to receive a minimum of 15 percent of the estimated value of the ships in exchange for their release. For all the ships being held, that would come to more than US$ 30 million. A letter from HEP shows that the estimate made by Deloitte&Touche for the 15% demand is largely the result of subjective criteria. In the letter, dated 10 October 2002, HEP tells the Ministry of Maritime Affairs that ‘there is no precise method for the calculation of the correct amount for a settlement.’ According to well-informed sources, the estimated value of the ships is exorbitantly high. HEP regards the sum demanded as being acceptable precisely so that the dredgers are not deterred from continuing to operate in Indonesia. HEP suggests that Indonesia should first agree a settlement of 15 percent with the owners of the ships with the lowest value in order to set an example. Two small Japanese ships were recently released after payment of US$ 650,000.
Agfa-Gevaert sells NDT division to General Electric

GE IS PAYING A COOL EUR 400 MILLION

The listed image-processing company Agfa-Gevaert from Mortsel is selling its non-destructive tests (NDT) division to the American company General Electric (to GE’s Aircraft Engines Division, to be precise). NDT supplies industrial tests for the checking of the resistance of materials in aviation and in the automobile, railways and petrochemicals sectors. The tests consist chiefly of X-ray systems, digital X-ray examination techniques and ultrasonic inspection systems. GE is paying a cool EUR 400 million for the division, which records an annual turnover of EUR 220 million and accounts for some 4.5% of Agfa-Gevaert’s total turnover. News of the sale led to Agfa-Gevaert’s share rising by 2.84% to EUR 21.68, its highest price since March 2001 (FF).

PASCAL SERTYN • DE STANDAARD • 21 JANUARY

The company’s management revealed yesterday that the sale would yield a capital gain of EUR 200 million. Agfa CEO Ludo Verhoeven emphasised that the image-creation group had not put the division up for sale. But GE’s Aircraft Engines Division finally made an offer that Agfa-Gevaert was unable to refuse. The sale will result in some 1,050 employees moving over to General Electric. However, in Belgium most of the 150 employees in the non-destructive tests division will remain on Agfa’s payroll. The Belgian image-creation group has made an agreement with GE whereby the American industrial group will continue to buy X-ray film from Agfa. GE will become the exclusive distributor of Agfa’s industrial X-ray film.

www.agfa.be

Colruyt negotiates for acquisition of Spar, Battard and Central Cash stores

The Belgian supermarket chain Colruyt is in talks with the Dutch group Laurus on the acquisition of 350 Spar franchising stores and adjoining head office and distribution centre, 21 of the 42 Battard stores and live Central Cash stores. An agreement should have been reached by the beginning of February. Laurus is posting a loss, and already carried through a reorganisation of its Belgian establishments last year. The Spar chain alone accounts for a turnover of EUR 350 million. The Battard and Central Cash stores eligible for the acquisition represent a further EUR 120 million on top of that, and all but three are located in Wallonia. Colruyt itself recorded a turnover of EUR 1.53 billion in the first half of 2002. Jef Colruyt, chairman of the Colruyt group, was voted Manager of the Year at the beginning of this year by the business weekly Trends. Colruyt stands for a prudent, cost-effective no-nonsense approach, which pushes up turnover and profit year after year, although never in spectacular fashion. This has provided the company with a war chest of EUR 300 million, hardly any debts and a reasonably stable stock exchange price (Trends, 9 January) (FF).

RUBEN MOOIMAN • DE MORGEN • 18 JANUARY

If Colruyt acquires the Battard and Central Cash stores, it will be with the intention of turning them into genuine Colruyt supermarkets. ‘The approach will be different, we will be doing it according to the Colruyt rules, but with the current staff’, according to managing director René De Wit. In addition to these stores, Colruyt is also putting it-self forward for the wholesale business comprising 350 independent Spar and Eurospar stores and 200 independent self-employed traders. ‘At the moment we do not yet have any business on a self-supporting basis,’ says De Wit. ‘It could be important to develop that. But we are not planning to change much as far as that is concerned. The stores will simply continue to be called Spar.’ Delhaize and Carrefour have chains of self-supporting stores in our country in the form of AD-Delhaize and GB-partner. Dewit stressed that nothing had been decided yet. ‘We still have to get started on the talks and there are still quite a few obstacles to negotiate’. He is hoping that the talks can lead to a provisional contract within two to three weeks. After that a start can be made on the audit and the procedure before the Competition Board can be initiated.’

An annual turnover of EUR 50 to 60 million is involved here. It is expected that the definitive acquisition agreement will be signed during the second half of the year.

Agfa’s non-destructive tests division has constantly been in the spotlight in recent years. Agfa was prominent in bringing about a consolidation trend in a highly fragmented industrial sector. By means of various acquisitions (Krautkramer, Seifert, Pantak), the Belgian image-creation group substantially expanded the activities of this division. The supply of X-ray film for materials testing was extended to include digital X-ray examination techniques and ultrasonic inspection systems. The fact that Agfa has accepted GE’s offer is all down to the fact that the division had become an odd man out. Commercially speaking, there was no longer much ground in common with the graphic and medical divisions, the two major pillars on which Agfa-Gevaert is based. Moreover, with a turnover of a billion dollars the world market for non-destructive tests is small. Agfa is currently playing a leading role and the division is highly profitable.

www.colruyt.be

www.laurus.be
The Dutroux case: a trio, not a network

The central figure in the kidnapping case, Marc Dutroux, ditched his lawyer Julien Pierre and replaced him with the Brussels lawyer Daniel Khan

Six years after the events, the court of Neufchâteau, sitting in chambers, has ruled that Marc Dutroux, Michel Lelièvre and Michelle Martin (Dutroux’s ex-wife) must go to the Assize Court for the kidnapping of the little girls Sabine and Laetitia and the kidnapping and murder of Julie, Mélissa, An and Eefje. According to the court sitting in chambers, there was no evidence to show that Michel Nihoul, the suspect from Brussels, helped organise the kidnappings. This also means that the court does not attach any credence to the thesis that a paedophile network of people in high places was behind the kidnappings. The parents of Laetitia Delhez and An Marchal and also the head of the prosecution department Michel Bourlet are appealing against the decision. The central figure in the kidnapping case, Marc Dutroux, ditched his lawyer Julien Pierre and replaced him with the Brussels lawyer Daniel Khan. He is asking for the investigation to be taken away from Neufchâteau, as he feels that it is not being carried out objectively. The dispute between ‘believers’, who think that there was a paedo network behind the kidnappings, and ‘non-believers’ appears for the time being to have been settled in the latter’s favour (FF).

Judge Moine in Neufchâteau is following the position adopted by examining magistrate Langlois who has always investigated a charge et a discharge, and is diametrically opposed to the public prosecutor Michel Bourlet, who originally together with the previous examining magistrate Connerotte, saw many more guilty parties. In addition to the trio and the accomplice Gérard Pinon, Bourlet also wanted to bring Michel Nihoul before the Asize Court, because he delivered a batch of Ecstasy pills to Lelièvre the day after Laetitia’s kidnapping, which can be interpreted as payment for services rendered. For that drugs case, Nihoul is now being referred to the Brussels courts. Bourlet also brought forward victims of eleven failed kidnap attempts, who said that they recognised not only Dutroux and Lelièvre but also Nihoul, as people involved. The public prosecutor thus hoped to breathe new life into his theory of a large network. Justice Minister Marc Verwilghen (VLD), who chaired the ‘Dutroux Commission’ from 1996 to 1998, also followed this hypothesis. However, the court has only referred Dutroux, Lelièvre and Martin to the Asize Court, to the annoyance of those who believed that the trio was part of a larger network. Many of them still reckon that Nihoul is the spider in the web. Dutroux’s new lawyer, Daniel Khan, will spare no resources in seeing to it that the case is put on the back burner again. Thus, Maître Khan was quoted in De Morgen as saying that the car that was used to kidnap Julie and Mélissa in the early evening of 24 June 1995 was driven by Michel F. He states that this clue has not been investigated thoroughly enough, partly because Julien Pierre was prepared to foist anything on his client in order to protect others. For according to Khan, it has been shown that in a radio interview on RTBF, Julien Pierre ‘subtly used a number of words that are only understood by his fellow freemasons. […] Pierre told his fellows that I was an idiot and didn’t represent a danger’. Khan has since brought legal proceedings before the Court of Cassation on account of well-founded suspicion against all magistrates in Neufchâteau and Liège who dare to negate his thesis. But up until now wasn’t the talk rather of a network of child-killers with French-speaking Christian-Democrats who were being protected?

The Borgerhout indoor football club is a phenomenon. In next to no time, the club from the Antwerp suburb, which is made up solely of immigrants, has rocketed from the fourth provincial division to the top national division. The players are enormously popular among the hundreds of young immigrants from the popular districts, where only recently major disturbances broke out after an immigrant had been murdered. Home matches attract hundreds of noisy supporters. The Minister of the Government of Flanders for Employment Renaat Landuyt (SP.A) immediately saw the possibility of combining professional sport with neighbourhood work. Eight of the eighteen players have now been given contracts as professionals, but between training sessions and matches they have to devote time to helping young immigrants with problems (FF).

Cub manager Chris Peeters: ‘In exchange for a professional contract, the players not only have to put in eighteen hours a week in training, but also have to devote the same amount of time, after a short course, to organising activities in public squares. Together with Antwerp city council, which started up the project, minister Landuyt is convinced that our soccer players command authority among difficult young people and that they can also have a positive influence on their way of thinking. How is this? Our team’s popularity borders on the improbable. They are the heroes of the young Moroccans. And people listen to heroes. […] I just hope that people will not regard the new pros as ‘the ministering angels of Borgerhout’. Of course some problem youngsters will be put on the right track as a result of my players’ work in the neighbourhood, but it is nonsense to say that thanks to this project there will never be any unrest or disturbances again. This is merely a first step in the right direction.’
Royal decree constitutes threat for summer festivals

Herman Schueremans, organiser of the largest festival in Belgium, Rock Werchter, sounds the alarm bell

Last week the Federal Interior Minister, Antoine Duquesne (MR), had a royal decree approved, which states that in 15 cases the local police can ask civilians or companies for payment for its intervention. The police can also request payment of this fee from the organisers of the many music festivals and sports competitions. Herman Schueremans, organiser of the largest festival in Belgium, Rock Werchter, sounds the alarm bell in an open letter published in De Morgen (18 January). He feels that in particular small municipalities with a small police force, who have to call in the assistance of other police forces, will forward the bill to the festival organisers. And most organisers will be unable to pay that bill. For his festival, he puts the costs at half a million euros. For him, the only solution lies in moving his festival to a large city or even to another country. The problem is a touchy one, for Prime Minister Verhofststadt (VLD) has also taken it in hand (FF).

Stef Van Woensel/Koen Huybens • Het Belang Van Limburg • 20 January

Aside from being a concert promoter, Schueremans is also a politician. In the next elections, he will occupy the last ‘pushing’ position on the VLD’s parliamentary list for the Lower House for the province of Flemish Brabant. The reactions to his open letter have not been slow in coming. The Ministry of the Interior swiftly stated that an organiser can negotiate with the municipal authority, which may not pass on the costs. A little later it was announced that a meeting with the provincial governors had been scheduled for next week, in order to find a solution to the problem, which could affect not just rock festivals but also football matches and cycle races, for example. ‘For football matches, we will let the police zones themselves take the decisions as far as possible,’ said Prime Minister Verhofstadt, speaking on the VRT programme Terzake. The cycling association and the football association are still uneasy and want to hold consultations with each other. Herman Schueremans, who was immediately supported in his objections by the organiser of the Pukkelpop festival Chokri Mahassine [also an SP.A politician], has since released a statement in which he says that he is satisfied that the problem will be dealt with.

www.rockwerchter.be
www.pukkelpop.be

Antwerp to be ‘World Book City’ in 2004

The logic underpinning it is the same as that behind Antwerp Book City

Two years ago, UNESCO and the international associations of publishers, booksellers and libraries, called the title of ‘World Book City’ into being. The World Book City should be a city in which the prevailing climate promotes reading and where all kinds of initiatives are launched, in conjunction with literary organisations, to place books and reading in the spotlight. In 2001 Madrid was the first city given the honour, in 2002 the honour fell to Alexandria, and this year it is the turn of New Delhi. For the 2004 title, Antwerp won the day over rivals Santo Domingo and Barcelona. That Antwerp should have landed the title should have come as no surprise, since the city already boasts a solid joint venture called ‘Antwerpen Boekenstad’ (Antwerp Book City). Eleven years after Antwerp ’93, when it was Cultural Capital of Europe, the port city will once again be in the international spotlight (FF).

Eva Berghmans • De Standaard • 20 January

The logic underpinning the World Book City is the same as that behind Antwerp Book City, says Michael Vandebriel, the co-ordinator of ‘Antwerpen Boekenstad’ (Antwerp Book City), a joint venture between the many literary organisations, publishers and institutions in Antwerp.

The dossier that was sent to the World Book City selection committee is pretty much a summary of the work done by Antwerp Book City. ‘We haven’t pulled anything out of the hat. We’ve won the title on the basis of what is already happening here,’ says Vandebriel. Notable initiatives launched by Antwerp Book City include the appointment of a city poet and the project ‘Wilde Boeken’ (Wild Books), which urges people to leave ‘missing books’ anywhere.

Obviously extra efforts will be made in 2004. Among other things, the idea of organising a literary-tourist year is gathering momentum in this respect. Meanwhile, Vandebriel will be entering into talks on the subject with Minister for Tourism Renaat Landuyt (SP.A), who is setting up a literary project on the coast this year together with the literary organisation ‘Behoud de Begeerte’. ‘A literary event on the coast is an excellent idea,’ says Vandebriel. ‘And with the same funds you can set your sights even higher here in Antwerp, since here you don’t have to start from zero. There’s a mass of know-how gathered together here already.’

The title of World Book City is nowhere near as well known among the general public as, say, Cultural Capital of Europe, but Vandebriel nonetheless expects that the choice of Antwerp will be a major boost for Dutch literature. The fact that the international professional associations are involved in organising the initiative means that a large number of publishers and other professionals in the literary world will be looking at Flanders in 2004. Antwerp Book City, together with the Flemish Fund for the Letters, the professional association Boek.be and the Stichting Lezen (Reading Foundation) will all be doing their utmost to enhance Flanders’ image on the international book market.
Vandervliet is thinking in international terms as regards the activities, too. He is thus thinking of a meeting of city poes from all over the world. After all, it is also the intention to have names of international renown making appearances in the World Book City termine which objects or collections are ‘top pieces’.

Diary

MUSIC, DANCE THEATRE

- 29 January: Alban Berg Quartett, PSK, Brussels; info: 02/507.82.00 www.desingel.be
- 30 and 31 January, 1 February: Parrots & Guinea Pigs, Jan Fabre, De Vooruit, Gent; info: 09/267.24.24 www.vooruit.be
- 31 January to 14 February: Werther by Jules Massenet, conductor: Patrick Fourmillier, Flanders Opera, Antwerp; info: www.vlaamseopera.be
- 31 January: Spiegel Strijkwierdje with Bernhard Wurm (piano), Schumann and Brahms, Bijloke, Gent; info: www.bijloke.be
- 30 and 31 January, 1 and 2 February: Billy Bragg, De Spil, Roeselare (051/26.57.00), De Warande, Turnhout (014/41.69.91), CC Hasselt (011/22.99.31) en AB, Brussels (02/548.24.24) www.abconcerts.be
- 31 January and 1 February: De Nachten (The Nights), performances, poetry, concerts, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- 1 February: Flemish Radio Orchestra conducted by Youri Leiri, Symphony nr 6 by Mahler, Bijloke, Gent; info: www.bijloke.be
- 2 February: Eva Zylka, Eric Baeten, Daniel Schmitt and Ilja Laporev, conducted by Christopher Hogwood, Koningin Elisabethzaal, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- 3 and 4 February: Van Morrison, Koninkig Elisabethzaal, Antwerp; info: 0900/260.60
- 3 and 4 February: Van Morrison, Koninkig Elisabethzaal, Antwerp; info: 0900/260.60
- 4 February: Beth Gibbons & Rustin Man, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
- 6 February: Beethoven Academy conducted by Christopher Hogwood, Violin concerto nr 5 by WA Mozart, Symphony nr. 4 by Schubert and Ouverture Oberon by CM von Weber, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- 8 February: Camilla Tilling (soprano) and Roger Vignoles (piano), Myrthen by Schumann, italienisches Liederbuch by Wolf and Ophelia-Lieder by Richard Strauss, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- 6 February: Brainpower, AB, Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
- 6 February: Scottish Chamber Orchestra conducted by Charles Mackerras, PSK, Brussels; info: 02/507.82.00
- 7 February: Paul Van Nevel and Huelgas Ensemble, medieval apocalypsis, Bijloke, Gent; info: www.bijloke.be
- 7 February: ‘(And)’, Grace Allen Barney, dance, CC Strombeek-Bever; info: www.needcompany.be
- 8 February: Elliott Murphy & Band, AB, Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
- 12 February: The Dutsuns, AB, Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
- 29 and 30 January, 7 February: Patagon, Patagonia with Dirk van Exbroek & Juan Masono, Handelsbeurs, Gent (09/65.91.65), Arenbergshouwberg, Antwerp (03/202.46.46), CC Minnepoort, Leuven (016/22.21.13)

EXPO

- Until 16 February: Selection 1/Backstage, Fashion exhibition, Antwerp Modern Museum (MoMu), Antwerp; info: 03/470.27.71 www.momu.be
- Until 2 February: Gaude succuretur vitae, exhibition: drawings and films by Ian Fabre, SMAK, Gent; info: 09/221.17.03 www.smak.be
- Until 30 March: Twins, (the fascination by scientists, artists and the public) exhibition, Museum Dr. Guislain, Gent; info: www.museumdraguislain.be 09/216.35.95
- Until 16 February: The gardens of the Alhambra, exhibition with Pedro Garcia-Ras, Maria Teresa Martin Vivaldi, Paco Llagares, José María Sicilia and Soledad Sevilla, Jan Vanriet, Jan De Vlieger, Jan Van Mechelen, Museum of Modern Art, Ostend, info: 059/50.81.18
- Until 16 March: Roman Jewels, Provincal Gallo-Roman Museum, Tongeren; info: 012/67.03.55
- Until 31 August: The big Sépetrion, scientific exhibition, Technopolis, Mechelen, info: 015/34.20.00
- Until 29 June: Music Planet, one century of pop music in an exhibition, Brewery Belle Vue, Molenbeek; info: www.euroculture.be 02/513/29/84
- Until 9 March: Who’s sweet, gets sweet, exhibition, KMSK and City Library, Antwerp.
- Until 6 April: Maria Magdalena, sinner from the Middle Ages until today, exhibition, Museum of Fine Arts, Gent, info: 09/222.17.03
- Until 16 February: Beaches and glances, a photo exhibition about Ostend, Venetaanse Gaaideren, Ostend; info: 059/56.20.15
- Until 23 February: ‘First Marriage’ by Suchan Kinoshita, exhibition and projects by Gert Robins, Joel Audebert, Nathalie Brevet and Hughes Rochette (Fr), MUHKA, Antwerp; info: 03/238.59.60
- Until 29 June: Music Planet, one century of pop music in an exhibition, Brewery Belle Vue, Molenbeek; info: www.euroculture.be 02/513/29/84
- Until 9 March: Who’s sweet, gets sweet, exhibition, KMSK and City Library, Antwerp.
- Until 6 April: Maria Magdalena, sinner from the Middle Ages until today, exhibition, Museum of Fine Arts, Gent, info: 09/222.17.03
- Until 16 February: The Gardens of Granada [photography and art] and ceramics by Claudi Casanovas [Catalonia], exhibitions PMMK, Ostend, info: 059/50.81.18 www.pmmk.be
- Until 30 March: Synesthesies - Pop d’Art in Belgium, pop music and visual arts, De Garage, Mechelen, info: 015/29.40.00 www.culturenruimtestmieken.be
- Until 9 February: The Antique Dealers, Fabio De Santis, exhibition in collaboration with Istituto Italiano di Cultura, PSK, Brussels
- Until 2 March: Pierre d’Gilles, exhibition, photography and painting, Botanique, Brussels; info: www.botanique.be
- Until 2 March: Jan Vercruysse, Labyrinth d’pleasure, exhibition, Xavier Hufkens, Brussels; info: 02/639.67.30
- Until 24 March: Jacques Chazler and Leo Copers, exhibitions, SMAK, Gent, info: 09/221.17.03 www.smak.be

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