Dark clouds gather over the diamond sector

The Belgian government’s rigid stance against the USA’s plans for war in Iraq is giving rise to concern in Antwerp’s diamond sector. The High Council for Diamond Trading (Hoge Raad voor de Diamant) is warning that diamond exports to the USA could suffer as a result. Furthermore, the Jewish community, which still plays an important role in the diamond sector along with the Indian community, reacted in shock to a recent pronouncement by the Court of Cassation in Brussels. The court ruled that the Belgian genocide law is indeed applicable to the current Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon, even though he does not reside in Belgium. This means that after his term in office, when he no longer enjoys immunity, Sharon can be convicted on account of his role as defence minister in the massacre in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila in 1982. Israel reacted by promptly withdrawing its ambassador from Brussels (FF).

MARC BALDUCK • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 14 FEBRUARY

An area of no more than two square kilometres near Antwerp’s city park was the scene of trading in goods to the tune of no less than 26 billion dollars last year, making the diamond sector the second biggest exporter in our country. Almost a third of the exports go to the Unites States. The Americans are big buyers of jewellery incorporating diamonds, and in fact exports even rose last year by 13%. New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco have well-known ‘high fashion streets’ where diamonds are readily bought and sold. Here internationally renowned jewellers fashion the little stones into expensive items of jewellery. But the traditionally high sales figures during the Christmas and New Year period were relatively low this year. Although there are rumours in and around Antwerp’s Hovenierstraat that some American clients are postponing their orders, the High Council’s communiqué was rather swathed and cautious on the subject, and did not contain any frontal attack on Verhofstads government, either. It could scarcely do so, for that matter, since the fairly blue [Liberal] diamond sector can hardly haul its VLD ministers over the coals. It was probably for this reason that the Council stated that ‘it is impossible to say that there is a connection between the low level of orders for diamonds from America and criticism of Belgium. The economic climate is most likely the main reason.’

INTRODUCTION

The news was important enough to merit front-page coverage in all the newspapers on Thursday 13 February. The still hugely popular Jean-Luc Dehaene will be standing as a candidate in the federal elections on 18 May after all, albeit right at the bottom of the list of follow-up candidates for election to the Senate. Dehaene succumbed to the pressure from the party’s rank and file and the party leadership of the CD&V, which implored him in unison to place his electoral capital at the party’s disposal. The CD&V believes that the votes that Dehaene would win for the party could make all the difference in the neck-and-neck race with the liberal VLD for the political leadership in Flanders. They could help break the ‘purple-green’ majority, and the party regards that as the main objective in these elections. However, Dehaene said that he was not making a comeback in national politics, and explained in an open letter published in the opinion pages of a number of a daily’s why he was going back on his decision. In the letter he declared the honour of becoming the standard bearer for the CD&V campaign. More than that, he was of the view that this would only be harmful for the position of the current party chairman Staafan De Clerck, who personifies the modernisation of the party. But whether he likes it or not, according to De Standaard and Gazet van Antwerpen (13 February), his party will be using him as a figurehead nonetheless, for the simple reason that he is still more popular than the current Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt and also party chairman Staafan De Clerck, the CD&V’s official figurehead. However, De Standaard (13 February) is of the view that by calling on Dehaene the CD&V is demonstrating just how weak it feels as a party. In these four years on the opposition benches, it has been unable to set itself up as an alternative to the ‘purple-green’ coalition and has barely even been able to make it clear what it stands for. It claims that it stands for ‘reliability’ and ‘enduring policy’, but it needs Dehaene to explain what it means by that, the paper says. What is more, it is weakening its own discourse against the ‘electoral deceit’ perpetrated by Flemish ‘Purple-Green’ ministers who figure on federal electoral lists and then send follow-up candidates to parliament. The paper feels that in part they are now playing that same game, too. However, the paper concludes that Dehaene’s candidacy for the elections on 18 May indisputably represents a point scored. For voters the choice will be clearer again. They may not know what the CD&V stands for, but they do know what Dehaene stands for, and they can weight that up against what ‘Purple-Green’ policy represents.

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief
Foreign Affairs Minister Louis Michel [MR] is not planning to give up his veto in NATO against the plan to step up NATO military assistance for Turkey. In so doing, he and his French and German counterparts are blocking NATO plans to send Patriot anti-aircraft missiles and AWACS early-warning aircraft to Turkey. These would be necessary for defence against missile attacks on that country in the event of a war with Iraq. Michel first wants to wait for UN inspector Hans Blix’s new report to the UN Security Council. After the Blix report, on Friday, Michel is counting on a second resolution opting for an intensification of weapons inspections. He says that he does not want to go along with the war logic, but rather wants to exhaust all possible diplomatic solutions. Michel points to public opinion in Belgium, which is largely opposed to a war. On the Flemish public television channel VRT, Michel said that the Americans are waging war for reasons other than those they are putting forward. For them it’s more about power, oil and the need for a new enemy, since they have not managed to capture Bin Laden. The American Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld is already describing the French/German/Belgian opposition in NATO as a ‘mistake’, and Secretary of State Colin Powell calls the decision ‘inexcusable’. The government is sticking to its standpoint, even after these comments. A war must be avoided by investing more resources and time in the weapons inspections, according to Verhofstadt. But he added that Turkey would be able to count on Belgium’s support if an armed conflict broke out. The largest opposition party CD&V does not back the Belgian veto in NATO, because it does not see it as an effective means of averting war and because it displays a lack of solidarity with the Turks. However, the party does continue to support the idea of bringing about the disarming of Iraq by means of an increase in the inspections. Although all Flemish newspapers are opposed to a war, some of them fear that the government is isolating itself with its veto. Others welcome the decision.

Opinions

BART STURTEWAGEN • DE STANDAARD • 10 FEBRUARY

The proposition that defensive assistance to Turkey now boils down to participating in a disastrous war logic is worth debating. But Belgium is overplaying its hand here in a big way. Germany, with a Green foreign minister, is acting a lot more skilfully. And who says that France will not honourably change its mind before long? Then Belgium will be shown up on the international stage as the mouse that roared. The question that our government should answer is why it helped bring this open conflict within NATO to a head, instead of looking for ways out. If a small country can be big, it is as a mediator and as a devisor of a creative compromise, not by looking for the spotlight itself. That glory doesn’t last for long.

Paul Geudens • Gazet Van Antwerpen • 10 February

Anything that can stop a war in Iraq deserves support, for an armed conflict will not solve anything. Rather, it will complicate matters and further disrupt the world order. The threat of war has come about because America is ‘sure’ that Iraq has secret weapons of mass destruction. Well, let us go and look for them, together with the whole world. However, diplomatic consultation is necessary in order to secure US and NATO backing for such a joint initiative. And we fear that Louis Michel is botching that up, by using the veto in NATO, by accusing the Americans of being after oil, and by cutting Bush to the quick with the reproach that he is unable to catch Bin Laden and therefore has to go after Saddam. You do not foster goodwill for a new peace initiative like that.

Frank Schlömer • De Morgen • 10 February

The Bush government’s patronising attitude towards Europe and the rest of the world is gradually becoming familiar. Washington appears not to be able to get its head round the fact that people on the other side of the Atlantic can think and act for themselves and do not automatically obey like military do. If Germany and France oppose military extremism, they are immediately labelled the ‘old Europe’ by the US. But old Europe was the Europe of nationalism, colonialism and wars, as Verhofstadt put it. Fortunately, the modern European Union no longer has anything to do with that. It cannot be denied that Europe is divided, but Michel is showing that ‘Old Europe’ still knows how to stick up for itself.
Jean-Luc Dehaene as electoral heavy weight on CD&V Senate list

BUT HE NO LONGER HAS ANY AMBITIONS IN NATIONAL POLITICS

Under considerable pressure from his party, former prime minister Jean-Luc Dehaene has agreed to stand as a candidate in the federal elections on 18 May after all, albeit as final follow-up candidate on the Senate list. Dehaene won 560,000 preference votes in 1999, and emerged in the latest De Standaard/VRT opinion poll as the second most popular politician in Flanders, behind Steve Stevaert (SP.A). That surprisingly good result in the poll led to genuine hype within the CD&V (including a petition on the website) aimed at persuading Dehaene to run as candidate. After talks with party chairman and standard bearer Stefaan De Clerck and strong man Herman Van Rompuy, the 62-year-old Dehaene took a decision that satisfies both himself and the party leadership. He is going to run, but he no longer has any ambitions in national politics (FF).

PAUL GEUDENS • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 13 FEBRUARY

‘I have shifted my field of action once and for all to Vilvoorde (where he is mayor, ed.) and to Europe (as deputy president of the European Convention, ed.’, he wrote in an open letter addressed to the Flemish newspapers. As a matter of fact, as final follow-up candidate, he does not ‘run the risk’ of being directly elected to the Senate. ‘I do not want to be a bogus candidate like Stevaert (SP.A) and Dewael (VLD) (respectively minister and Minister-President in the Government of Flanders, ed.), who say in advance that they will not take up their seats.’ Jean-Luc Dehaene does not want to be a figurehead or leader of the CD&V during the campaign, since at no time has he been opposition leader or party spokesman during the ‘purple/green’ government’s term of office. ‘Stefaan De Clerck has been the coach, and he must continue to be. He personifies the party’s modernisation, in which I firmly believe. He must therefore be the indisputable figurehead in the campaign. But some appear not to understand that an appeal to me undermines the chairman’s position. I want nothing to do with that. Having two standard bearers for the party creates ambiguity and tensions, both during the campaign and thereafter. We can do without that.’

Flemings overwhelmingly support Belgium’s NATO veto

Het Laatste Nieuws carried out a survey on 11 and 12 February among a representative sample of 500 Flemings, in which interviewees were asked about their opinion on the Belgian veto in NATO and the NATO alliance in general. The results reveal that the population overwhelmingly backs the government’s decision (FF).

LUC VANDER KELEN • HET LAATSTE NIEUWS • 13 FEBRUARY

The Texan rednecks around President Bush have succeeded, at breakneck speed, in making their country as unpopular as it was during the most dramatic period of the Vietnam War at the end of the nineteen sixties. The widespread rejection of war among the Flemish population is in itself fairly normal, but the latent opposition to American hegemony is much more deep-seated than people think. Three out of four Flemings no longer support what has been the foundation stone of the Western world’s defence policy over the past half century: namely, a solid NATO alliance with a single partner (the USA) running the show as regards military matters. A majority of those polled opt for a European defence force and thus want to see an end to American domination.

DO YOU THINK THAT BELGIUM’S USE OF ITS NATO VETO IN ORDER TO OPPOSE MILITARY SUPPORT TO TURKEY WAS A GOOD DECISION?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: Het Laatste Nieuws</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>YES</strong> 65.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NO</strong> 25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NO OPINION/DON’T KNOW</strong> 9.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DO YOU THINK THAT BELGIUM SHOULD REMAIN A LOYAL ALLY OF THE UNITED STATES?

| **YES** 17.6%               |
| **NO** 74.2%                |
| **NO OPINION/DON’T KNOW** 8.2% |

DO YOU THINK THAT BELGIUM SHOULD DEVELOP A EUROPEAN ARMY WITH OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES?

| **YES** 57.0%               |
| **NO** 35.6%                |
| **NO OPINION/DON’T KNOW** 7.4% |
O n 12 February Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt (VLD) left for New York, where, accompanied by Minister Annemie Neyts, he is to set up a roadshow aimed at promoting Belgium to American investors. According to the Federation of Belgian Businesses (VBO), the decision regarding the timing of this roadshow was inopportune to say the least. Verhofstadt replied that he would regard it as very cynical indeed if people reduced the debate on war or peace to a choice between investing and not investing. The United States accounts for 12.7% of investments in Belgium, and in 1999 American companies represented 142,000 jobs or 8% of total employment in Belgium. Conspicuously large companies include Ford, General Mo-

tors with Opel Antwerp, Du Pont de Nemours (chemicals), Pfizer and the parent company of Janssen Pharmaceutica, Johnson&Johnson. But American investments in Belgium are on a down-
ward trend. Whereas at the beginning of the nineteen nineties Belgium still attracted 5% of all American investments in Europe, this has now fallen to less than 1%. Flemish Economic Affairs Minister Jaak Gabriëls (VLD) is pulling out all the stops in an effort to persuade America’s business community of Bel-
gium’s good intentions. To this end he is working together with his Walloon counterpart Serge Kubla (MR). The aim is to have trade attaches and diplomatic representations of both regions speak the same language (FF).

Verhofstadt can expect criticism during roadshow

According to the Federation of Belgian Businesses (VBO), the decision regarding the timing of this roadshow was inopportune.

While American investments in Flanders are showing a down-
ward trend, Flemish exports to the USA paint a very different picture. Despite the slack world economy, 60% more in-
vestments were made in 2002 than in 2001. This export boom caused the share of Flemish exports that go to North America to rise from 6% to 9.2%, whilst exports to the EU Member States stabilised (FF).

GEERT SCIOT • DE MORGEN •
11 FEBRUARY

Flemish exports to the USA are booming

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Foreign policy:

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Verhofstadt can expect criticism during roadshow

Next month dozens of Flemish compa-
nym managers will be descending on Grobbendonk and Kortrijk for the ‘America Export Days’. During work-
shops, speeches by the thirteen Flemish economic representatives and contacts with companies, they will be able to fa-
miliarise themselves with the trading potential waiting to be seized upon in the land of the Yankees. The ‘Export Days’ have taken on a symbolic charac-
ter now that our country is currently in Washington’s black books, as it were, on account of Belgium’s veto in NATO. Katoen Natie, an Antwerp tranship-
ment company, is building a tranship-

ment unit for dry chemical bulk prod-
ucts in Houston to the value of EUR 60 million. A second similar project is in the making. Thanks to its high-tech monitors with medical and graphical applications, the firm Barco has been able to develop a solid market position. Godiva has established small and large stores all over the States, where Ameri-
cans pay as much as five times what we do in Belgium for a chocolate. These are just a few examples of the many Belgian investment projects in the States. ‘The time is ripe to come to the States,’ says Flemish Economic Representative Wouter Van Gulck in New York. ‘The country is preparing for a period of re-
newed growth, Americans are becoming increasingly receptive to interna-
tional co-operation, business travellers have been paying a lot less for hotel rooms since 11 September, and anyone considering opening an office for busi-
ness prospecting can count on lower rental prices due to the oversupply’. In the short term a war against Iraq and our country’s position could have a neg-
ative effect. ‘But in the long term there is no reason whatsoever to doubt the growth potential the American econo-
ym offers us’.

JOSSE ABRAHAMS • DE MORGAN •
11 FEBRUARY

‘I think that it is very important that we made it clear to the US that we do not harbour any anti-American feeling and that we are still their partners. We sim-
ply also have to tell them that in our view war is not the right course of ac-
tion at the moment. Thinking in terms of black and white is very dangerous right now.’ Gabriëls realises that Ver-
hofstadt’s so-called roadshow does not come at the right moment. ‘The Pre-
mier will have to cope with a lot of crit-
ical questions, but it is a matter of ex-
plaining exactly what we are doing and why we are doing it’. Despite falling American investments in Flanders, Gabriëls has good prospects in sectors such as car production. He makes refer-
ence to a couple of very important pro-
jects that American firms have to de-
cide on and for which Flanders is in the running.

WWW.FFIO.BE

Flemish exports to the USA are booming

FOREIGN TRADE

Export of Diamonds from Antwerp in 2002, Turnover in $-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Turnover in $</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>254 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hongkong</td>
<td>259 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>586 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>767 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>254 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>215 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>158 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>215 million</td>
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<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
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<td>Japan</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>158 million</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: GVA

fOCUS ON FLANDERS • 8 FEBRUARY - 14 FEBRUARY 2003 • Number 6
Inquiry into practices of Antwerp police chief

Mayor Leona Detiège [SP.A] continues to have faith in Lamine

It was no laughing matter for the Chief Superintendent of the Antwerp police force, Luc Lamine, when he and a number of his officers were accused in the Gazet van Antwerpen of lavish use of credit cards, favouritism, and having gone on expensive jaunts to the United States and South Africa and on an equally expensive team-building weekend in Knokke. At the request of Interior Minister Duquesnes (MR), the judicial authorities immediately instigated an inquiry into the police force’s accounting. Antwerp’s VLD alderman for Security Dirk Grootejans is also calling for a thorough inquiry. His party colleague Luc Covelle, the leader of the VLD parliamentary party in the House, is even calling in no uncertain terms for Lamine’s dismissal. Mayor Leona Detiège (SP.A), on the other hand, continues to have faith in the police chief and laments the smear campaign. Lamine was brought in two years ago as a ‘wonder boy’. With his new mediagenic style and his ‘dream team’ of young officers, each of whom was allocated a zone in the city, he would restore the faith of Antwerp’s residents in their police force. But recently a blazing row over the police chief’s latest reform plans broke out within this team. Lamine wants to seize for himself a number of areas of competence from the zones, and his zone officers are having nothing of it, according to Het Laatste Nieuws (FF).

KURT TUERLINCKX • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 8 FEBRUARY

The spokesman of the Antwerp Local Police Force Fons Bastiaenssens announced that the financial vicissitudes ‘have nothing to do with what earlier this week was referred to as the ‘row in the senior echelons of the police force’’. The financial policy has no connection with all at the background to the so-called crisis. Every item of expenditure is previously submitted to the college of aldermen for approval.

Opinion

YVES DESMET • DE MORGEN • 11 FEBRUARY

The attack on Luc Lamine is so outrageously lightweight in content that it is hard to take it seriously. There are therefore other reasons for the witch-hunt that has been stirred up against the man. Up until a few years ago, the Antwerp police force was a mess: over-politicised, inefficient, and in some cases dallying with corruption. Lamine, the first to be promoted to police chief on the basis of exams and not political hue, has put the reorganisation into action with enormous dedication. There have been results, too: crime is no longer rising, and there has been an increase in the percentage of crimes solved. That is apparently not to the liking of a number of Antwerp politicians who would prefer not to see the problems solved, since they draw on their electorate on the basis of themes such as lack of safety and the feeling of insecurity. That is the real background to this attack on Lamine.

Flemish Government approves decree aimed at preventing floods

Last week the Government of Flanders approved a draft decree for integral water management tabled by Flemish Environment Minister Vera Dua (Agalev). The draft now goes to the Council of State and Dua wants it to be voted on before the summer recess. The decree is aimed at monitoring water quality, guaranteeing the water supply, but above all providing an answer to the recurring floods that have hit Flanders in recent years. In her decree Dua is opting for the creation of monitored flood areas and watch basins. These flood areas should be clearly established in town and country planning implementation plans, which municipalities help to draft. For residents affected who live in a flood area, the draft decree contains a right to compulsory purchase, which means that the government has to buy their house upon request (FF).

ILSE DE VOOGHT • DE FINANCIeel-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 8 FEBRUARY

In order to be able to implement its water policy, the government is giving itself a number of instruments. The first is the introduction of the water test. This means that people can no longer buy building land in areas liable to flooding. Another instrument is the entitlement for people who are regularly the victims of flooding in riverbank or flood areas, to the compulsory purchase of their house by the government. They can ask the authorities to be expropriated. ‘To achieve our objectives, we will have to deal with water in a different way’, says Dua. ‘Green roofs, rain drains, separate drainage of rainwater and wastewater, and the re-use of ditches are all measures that could help rainwater flow less quickly to the watercourses. In actual fact, the draft decree is already lagging behind what is happening in practice in some cases. Municipalities that take measures against erosion can obtain subsidies for this, and the laying of green roofs is already subsidised. The Minister also said that 60% of the maps for the demarcation of flood risk are definitive. All maps should have been laid down definitively by September 2004.

ERWIN VERHOEVEN • HET LAATSTE NIEUWS • 8 FEBRUARY

One day the zone officers, each of whom is something of a god in his own little area of the city, had to shut up. The police headquarters was ‘streamlining’ communication. In the mean time, Lamine wrote books and continued to give at times highly controversial interviews in his own typically flamboyant style. That, together with other little aspects of his character, caused some gnashing of teeth. In recent months this has evolved into an open mutiny. Some of the zone officers do not want to have anything to do with Lamine’s reform plans. After the communication, the police chief wants to transfer many more competencies from the zones to the central headquarters. The local barons quietly worked on a counter-proposal under the leadership of the equally media-hot zone chief Serge Muyters. When the at times paranoid Lamine got wind of this, the bomb exploded. This bitter power struggle had already reached the press last week. Then the story of the expenses and the expensive trips surfaced on 7 February. In this war, apparently, all means are valid. Irrespective of which version is the correct one and who has leaked the story, the dream team is no more.

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The Belgian Railways (NMBS/SNCB) is assuming a loss of EUR 273 million for the 2003 budget. This means that 2003 will be the fourth consecutive year that is closed with a loss. The fact that the result remains so poor despite the huge efforts the company wants to make to save money is giving rise to a lot of furrowed brows. CEO Karel Vinck wants to save no less than EUR 353 million on investments and 15% on the purchase of trains and work on station buildings. On top of that, a selective recruitment freeze (not applying to train drivers and conductors) is being introduced. 1,200 employees who are leaving the company naturally are not to be replaced. The cut in the investment budget (from EUR 87 million to 7 million) for the Regional Express Network for Brussels, in particular, provoked a fierce reaction from the supervisory minister, Isabelle Durant (Ecolo). Vinck, angered by the fact that his proposal (which still has to secure the approval of the board of directors) was leaked to the press, subsequently tried to reassure Durant. Not a single major project for the development of the REN is being cancelled. Vinck is simply making savings in the same way that he does in other areas: by spreading the work over time. What is more, says the version of his investment plan, Karel Vinck’s room for manoeuvre will become increasingly smaller. The NMBS/SNCB boss knows better than anyone that no further important decisions will be taken now before 18 May. The necessarily unpopular measures that Vinck has to carry through will not be able to count on the approval of any candidate politicians before that date. But the NMBS/SNCB has no more time to lose. The indebtedness threatens to increase by an additional one billion euros this year, the company’s productivity is among the lowest in Europe, and nothing has been done regarding the reform of the goods division with just a month to go before the liberalisation of the market. Vinck has to do his homework fast and place the trade unions before their responsibility, whilst the government has to make the necessary funds available to the railway company. If it does not do so, it will have to learn to live with a severely streamlined NMBS/SNCB - and postponement of the REN.

Opinion

GUIDO MEEUSEN • DE FINANCIELE-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 8 FEBRUARY

On Friday 14 February it appeared that Minister Durant’s protest had in the meantime had an effect. In the second version of his investment plan, Karel Vinck has increased the budget for the GEN from EUR 7 million to EUR 25 million, so that a start can be made on the extension of a number of railway lines.

WWW.NMBS.BE
Bekaert has had a good year, operationally speaking

EUR 84 million was used to write off the holding in United Solar, the subsidiary that assembles solar panels.

According to Paul Buysse, chairman of the West Flanders steel wire processing group Bekaert (turnover in 2001: EUR 1.8 billion), his company has had an exciting year. The change of management that brought the new duo of Julien De Wilde and Bert De Grave to the helm went off smoothly, and from an operational point of view 2002 was a successful year. The operational profit (EUR 60 million in 2001) rose by 60%. But restructuring and cost cutting meant that provisions of EUR 140 million had to be built up. Of this, EUR 84 million was used to write off the holding in United Solar, the subsidiary that assembles solar panels and for which Bekaert entered into a joint venture with the American company Energy Conversion Devices in 2000. This write-off led to Bekaert dipping into the red to the tune of EUR 59.4 million in the first half of the year. A further EUR 48 million was used for the closure of the British steel wire producer Sykes. The group is reckoning on a loss of EUR 50 million for the whole year (FF).

Marc De Roo • De Financieel-Economische Tijd • 11 February

2002 was a successful year’, echoed managing director Julien de Wilde. ‘The consolidated turnover is 3 to 5% higher than in 2001 despite the fall in the dollar. All the major divisions did better than in the previous year, in terms of both turnover and profit. In the steel wire division, most segments booked an improvement. Bekaert Fencing, the producer of railings and fences, posted markedly better figures. The effects of the restructuring were already perceptible but the full impact of the rationalisation will only be felt this year’. Bekaert Fencing closed three of the 14 plants last year, with the loss of 455 jobs and at a cost price of EUR 34 million. The steel wire division benefited last year from the growing markets in China and Brazil, in particular. The Chinese market is growing by 10% a year. Bekaert has invested EUR 200 million in that country so far, and additional investments in China to the tune of EUR 150 to 200 million are planned for the coming years. ‘For our shareholder value, China is far more important than our solar energy activities which we are now writing off completely’, Buysse says in a whisper. Aside from Unisolar, BAM, the division that groups together all new technologies (protective coatings on films for windows and cars, fibre technology for gas burners, and advanced coatings), performed well, as was expected.

www.bekaert.be

Royal Flanders Ballet bids farewell to musicals

CLASSICAL BALLET AND MUSICAL PRODUCTIONS CANNOT BE PART OF THE CORE BUSINESS OF ONE AND THE SAME COMPANY

The Royal Flanders Ballet (Koninklijk Ballet van Vlaanderen - KBVV) is giving up its musical department, and from now on will be concentrating solely on classical ballet. Flanders needs both a classical ballet company and musical productions of a high artistic quality, but the two cannot be part of the core business of one and the same company. In a nutshell, this was the conclusion that Minister Van Grembergen (Spirit) drew from the talks and hearings that the Flemish Parliament’s Culture Committee had organised on the KBVV’s role in the performing arts scene in Flanders. For the development of musicals, a new organisation will be set up which may or may not be based on the KBVV’s present musical department (FF).

Geert Sels • De Standaard • 12 February

The minister announced yesterday that the Ballet would not be financially affected. He wants to turn the company into a unique institution for classical ballet in Flanders. One of the major demands among colleagues, namely that ballet automatically receives subsidies, still stands. The body will thus continue to receive its funding without any advisory committee intervening. The management succession issue is solved organically. The current artistic director, Robert Denvers, is sixty and gradually wants to retire. At the beginning of March the Ballet will be starting up a procedure for the appointment of a successor. The whole transition should have been completed by 2006, which is when the new arts decree comes into force. The musical department can fulfil its engagements for new productions through to the end of 2004, after which it will have to continue on its own two feet. The term ‘musical development’ is being used to denote the new structure. Large-scale productions aimed at competing with the brute strength of the commercial musical sector are not immediately expected of it. Attention should be paid to new talent and the new body will still have a responsibility as regards ensuring a wide spread. It is not out of the question that the current musical director Linda Lepomme will head up the new organisation. A sum of EUR 150,000 will be forthcoming every year until 2006 in order to oversee the dismantling of the musical department and to set up the new operation.

www.kbvv.be
**Diary**

**MUSIC, DANCE THEATRE**

- 20 February: Wust by Radioslof (New York), a camp version of the Nibelungenlied, kaaitheaterstudio’s, Brussels, info: 02/201.59.59 www.kaaitheater.be.
- 18 to 21 February: Katagreas (Turkey, instrumental music), De Bijloke, Ghent; info: www.bijloke.be.
- 19 February: Capilla Flamenca and Oltremontano with 15th century religious works by Alexander Utenstad, Concertbouw, Bruges; info: 070/22.33.02
- 25 February to 1 March: Nicola Humpel - Nico and the Navigators, Eggs on earth, dance, de Singel, Antwerp, info: 03/248.28.28
- 28 February: Till Fellner (piano) with compositions by Schubert, Lachenmann and Liszt, de Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28
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**EXPO**

- Until 30 March: Twins, [the fascination by science in the public] exhibition, Museum Dr. Guislain, Ghent; info: www.museumgruislain.be 09/216.35.95
- Until 16 March: Roman Jewels, Provincial Gallo-Roman Museum, Tongeren; info: 012/67.03.55
- Until 31 August: The big Sexperiment, 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.euicroticulture.be 02/513/29/84
- Until 9 March: Who’s sweet, gets sweets, exhibition KMSK and City Library, Antwerp.

**Focus on Flanders**

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.