Brain behind Antwerp diamond heist caught

There is no trace of the booty, which amounts to something in the region of EUR 100 million

The suspected brain behind the diamond heist in Antwerp on 16 February has been detained. Leonardo N., a notorious Italian criminal, had rented an office in the Diamond Center as a small diamond trader, since 2001. He was apprehended when he reappeared at his office again, together with his friend Antonio F., on 21 February. It was Leonardo N. who disconnected the security system of the Diamond Center’s safe-deposit-box room. The three people who carried out the heist, who are also Italians and had spent a week staying at Leonardo N.’s apartment in Antwerp, are still at large. There is no trace of the booty, which amounts to something in the region of EUR 100 million in cash, diamonds and securities (FF).

JOHAN VAN BAELEN • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 28 FEBRUARY

For their break-in the robbers cleverly sabotaged the alarm system, but they were also careless. On 17 February the police found a number of rubbish bags discarded on the shoulder of the E19 in Machelen (near Brussels). These contained the stolen batch notes in which diamond traders wrap their little stones, and in fact a number of these still contained diamonds. The difference in style between the sophisticated preparation and the careless execution of the robbery indicate that two groups from one and the same gang were at work. The Italians detained last week are not regarded as the perpetrators, but rather the persons who prepared the operation. The federal criminal investigation department, which is now working in close co-operation with the Italian Carabinieri, is chiefly looking for clues that will lead them to the people who carried out the robbery and to the booty. Some clues might be found in the videocassettes that the gangsters threw away next to the E19. These are videos that they removed from the security system of the safe-deposit-box room. They put in empty ones in their place, broke the cassettes open, and chucked the film out of the car window, alongside the motorway.

CONTENTS

Justice and Politics
Court of Appeal incompetent in racism trial 2
SERV report puts ‘Flanders top region’ in perspective 2
Court of Arbitration suspends new electoral law for Brabant 3
Elections: three quarters of seats assigned 3
Liberal Appeal, the alternative for Blok voters 4

Social Policy
British scanners must detect refugees 4
Cities and Government unveil renovation projects 5
Employment Office sends out emergency teams 5

Economy and environment
Top industrials voice complaints 6
Foreign decision makers in Belgium 6
Caution money to prevent dumping of waste 7

Culture
Music industry turns artists onto the street 7

INTRODUCTION

This week the Court of Arbitration suspended the new electoral legislation (13 December 2002) in Brabant. This was not really surprising news. The electoral law had already come in for criticism not only from the opposition parties that had lodged the complaint, but also from specialist lawyers. With the introduction of larger provincial constituencies and the possibility of candidates standing simultaneously for the Lower and Upper Houses of Parliament, the VLD, SPA, Spirit and Agalev are hoping to scoop a government bonus, i.e. to gain maximum benefit from the reputation of their ministerial heavyweights. That this was inspired not by democratic concerns, but by electoral calculation, was apparent to all and sundry, in the view of the Gazet van Antwerpen. Nonetheless it is not this redrawing or the controversial introduction of the 5% electoral threshold that the Court of Arbitration rejects, but rather the tinkering and special treatment that the province of Brabant receives in the new electoral law. Unlike elsewhere in Flanders, no provincial constituency was introduced in Flemish Brabant, since the constituency of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde could not be split. The splitting up of this constituency is a long-standing Flemish demand, but the federal government bowed to the French speakers’ tenacious opposition to it. The Verhofs-tadt government defended itself by arguing that a division would cost Flanders two seats. But in saying this, according to De Financieel-Economische Tijd (27 February), it is keeping mum about the fact that the new regulation also costs one or two Flemish seats and completely ignores the principle of territoriality on which the federal state structure is grafted. Now that the government has decided not hastily to work on a new regulation for Brabant, but to go into the elections with the old electoral legislation still applying to Brabant, another principle of equality is defacto being violated. De Morgen and the Gazet van Antwerpen (27 February) point out that the introduction of an electoral threshold of 5% and provincial constituencies in all Flemish provinces with the exception of Flemish Brabant is just as discriminatory. The Flemish Nationalist party N-VA, which risks falling victim to the electoral threshold, is seriously considering lodging another complaint with the Court of Arbitration in this respect. However, in government circles people doubt that the Court would suspend an incongruity that it itself has brought into being. De Standaard (28 February), meanwhile, feels that the ‘Purple-Green’ government has taken a wise decision in opting not to start fiddling around with the electoral law again with the elections just a matter of weeks away.

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief

focus on FLANDERS • 22 February - 28 February 2003 • Number 8
The Brussels Court of Appeal cannot assess whether three Vlaams Blok non-profit-making organisations are guilty or not of violating the Anti-Racism Act. The Court has declared itself incompetent to deal with the action, which was brought jointly by Johan Leman’s Centre for the Fight Against Racism and the League for Human Rights. The complaint is aimed against the ‘Flemish Concentration’ (Vlaamse Concentratie), the Nationalist Socio-cultural Training Institute (Nationale Vormingsinstituut) and the Nationalist Broadcasting Foundation (Nationalistische Omroepstichting). The first-named non-profit organisation manages the sizeable party allocation that the Blok receives from the government every year. A conviction could therefore have cost the Blok its allocation, but things have not come to that. With this ruling the Court of Appeal is siding with the view of the judge in the Criminal Court who had declared himself incompetent in the first instance (29 June 2001) because the case involved a political offence. Only the Crown Court (Assize Court) with its people’s jury can pronounce on political offences. The Court stressed in an explanatory statement that from a strictly juridical standpoint there were no winners in this trial. The question as to whether or not the Vlaams Blok is guilty of discrimination remains unanswered. But that did not prevent Vlaams Blok Chairman Frank Van Hecke from calling the ruling a political victory and a ‘slap in the face for the Verhoftaat government’. Van Hecke declared that for the second time it had been confirmed that this debate did not belong in the courtroom, but in the public forum and in parliament. The director of the Centre for the Fight against Racism, Johan Leman, is not exactly happy with the ruling, regards the judge’s reasoning as mysterious, and is considering an appeal to the Court of Cassation. In any case the Court of Appeal’s explanation surprises us. According to the Court, the case involves a political offence, but the reasoning remains mysterious. For that matter the judicial authorities themselves are deeply divided on the issue of who has competence. The public prosecutor’s office is asking for a conviction, but the judge does not want to pronounce on the merits of the case. Hopefully the public prosecutor’s office will continue to assume its responsibility. Leman sees good reasons for going to the Court of Cassation. ‘The Court of Cassation can give a definite answer, whether it is a political offence or not.’

Opinion

YVES DESMET • DE MORGEN • 27 FEBRUARY

The Blok presented itself as the great winner of the action. Of course it is not, since no judgement on the merits has been handed down on the question of whether the party is or is not racist. The ruling also shows that there is a Catch 22 situation surrounding the Blok in the field of justice, too: declare yourself incompetent to hear the case, and they turn it into a victory, convict them and they grovel in their role of victim. There’s always a reward, in other words. The trial also proves two other things, namely that the Belgian Anti-Racism Act appears to be largely an empty box and that the battle against the Blok ought not to be waged in the courtroom, but in the political arena. It is there that political voters must be won back, and you do not do that by court order.

Paul Geudens • Gazet van Antwerpen • 27 February

So there is no conviction. But there has been no acquittal, either. Nonetheless, the Blok does indeed emerge as the winner on points. It can at least now tell its (potential) voters that the judge has refused to brand the party as racist, for the second time in a row. That could be a formidable weapon in the electoral battle.

The ball is now back in the political court, where it belongs. It is not appropriate for this hot potato to be passed on to the courts. The Vlaams Blok should not be fought in the courtroom, but in the Wetstraat (the centre of Brussels’ political district, ed.), for example by tackling the problems that the Blok raises.

Flanders Report: Flanders Top region should be put in perspective

FF Editorial Staff

According to the United Nations’ development indicator, Flanders is one of the top regions in the world, together with Norway. But the Socio-economic Council of Flanders (Sociaal-economische Raad Vlaanderen - SERV), the consultative body between trade unions and employers, which advises the government, says that this is far from being the case in all areas. In the Flemish Parliament, the SERV presented a report in which, on the basis of hundreds of tables and graphs, it compares Flanders with neighbouring countries and with other top regions such as Emilia-Romagna [Italy], Bavaria or the South-East of England. The comparison gives rise to a differentiating image. Flanders scores very well in the fields of education, social protection and purchasing power, but fares a lot less well in level of activity, road safety, quality of the environment or entrepreneurship. Therefore any tendency towards self-satisfaction is misplaced, the SERV warns. The comparison with other top regions shows us that we can learn a lot from them in several areas [innovation, activity, entrepreneurship, the environment], says the Council. SERV chairman Xavier Verboven announced that the Council would be organising study days on six themes, which are expected to lead to policy recommendations.

Www.serv.be
Court of Arbitration suspends new electoral law for Brabant

The suspension is not only a discredit to the Verhofstadt government but is also a nightmare for the party’s headquarters

The Court of Arbitration has suspended the reform of the electoral system in the three constituencies of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde, Leuven and Walloon Brabant. The government had worked out an arrangement under which the Flemish parties in Leuven and Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde had to submit the same list of candidates. CD&V, N-VA and the Vlaams Blok had lodged an appeal for suspension and annullment against this regulation. If the government does not swiftly work out a new arrangement in the little time remaining, the ruling determines that the elections in Brabant will be held according to the rules prevailing in 1999: with separate lists in the three constituencies, without any electoral threshold and with grouping of electoral lists between Leuven and Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde on the Flemish side and Walloon Brabant and Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde on the French-speaking side, and with the possibility of bilingual lists being submitted in Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde. Simultaneous nomination for the House (Lower Chamber) and the Senate (Upper Chamber) and the electoral threshold of 5% did not come up against any opposition from the Court of Arbitration (FF).

BART EECKHOUT • DE MORGEN • 27 FEBRUARY

The Court follows the argument of the opposition parties that the arrangement for Flemish Brabant violates the principle of equality. Among other things, the fact that the candidates de facto run in two constituencies at the same time (Leuven and Brussels) is in contravention of the constitution. The Court of Arbitration also considers that the fact that voters from Leuven cannot be guaranteed that they will have as many seats allotted to them as the number to which they are entitled according to the population figures is in breach of constitutional law. The CD&V party leader in the Senate Hugo Vandenberghe triumphed. He claimed that the suspension means that two seats have been saved for Flanders - seats that under the new system would have shifted to the French-speaking part of Belgium. The N-VA echoed the same tone. The Flemish radicals want the ‘Purple-Green’ government to redo the entire electoral reform. The suspension of the electoral arrangement for Flemish Brabant is not only a discredit to the Verhofstadt government but is also a nightmare for the party’s headquarters. After all, the lists that were drawn up with blood, sweat and tears have to be split in two.

Three-quarters of Flemish seats in federal parliament assigned

Despite the increasing number of preference votes in the last elections and the halving of the importance of the list vote

The names of 69 of the 88 or 89 Flemish Members of Parliament who will be elected on 18 May are already known. This is the conclusion that De Financieel-Economische Tijd has arrived at after an investigation of the new electoral system, in which it is assumed that no single party gains or loses more than 2.5%, as most of the opinion polls indicate. Despite the increasing number of preference votes in the last elections and the halving of the importance of the list vote (the vote placed at the head of list instead of being given to a candidate), which is intended to give the voters more involvement in the designation of their elected representatives, there are more parliamentary seats already allocated now than in the previous elections (FF).

MARK DEWEERDT • DE FINANCIËL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 25 FEBRUARY

The political parties traditionally have a firm grip on the election of politicians. The order in which they place their candidates on the list determines to a large degree who gets into parliament. Indeed, the list votes are transferred to the candidates according to their order of rank on the list. Only in very exceptional cases does a candidate manage to break through the order on account of the large number of preference votes for him/her. The increased use of preference votes has changed little if anything here. In order to let the voters have a greater say in deciding themselves who their representatives will be, the ‘Purple-Green’ majority halved the importance of the list vote. As a result of this, who gets elected would largely depend on the number of preference votes, they believed. However, applying this to the 1999 elections shows that the halving of the importance of the list vote has little effect: just four of the 150 federal MPs would have had to give up their seat to a fellow party member.

With the introduction of provincial constituencies and the abolition of grouping of votes from different electoral constituencies, a factor of uncertainty has also been removed as regards the distribution of seats. In the 1999 parliamentary elections, the VLD of East Flanders, for example, could not say beforehand in which of the three constituencies two of its six parliamentary seats would ‘fall’. That is no longer the case. Then, something like half of the MPs were known beforehand, with a fair degree of certainty. With the grouping of votes from different electoral constituencies abolished, three-quarters of the names are now already as good as definite.

focus on FLANDERS • 22 February - 28 February 2003 • Number 8
Liberal Appeal wants to be an alternative for Blok voters

Ward Beysen, the Antwerp MEP who split from the VLD with his Liberaal Appel (Liberal Appeal) at the beginning of this year in order to form a ‘sensible right-wing’ alternative, presented his draft party manifesto on 24 February. Beysen wants a company-friendly policy, more policemen on the street, illegal aliens removed from the country, and a 150 km/h speed limit on motorways after 10 p.m. He also wants to do away with compulsory voting, abolish the new drugs law, and put a stop to the policy of tolerance towards drugs. With this programme, Beysen is hoping to become an alternative for Vlaams Blok voters. His target group consists principally of those voters who opt for the Blok in order to register a protest vote, but do not actually have any common ground with the extreme right-wing party (FF).

DIRK CASTREL • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 25 FEBRUARY

‘In the long run we want to unravel the Vlaams Blok,’ Beysen said at his press conference. ‘Beysen is mistaking the enemy,’ was the prompt reaction of Vlaams Blok chairman Frank Vanhecke. ‘We thought that the Liberal Appeal had come into being out of a dissatisfaction with the leftward course of action being plotted by the VLD. The logical course of action would be for Beysen to direct his attacks at the VLD. Our voters know only too well that the original is better than the pale copy that is the LA’. ‘The LA is opposed to the cordon sanitaire around the Vlaams Blok because it is undemocratic. We regard the Blok as a political opponent just like any other. The LA offers an alternative to those voters who voted for the Blok out of protest’, says Beysen. Spokesman Rudi De Ceuster referred to rumours that the LA would be holding talks with the Vlaams Blok to discuss co-operation, as ‘barefaced lies’. Any possible co-operation with the Greens looks out of the question. ‘Their passion for rules goes too far’, Beysen feels. The LA manifesto therefore includes a call for ‘Green communism’ to be stopped. ‘The Greens are jeopardising jobs by sabotaging the chemical industry, nuclear energy, the airports, etc.’.

New scanners must detect refugees in containers and lorries

ZEERBURGGE’S POPULARITY AS A PORT OF DEPARTURE FOR GREAT BRITAIN IS CONTINUING TO GROW

In the port of Zeeburgge no fewer than 3,766 illegal stowaways were found in lorries and containers last year, attempting to use this as a way of entering Great Britain illegally. The number is 20% up on the 2001 figure, and represents a twofold increase compared with 1999. And the number of refugees intercepted in January 2003 shows that Zeeburgge’s popularity as a port of departure for Great Britain is continuing to grow, especially now that the French and British have closed the route via Calais in France. At the beginning of March the first of a number of very expensive scanners will be installed in Zeeburgge. Great Britain is financing the equipment, since the British want to curb the influx of illegal aliens from the continent at all costs. The P&O terminal will be fitted with the first such device, and scanners are also due to be installed in all other loading and unloading quays in the ports of Zeeburgge and Ostend this year (FF).

GUY FRANSEN • DE STANDAARD • 25 FEBRUARY

According to the Zeeburgge port authority, the Flemish coastal ports will also become an awkward obstacle for illegal aliens by the end of the year. The British are providing the entire funding for the installation of two new detection techniques. In addition to Zeeburgge, the equipment is also to be installed in the smaller port of Ostend. The devices are extremely effective. The credentials of the first include the ability to scan a container millimetre by millimetre for human presence. The device has a range of no less than 300 metres, and therefore also picks up the people around the lorries being scanned.

The British equipment is extremely interesting, according to the port authorities, on account of its location. ‘At the terminals and just before embarkation. For you can’t be sure whether the content of a lorry is still the same if a period of three hours elapses between checking and lading. A lot can happen in that space of time,’ says Duthewiu of the port authorities. In the dock area, the customs authorities do have a modern X-ray machine but the checks are far from watertight. The customs officers do not make checks of freight headed for Great Britain a priority, because the destination is within the European Union and the ship thus falls within the rules governing free movement of goods. Ninety percent of the freight traffic out of Zeeburgge is destined for the United Kingdom, but theExactly this traffic that is especially popular with refugees. What is more, the customs authorities’ X-ray machine is more geared to goods. The federal police is therefore looking out for the arrival of its mobile scanner. However, the lorry will not arrive before the end of this year. The lorry equipped with an X-ray machine comes at a cost price of EUR 2.5 million, and will not be deployed solely within the dock areas of Zeeburgge and Ostend. The scanner will also be used on all roads affording access to the coast.
The winning projects

Leuven: Development of the Centrale Werkplaatsen ('Central Workshops' - a former industrial site of the Railways) into a residential area (EUR 4,500,000).

Ghent: Brugse Poort, nineteenth-century working-class district (EUR 4,200,000).

Antwerp: Design and layout of the outdoor area of the Museum aan de Stroom (Museum near the river) (EUR 3,000,000).

Hasselt: Railway station district (EUR 3,000,000).

Kortrijk: Buda-eiland arts island, an arts centre in the city centre squeezed between two arms of the Leie (EUR 3,000,000).

Vilvoorde: Watersite, residential area and business district on a former industrial site on the banks of the Zenne (EUR 2,600,000).

Sint-Niklaas: Railway station district (EUR 2,000,000).

Bruges: Nieuwe Molens, apartments, lots and houses on a former industrial site (EUR 800,000).

Eeklo: Stassano en Melkweg, residential area on a former industrial site (EUR 700,000).

Employment Office sends out emergency teams

Two hundred jobs are being axed at Mercator Bank & Verzekering, 89 are going at the Banca Monte Paschi, 150 employees are losing their job at the bankrupt Limburg construction company Claes, but Douwe Egberts is creating an additional 180 jobs. The calamitous reports on the Belgian job market were predominant again last weekend. Flemish Employment Minister Landuyt (SP.A) feels that he has to step in. He has given the Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Agency (Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling - VDAB) the job of setting up ‘labour intervention teams’ in every province, whose task it is to go to every bankrupt or restructuring company in question and collect data on the employees affected. This should put the VDAB in a position to help the employees who have been made redundant to find another job more quickly (FF).

WIM WINCKELMANS • HET NIEUWSBLAD • 24 FEBRUARY

‘If we know what vacancies or training courses the employees are eligible for, we can help them find another job more quickly’, says minister Landuyt. ‘This should become a front-line emergency measure to help employees - a kind of first aid for victims of ‘accidents’ on the job front, along the lines of what we organised after the bankruptcy of Sabena’. The flying team, which is made up of two officials per province, can only act after the employers and trade unions have given their agreement. They are not allowed to disrupt the dialogue between the social partners and must also definitely prevent employees from becoming unnecessarily worried. Landuyt is hoping that the measure will enable him to cope with the current wave of redundancies and corporate restructuring more effectively. ‘Every job lost does not mean an extra person on the dole,’ he says. ‘The bankruptcy of one enterprise if often offset by the expansion of another’. According to the VDAB’s estimates, the number of jobs in Flanders fell slightly last year for the first time. Bankruptcies accounted for 13,000 redundancies, whilst restructuring represented a further 11,700 job losses.
Top Belgian industrialists voice their complaint

HIGH SOCIAL SECURITY CHARGES, INCREASING INTERFERENCE FROM THE GOVERNMENT, INORDINATE RED TAPE AND REGULATIONS, AND LEVIES ARE UNDERMINING THE COMPETITIVE POSITION OF OUR INDUSTRIAL SECTOR

On 25 February four captains of industry at the helm of large Belgian industrial companies called on the government to take more account of the industrial sector's needs. The man behind the initiative, Thomas Leysen (Umicore, production and processing of copper, zinc and precious metals) was backed by Antoon Dieusaert, CEO of BASF Antwerp, the largest chemical complex in Belgium, Philippe Vlerick, CEO of the textile group Uco and chairman of the Belgian textile federation Febeltex, and Luc Williame, CEO of the glass producer Flat Glass Company, which owns the Belgian Glaverbel plant, among others. The four senior industrialists are complaining at the suffocating policy, which they say is the reason why industry is less investing in Belgian plants. They conclude that high social security charges, increasing interference from the government, inordinate red tape and regulations, and environmental, transport and distribution levies are undermining the competitive position of our industrial sector. Industry accounts for 600,000 jobs and 85% of exports, and a crumbling of the sector would have serious consequences for prosperity in the country, they warn (FF).

The employers are of the view that the Belgian government is patronising industry with an excessive number of little rules and regulations. ‘Not a single social problem can arise without us being confronted with new rules and inspections’, complains Antoon Dieusaert. ‘We need a safety adviser, an environmental co-ordinator and now also someone whose job it is to ensure that there is no badgering and bullying at work. The new legislation (concerning badgering and bullying at work), obliges us not only to appoint a responsible officer in this respect, but it also reverses the burden of proof’. Philippe Vlerick of Uco Textiles agrees. ‘In the environmental field, for example, Flanders lays down the strictest requirements in the whole of Europe. UCO is investing EUR 8 million this year, and half of that is going into a water purification plant. The only thing is that we now already know that the environmental permit granted is only valid for 12 months. After that the rules will be made harsher still’. Whatever an entrepreneur wants to do, he is bound by administrative procedures. And these are dealt with far too slowly, in the view of Thomas Leysen. ‘Let me give you an example. Umicore set up a new battery factory three years ago. We wanted to build it in Belgium, but here it takes at least nine months to obtain a building permit. In order to keep ahead of our competitors, we built the factory in South Korea’. As for the soil sanitation that Umicore has to carry out, he says: ‘We were one of the first companies to conclude an agreement with the government for the cleaning up of the contamination caused by 150 years of industrial activity. We are willing to pay tens of millions of euros for this, but after six years of red tape we are still waiting for the first spade to hit the ground’. Philippe Vlerick can also talk about Belgian sluggishness. ‘Starting up a company takes two to three months here. In the USA it’s a matter of a couple of hours’. The high cost of labour is an ever-recurring complaint by employers. In the textile sector, wage costs are 12.6% higher than the average of the neighbouring countries. ‘This is not because the wages are too high, but because more is creamed off by the government,’ says Vlerick. In particular the taxes that are not results-dependent, and have to be paid irrespective of profit or turnover, are a thorn in the side of the employers. Examples are the environmental levies, the provincial tax and the advance levy on income derived from real estate. For these taxes BASF Antwerp pays more than EUR 25 million per year, more than in all the other European BASF companies put together, according to Antoon Dieusaert. Finally, the extras that Belgian industry has to pay, on top of the high electricity bills, are too much for the industrial sector and for Luc Williame. ‘For every EUR 100 that a Belgian company pays for electricity, only EUR 81 has to be paid in the rest of Europe, and all the levies, taxes and duties that have been announced mean that the electricity bill is going to rise by a further 15%’. ■

GUY VAN VLIERDEN • HET LAATSTE NIEUWS • 26 FEBRUARY

Belgian economy in foreigners’ clutches

Research by the business journal Trends [27 February] shows that approximately two in three companies in Belgium with more than 1,000 employees are under foreign control. Ten percent of employment is accounted for by foreign subsidiary companies, branches or companies whose decision-making centres are located abroad. In the industrial sector this figure is as high as 50%. Moreover, Belgium has not been able to retain control of its own large companies. The sale of virtually the entire energy sector [Tractebel, Electrabel, Distriegas], Petrofina and a bank like BBL, has speeded up this trend in the last decade. In Flanders, Flemish family shareholders suffer too much from a passion for control and prefer only to play the role of boss controlling the enterprise, as a result of which they end up being bought out. There is still a long way to go before the Flemish business model of ‘start up, grow, sell’ can be rewritten so that it reads ‘continued growth with external capital’, according to Trends. Bekaert, Interbrew and Delhaize are the exceptions.

EMployees in the paid employment of foreign companies

| 1. FRANCE | 93,899 |
| 2. US | 83,746 |
| 3. GERMANY | 37,212 |
| 4. THE NETHERLANDS | 30,787 |
| 5. LUXEMBURG | 21,318 |
| 6. DENMARK | 19,370 |
| 7. UK | 17,140 |
| 8. SWEDEN | 12,138 |
| 9. JAPAN | 4,669 |
| 10. SWITZERLAND | 3,682 |

SOURCE: TRENDS

ECONOMY
The international music industry is suffering from a major crisis, and in Belgium things are no different. According to Marcel Heymans, director of the Belgian branch of the IFPI (International Federation of the Phonographic Industry), the malaise is the result of illegal copying far more than Internet piracy. One indication of this is the fact that 20 million CDs were sold in Belgium last year, but no fewer than twice as many blank CDs were sold. Flemish artists are risking becoming victims of this. There is no longer any chance of them securing an extension of their record contracts. Precisely now, of all times, Spirit, the political alliance partner of the Socialists in the next elections, is proposing legalising the downloading and copying of music, and this has led to a furious debate on the Internet (FF).

**KARL VANDEN BROECK/JOERI NAANÂA**

**DE MORGEN • 26 FEBRUARY**

The list of Flemish artists who have been laid off is a long one: Arid, Zita Swoon, Paul Michiels, Yasmine, Bart Kaëll. All of them were informed by their record company that their contract would not be extended. According to Patrick Decam, director of Sony Belgium, the Belgian market is far too small for domestic artists. Only big names like Clouseau will be able to survive, whilst the rest will disappear or end up bringing out CDs under their own management.’ Kris Wauters of EMI estimates that at least a further 100,000 copies are circulating illegally. Wauters reckons that he has been robbed of at least half of his income from CD sales. But is there a causal connection between illegal copying and downloading and the record companies’ decision to give Flemish artists the boot? Marcel Heymans (IFPI) thinks there is. ‘Internet piracy remains restricted to a small part of the losses that we incur. And anyway homegrown music is not easily found on the Internet, yet it is copied on a huge scale. This has led to profitability falling drastically in all genres, including pop music. Illegal copying accounts for some 90% of the loss. Heymans warns of a waning in the Flemish musical landscape. ‘If this trend continues, only the really popular artists will be able to get a job in the long run’. A great many Flemish artists are therefore supporting the campaign ‘Stop Spirit’, which has been launched by an anony-

### Caution money prevents ships from dumping waste

**SOURCE: TRENDS**

In the wake of the environmental disasters caused by the sunken ships Prestige, Tricolor and Vicky, there are vociferous calls for measures to be taken to make shipping safer, but also to prevent ships from continuing to dump their waste at sea. After all, ships conveniently make use of disasters in order to do this unnoticed, as became apparent recently off the Belgian coast. These are condemnable practices that should be avoided. In implementation of a European directive from 2000, Environment Minister Vera Dua (Agalev) has made her contribution towards preventing the dumping of waste at sea. Ships that enter Flemish ports first have to pay a deposit by way of caution money, which is only repaid when the ships have left their waste in special facilities in the port (FF).

**DE FINANCIËL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 22 FEBRUARY**

Ships that call in at Flemish ports have to report their waste beforehand and pay a deposit. The amount roughly corresponds to the amount that ships now already pay for waste processing in the ports. Depending on the ship, the deposit amount ranges from EUR 5,00 to EUR 3,000. The ships only get their money back when they have demonstrated that they have left their waste in special containers designed for this purpose. Sums that are not repaid are used exclusively to improve the environment in the ports. A European directive dating from 2000 obliges ports to have specialised waste receptacles. In cooperation with the Openbare Vlaamse Afvalstoffenaamschappij (OVAM - the Flemish Public Waste Products Company), the four Flemish ports have already worked out a plan. This has resulted in mobile waste facilities that are now already ready for use.

The fact that Flemish ports might be placed at a considerable competitive disadvantage has been firmly put in perspective by all concerned. ‘The deposit, which is collected together with the port dues, is merely an additional incentive,’ says Ann Wittemans, spokesperson for the Antwerp Port Authorities. ‘The European directive has already been transposed into national legislation in other countries, too, such as Great Britain and Denmark.’

### Top-20 of foreign employers in Belgium

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<tr>
<th>COMPANY</th>
<th>HEADQUARTERS</th>
<th>NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES IN BELGIUM</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ARCELOR</td>
<td>LUX.</td>
<td>21,318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ELECTRABEL</td>
<td>FRA.</td>
<td>16,985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. FORD BELGIUM</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>15,122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. ISS BELGIUM</td>
<td>DEN.</td>
<td>12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. BBL</td>
<td>NETH.</td>
<td>11,565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. CARREFOUR BELGIUM</td>
<td>FRA.</td>
<td>11,563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. VOLKSWAGEN BRUSSEL</td>
<td>GER.</td>
<td>6,674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. SIEMENS BELGIUM</td>
<td>GER.</td>
<td>6,330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. PHILIPS BELGUM</td>
<td>NETH.</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. GROUP 4 SECURITAS</td>
<td>DEN.</td>
<td>5,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. OPÉL BELGIUM</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>5,424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. TOTALFINALEP BELGIUM</td>
<td>FRA.</td>
<td>5,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. DELHAIZE LOUIS</td>
<td>FRA.</td>
<td>5,018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. ALCATEL</td>
<td>FRA.</td>
<td>4,375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. CATERPILLAR BELGIUM</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>4,106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. ALDI HOLDING</td>
<td>GER.</td>
<td>4,066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. JOHNSON &amp; JOHNSON BELGIUM</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>4,021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. BASF BELGIUM</td>
<td>GER.</td>
<td>3,858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. METRO BELGIUM</td>
<td>GER.</td>
<td>3,841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. BAYER BELGIUM</td>
<td>GER.</td>
<td>3,735</td>
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</table>

**SOURCE: TRENDS**

### Popular Music

**THE MALAISE IS A RESULT OF ILLEGAL COPYING**

The list of Flemish artists who have been laid off is a long one: Arid, Zita Swoon, Paul Michiels, Yasmine, Bart Kaëll. All of them were informed by their record company that their contract would not be extended. According to Patrick Decam, director of Sony Belgium, the Belgian market is far too small for domestic artists. Only big names like Clouseau will be able to survive, whilst the rest will disappear or end up bringing out CDs under their own management.’ Kris Wauters of EMI is complaining bitterly. After eleven weeks at number 1 in the charts, his record company had sold a grand total of 57,486 copies of the group’s latest CD ‘En dans’. EMI estimates that at least a further 100,000 copies are circulating illegally. Wauters reckons that he has been robbed of at least half of his income from CD sales. But is there a causal connection between illegal copying and downloading and the record companies’ decision to give Flemish artists the boot? Marcel Heymans (IFPI) thinks there is. ‘Internet piracy remains restricted to a small part of the losses that we incur. And anyway homegrown music is not easily found on the Internet, yet it is copied on a huge scale. This has led to profitability falling drastically in all genres, including pop music. Illegal copying accounts for some 90% of the loss. Heymans warns of a waning in the Flemish musical landscape. ‘If this trend continues, only the really popular artists will be able to get a job in the long run’. A great many Flemish artists are therefore supporting the campaign ‘Stop Spirit’, which has been launched by an anony-
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, 9000 Bruges and can also be obtained by e-mail.

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Focus on Flanders • 22 February - 28 February 2003 • Number 8