Furious Belgians demonstrate against war

The American attack on Iraq brought tens of thousands of furious Belgians out onto the streets on 20 March. In almost all Flemish towns and cities, schoolchildren and students took part in mass demonstrations from the morning on. These demonstrations were frequently playful: in one case, several DJs used five tonnes of sound equipment to simulate a bombardment in Ghent city centre. At the American embassy in Brussels the mood was grimmer and there were scuffles with riot police. In the Federal Parliament there was a brusque discussion on allowing American weapons transports through our country. The Socialists and Greens want to ban them, the Liberals do not. However, only the Greens find the difference of opinion important enough to step down from the government. Only: no further weapons transports are planned in the near future (FF).

DE STANDAARD • 21 MARCH

At the American embassy in Brussels, feelings were running high. The embassy looked like a fortress: Sawhorses, water cannons and a host of police officers had to protect the building from the rage of the thousands of demonstrators. Initially it was mainly schoolchildren and students. They threw paper aeroplanes and eggs from a distance.

In the late afternoon more and more adults and politicians joined the demonstrators. ‘It is my duty as a citizen to be here,’ said Flemish Minister Mieke Vogels (Agalev). Bert Anciaux (Spirit) was also there.

Meanwhile the Federal MP’s sat in the Chamber for a debate on Iraq. Both the Green Party and the Socialists made it perfectly clear that they were against further American weapons transports through our country. Premier Verhofstadt (VLD) countered with legal arguments. It would take six months to amend the international treaties, he said. The SPA swallowed that argument. Not so the Greens. Agalev ‘could’ step down from the government if there were any more weapons transports in our country, says Agalev boss Jos Geysels. According to Verhofstadt, however, there will be no transports in the next few days. Brussels is again getting ready for its third mass peace demonstration on Saturday 22 March. The trade unions mobilised on the occasion of the European summit.

INTRODUCTION

In his own words, Former European Commissioner Karel Van Miert never doubted for a minute that the United States would launch military attacks on Saddam Hussein. After all, Bush and his club had already opted for an aggressive unilateralism before 11 September, claims Van Miert in Knack (19 March). Since then they submitted one multilateral agreement after the other, introduced the concept of ‘pre-emptive strike’ and abused NATO to pull the strategically important Turkey on board. The Americans are so convinced of their military superiority that they also adopt a military philosophy in politics and diplomacy. Van Miert believes. International law does not apply to them. America’s interest is international law. Actually they had only one message for the UN from the outset, and this was: ‘Either follow us or you will become completely irrelevant.’ According to Van Miert, public opinion grasped this very well, hence the mass peace demonstrations across the globe. Van Miert wonders how much collateral damage this war will cause in the international institutions: the UN and NATO, but also the EU. At the EU summit on 20 March in Brussels the dissertation could already be measured. Blair and Chirac barely glanced at each other. Van Miert does not preclude a return to the old Europe of the six, as suggested by Gerhard Schröder. According to Foreign Affairs Minister Louis Michel (Knack, 19 March), the close consultation that has developed between France, Germany and Belgium over the Iraq question could even form the nucleus of a European military coordination. A number of countries that have sided with the US are now faced with a difficult choice, since France and Germany will expect them to take sides, Van Miert believes. He is also afraid that the new European Treaty that is being prepared by the European Convention will suffer harm and delays. Nevertheless he hopes that the Europeans have learned their lesson that they are powerless when disunited and that major European Member States have no further significant role to play on their own. On precisely the day that war broke out the report appeared in Flemish newspapers that in the Justus Lipsius building in Brussels, where the European Member States hold their meetings, highly sophisticated monitoring apparatus was discovered. Immediately rumours began circulating that the US was behind it all. There is no actual evidence, so no one is daring to make open accusations. But what if it was indeed the US?

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief
Verhofstadt defends the transit of military transports

Premier Verhofstadt (VLD) has blown the whistle on his Ministers Louis Michel (Foreign Affairs, MR) and André Flahaut (Defence, PS) after they openly questioned on Sunday whether Belgium should still leave its territory and air-space open to American armed forces if the USA goes to war without a UN resolution and ignores international law, reports De Standaard (18 March). Both ministers had expressed this view, which was earlier defended by the Green parties Agalev and Ecolo, in a debate on the Francophone TV broadcasters RTBF and RTL. Since the US and UK are violating the UN Charter, we must ask ourselves whether we want to be in league with a state that is seen as an aggressor, says Louis Michel.

In the Chamber Foreign Affairs Committee (18 March) Verhofstadt defended the transit of military transports. By allowing these transports we are demonstrating that we are abiding by the international rules, unlike the Americans, claims the Prime Minister (FF).

Opinion

BART STURTEWAGEN • DE STANDAARD
• 18 MARCH

The raising of the stakes by Ministers Flahaut of Defence and Michel of Foreign Affairs is pure slogan-mongering. It will not stop the war in Iraq for a second and is in no way helping the final diplomatic efforts to prevent the outbreak of hostilities. What is certain is that they are threatening to do the country considerable harm with their games.

In diplomatic terms this is a hostile act. It boils down to cutting the confederal ties that have bound us to the United States for decades. These are not matters that can be decided on lightly and certainly not by individual ministers. With a few minutes’ insanity, both men caused so much damage that it may take Belgian diplomacy months, perhaps even years to recover. It is one thing to have a difference of opinion with the US as regards their aggressive Iraq policy. Every country, however small, has the right to express an opinion. It is totally different to unilaterally sever existing ties. Pacta sunt servanda. Anyone who breaks the rules ceases to be a possible partner in discussions. Hailing from Walloon Brabant, Flahaut and Michel are rivals in the coming elections. They are both trying to ride the wave of the justifiable aversion to war expressed by the population. But that does not give them the right to juggle with the political and economic interests of this country.

Premier Verhofstadt made that distinction last week, but he was clearly unable to keep his government under control. The costs of that inability threaten to be high. Belgium is the headquarters of NATO, and Antwerp’s international port our source of prosperity. Do we want to risk all that for the glory of one or two village politicians promoted above their station?

Antwerp: fraud investigation continues, chief police officers suspended

SUPER-TRIO OF THE ANTWERP ADMINISTRATION WERE GIVEN OVER TO THE EXAMINING MAGISTRATES

After the resignation of the boss of the Antwerp administration, the Chief of Antwerp Police, Luc Lamine, is now suspected of fraud. Lamine is suspected of having used his Visa card to buy women’s clothing and leather goods at the expense of the police budget and even of having forged related documents. Mayor Leona Detiège (SP.A) immediately suspended Lamine with effect from 19 March. Chief Constable Van Beylen is also suspected. Meanwhile, the big clean-up continues apace in Antwerp. At the meeting of the local council on 17 March, candidate mayor Patrick Janssens (SP.A) lodged a complaint relating to ‘suspected’ expenses incurred by the non-profit organisation Technopolis, which is responsible for the city’s IT systems (FF).

ANNICK GROBBEN/JOHAN VAN BAELEN • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 19 MARCH

According to the Antwerp Public Prosecutor’s Office, the latest developments centre exclusively on Visa card expenses from the police budget. Chief Officer Luc Lamine, Chief Constable Luc Van Beylen and three other senior figures in the Antwerp Police spent several hours being questioned by the General Inspectorate of the Federal and local police by order of Investigating Magistrate Dirk Verhaeghe, supported by the Central Anti-Corruption Service (CDBC) and the Central Service for Organised Fraud. The court is extremely concerned that Lamine forged documents to justify private expenses incurred with a police Visa card to the bench of aldermen. Thus, he bought women’s clothing and leather goods, amongst other things, with the Antwerp taxpayer’s money. Chief Constable Van Beylen is also on shaky ground. He not only abused his police Visa card, he also exceeded the limit by 1000 euros. He paid for hotels and hire-cars with the city’s money during a trip to France.

FF EDITORIAL TEAM

Following the preventive suspension of Luc Lamine, Mayor Detiège appointed Eddy Baelemans as replacement Chief Officer. Baelemans originally headed the unit responsible for dealing with football hooliganism. Later he also led the traffic police and the public order unit.

On 19 March the super-trio of the Antwerp administration, resigning City Secretary Fred Nolf, Deputy City Secretary Freddy Vandekerckhove and City Collector Roger Bekaert, were given over to the examining magistrate after a whole day of being questioned by the Federal Police. Incriminating accounts of the non-profit organisation ‘Haven en vaartindustrie’ were seized.
Stalemate over Antwerp’s mayorship

THE PARTIES ARE MORE CONCERNED WITH THE IMMINENT ELECTIONS THAN WITH FINDING A SOLUTION TO THE CRISIS IN ANTWERP

The Socialists (SP.A) and Liberals (VLD) have reached deadlock in their battle for Antwerp’s mayorship. On the morning of Friday 14 March, SP.A Chairman Patrick Janssens left the initiative to the VLD to look for a mayor amongst their own ranks. The Antwerp VLD division put forward the current Alderman Leo Delwaide, but after top-level talks with the national VLD big guns in Brussels the choice fell on Hugo Coveliers, current Parliamentary Party Chairman for the Liberals in the Federal Chamber. Coveliers has a right-wing profile, and according to the VLD mandarins is the natural candidate to stop the progress of the Vlaams Blok in the port city. However, Coveliers does not sit on the local council, and is therefore unacceptable to the SP.A. Not being a member of the council, by law Coveliers cannot simply become mayor. He has to be nominated by the Permanent Deputation of the Province and all council members of the majority have to give their consent. Therefore, the last thing the SP.A wants is a protracted legal battle. Shortly afterwards the Socialists pushed forward their own candidate, Patrick Janssens. It is Janssens who set up the ‘clean hands’ operation and filed charges of corruption in Antwerp’s administration, which is dominated by his own party. Janssens and Party Leader of the Antwerp SP.A division Robert Voorhamme believe that the situation in Antwerp ‘is a matter for the people of Antwerp’ and feel that the efforts of the national VLD party leadership are doing more harm than good. The Liberals, on the other hand, believe that the SP.A is chiefly responsible for the chaos in Antwerp, since it has been in power for 70 years. To lend weight to his ambition and allow himself to concentrate fully on Antwerp, on 17 March Janssens resigned as Chairman of the SP.A. He is succeeded in the position by Steve Stevaert. The coalition partners in Antwerp City Council, the Christian Democratic CD&V and the Green Agalev, feel that the VLD and SP.A will just have to dig their own way out of the mess that they themselves created. Most political commentators are of the opinion that the parties are more concerned with the imminent elections than with finding a solution to the crisis in Antwerp.

FF EDITOR

In contrast to the Antwerp coalition partners the CD&V and Agalev, the SP.A rejects the Coveliers scenario. Coveliers is not a member of the local council. According to the Socialists, that presents insurmountable legal problems. The VLD thinks otherwise. ‘The whole thing can be settled in a week,’ says VLD Chairman Karel De Gucht. The final decision lies with the Flemish Minister for Internal Affairs, Paul Van Grembergen (Spirit). He says that a candidate who does not sit on the council can only become mayor in ‘highly exceptional circumstances’. If, however, four groups agree on an administrative text and a bench of aldermen, but not on the person of the mayor, from a legal point of view it is simply a question of personnel. Then a censure (from the Council of State, ed.) lies in wait for improper use of the Exceptions Act. In Van Grembergen’s office these reserves are being taken seriously. The SP.A and VLD are sticking to their guns. ‘We don’t want an SP.A member as mayor,’ says De Gucht. ‘Our candidacy is on the table and it’s not moving. We also feel this will be well-received by the people.’ The SP.A in turn is saying that ‘the objective truth is that the whole of Flanders knows what the simplest solution is.’ For which read: ‘Patrick Janssens for mayor.’

Opinion

LUC VANDER KELEN • HET LAATSTE NIEUWS • 15 MARCH

What conclusion should we draw from this turbulent Friday? That the biggest city in Flanders is going through its worst crisis ever, but that the politicians are still more bothered about their party’s chances of cashing in on the crisis in the elections. Every day the protagonists, in Brussels and in Antwerp, say that it is about content, about the administration of the city, but every day they show that this is not at all the case. It is a question of electoral interests for 18 May, with one eye already on the local elections of 2006. Just look at the attitude of Bart Somers (leading VLD candidate for the Federal elections in the Antwerp electoral district) that Coveliers ‘is right-wing enough to block the Blok and Liberaal Appel.’ That is at the back of people’s minds, the shadow of Dewinter and now that of Ward Beysen too, rather than policy. It makes me feel pessimistic about the future of Flanders’ biggest city.

WWW.ANTWERPEN.BE

ELECTORAL MARKET, 21 MARCH 2003 (IN %) (WWW.TIJD.BE)

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SOURCE: TIJD GRAPHICS
On the afternoon of Monday 17 March the first tentative talks within the Antwerp majority came to nothing. ‘Government former’ Hugo Covielers was to present a memo to the Antwerp coalition partners for a Clean Hands operation for politics, the civil service and the police. The VLD is prepared to negotiate over details, but not over the candidacy of Covielers. Agalev negotiator Edwin Parion was at the meeting. CD&V negotiator Marc Van Peel stayed away. He believes that the VLD and SPA want to just have to dig their own way out of the mess that they themselves created. Patrick Janssens explained his standpoint at a subsequent press conference. According to him, the VLD has thrown away its chances of pushing forward a democratically elected candidate mayor. If necessary the voters will decide on 18 May, says Janssens (FF).

The Socialists want to get the negotiations up and running again over the next few days with bilateral contacts. But they admit that the key initially lies with the VLD Chairman, Karel De Gucht. He emphasised that over the next few days the emphasis initially had to be on content, and not personalities. Yesterday he came across as particularly angry with Janssens’ ‘piouettes’.

With his surprising resignation Janssens wanted to speed up coalition talks and at the same time seize the initiative. Above all, the party wants to avoid bringing in mediators. Without a quick solution, claims Janssens, who in any event remains at the top of the list for the Chamber, the question will become the main issue of the elections of 18 May: ‘I am perfectly happy to let the voters decide. Then the VLD will get to heal.’

For the Purple-Greens, the Antwerp débâcle could well be just as much of a disaster as the dioxin crisis was for the former coalition of socialists and Christian-Democrats.

Opinion

STEFAAN HUYSENTRUYT • DE FINANCIËL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 18 MARCH

In reality the SPA has always begrudged the VLD the mayorship, and vice versa. In recent days both parties have been doing each other down and tried to lay the blame for this firmly at each other’s door. With the elections in sight both parties are less prepared than ever to make concessions, arguing that losing face costs votes. Nevertheless, the continuation of the impasse could cost both parties many more votes. Either the crisis in Antwerp is quickly resolved and its effect smoothed out by 18 May. Or the impasse continues and the Federal elections in the electoral district of Antwerp will also become new local elections. Worse still, because the candidate mayors are known, we would actually get the first direct mayoral election on 18 May. An election of which the outcome is far from certain. Because if the VLD and SPA are fighting for one leg, Filip Dewinter (Vlaams Blok) may well run away with it.

The row in the Antwerp coalition is now reflecting on the federal coalition. For the Purple-Greens, the Antwerp débâcle could well be just as much of a disaster as the dioxin crisis was for the outgoing Roman-Red (Christian democrats and socialists, ed.) coalition in 1999. But even if the voter allows the Purple-Greens another majority, is it not certain that this would result in a reissue of the outgoing coalition. After all, the Antwerp débâcle has caused rifts in the majority that will take time to heal.

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Banks lose 4 billion through credit losses and shares

The 'Belgian' loss of the top four banking groups comes out at 3.14 billion

The Belgian-Dutch bank insurer Fortis was able to submit better-than-expected results for 2002. For a turnover of 485.8 billion euros, operating profits of 1.92 billion euros were posted. The banking arm in particular performed well, with a 6% rise in operating profits, while the insurance arm remained stable. But after deducting the massive losses on share portfolios of the insurance arm, the remaining net profits amounted to 531.6 million euros.

The other big 'Belgian' bank, Dexia, recorded a group net profit of 1.29 billion euros, a drop of 18.4%. The group in profits was able to be kept low because the group did not create any new provisions for the problems with the share lease contracts of the Dutch subsidiary Labouchere. 200,000 customers of this bank who opted to buy shares via a special investment formula cannot service their loan because the share prices have since fallen too low. The losses amongst Labouchere customers due to the drop in share prices is around 2 billion euros. Earlier Dexia had already set aside 467 million euros for this; now the bank is refusing to do so. In 2002 Dexia's turnover came to 350.9 billion euros.

The profit-and-loss accounts of the four big Belgian banks (Fortis, KBC Bank & Verzekeringen, Dexia and BBL) lead De Standaard (18 March) to conclude that together Belgian banks suffered losses of an estimated four billion euros (Fortis: 1.3 billion/KBC: 965 million/Dexia: 758 million and BBL: 224 million) through credit losses and decreases in the values of share participations (FF).

STEFAN MICHIELSEN • DE STANDAARD • 18 MARCH

The weak economic climate has caused problems for a number of firms, making them unable to continue to meet their credit obligations to the banks. The result is that the banks were obliged to take losses on their credit portfolio. The main victims were those banks that are active in the provision of credit to multinational groups. The sharp drop on the international share markets also meant that the value of the share investments held by the banks fell sharply. Belgian banks are not traditionally great shareholders. Their securities portfolio consists mainly of bonds. The damage to all was therefore limited. But that is not the case for the insurance companies, which are sitting on considerable share portfolios. They felt the collapse of the stock markets especially keenly. So too the financial groups that incorporate a bank and a major insurance division.

The malaise in the economy and the crisis on the stock markets could be said to have cost the country’s four main financial groups 4.3 billion euros last year. Fortis, however, is 50% a Dutch group. This means that, after correction, the ‘Belgian’ loss of the top four comes out at 3.14 billion euros. But in the best case the big four account for at most 75% of the Belgian banking and insurance market. It can therefore be assumed that the total loss of the Belgian financial sector is slightly in excess of 4 billion euros. That represents 1.5% of Belgium’s gross domestic product.

WWW.FORTIS.BE
WWW.DEXIA.BE

Delhaize: better results than expected

The 2002 results for the supermarket group Delhaize were better than expected. During 2002 the group had given two profit warnings, causing the price of its share to nosedive. Following the revelation of the accounting scandal among their Dutch colleagues of the department store group Ahold the price fell a further 21%. Analysts had also expressed doubts as to Delhaize’s debt position after the take-over of the American Hannaford group. This still amounts to 3.9 billion euros, but was reduced seriously in 2002 from 127 to 109% of the net assets. Turnover fell in 2002 by 3.3% to 20.7 billion euros, primarily due to falling sales in American stores (Food Lion), where Delhaize achieves three quarters of its turnover and due to the drop in the price of the dollar. The net profit came to 178.3 million euros, 19.3% higher than in 2001.

WWW.DELHAIZE.BE

Bekaert: operational profits grow

The net profits of Belgian steel wire and steel rope producer Bekaert fell to -50 million euros. But that was mainly due to the exceptional mark-down of Unisolar, the American producer of photovoltaic cells, by 84 million euros and 50 million euros in one-off provisions. Bekaert therefore did not mark down Unisolar and is still looking for a partner, confirms Managing Director Julien De Wilde in De Financieel-Economische Tijd (14 March). Operating profits, on the other hand, rose to 64.2 million euros. Consolidated turnover also rose by 3.8% to 1.9 billion euros. The steel wire (1.4 billion euros), steel rope (677 million euros) and fencing (469 million euros) divisions continue to account for most of the turnover. The turnover of the new technologies division (BAM) did, however, rise by 25% to 243 million euros.

WWW.BEKAERT.BE
The Westerscheldt Tunnel: blessing or curse for Flemish ports?

Zeeland Seaports’ plans will create considerable competition

The Westerscheldt tunnel was opened on 14 March in the south Dutch province of Zeeland. The tunnel runs under the Westerscheldt from Eelwoutsdijk (South-Beveland) to Terneuzen (Zeeuws-Flanders), linking the port of Vlissingen with those of Terneuzen and Ghent. For Flanders this has its consequences. The tunnel will carry around 12,000 cars a day, increasing traffic volumes on the motorways around Ghent and towards Terneuzen. Transport specialists such as Agalev MP Dirk Holemans pointed this out some time ago. But this tunnel is not good news for Flemish ports either, claims Knack. The position of the Dutch ports of Vlissingen and Terneuzen, both in full expansion and coordinated in Zeeland Seaports, is strengthened as a result. The plans for Vlissingen are particularly impressive. The connecting piece is the Westerscheldt Container Terminal, which with a length of 2.6 km and a depth of 18 m can accommodate the largest container vessels. Knack spoke to Daan Bruinooge, until recently the key strategist of Zeeland Seaports (FF).

In February it emerged that from this summer the Antwerp shipping company Cobelfret will no longer have Ford cars transported to the UK via the outlet of Zeebrugge, but via a roll-on-roll-off terminal (60 ha) in Vlissingen, which has to be able to handle half a million cars a year. Above all it was the refusal of Zeebrugge Port Authority to convert the dying Flanders Container Terminal (KatoenNatie) in the outlet into a ro-ro terminal for Cobelfret that led to the move. On the other hand, Antwerp’s biggest transshipment company, HesseNoordNatie, since recently mostly owned by the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA) together with Zeeland Seaports, is waiting anxiously for the Council of State in The Hague to give its ruling on the objections to their planned Westerscheldt Container Terminal (WTC) in Vlissingen. In Vlissingen, HesseNoordNatie will be able to handle 7 to 9 of the biggest (Ultra Large) container ships simultaneously, is being provided with land next to the quay (some 200 ha) and its own dock for coasters and inland shipping. The WTC will transship and/or reship 25 to 30 million tonnes a year. That is as much as Vlissingen and Terneuzen now handle annually. The Ghent port authorities are rather hoping to profit from the further expansion of Terneuzen and the Westerscheldt tunnel. Nothing is less certain. In Terneuzen port land is being made ready, some with Antwerp’s Katoennatie, for the further expansion of the Zeeland Container Terminal (5 ha) on this side of the Westerscheldt - without the nuisance of any locks, and for the development of a logistics park (140 ha) on the Moselebanken, including a container terminal for coasters. After that the Axelsevlakte (475 ha) will be developed as a port area along the Ghent-Terneuzen canal. Daan Bruinooge, one of the chief lobbyists in favour of the Westerscheldt tunnel, points to the importance of the new link: ‘Businesses used not to take on commutes. Now you can get to the other side in little more than ten minutes.’ This argument also applies to attracting shipping traffic, where the cost of the link with the hinterland is decisive. The tunnel links Vlissingen with Terneuzen, but also brings freight traffic to Lille in barely an hour, for example. Vlissingen is no longer more expensive than Antwerp or Rotterdam because its links to the hinterland are not as efficient. (…) Apart from the tunnel, Vlissingen may well have the best ‘wet’ infrastructure in Western Europe. Why do you think HesseNoordNatie and Cobelfret have moved here? We have an open tidal port, two fantastic canals, the South-Beveland canal and the Rhine-Scheldt canal. Zeebrugge, on the other hand, does not have a canal connecting it to the hinterland. Bruinooge does not therefore see complementarity with Zeebrugge, but with Antwerp and Ghent. ‘The port zones of Ghent and Terneuzen lie along the Ghent-Terneuzen canal, where we have similar interests in the infrastructure: the canal, the roads, the locks, a planned tunnel beneath the canal in Sluiskil, etc.’ And yet Zeeland Seaports’ plans will create considerable competition. ‘Businesses want to attract customers and I can imagine they would rather operate from the Axelsevlakte, right by Terneuzen’s locks, than from the more inland-situated Kluisendokken of Ghent Port Authority.’
Focus on Flanders • 15 March – 21 March 2003 • Number 11

**ECONOMY AND CULTURE**

**Interbrew wants to reduce take-overs**

**FF EDITOR**

Restructuring costs [at sites in Breda and Manchester], the harmful effects of exchange rates, but above all the forced sale of the British Carling caused the turnover of the Leuven brewer Interbrew to fall by 4.3% to 6.99 billion euros and net profit by 13% to 467 million euros. As a result, operational cash-flow [ebitda] fell by 9.1% to 1.39 million euros. It was the new General Manager, American John Brock (former Operational Manager at Cadbury Schweppes), who is replacing Hugo Powell, who announced Interbrew’s results for the first time. With Brock a new wind is blowing through the company: after the turbulent take-overs of Labatt, Bass, Beck’s and Gilde Brock wants to concentrate mainly on inter- nal growth. According to De Financieel-Economische Tijd [20 March], in so doing Brock is satisfying the wishes of analysts who feel that Interbrew overcooked things with its take-overs. The Interbrew share price halved in 2002.

**INTERBREW**

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**LITERATURE**

**Dutch and Flemish authors guests of honour at salon du livre in Paris**

*Under the banner of ‘Les phares du nord’, Flemish and Dutch literature is the guest of honour at this year’s ‘Salon du Livre’ in Paris. The choice of Dutch-language literature as the guest of honour was made at the invitation of French publishers, who have noted a growing interest amongst the French reading public in the literature of the Low Countries. The number of translations of well-known and not so well-known Dutch and Flemish authors has therefore risen sharply over the past few years. Some 75 works have recently been translated into French. Until 26 March there are six days of signing sessions with 56 Flemish and Dutch authors. The publishers now want to use the overwhelming media interest in France to have even more Flemish and Dutch authors translated into French. It is also an opportunity to explain yet again to the French how Flemish, Dutch, Dutch-speaking, Belgian and Walloon relate to each other (FF).*

**MARC HOLTHOF • TIJD CULTUUR • 19 MARCH**

It is a mystery to the French. Most think that the people of Flanders speak French. Or Flemish. Flemish literature that is written in Dutch and published in Belgium (or the Netherlands) - they simply cannot understand that. For the French with their Republican spirit a nation can only have one language, preferably French. Not by chance does the press folder for this event contain a map of our linguistic region. Some of the many literary supplements that appear on the occasion of the book fair have already discussed the subject. And yet the prestigious journal Nouvelle Revue Française is managing to use the Paris Fair to bring out an anthology of Dutch and... Walloon poetry. Flemish poetry will only appear in April, after the event.

Each of the 56 authors invited to the Book Fair is published in translation by a French publisher. These include many major publishers, such as Gallimard [with Mulisch, Nooteboom] or Seuil [with Claus or Leon de Winter], but also a great many smaller ones. A whole series of debates is also planned on subjects such as ‘Néerlandais? Flamand? Hollandais?’ (‘Netherlandish? Flemish? Dutch?’) or ‘La nouvelle vague dans le théâtre’ (‘The New Wave in Theatre’). The list of Flemish novelists invited [Michiels, Claus, Geeraerts, Hemmerechts, Hermans, De Kuyper, Mortier & Verhelst] is not especially innovative. Flemish novelists are also heavily under-represented compared to the Dutch. Hopefully the fair can boost interest in less well-known Flemish novelists. However, that is compensated for in other areas. Flanders is clearly ahead in young people’s books and strip cartoons. The ‘Beau-Livre / livre d’art’ section is filled entirely by Flemings. And the same is true of theatre, where Tom Lanoye and Jan Fabre, who is highly rated in France, are involved.

The imbalance between Flemish and Dutch novelists is not only to do with the French publishers, but also with promotional policy in the Low Countries. In the Netherlands the Literary Production and Translation Fund [Literair Productie- en Vertalingenfonds] has spent the past twelve years promoting primarily its own novelists. In Flanders the Flemish Fund for Letters [Vlaams Fonds voor de Letteren, VFL]...
CULTURE

has had one employee for the past six months who concentrates on other countries. The establishment of the VFL is intended to streamline co-operation with the Netherlands in the future.

www.desingel.be

• Until 30 March:
• 15 March - 21 March 2003 • Number 11
• 22 March: Match of the Flemish．
• 1 March onwards:
• 28 and 30 March: European Youth Orchestra, conducted by Vladimir Ashkenazy, Concertgebouw Bruges and PSK, Brussels; info: 070/22.33.02 and 02/507.82.00
• 20 March: Contemporary Art, Brewery Belle Vue, Ghent; info: 09/283.79.00
• 15 March: 'Museum Akkoord', the rise of the bourgeoisie and the literary life from the 14th to the 17th Century in Brussels, exhibition, City Hall, Brussels.
• 21 March:
• 15 March:
• 21 March:
• 20 March:
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www.rogervaneumeulen.be

• Until 6 April: 'Abroad', exhibition with work by Raveel, Richter, Pistoletto and Tapies, Roger Raveelmuseum, Machelen aan de Leie (near Deinze), www.rogervaneumeulen.be

• Until 20 March: 'Museum Akkoord', the rise of the bourgeoisie and the literary life from the 14th to the 17th Century in Brussels, exhibition, City Hall, Brussels.

www.muhka.be

• Until 2 June:
• Until 20 April:
• Until 20 April:
• Until 20 April:
• Until 6 April:
• Until 6 April:
• Until 6 April:
• Until 6 April:
• Until 6 April:
• Until 6 April:

www.rogervaneumeulen.be

Editor in chief: Frank Vandecaveye

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• Until 29 June: Music Planet; one century of pop music in an exhibition, Brewery Belle Vue, Moenlenbeek; info: 02/513/29/84

• Until 6 April: Maria Magdalena, sinner from the Middle Ages until today, exhibition, Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent; info: 09/232.17.03

• Until 30 March: Synesthetics - Pop & Art in Belgium; pop music and visual arts, De Garage, Mechelen; info: 015/29.40.00

• Until 13 April: Jacques Charlier and Leo Copers, exhibitions, SMAK, Ghent; info: 09/221.17.03

• Until 20 April: 'Abroad', exhibition with work by Raveel, Richter, Pistoletto and Tapies, Roger Raveelmuseum, Machelen aan de Leie (near Deinze), www.rogervaneumeulen.be

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www.euroculture.be 02/513/29/84

• Until 6 April: Lacaton & Vassal, Architects, Bordeaux - Paris, exhibition, DeSingel, Antwerp, info: 03/248.28.28

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