Verhofstadt wants Dewael in federal government

First Minister Guy Verhofstadt has asked Flemish Minister-President Dewael to join the next Federal Government, at least if he is still First Minister after 18 May. It goes without saying that Guy Verhofstadt would not have asked this question if Dewael had not already promised, says Het Belang van Limburg. De Standaard, together with various other media, was anything but complimentary about the performance of the two current Federal VLD ministers, Rik Daems (Public Enterprises) and Marc Verwilghen (Justice) in the previous legislature. With Dewael stepping down from the Flemish Government there will inevitably be a shift at the top of the liberal VLD. The current VLD Chairman Karel De Gucht is being tipped for the post of Flemish Minister-President (FF).

INTRODUCTION

There has not been one single dominant theme in this election campaign. Not that the media has not paid any attention to the politicians: from the smallest regional radio station to the public broadcasting company, from the popular television magazine to the broadsheet: they have been able to spout their election manifesto and opinions everywhere. But the onslaught was so endless that the voter risked losing sight of the bigger picture in all this cacophony. Agalv says that for most parties ‘More jobs’ was the message, even for the liberal VLD, for which the unique selling proposition has always been cutting taxes. But those who had expected cutting-edge debates on the subject in which emotions ran high were disappointed. The remedies proposed by the three main parties—VLD, CD&V and SPA-Spirit, were too similar for this to happen. All three agree that the tax on employment, which is almost 50% in Belgium, must be lowered. According to the SPA-Spirit cartel, the hole created by cutting taxes must be filled with more efficient tax collection and the fight against moonlighting. The Liberals claim that the hole will be filled by cost recovery effects. In addition, all the parties feel that the health insurance budget must be increased, personal income tax and VAT for the hotel and catering industry must be cut, that early retirement pensions must not be touched and that the high national debt must also be paid off. The fact that politicians have once again promised heaven on earth, despite there being no money available, has made De Morgen (16 May) call for an independent institute to check all these promises. For the ‘own people first’ party, the Vlaams Blok, the ‘immigration issue’ and the approach to crime remain atop the agenda. For the ‘own people first’ party, the Vlaams Blok, the ‘immigration issue’ and the approach to crime remain atop the agenda. Politicians have once again promised heaven on earth, despite there being no money available, has made De Morgen (16 May) call for an independent institute to check all these promises. For the ‘own people first’ party, the Vlaams Blok, the ‘immigration issue’ and the approach to crime remain atop the agenda. But the broad public broadcasting company VRT has become remarkably mild towards this far right party, which has itself assumed a softer image in its campaign, notably by reducing the number of debates. The remedies proposed by the three main parties—VLD, CD&V and SPA-Spirit, were too similar for this to happen. All three agree that the tax on employment, which is almost 50% in Belgium, must be lowered. According to the SPA-Spirit cartel, the hole created by cutting taxes must be filled with more efficient tax collection and the fight against moonlighting. The Liberals claim that the hole will be filled by cost recovery effects. In addition, all the parties feel that the health insurance budget must be increased, personal income tax and VAT for the hotel and catering industry must be cut, that early retirement pensions must not be touched and that the high national debt must also be paid off. The fact that politicians have once again promised heaven on earth, despite there being no money available, has made De Morgen (16 May) call for an independent institute to check all these promises. For the ‘own people first’ party, the Vlaams Blok, the ‘immigration issue’ and the approach to crime remain atop the agenda. But the broad public broadcasting company VRT has become remarkably mild towards this far right party, which has itself assumed a softer image in its campaign, notably by reducing the number of debates.

ERIÇ DONICKER • HET BELANG VAN LIMBURG • 16 MAY

Verhofstadt says that he has an outstanding team, but that he wants to strengthen it even more. The Premier also claims that Patrick Dewael can have an even greater bearing on community dossiers (including state reform, ed.) in the Federal Government. Verhofstadt is hoping that the VLD emerges from the elections stronger, which will allow his party to exert a greater influence on policy and demand more positions. The latter is the case if fewer parties are required to form a government. Which ministerial position Patrick Dewael will eventually get will depend on the government negotiations and the final distribution of portfolios. In any event, Dewael will be Vice-Premier. Who is to succeed him as Minister-President of the Flemish Government is not yet clear. That will depend on the results of the election. It is expected that the Flemish Government will also be partially reshuffled after the Federal Government negotiations. The name most frequently mentioned for the Minister-President is that of current VLD Chairman Karel De Gucht. And in that case Bart Somers (currently Mayor of Mechelen and the VLD’s leading candidate in the province of Antwerp, ed.) will be the name most often mentioned as new chairman of the VLD.

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Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief
De Standaard/VRT

One week before the elections on 18 May, the results of two opinion polls, one by De Standaard/VRT and the other by La Libre Belgique, were needless to say keenly awaited. The De Standaard/VRT poll was organised in the last two weeks of April. During that period the news was dominated by the prison wards’ strike, the after-effects of Antwerp’s city council crisis and the outbreak of fowl pest. It was also during that period that CD&V Chairman Stef van Clerck formulated his veto against the Greens.

In this poll the CD&V falls below its result of 1999, with just 21.9%. As in the other poll, the SPA-Spirit cartel climbs to join the two front-runners (21.1%). The Vlaams Blok also does exceptionally well with 18%. The decline of the Flemish Greens, however, is less spectacular in this poll. They remain stuck on 8.4%. The Flemish-National N-VA fails to achieve the electoral threshold.

Le Soir

The French-language newspaper Le Soir also published an opinion poll, which is interesting because it was carried out after the crisis surrounding night flights over Brussels fell right in the middle of this period. This poll shows that 21.5% of voters are still uncertain. This mainly involves young people up to the age of 25. Of the 78.5% who have already made their choice, however, 22.4% will be voting for the CD&V, 21.4% for the VLD, 21.1% for SPA-Spirit and 18.2% for the Vlaams Blok. Agalev gets 9.8% and the N-VA 5%.

Here too, therefore, the three front-runners are well-matched. By asking voters who have already decided how they voted four years ago the pollsters were also able to produce a table showing who is winning votes from whom. This shows that half the former VU-ID voters now intend voting for SPA-Spirit, 38% for the Flemish-national N-VA and only 3.2% for the VLD.

La Libre Belgique

In a poll by the French-language newspaper La Libre Belgique the VLD also just finishes as the biggest party (22.5%). In this poll the CD&V falls below its result of 1999, with just 21.9%. As in the other poll, the SPA-Spirit cartel climbs to join the two front-runners (21.1%). The Vlaams Blok also does exceptionally well with 18%. The decline of the Flemish Greens, however, is less spectacular in this poll. They remain stuck on 8.4%. The Flemish-National N-VA fails to achieve the electoral threshold.

Het Laatste Nieuws

For completeness’ sake we are also reproducing the opinion poll that Field Research had carried out between 1 and 7 May for Het Laatste Nieuws (12 May).

The government crisis concerning night flights over Brussels fell right in the middle of this period. This poll shows that 21.5% of voters are still uncertain. This mainly involves young people up to the age of 25. Of the 78.5% who have already made their choice, however, 22.4% will be voting for the CD&V, 21.4% for the VLD, 21.1% for SPA-Spirit and 18.2% for the Vlaams Blok. Agalev gets 9.8% and the N-VA 5%.

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### Vote 4 years ago

<table>
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<th>Party</th>
<th>VLD</th>
<th>CD&amp;V</th>
<th>SPA</th>
<th>Vlaams Blok</th>
<th>Agalev</th>
<th>N-VA</th>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>91.7</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
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<td>Poll Le Soir</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>-0.4</td>
<td>+0.9</td>
<td>+6.6</td>
<td>+2.4</td>
<td>-2.8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VLD: tax cuts will create more jobs

One week before the elections the three Purple-Green government parties once again gathered their supporters together. With the results of the recent opinion polls at the back of everyone’s mind the final instructions were given and if necessary the direction of the campaign adjusted. For the liberal VLD cutting corporate taxes remains central, with the ultimate aim of creating 160,000 new jobs (FF).

BART BRINCKMAN • DE STANDAARD • 12 MAY

At the election meeting in Winterslag, Premier Guy Verhofstadt himself spoke of a ‘tame campaign’. No single theme seems to have really caught the imagination. Even though the Liberals are doing their utmost to launch tax cuts - both social security contributions and income taxes - as a stake. At the same time the Socialists are being resolutely labelled ‘converts’ because even the SPA-Spirit cartel is calling for lower taxes. Chairman Karel De Gucht called the CD&V the party that has made Belgium ‘by far the most heavily taxed country in Europe’.

These tax cuts are central to the VLD’s job plan, which is designed to create 160,000 new jobs. According to Verhofstadt, that plan will have to be drawn up during the first six months in office. Among other things, the lowest wages, older workers and interim work will have to become as good as tax-free. Minister-President Patrick Dewael: ‘The VLD is going to the voter with three priorities: jobs, jobs and jobs.’

Stevaert calls for modesty

The SPA wants to tackle unemployment with a ‘clever economy’

The SPA has sounded its rallying call in Hasselt. In his hometown, SPA Chairman Steve Stevaert called for discretion and in particular asked the militants not to lose their heads over the encouraging opinion polls. We have ploughed and sown, but the harvest is not yet in, is his advice. In the last week a storm can still seriously damage that harvest. Stevaert, who has an almost unassailable lead in the De Standaard/VRT popularity poll ahead of Premier Verhofstadt (VLD) and former Premier Jean-Luc Dehaene, remains extremely modest about his own ambitions (FF).

DE STANDAARD • 12 MAY

‘If Laurent were king, then Stevaert would have been prime minister for some time now, some people say. The press is constantly asking me whether I’m a candidate for prime minister. But that’s not how our system works, we don’t have a directly elected premier,’ says Stevaert. Other parties are forming cartels across linguistic borders, he pointed out, a reference to the VLD and the MR. ‘But there is no arrangement between me and (PS Chairman) Elio Di Rupo. I called him: he isn’t a candidate for premier, and neither am I.’ Stevaert also took aim at the politico: ‘A vote for the VLD is a vote for Agalev, says Stefaan De Clerck (CD&V chairman), and a vote for the CD&V is a vote for Di Rupo, says Louis Michel (MR chairman). That’s all too complicated for me. I just want people to vote for the Socialists.’ ‘I’m not attacking Agalev, which is and will remain a progressive party,’ Stevaert continued. The cartel’s doors will remain open. ‘Who knows what will happen tomorrow. Perhaps these elections will help,’ he said. Only Stevaert can say such a thing without it sounding cynical.

The SPA wants to tackle unemployment with a ‘clever economy’. In particular, tax cuts must apply to new workers and those at the end of their careers. Existing early retirement pensions cannot be touched, because many of those involved did not ask to stop work. ‘Some of those who want to stop cannot, and others who don’t want to have to,’ says Stevaert. The end-of-career regulation is a complex tale: ‘People should therefore vote for Socialist ministers, because they’re the most competent.’

Agalev adjusts campaign

At Agalev’s final election conference in Antwerp on 10 May it was all hands to the deck. After the poor polls the Greens have to make significant changes to their campaign in the last week. In previous weeks the Greens were presented with the bill for a number of incidents: the administrative crisis in Antwerp, the crisis surrounding Brussels night flights with the resignation of Francophone Green Minister Isabelle Durant and on top of that they were the scapegoat in the campaigns of the VLD and above all the Christian Democratic CD&V. The Greens are angry with these parties for blackening the reputation of the Green party and leaving the black party (Vlaams Blok) alone. Angry too with the employers of the Flemish Employers’ Association (Vlaams Economisch Verbond) and with the Farmers’ Union (Boerenbond), ‘that are marshalling their forces against Agalev’, claims Flemish Minister Vera Dua. Party Leader Jos Geysels now wants to gradually convince Flanders to vote for the Greens instead of the SPA. The slogan ‘Agalev makes the difference’ has now changed to ‘Green is vital’, which may as well read ‘You need Agalev’.
De Clerck: Verhofstadt seeks support in Wallonia to remain prime minister

The Flemish and Francophone Liberals are throwing in their lots. The VLD and MR of Premier Verhofstadt and Foreign Affairs Minister Louis Michel (MR) respectively have formed an alliance to form the next government with a shared 7-point manifesto. This means the Walloon Liberals will not form a government without the VLD and vice versa. Guy Verhofstadt is also the Francophone MR’s candidate for premier. The Netherlands of the Christian Democrat Balkenende, firstly at the head of a rudderless government and then as initiative-taker in the months-long process of forming a government, can be seen as an example of how it should not be done: a budget deficit of 3 billion euros, 0% growth and 85,000 unemployed. In these difficult economic times no time must be lost in disputes between communities, say both outgoing ministers. In an interview with De Financieel-Economische Tijd (13 May), CD&V Chairman Stefaan De Clerck alleges that Premier Verhofstadt is seeking support from his Walloon sister party because he is afraid the CD&V will become the biggest party in Flanders. But he is not arguing with those of his party colleagues who say that the final reckoning will only be possible after the Flemish elections in 2004. ‘For us these elections may well be a fraction too early. (...) In any case, on 19 May the campaign for the elections in our biotope, Flanders and Europe, will begin.’

Ivan Broeckmeier • De Financieel-Economische Tijd • 13 May

The CD&V Chairman has hit out hard against Premier Guy Verhofstadt. On Sunday in a debate on VRT he branded a CD&V communiqué, which apparently shows that the CD&V does not support the new corporate tax cuts. Nonsense, says De Clerck. The CD&V is still a firm supporter of the new tax cuts. ‘The communiqué merely says that we want to combine them with a healthy budgetary policy.’ De Clerck himself attacks the government parties on their ‘poor Flemish demands’. By enduring the efforts of Louis Michel and Elio Di Rupo ‘the VLD and SPA are now allowing their Flemish wings to be clipped.’ ‘Because he is afraid that a CD&V victory will cost him his job, Verhofstadt is creeping under the wings of mother Michel.’ De Clerck himself is refusing to throw in with that of his Francophone sister party, the cdH. ‘If it can work with them, great, if not, so be it. ‘If I threw in my lot with the cdH, I would have to give up my choice for a more independent Flanders, just like the Liberals and Socialists.’ He is not, however, making any effort to hide his preference for a tripartite (Socialists, Christian Democrats and Liberals together, ed.). Such a tripartite could be a Federal umbrella under which the regions could develop their autonomy to the maximum, he says. But asymmetrical formulas are also possible. ‘We would also be a reliable partner in such a configuration.’ The Chairman continues to count on being able to overtake the VLD on 18 May with the CD&V and again become the biggest party in Flanders. But he is not arguing with those of his party colleagues who say that the final reckoning will only be possible after the Flemish elections in 2004. ‘For us these elections may well be a fraction too early. (...) In any case, on 19 May the campaign for the elections in our biotope, Flanders and Europe, will begin.’

No alliance between SPA and PS

FF Editor

Last week a remarkable open letter from PS Chairman Elio Di Rupo to all Flemings appeared in the Flemish press. His message was this: the next government must not again devote its time and energy to state reforms or community-charged dossiers, but must address the real problems: socio-economic problems and the preservation of social security. That same day he gave several high-profile interviews for the Flemish public broadcasting company in Dutch, feeding the speculation that he has his sights on becoming premier if the Socialists were to become the biggest party in the whole of Belgium. His chief competitor from the Liberals, Louis Michel, had previously explicitly warned against this and therefore called on Flemings to vote for the CD&V and not the CD&V, so that the Liberals could continue to provide the premier. But Di Rupo denies any ambition in this direction and for the time being there is no alliance between his PS and the Flemish sister party, SPA-Spirit, like the Liberals. SPA Chairman Stevaert is not quite on the same wavelength as his Walloon peer. According to Stevaert, socio-economic progress and state reform go together (De Morgen, 14 May). What is more, if we are to believe the polls, there is a good chance that the SPA-Spirit cartel will become bigger than the PS.

Tijd Electoral Market 2003: Predictions on 15 May 2003

Source: Tijd-graphics
Demonstration

Countryside angry with greens

The delimitation of the Flemish Ecological Network is supposed to be approved next week in the Flemish Parliament, but VLD wants to remove overly strict measures.

On Sunday 12 May a countryside demonstration marched through Ghent. One week before the elections, some 20,000 dissatisfied farmers, huntmen and fishermen protested against the Flemish Ecological Network (Vlaams Ecologisch Netwerk, VEN), a plan to link together protected conservation areas in Flanders, in which restrictions will apply to hunting, fishing and farming. Striking by their presence were large delegations from the opposition parties, the N-VA, CD&V and Vlaams Blok, also from the government partner, the VLD. The scapegoat of the demonstration was the Green Flemish Minister for Agriculture and Environmental Policy, Vera Dua. Afterwards the main cause of the Green Minister’s anger was the fact that her Flemish Liberal colleague Jaak Gabriëls (VLD) also took part in the demonstration. She demanded at least excuses from her colleague, but got none. The delimitation of the VEN is supposed to be approved next week in the Flemish Parliament, but in extremis the VLD now wants to reject a number of ‘overly strict implementing decrees’. Dua claims that the Liberals are ‘splitting hairs’ for electoral reasons. According to De Morgen (14 May), the difference of opinion could have far-reaching consequences for the Flemish Government (FF).

MARC REYNENBAU • KNACK • 14 MAY

Not by chance did ‘the countryside’ demonstrate one week before the elections. The presence of the CD&V, VLD, N-VA and Vlaams Blok underlined that political aspect all the more. Nonetheless, the demonstrators must not turn to the Federal Government, but the Flemish. In point of fact, all Flemish ministers are collectively responsible. It was therefore a bit silly to see Flemish Minister Jaak Gabriëls (VLD) demonstrating against himself. Worse still, according to Environment Minister Vera Dua (Agalev), the Flemish Government is no longer implementing much of what has already been decided under the previous Christian Democrat-Socialist cabinet. Nevertheless, no one could fail to notice that the demonstration in Ghent was mainly directed against Agalev, with Dua as the scapegoat. The countryside experienced Green policy as ‘intolerable busybodying’. The demonstration is part of what is gradually being viewed as something of a minor guerrilla war against Agalev. This began with CD&V Chairman Stefaan De Clerck, who never wanted to join forces with the ‘irresponsible’ Agalev, a comment he initially toned down and then embroiled. The Flemish Liberals, through Chairman De Gucht and Flemish Minister-President Patrick Dewael, then called on Agalev to be ‘more reasonable’. If the analyses of Agalev’s pernicious role tally and the party manages to impose all manner of hateful restrictions, it will have to be an extremely powerful party. Which is not the case. The affair shows that in the eyes of the public Agalev does not so much address concrete interests (except perhaps ‘future generations’), but symbolic ones. The ecological effort touches the sore spot of the growing pains of society and, regardless of the way it turns out, that is never nice. Caring for the environment is a daily burden involving learning to live with restrictions. It demands constant daily attention, full of new obligations (sorting waste) and things that can no longer be done. The main parties would rather let Agalev bear this burden alone. They find that all the more easy to do since the ecologists will always remain electoral competitors for them. The Christian Democrats experienced that in 1999 when a sizeable pack of voters (after the dioxin crisis) switched from them to Agalev, the collaboration with Agalev in the Purple-Greens made the Liberals vulnerable on their right flank. Only SPA Chairman Stevaert can act as if he has nothing to do with it. He knows well enough that desertion from Agalev will mainly benefit his own party.

WWW.VLAANDEREN.BE/VLAAMSECOLO-GISCHNETWERK

Liberal/green conflict about VEN settled in Flemish Parliament

In a debate in the Flemish Parliament on 14 May Agalev received the support of the SPA in the dossier of the decree on natural conservation and the delimitation of the VEN area. The SPA found the attitude of Minister Gabriëls (VLD) ambiguous and Parliamentary Chairman De Batselier pointed out that a minister cannot govern and participate in a demonstration directed against decisions taken by the government. The opposition CD&V felt that electoral considerations had the upper hand among Flemish members of government and that reliable government was no longer possible. Minister-President Dewael (VLD), himself Limburg’s leading candidate in the Federal Chamber elections and ‘coach’ to the government team, had to perform a delicate balancing act (FF).

FILIP ROGIERS • DE MORGEN • 15 MAY

Once again Patrick Dewael managed to resolve the issue. He gave Minister Gabriëls a gentle rap on the knuckles. But, said Dewael, it could not be deduced from the invitation of the organisers of the demonstration that it was directed against the government’s policy. The question remained as to whether the VLD wanted to comply with the agreements made earlier concerning the VEN. Yes, said Dewael formally. But Dewael expressed, rather more cautiously than his party chairman De Gucht a day earlier, his reservation as to the definitive form of the VEN. He called for understanding for the uneasiness of fishermen and farmers in particular, although he implicitly accepted that the texts of the VEN did not warrant this fear. What was striking was that Dewael pointed an accusatory finger at the administration, claiming it showed too little respect for the complaints of uneasy countryfolk. Dewael wants further consultation on the basis of the 9,000 letters of protest that were submitted during the public enquiry into the VEN. In addition, Environment Minister Dua (Agalev) is not excluding the possibility that certain VEN implementing decrees could still be modified slightly. Agalev accepted the position adopted by Dewael.
The total fiscal and parafiscal burden for 2002 rose by 0.6% to a record high of 45.6% of GDP, so De Financiel-Economische Tijd quotes the Institute for National Accounts (Instituut voor Nationale Rekeningen) (13 May). Put another way, of every 100 euros earned by Belgians, 45.6 euros goes to the government, directly or indirectly. That is not good news for the Liberals of the VLD and MR, who are keen to unveil their tax cut, a large part of which still has to be implemented. Moreover, the Federal Government has saddled new municipalities with taxes, which saw themselves obliged to increase the surcharges on the mill rate and personal income tax. At first sight, therefore, this tax cut appears a grandiose failure, but the truth is more subtle, claims De Standaard (14 May). The government’s increased claims on the economy is also the result of movements with the economy that are not necessarily negative (FF).

Opinions

BART STURTWAGEN • DE STANDAARD • 14 MAY

If more people find work and people who already had a job, get higher wages, the income from taxes will grow proportionally quicker than the economy. If the tax man becomes more efficient and more abuses, such as in the collection of VAT, are weeded out, the tax burden will rise. And because of delays in the system the government currently also receives those taxes that companies pay on the profit they made in the strong year of 2000. This list of factors again makes it clear how heavily the tax burden weighs on the active, working, enterprising section of the population. The number of new businesses starting up is decreasing sharply and our country is dropping down international lists (IMD ranking, www.imd.ch/wcy, ed.) of countries in which it is good to invest or which perform well against global competition. The writing is on the wall. We must continue down the path of tax cuts that we have taken at all costs.

STEFAN HUYSENTRUYT • DE FINANCIEL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 13 MAY

According to the Federal Minister for Finance, Didier Reynders (MR), the INR’s figures show that rising income and falling rates can go hand in hand. You simply have to ensure more efficient collection and more jobs. But the Federal Minister for Finance is not telling the whole story. He remains modest about the tax increases implemented by most municipalities in recent years. He is therefore not breathing a word about the fact that most of the tax cuts will have to be made by the next government.

The question remains whether fiscal decisions taken by the current government will survive the new government formation. For some time now the subject of taxation has not been the exclusive domain of the Liberals. Steve Stevaert’s Socialists have emerged as competitors on the fiscal front with radically different emphases.

The difference between the Liberal and Socialist vision of taxation can be summed up in the words cents and percent. In the Liberal vision tax cuts must be in terms of percentages and taxes that represent a payment to a government service must be one-off. But SPA-leader Stevaert has declared to fight against all one-off taxes and against all percentage-based tax relief.

The impetus for the growth in China is the modernisation of that country’s infrastructure. This makes driving on radial tyres, which are based on steel cord, much more attractive. The traditional textile-reinforced tyres are better suited to roads with potholes, which explains their popularity. But significant investments are being made in road infrastructure, especially on the coast. As soon as the roads have been improved, production of radial tyres will increase and Bekaert should be sitting pretty with its investment. Radial tyres give better road-holding and are harder to pierce. With this investment Bekaert is strengthening one of its traditional activities (steel wire and steel cord), whereas in the past it gave the impression this was no longer that important. The group focused primarily on new materials and hi-tech products. Bekaert’s market position in this segment and the expected growth in China and Eastern Europe re-awakened investors’ interest. Earlier this year the Flemish multinational also acquired a steel cord plant in Slovakia. ‘If you apply the ratios of South Korea to the Chinese market, and in particular the coastal region, with all tyres becoming radial tyres, then China offers prospects of 600,000 tonnes of steel cord. This is half of current global production,’ says Vice-President for Communications, Willy Snaet.

Bekaert Invests 200 million in Chinese steel cord market

The West Flanders multinational firm Bekaert is to invest 200 million euros in China, more specifically in the production of steel cord. The existing production capacity of 45,000 tonnes per annum must increase significantly. For this, capacity at the two existing plants at Jian-guyin and Shenyang must be doubled and a new plant is also to be built. While the two existing plants are joint-ventures with the Chinese CBSC, Bekaert will retain 100% control of the new plant. Bekaert claims that the increasing demand for radial tyres for cars, in which steel cord is used, will make the investment more than profitable. Today Bekaert holds 40% of the Chinese steel cord market, and its goal is 50% (FF).

JOSSE ABRAMS • DE MORGEN • 10 MAY
Capco wins a contract for 72 million with Canadian bank

The contract should put the Flemish IT consultant and software developer for the financial sector back on the right track

The Flemish IT consultant and software developer for the financial sector, The Capital Markets Company (Capco), has won a contract for 83 million dollars (71.8 million euros) for the technological restructuring of a Canadian bank. It is the biggest contract ever entered into by Capco. The contract should put Capco back on the right track again. In 2002 the company made a loss of 40 million dollars (FF).

DE FINANCIËL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 13 MAY

The bank, the name of which cannot yet be made public, is automating the processing of its financial transactions, the back-office, as much as possible. The bank is spending some 200 million dollars on the project. Of this, Capco is getting 83 million dollars, spread over three years. The project is designed to cut the bank's costs by 40%. With several tens of thousands of employees, the bank is one of the biggest in Canada. The contract is the result of Capco's new strategy. The company wants to develop from a pure consultant and software developer into a full service provider for financial transaction systems. The new strategy is intended to put Capco back on the path of growth.

In 2002 turnover fell 46% to 60 million dollars. Staff levels were cut from 700 to 500. Several offices were closed. In Belgium, Capco centralised its activities in Edegem and the Wilrijk office was shut. As a result of the exceptional costs of the restructuring, the net loss grew from 29.5 million dollars in 2001 to more than 40 million dollars last year. Nevertheless, Managing Director Rob Heyvaert is reasonably optimistic for this year: 'In the first quarter we did well. The banks are investing again to fundamentally lower their costs structure. And we're profiting from this. During 2003 we will again reach break-even point.' Capco recently opened an office in the Indian city of Bangalore. According to Heyvaert, a great many western banks will move the processing of financial transactions to India. Capco's Indian office employs 50 people, but this number will double by the end of this year.

WWW.CAPCO.COM

Music publishers take teachers and schools to court

According to Semu, music publishers are missing out on around 40 million euros each year in copyright fees

Belgian music publishers have taken around seventy teachers and heads from music education to court. They want an end put to the mass copying of music scores for students. The publishers' administrative company Semu says it has long been open to a positive solution, but claims the Ministry of Education is being obstructive. The publishers had bailiffs assess the breaches in music academies, on the basis of which they are taking heads, schools and music teachers across the whole of Flanders to court. The Ministry of Education is warning that the teachers risk becoming the victims of the legal action (FF).

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'Since 1994 the authors of music scores or their publishers have been entitled to payment. Hofkens: 'But music academies copy the scores en masse for their students. The bailiffs we commissioned came across this on several occasions. Nor do the teachers concerned deny it. It's a plague, like the pirating of CDs. The difference is that this is being committed by civil servants.'

According to Semu, music publishers are missing out on around 40 million euros each year in copyright fees through illegal copying. 'For years we have been fighting against the copying of scores in music education. Initially we tried making people more aware of the situation. We entered into a protocol with the heads of the music academies, but it just got worse: the copying of scores has become the norm.'
**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.

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**Diary**

**MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE**

• 17 May to 1 June: L’amour des trois oranges by Seegok, Kasparyk, conductor: Balazs Kascar, director: Andreas Komoki; Flanders Opera, Antwerp; info: www.vlaamseopera.be

• Until 8 June: Revolution/Restoration - Paix, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be

• To 24 May: KunstFESTIVALdesArts, Brussels with Christoph Marthaler, Wim Vandekerckhove, El Periferico de los Objetos, Fedrico Leon, Transcinsquiurnal, Taiththeature, Berliner Ensemble, Ugo Kuyper, Daniel Veronez and many others, Brussels; Info: 070/222.199 www.kunstfestivaldesarts.be

• To 22 May: Ibrahim Ferrer, Vorst National, Brussels; Info: 0900/00991

• To 21 May: Therapy?, Botanique, Brussels; Info: 02/548.37.32

• To 23 May: Neil Young, Elisabethhzaal, Antwerp; Info: 0900/26060

• To 21 May: Jazz: Fred Hersch (piano) solo; PSK, Brussels; Info: www.bozar.be 02/507.84.44

• To 21 May: Chicha, concert (France/Palestina), Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; Info: www.zuiderpershuis.be

• To 23 to 25 May: Festival City Villages, Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; Info: www.zuiderpershuis.be

• To 23 May: Wannes Vandevande & L’alma & Anno Cordes (Flamenco), Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; Info: 02/548.24.24 www.ab-concerts.be

• To 22 May: Spaceways Incorporated (SA) and Zu (It), Jazz, De Vooruit, Ghent; Info: 09/267.24.24 www.vooruit.be

• To 23 May: Super Numeri (Ninja Tune, UK) De Vooruit, Ghent; Info: 09/267.24.24 www.vooruit.be

• To 25 May: The Symphonic Orchestra of Flanders conducted by David Angus with compositions by Shostakowitch, Hindemith and Canteloube, Concertgebouw, Bruges and De Bijloke, Ghent; Info: 09/267.24.24 www.vooruit.be

• To 23 May: EuphoricspieLei Knaapstraat 50, Brussels; reservation required

• To 22, 23 and 30 May: deFilharmonie conducted by Jacks Kasparyk, Nicola Luganski, piano with Pianoconcerto nr 2 by Prokoviev and Symphonic dances by Rachmaninov, PSK, Brussels, Bijloke, Ghent and Koningin Elisabethzaal, Antwerp; Info: 02/507.82.00 www.bozar.be 09/269.92.92 www.bijloke.be and 0800/21036 www.defilharmonie.be

• To 25 May: Soile Isokoski, Bo Skovhus, Mariati Vittasalao, Hugo Wolf Italienisches Liederbuch, PSK, Brussels; Info: www.bozar.be

• To 26 May: Dandy Warhols, Hallen van Schaik 24, 0900/26060

• To 30 May: Simply Red, Vorst National, Brussels; Info: 0900/26060

• To 31 May: Live, Vorst National, Brussels; Info: 0900/26060

• Up to 1 June: Anni Lennox, Elisabethzaal, Antwerp; Info: 0900/26060

• 3 June: Evan Dando, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; Info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be

• 8 June: Edward Nix, Wellington Hippodroom, Ostend; Info: 0900/26060

• 22 May: Khovanskchina by Modest Moussorgsky, conductor: Kazuhi Ono, De Munt, Brussels; Info: 09/267.33.39 www.demunt.be

• 22 and 23 May: Vladimir Ashkenazy and the Reykjavík Chamber Orchestra, Concertgebouw, Bruges; Info: www.concertgebouw.be; Info: 070/223.00 02/539.39.39 www.desingel.be

• 23 and 24 May: Gipsy Festival, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; Info: www.handelsbeurs.be

• 5 June: Collegium Vocale conducted by Philippe Herreweghe with JS Bach, missa brevis and stabat mater, Miniemenkerk, Brussels; Info: 09/267.99.99 www.bozar.be

• 27 to 29 May: Mxoli George Khumalo, LA, dance, Vooruit, Ghent; Info: www.vooruit.be 09/267.24.24

• 24 May: Ex Tempore/Il Gardellino with Florian Herzog, Zelenka, Fux, Bach, Händel, Telemann;

• 29 May: Lynne Dawson with English songs, Concertgebouw, Bruges; Info: www.concertgebouw.be; Info: 070/223.00

• 2 to 7 June: Final sessions of Queen Elisabeth competition for piano, PSK, Brussels; Info: www.bozar.be

**EXPO**

• From 22 March to 17 January: Jacques Brel, ‘The right to dream’, exhibition, Scheldenaaplaat, 30, Bruges; reservation required Info: www.scheldenaaplaat.be 02/511.10.20

• 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.eurcoture.be 02/513/29/84

• From 1 March onwards: The Groeninghjemuseum in Bruges reopened after facelift; Info: 050/44.67.12

• Until 25 May: Presents from the Muses (Greek exhibition linked to the Greek chairmanship of the Eurogroup U. irez). Royal Museum of Art and History, Jubelpark, Brussels; Info: 02/742.72.11

• Until 1 June: Horizons of reality, Russian contemporary Art, Muhka, Antwerp; Info: 03/238.50.60 www.muhka.be

• Until 31 May: Louise Bourgeois and Hans Op de Beeck, exhibition, Galery Xavier Hufkens, Brussels; Info: 02/639.67.30

• Until 9 June: Projects and objects, Claire Baille and Paul Ibens, exhibition, design museum Ghent; Info: 09/267.99.99 www.designmuseum.gent.be

• Until 30 August: 50 Years of Matchbox; Tokyo museum; Info: 015/55.70.75 www.speelegoudsmuseum.be

• Until 1 June: Social Housing, exhibition, PSK, Brussels; Info: 02/507.82.00 www.ps.kpb.be

• Until 28 September: 2003 Beaufort, Contemporary art in the dunes and on the beaches of the coastal towns, open air exhibitions with Jan Fabre, Wim Delvoye, Anne & Patrick Poirier, Dries Sopner, Henk Visch, Antony of Pop, Goethe-Institut Inter Nationes, Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: coastal.be

• Until 15 May: Raspberry festival, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be

• Until 28 September: Maritime in confrontation: Seascapes in painting, PAKM, Ostend; Info: 059/70/11/99 www.pakm.be

• Until 15 June: An arbitrary History, Cia Guo-Qiang, exhibition, SMK, Ghent; Info: www.smak.be

• Until 15 June: The City as loft, KCAP/AS TO/C/Keesa ready, exhibition De Singel, Antwerp; Info: 02/248.28.28 www.desingel.be

• Until 15 June: David Goldblatt, photographer, exhibition, PSK, Brussels; Info: www.bozar.be

• Until 24 May: Edward Lipski, Van Laere Contemporary Art, Verlatstraat, Antwerp; Info: www.artsite.be/ VANLAERE

• Until 14 September: Kin Moto na Brussel, exhibition by popular Congolese painters, City Hall, Museum for Central Africa (Tervuren); Info: 02/412.58.81 www.africa.ca

• Until 15 June: One century of Abstract art in Brussels and Wallonia, Botanique, Brussels; Info: 02/218.37.32

• Until 22 June: Gert Verhoeven, exhibition, Museum Dhoont-Dhaenens, Deurle; Info: 09/282.51.23 www.museumdtd.be

• Until 17 August: Fatal women 1860-1910, exhibition, KM SK, Antwerp; Info: 03/242.04.16 www.antenwerpen.be/culture/kmska