Flanders loses position as top region

Flanders remains a prosperous region with a gross domestic product of 24,357 euros per inhabitant, but lacks the dynamism of countries such as Ireland and Finland, or top regions such as Baden-Württemberg, Rhône-Alpes, Catalonia or Lombardy. Economically we live too much off the high productivity of workers and traditional industries such as car assembly or the chemical industry that have little potential for growth, and we have difficulty making the switch to the knowledge economy. The level of activity (table p.5) is also much too low and Flanders competes too much via price-fixing and not through the quality of its products. So says a report on Flanders’ ability to compete produced by a team from the University of Leuven headed by Leo Slevuagen and Koen De Backer for the Flemish Government. This report therefore concludes that the Flemish economy is in urgent need of an upgrade. Minister for Economic Affairs Patricia Ceyssens (VLD) presented the report as an ‘economic barometer’ and is suggesting remedies (FF).

The conclusion is that Flanders needs to ‘upgrade’ its economy. This will require a mix of measures, such as stimulating and evaluating entrepreneurship, greater innovation and a better translation of research results into commercial products and services. The government’s stifling regulations must also be tackled. But it is not only industry that needs upgrading; the lack of market forces in the blossoming service sector is also a major reason for the decline of the Flemish economy. ‘Many services that are becoming increasingly important in our consumer pattern (healthcare, education, communication) are still largely financed and coordinated by the government, without any market sense for what the consumer wants,’ states the report. The Flemish Economic Affairs Minister, Patricia Ceyssens, admitted that she wants to introduce trial projects to make Flemish government services, such as childcare and service flats, commercial export products. She will discuss this at the ‘strategy days’ soon to be held around Export Vlaanderen and the Flanders Investment and Trade (FIT) service. The minister also wants to discuss how Flemish government services, such as childcare and service flats, commercial export products. She will discuss this at the ‘strategy days’ soon to be held around Export Vlaanderen and the Flanders Investment and Trade (FIT) service. The minister also wants to discuss the credit accorded the Purple-Green government when it came to power in 1999 is great. The unwritten rule that a new government is given the benefit of the doubt and the first few months are overlooked before any conclusions are drawn suddenly appeared to no longer apply. As early as July resentment reared its head in the press when the Federal Government was sworn in. Was this to do with the abandonment of the Genocide Act, the prosecution before the Americans? With the fact that the Nationale Bank only published its poor economic figures after the elections? Or did the large number of new excellencies - whose main task consists of securing a place in the public eye with a view to on next year’s regional elections - play a part, the weekly magazine asks. Political talent is scarce, was the word at party headquarters, and must be used everywhere.

INTRODUCTION

It is remarkable how enthusiastically the new Purple government was received in the Flemish press, concludes Knack (3 September). The contrast with the credit accorded the Purple-Green government when it came to power in 1999 is great. The unwritten rule that a new government is given the benefit of the doubt and the first few months are overlooked before any conclusions are drawn suddenly appeared to no longer apply. As early as July resentment reared its head in the press when the Federal Government was sworn in. Was this to do with the abandonment of the Genocide Act, the prosecution before the Americans? With the fact that the Nationale Bank only published its poor economic figures after the elections? Or did the large number of new excellencies - whose main task consists of securing a place in the public eye with a view to on next year’s regional elections - play a part, the weekly magazine asks. Political talent is scarce, was the word at party headquarters, and must be used everywhere.

To the reasons for this resentment we can add: the vision of ‘governing’ on the other side of the linguistic border. This week Flemish newspaper commentators pulled out all the stops again when Civil Service Minister Marie Arena (PS) consigned the Copernicus reform of the federal administration of her Flemish predecessor Luc Vanden Bossche (SPA) to the waste bin in the French-language newspaper Le Soir. The Minister wants to put an end to a reform that pays top civil servants far too much, spent a fortune on private consultancy and assessments by private selection agencies and with which 80,000 federal civil servants are in the stops again when Civil Service Minister Marie Arena (PS) consigned the Copernicus reform of the federal administration of her Flemish predecessor Luc Vanden Bossche (SPA) to the waste bin in the French-language newspaper Le Soir. The Minister wants to put an end to a reform that pays top civil servants far too much, spent a fortune on private consultancy and assessments by private selection agencies and with which 80,000 federal civil servants are in their own words fed up. And yet a similar reform to create greater efficiency and better service - also implemented by Vanden Bossche - succeeded in the Flemish administration. According to De Standaard (4 September), by doing this the Minister is giving out the message that the administration is there for itself, not to serve the people and that the PS again wants to continue its political appointments in the civil service via the public recruitment service. Although Arena subsequently qualified all this and Premier Verhofstadt minimised her comments to ‘adjustments’ that could be found in the coalition agreement, De Morgen (4 September) cannot get rid of the impression that the reform was buried. Yet more evidence that Flanders and Wallonia are two different worlds, says the paper.
with social partners the VZW (non-profit organisation) structures within which the Flemish Government services sector is largely confined. This makes economic activation difficult. Ceyssens said that her policy would play the three Cs card: 'creativity, competitiveness and connectivity'. According to Ceyssens, creativity requires the stimulation of talent, technology and greater tolerance for entrepreneurs. She is aiming to improve competitiveness in the 'Action Plan for Entrepreneurs', in which the stimulation of risk capital and administrative simplification are central. With Flanders Investment and Trade she wants to manipulate markets more effectively. The minister is also attaching considerable importance to industrial processing and design. 'We must sell stories, not products.' Finally, Ceyssens translates connectivity into the importance of e-government.

www.ondernemenschap.be

### STANDARD OF LIVING EU-15, GDP/INHABITANT, 1995 AND 2001, EURO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>luxembourg</td>
<td>30.370</td>
<td>44.400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>denmark</td>
<td>20.810</td>
<td>27.360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>belgium</td>
<td>19.840</td>
<td>26.670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flanders</td>
<td>19.520</td>
<td>26.660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>austria</td>
<td>19.470</td>
<td>25.740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>germany</td>
<td>19.420</td>
<td>25.260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the netherlands</td>
<td>20.280</td>
<td>24.357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sweden</td>
<td>18.720</td>
<td>24.170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>italy</td>
<td>18.250</td>
<td>24.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>france</td>
<td>18.020</td>
<td>23.930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 european top regions</td>
<td>20.994</td>
<td>27.264</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### PUBLIC ENTERPRISES

Vande Lanotte wants to press ahead with reform of Post Office

Public Enterprises Minister, Johan Vande Lanotte (SPA), wants the Post Office to press ahead with its reforms. In a letter to the Chairman of the Board of Directors, Pierre Klees, he insists on an offensive corporate strategy, better service, a financially healthier structure and honest industrial relations. Currently the Post Office is on the defensive, staff is unhappy and the business is making a loss, according to the minister.

In concrete terms, Vande Lanotte wants the Post Office to urgently abolish its heavily criticised new tariff system with priority and non-priority stamps. The intention was that in accordance with the management agreement between the company and the government, 92% of post with priority stamps would be delivered the next day. However, last year the Post Office only achieved a figure of 83%. Vande Lanotte wants 95% of all letters to reach their destination the next day within three years. The investigation by consumer organisation Test-Achat also shows that the quality of service provided by the Post Office has declined sharply in recent years.

On 1 September negotiations began between trade unions and management on a new Collective Labour Agreement for the Post Office. But on 3 September the Christian ACV union walked out of these negotiations. They refuse to accept that the management is asking for holidays to be given up and that efforts are being made to combat the high level of absenteeism in the company in exchange for a pay increase of 1% and in increase in holiday pay for the 30,000 permanent civil servants.

With 42,000 members of staff, the Post Office is the country's largest employer.

www.depost.be
www.test-aankoop.be

### EXPORT AND TRADE

Flemish minister Ceyssens reorganises Flemish Export and Foreign Investment policy

FF EDITOR

The Flemish Economic Affairs and Foreign Policy Minister Patricia Ceyssens (VLD) unveiled her vision of export policy at the Flemish diplomatic days. Hundreds of trade attachés were there for an annual exchange of information. It immediately became clear that Ceyssens had slightly reorganised the policy of her predecessor, Jaak Gabriëls. The merging of the services Export Vlaanderen (export promotion of Flemish products) and Investeren Vlaanderen (investments by foreign companies in Flanders) into Flanders Investment and Trade (FIT) remains unchanged. But Ceyssens is no longer housing them in the ‘Huizen van de Vlaamse Economie’ ('Houses of the Flemish Economy'), as Gabriëls saw it, but in the Federal ‘Ondernemingsloketten’ (‘Entrepreneur Offices’), where, among other things, companies are assigned their trade number or to ‘other economic players’.

Ceyssens is calling for public-private co-operation, in which the FIT remains an external independent government service with the entrepreneur offices as the way in. In the FIT itself private organisations will be sit on the Board of Directors and therefore have a say in policy. The Houses of the Economy are mainly aimed at new entrepreneurs, who will be coached by some 150 highly qualified business consultants from VIZO (the Flemish Institute for Independent Entrepreneurship) and the Regional Development Authorities and form the spearhead of the policy to encourage entrepreneurship, according to Ceyssens in De Standaard (2 September).

www.ffio.be
www.export.vlaanderen.be
Few people and enthusiasm on IJzer Pilgrimage

The Christian Democratic CD&V had called on its members to stay away, because the event ‘has lost its credibility’

On Sunday 31 August the 76th Ijzer Pilgrimage, the traditional commemoration of the victims of the First World War, which for years has been seen as the most important gathering of the Flemish Movement, was held in Diksmuide. The press awaited the event anxiously, because last weekend the dissident right-wing Ijzer pilgrims had for the first time organised their own meeting in Steenstraete, near Ypres. That homage was christened the IJzerwake, and according to opponents was entirely dominated by the Vlaams Blok, which had laid on free buses for all involved. Four thousand people attended the IJzerwake. According to the organisers’ estimates, 7,000 were present at the Ijzer Pilgrimage, while the police put the figure at 2,700. The press puts it at 4,000. The new Chairman Walter Baeten gave his maiden speech there. Baeten succeeds Lionel Vandenberghe, who made the transition to politics and represents Spirit in the Senate.

A large number of Spirit politicians were present. From the N-VA there were party leaders too, but they did not appear in the front ranks, in protest against the Spirit politicians - they feel are all too loyal to the government. The Christian Democratic CD&V had called on its members to stay away, because the event ‘has lost its credibility’, according to CD&V Parliamentary Party Leader in the Flemish Parliament Eric Van Rompuy. He referred to ex-Chairman Lionel Vandenberghe, who last year at the IJzerbedevaart had condemned arms sales to Nepal, but this year as a Spirit Senator approved the regionalisation of granting export licences for arms (FF).

ISABEL ALBERS • DE STANDAARD • 1 SEPTEMBER

None out of ten, said the IJzerbedevaart Committee in July, is what Verhofstadt I deserves. At the time the organisation was extremely disappointed with the fact that in their opinion no Flemish demands had been met in the coalition agreement. Baeten did not put it so crudely in his maiden speech yesterday. The (previous) Verhofstadt government was even praised because it ‘has in principle propagated our desire for peace and stuck to its guns’ over the war in Iraq.

Naturally he called for more homogeneous packages of powers for Flanders (for juvenile penal law, road safety and social security) and the splitting of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde constituency. But at no point was the tone bitter. He complimented Norbert De Batselier (S.P.A) and called on ‘Flemish MPs of all parties, especially those who have shown solidarity with the Flemish Movement’, to show that they still stand by their ideals. Baeten does not like the fact that more and more politicians defend simultaneous Flemish and Federal elections. ‘The Flemish Government must not become a subsidiary of the Federal, and the Flemish Parliament a department of the Belgian.’ The mood at the Pilgrimage was quieter and more subdued than at the IJzerwake. Spirit itself was the most obviously represented political party. ‘I am not that concerned by how many people are here. The most important thing is that the concept of peace and further emancipation is demonstrated. The IJzerbedevaart does not belong to one or other political persuasion, but is a memorial to six million Flemings,’ said Flemish Minister Paul Van Grembergen (Spirit).

www.ijzerbedevaart.be

Opinions

GUY TEGENBOS • DE STANDAARD • 1 SEPTEMBER

Now that the IJzerbedevaart is free of the far-right, the message of tolerance and the multicultural variety of Flanders can ring out without interference and no longer be hindered by walls of mistrust of everything foreign. Can the IJzerbedevaart also speed up the process of change in the minds of Flemings and get across the idea that multicultural variety is a bonus and not a problem? There is therefore a chance to find a new fervour. And not only is the extension of the autonomy of Flanders an area for intervention, but also the implementation of this autonomy.

PAUL GEUDENS • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 30 AUGUST

No more good will come of the IJzerbedevaart, I fear. The crown jewel of the Flemish Movement has lost its lustre. The Pilgrimage was a thorn in the sides of Flemish politicians. A whip to force them to go further. It radiated moral authority. And that lasted as long as the IJzerbedevaart was apolitical. As long as the IJzerbedevaart Committee remained neutral. When that was given up it was the beginning of the end. It has always been the same story in recent years: put three people from the Flemish Movement together and within an hour they are arguing. This may well have meant that the IJzerbedevaart has a great past, but probably no future.

The Key Indicators of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) show that after the US, Belgium achieves the highest productivity per worker. In 2002 the Belgian worker produced 54,338 dollars worth of goods and services, while the American worker did somewhat better, with 60,728 dollars. But the Americans owe their position at the top primarily to the high number of hours worked each year. In 2002 this was 1,825, compared to only 1,559 in Belgium, 1,545 in France and 1,340 in the Netherlands.

In terms of productivity per hour worked, therefore, the average Belgian worker (34 dollars) scores higher than the American (32 dollars), but has to concede ground to the Norwegian (38 dollars) and the French worker (35 dollars). However, the growth in productivity is twice as high in the US as in European countries (2.2% compared to 1.1% in 2002). The Americans owe this to the wider spread of IT technology and the sharp rise of the services sector.

www.ilo.org
N-VA consigns cartel with CD&V to waste bin

The CD&V Chairman, Yves Leterme, is disappointed. He attributes the failure of the negotiations to internal divisions within the N-VA

The leaders of the Flemish-National N-VA party have rejected a cartel with the Christian Democratic CD&V. The party has been holding talks with the CD&V since mid-July on the possible formation of a cartel for next year's regional and European elections. For the N-VA party council, such a cartel was only possible if four conditions were met: that the party continued to exist as an independent party, that it could retain its manifesto, that major powers would be transferred to Flanders if the cartel became part of the Federal Government - set down in the five resolutions voted on in the Flemish Parliament in 1999 - and that the collaboration would strengthen it in terms of mandates. In the end the CD&V was unable to provide two guarantees: that the five resolutions would actually be adopted and that the Brussels list would also include the N-VA in its name. Negotiations on mandates also proved difficult, as it is still unclear whether the larger provincial constituencies, the electoral threshold and the system of successors will also be introduced next year for the regional elections. The CD&V Chairman, Yves Leterme, was disappointed. He attributes the failure of the negotiations to internal divisions within the N-VA. In recent weeks prominent N-VA members had given full vent to their displeasure about a possible cartel in the press. Some even threatened to resign (FF).

By their own admission, the N-VA struggled with the fact that the CD&V was not prepared to guarantee that the five resolutions would be adopted if it became part of a Federal Government. For the N-VA one particular stumbling block was that there could not be a cartel in Brussels with N-VA in its name. The CD&V Chairman, Yves Leterme, was not surprised: ‘We should have seen it coming. This summer the divisions within the N-VA appeared. They wanted to hide this, and so in the end didn’t have the courage to take the decision to form a cartel. They are now saying that the conditions for joining a Federal Government - the adoption of the five resolutions - were the stumbling block, but that’s not true.’ The manifesto also included a passage on the centre-field organisations. The Chairman of the Christian workers’ movement, the ACW, Jan Renders, feared that a merger of the CD&V and N-VA would force the formation to the right. He emphasised that the Flemish nationalists had always been highly critical of the centre-field. However, the CD&V Chairman, Yves Leterme, vouched personally for the collaboration with that centre-field. He guaranteed the social position of any cartel.

Opinion

Stefaan Huyssentruyt • De Financieel-Economische Tijd • 3 September

The Chairman of the N-VA, Geert Bourgeois, attempted to lay the blame for the failed joint venture on Monday evening entirely at the door of the Christian Democrats. But Geert Bourgeois is a bad liar. His explanation lacked cohesion. For CD&V Chairman Yves Leterme it was therefore not difficult to see through that explanation, negotiation documents in hand. Why did the N-VA chairman not simply admit that the party leaders were happy with the cartel, but that the local party chiefs and grass roots wanted nothing to do with it? To avoid losing face? Bourgeois made the best of a bad job in difficult circumstances. Had he not blown up the cartel discussions, the N-VA would most likely have flown into pieces. The realists among the party’s leaders lost out to the fundamentalists of the local party chiefs and grass roots. After the disappointing election results of 18 May the feeling had grown among party leaders that the part was too small and would most likely remain too small to survive, let alone ever be able to influence policy. But most in the party still feel that they must try and survive on their own. Because fundamentalists would rather die than add water to the wine of their absolute right.

Paul Geudens • Gazet van Antwerpen • 3 September

The N-VA will try life on its own in 2004. That is certainly brave, and testifies to much Flemish firmness of principle. But this was the easiest part. Now the real challenges begin. How will the party prove itself? Can it cope financially? Can it still have a political role of any significance? Is the N-VA still politically relevant after the 2004 elections? In an alliance with the CD&V the N-VA had been certain of at least five seats. Now the party will have to wait anxiously to see if it has any at all. Simulation calculations suggest that a cartel of the CD&V and N-VA would probably not gain many seats, but in the Flemish political landscape small shifts can lead to major changes, such as a different Flemish majority. Meanwhile, VLD bosses are breathing a sigh of relief. The new alliance would mainly have provided competition for the Flemish Liberals.

www.n-va.be
www.cdenv.be
Immigrant voting rights: VLD isolated within federal government

It was agreed in the coalition agreement that any party could table bills and that this would not be seen as a hostile act by the other parties.

After the Flemish SPA and Spirit and the Francophone PS, the Francophone Liberals of the Mouvement Réformateur are now also planning to table their own bill to grant local voting rights to foreigners who have been resident in Belgium for five years in 2006. By doing so, it has isolated its Flemish sister party the VLD in the government, since the VLD remains opposed to voting rights for non-European immigrants. It should come as no surprise that the VLD and MR are now going their separate ways. It was agreed in the coalition agreement that any party could table bills and that this would not be seen as a hostile act by the other parties in government. It is true that VLD Chairman De Gucht announced he would fight the bill in Parliament, but that battle appears lost before it has begun. After all, the Francophone Greens (Ecolo) and Christian Democrats (CDH) have already spoken out in favor of immigrant voting rights. This gives the bill’s supporters a broad majority of 84 of the 152 seats. The Francophone PS Chairman Elio Di Rupo threw the VLD’s problem into even sharper relief by demanding that Parliament vote on the matter this year. On the Flemish side the opposition CD&V, N-VA and obviously the Vlaams Blok are also opposed to immigrant voting rights along side the VLD. Any concession by the VLD to the government partners could therefore yield the opposition votes. In an interview with De Morgen (1 September), Premier Verhofstadt warns that there is no majority in Flanders for immigrant voting rights and that he will continue to defend the flexible acquisition of nationality (the Fast-Track Belgian Act) as an alternative. CD&V Chairman Yves Leterme launched the idea of offering foreigners dual nationality, so that they do not need to give up their original nationality if they wish to become Belgian (Gazet van Antwerpen, 30 August). For many immigrants the loss of their old nationality is a sensitive subject. Nevertheless, Leterme is continuing to call for a tightening of the Fast-Track Belgian Act (FF).

KOEN VIDAL • DE MORGEN • 30 AUGUST

De Gucht and his VLD will have to find a way of swallowing immigrant voting rights issue without losing too many voters on the right. To entice as many dissatisfied voters as possible away from the VLD, the joint Flemish opposition has already made its position clear. ‘Under no circumstances will we ratify the bills of the majority,’ said CD&V Chairman Yves Leterme. ‘As far as we’re concerned, immigrant voting rights can only be discussed if the Fast-Track Belgian Act is first tightened up. A naturalisation process must be built into the Act, and the period for investigating whether or not someone is a security risk must be extended.’ But even if the Fast-Track Belgian Act is tightened up, the CD&V will not simply ratify immigrant voting rights. ‘We believe that an immigrant can only participate fully in our society if he adopts Belgian nationality.’ The N-VA of Geert Bourgeois and the Liberaal Appel of Ward Beysen also stressed their opposition. Beysen: ‘What will be most important to the VLD? Keeping their electoral promise or holding on to power in the Federal Government?’ Geert Bourgeois (N-VA): ‘It is out of the question until the Fast-Track Belgian Act is abolished and voting rights are linked to compulsory naturalisation.’

Now that a Parliamentary debate on immigrant voting rights is inevitable, the VLD leadership will also have to ensure that mutiny does not break out in its ranks. For this reason, a close eye has been kept on the behaviour of the conservative VLD Senate faction. Both Parliamentary Party Leader Hugo Coveliers and Jeanine Leduc and Jean-Marie Deedecker have already flexed their muscles, unveiling a proposal to regionalise immigrant voting rights, because ‘opinions in Flanders and Wallonia are different’. Brussels VLD Minister Van Hengel opposed immigrant voting rights, mainly because that would gain new voters for the Francophone parties.

The VLD leaders will probable count on bills from the coalition partners differing too much in terms of content to allow a consensus to be reached. But if that fails it is highly likely the party will link immigrant voting rights to a tightening of the Fast-Track Belgian Act. ‘But then the immigrant will be the victim,’ say the VLD leaders. ‘If we further restrict access to Belgian nationality in exchange for the symbolic gesture of immigrant voting rights, few foreigners will see that as a step forward.’
Brussels: Flemish children no longer getting into Dutch-speaking schools

At a press conference Education Minister Vanderpoorten (VLD) presented several changes in primary education. The first is the introduction of one extra care co-ordinator in every primary school. These will provide extra care for children with individual learning difficulties such as concentration problems, dyslexia, etc. On 1 September the right to enrolment from the Equal Opportunities Decree also took effect. The Decree is intended to prevent schools barring immigrant or underprivileged children. However, in Brussels that has had an unexpectedly misplaced effect (FF).

GUY TEGENBOS • DE STANDAARD • 3 SEPTEMBER

Flemish parents who are unable to enrol their children in Dutch-speaking schools have exposed one of the negative consequences of the Equal Opportunities Decree for Flemish education. This prohibits schools from being selective. Those who turn up first must be enrolled first. Flemish schools in Brussels are extremely successful, partly due to the advertising campaigns that are being run for this education. They also attract many children of French-speaking parents.

Formerly schools kept places free for Dutch-speaking Brussels children, but the ministerial interpretation of the Equal Opportunities Decree prohibits this. Now it is ‘first come, first served’. As a result, many Flemish residents of Brussels who were a little late in going to enroll their children at Dutch-speaking schools in recent weeks were met by the sign ‘full’. How many this involves is not yet known.

Vanderpoorten said yesterday, in response to the actions of the parents, that she would examine a number of courses, including whether the schools concerned could perhaps give priority to children who had previously been enrolled in Dutch-language education in Brussels.

www.ond.vlaanderen

Poll reveals picture of motivated Flemish teacher

FF EDITOR

I 1 September was the first day at school for around 1.1 million Flemish pupils from nursery, primary and secondary education. For De Standaard it was an opportunity hold an extensive poll together with Le Soir and Grenz Echo of teachers in secondary education. This shows that Flemish teachers are satisfied with their salary, that they have the feeling they are valued by their pupils and colleagues and to a lesser extent by management and parents, but much less so by the rest of society. Nevertheless they also have quite a few complaints. Firstly about the masses of administrative paperwork they have to work through year after year. They are also unhappy about class sizes, old classrooms and insufficient computers. Obviously some pupils are also often the source of the dissatisfaction. They are tired of school, often cause trouble, drink alcohol or take drugs, are violent or disrupt lessons with the mobile phones.

In the poll by De Standaard, Education Minister Marleen Vanderpoorten (VLD) is reproached for having introduced too many changes. The Minister is aware of this and has now undertaken not to make any more new plans this school year, in which the elections for the Flemish Parliament will be held. Launching new plans now, which would create further uproar, would not be wise, she says in an interview in De Standaard (30 August). She is not too worried about scoring badly with teachers. Many of her measures will only have an effect in a few years, she points out and the opinion of parents and pupils was not sought. Nevertheless, the poll reveals an overall picture of a motivated, satisfied teacher.

Opinion

PETER VANDERMEERSCH • DE STANDAARD • 30 AUGUST

In general this poll does not reveal a picture of a carping and complaining teacher. Rather, of someone who is reasonably satisfied with his job and salary. Of someone who enjoys the respect of pupils, colleagues and management. Of a teacher who is still prepared to organise many unpaid activities. Who enjoys contact with young people, teaching skills and passing on knowledge. Almost nine out of ten Flemish teachers would - if offered the choice again - choose a career in teaching again. That is encouraging. The figure says a lot about the motivation of the people to whom we entrust our children. Precisely because of this it is striking that these people - who are motivated and can submit internationally valued results - enjoy too little respect from the society in which they function. This society owes them that respect. How should that be expressed? Not necessarily by tinkering with salary and pension conditions. But by having confidence in teachers and schools. These do not need political and administrative patronizing, but space for creativity and independence.

www.standaard.be/nieuws

### POLL: THE ADVANTAGES OF TEACHING (FLEMISH AND FRENCHSPEAKING TEACHERS IN %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>advantage</th>
<th>Flemish</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>contact with young people</td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>holidays</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teaching itself</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>passing on knowledge</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contact with colleagues</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### POLL: THE DISADVANTAGES OF TEACHING (FLEMISH AND FRENCHSPEAKING TEACHERS IN %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>disadvantage</th>
<th>Flemish</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>paper work</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marking work</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work pressure</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assessments</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meetings</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### PROBLEMS WITH PUPILS (FLEMISH AND FRENCHSPEAKING TEACHERS IN %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>problem</th>
<th>Flemish</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tiredness of school</td>
<td>88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use of drugs</td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use of mobile phone</td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pestering</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>violence</td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: DS-INFOMARK

---

**PROBLEMS WITH PUPILS (FLEMISH AND FRENCHSPEAKING TEACHERS IN %)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>problem</th>
<th>Flemish</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tiredness of school</td>
<td>88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use of drugs</td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use of mobile phone</td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pestering</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>violence</td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Govermnents continue talks in work groups

FF EDITORIAL TEAM

For the time being the Minister-Presidents of the Walloon Region and the Flemish Community, Jean-Claude Van Cauwenbergh (PS) and Bart Somers (VLD), seem disinclined to agree to the request of Federal Premier Verhofstadt (VLD) to cough up 340 million euros in 2004 to settle the Federal Government's financial position. Verhofstadt wants the Federal States to help get rid of 's national debt. Van Cauwenbergh, however, let it be known that Wallonia did not have any money to spare, and Somers immediately made it clear that the budgetary position of the Flemish Community allowed little room for manoeuvre either. Somers also claimed to have concluded from the talks that Wallonia is ready to collaborate constructively with Flanders towards a solution to the difficult Kyoto dossier.

No one was therefore surprised when the consultation committee failed to reach any sort of agreement on 3 September. Premier Verhofstadt offloaded the six sticking points (joint reduction of debts, examination of financial repercussion of coalition agreement for regional governments, Kyoto efforts, railway investments, compensation for municipalities for the loss of energy dividends, repatriation of foreign assets) onto work groups. An agreement has to be reached by 18 September at a meeting of the next consultation committee.

Crisis at the VRT news service

A small group of senior journalists informed the managing director that there was a 'confidence rift' with their editor-in-chief

The VRT news service is in crisis. It began with the move two weeks ago of Stef Wauters, anchorman of the VRT evening bulletin, to the main commercial competitor, VTM. Last weekend, deputy editor-in-chief Jan Ouvry tendered his resignation and shortly afterwards at an editorial meeting several journalists expressed their displeasure with the policy of the news service's editor-in-chief, Leo De Bock. This apparently involved a small group of influential journalists. They accused De Bock of not defending the editorial staff sufficiently before the VRT management, of not consulting with his journalists enough where important decisions were concerned and informed VRT's Managing Director, Tony Mary, that there was a 'confidence rift' with their editor-in-chief. On Monday 1 September Tony Mary intervened and De Bock drew his own conclusions. He tendered his resignation and Mary promised him another position within VRT. De Standard talks of a 'putsch' by a small group of journalists, given that most of the editorial staff had not noticed the conflict. In the Gazet van Antwerpen (3 September) an anonymous employee 'unmasks' 'star journalist' Siegfried Bracke as the brains behind the putsch. In any event, De Bock cannot attribute his resignation to bad viewing figures. Since he replaced Leo Hellemans at the head of the news service last year, his operation to modernise the news service ensured that VRT again became market leader for news programmes and since then has moved further ahead of its main competitor, VTM. Mary has now hastily recalled Hellemans to head up the news service on an interim basis (FF).

WALTER PAULI • DE MORGEN • 2 SEPTEMBER

According to the VRT news service, De Bock was the man from the top, more specifically from Director of Television Aimé Van Hecke, who saw in him the perfect editor-in-chief. The loss of Stef Wauters was the fatal spark, but there is no smoke without fire. Some members of his own editorial staff strongly resented the way De Bock handled the assessment of the reporting of the recent parliamentary elections. The TV editorial staff was proud of its work. There was less enthusiasm, even dissatisfaction, about the collaboration with the production house deMensen for the election show 'Bracke en Crabbé'. The high infotainment content was not appreciated very much and there was internal criticism of the commercial aspects of the collaboration. The editorial staff wanted to handle everything themselves for the Flemish elections (June 2004). De Bock took this request to the top, in other words to Director of Television Aimé Van Hecke, who swore by the aforementioned production house. Ouvry's resignation this weekend was the clearest signal of the revolt of the old guard in the editorial news staff.

While De Bock was still trying to pick up the pieces on 1 September, big wheel Siegfried Bracke organised the protest. It was an ultimatum: no more De Bock. The contact was Tony Mary, and he decided that it was time for action that was contrary to the thus far respected policy of Aimé Van Hecke: Leo De Bock is being sidelined and leadership of the news service is passing to the only person who can restore calm in the short term: Leo Hellemans.

But this has not happened without a conflict. Open conflict between the editorial news staff and its editor-in-chief who has barely settled into the job and a very real difference of opinion between the Managing Director Tony Mary and his Director of Television Aimé Van Hecke, who has not even been permanently appointed.
**Diary**

**MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE**

- **7 September:** TW Classic with Therapy, Simple Minds and The Rolling Stones, Werchter; info: www.twclassic.be
- **9 September:** The King’s Consort conducted by Robert King, The Coronation of George II by GF Haendel, St Baafs cathedral, Ghent; info: www.festival.be
- **10 September:** Tonhalle Orchester Zürich with Richard Strauss and Antonin Dvorak, PSK, Brussel; info: www.bozar.be
- **10 September:** Dambe Festival (Cameroon, Niger, Burkina Faso), Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
- **10, 12 and 13 September:** Alain Platel & Les Ballets C. dela B, Wolf (Wolfgang Mozart), De Vooruit and Flanders Opera Ghent; info: www.vooruit.be and www.vlaamseopera.be
- **10 to 17 September:** Meg Stuart/ Damaged Goods, Visitors only, dance, Kaaitheater, Brussels; info: 02/201.59.59 www.kaaitheater.be
- **10 en 11 September:** Marc’Antonio e Cleopatra by Hasse, Concerto Köln conducted by René Jacobs, De Munt, Brussels; info: 070/23.39.39 www.demunt.be
- **12 September:** On:to, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: 09/267.28.28 www.vooruit.be
- **13 September:** Opening of the Festival of Flanders (Old Gand) with House Music, Abida Parveen (Pakistan) Ekrem Ogur (Turkey), Phillip Catherine (Belgium), Mafaal Arnauth (Portugal), Harem Fasli (Turkey), Tambours de Gaetan (Turquie, Faso), Oulad Bambaara (Belgium – Morocco) Warner & Consort (The Netherlands) Don Fiasco (Belgium), Adesa (Ghana), Gamelan ensemble (Bali), Accord with Marco Beasley and Pino Di Vittorio (Italy), Enoch Arden (Belgium) Thérèse M’alengre (Belgium) Kontraste Köln (Duitsland) Savall Jordi (Spain), 2 generations Kuyken (Belgium) Ensemble Explorations with Roel Dietltiens and generations Kuyken (Belgium) Ensemble Arco Baleno Ensemble, Foyer Stadschouwburg, Bruges; info: www.westvlaanderen.be/brok
- **19 September:** Universum, Ernesto Arredel & Zounama Diarra (percussion), Magdadalenaza, Bruges; info: www.westvlaanderen.be/brok
- **20 September:** 50 years Django Reinhardt with Koen, Waso and Dajo De Cauter, Patrick Saussol and Daniel Colin, De Werf, Bruges; info: 050/33.05.29
- **20 September to 4 October:** Luisa Miller by G. Verdi, director: Guy Joosten, Flanders Opera, Antwerp; info: 070/22.02.02 www.vlaamseopera.be

**EXPO**

- **From 22 March to 17 January:** Jacques Brel, ‘The right to dream’, exhibition, Schildknaapstraat 50, Brussels; reservation required: info: www.jacquesbrel.be 02/511.10.20
- **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, Dnier Spoerri, Henk Visch, Antony Gormly and others; info: coastal tourist offices www.beaufort.be
- **Until 28 September:** Marines in confrontation: Seascapes in painting; Museum Dr. Guislain, Ghent; info: 051/40.11.52
- **Until 14 September:** Focus on Africa, exhibition, Open Air Museum Middelheim, Antwerp; info: 09/216.35.95 www.museumdrguislain.be 09/216.35.95
- **Until 28 September:** Searching for Utopia, exhibition by Jan Fabre, Het Zwarte Huis, Knokke-Heist; info: 050/61.35.65
- **Until 14 September:** Gelijk het Leven is (just like life), exhibition on 17 Locations in Ghent; info 09/221.17.03 www.smak.be
- **Until 14 September:** Hollywood near The Scheldt, exhibition, Cinema Roma, Antwerp; www.rata-planzwv.be
- **11 September to 30 November:** Urban Dramas, photo and film exhibition on urban life, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- **6, 7, 13 and 14 September:** Open air exhibition Art & Zwalm 2003 (south of Ghent), Flemish and Catalan artists; info: 09/360.65.20 www.kunst-en-zwalm.be
- **Until 2 November:** Fashion, evening and party dress, exhibition, CC, Knokke-Heist; info: 050/630.430

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.