Flemish Ministry-President Bart Somers (VLD) wants to submit Flanders’ candidacy for the organisation of the Olympic Games in 2016. Next week he will hold talks with the Belgian Olympic Committee. In the meantime, Minister for Sport Marino Keulen (VLD) is releasing 250,000 euros for a feasibility study. If this shows that Flanders is up to the task, it will put itself forward as a candidate in 2007. Officially applications must be submitted by a city, but according to Somers the whole of Flanders would de facto take part. Somers is aware that this decision must be supported not only by the political world, but also by the worlds of sport and business. It is a project with which he wants to put Flanders on the world map in the 21st century. But a project that will also involve an investment of billions. Flanders has little if any infrastructure that meets Olympic requirements. And a financial hangover cannot be excluded, something they know all about in Montreal (1986) and Barcelona (1992). The candidacy alone will cost a small fortune. London estimated this cost for 2012 at 18.4 million euros (FF).

STEVEN SOMERS • HET LAATSTE NIEUWS • 18 SEPTEMBER

Minister-President Bart Somers: ‘What do we need? A project for which we can combine economic, political, social and cultural strengths. There are few alternatives: if we want to remain a top economic region with six million Flemings we need such an ambitious project.’ Which city Flanders will put forward has not yet been decided. Somers: ‘One Flemish city cannot support this project. We will have to modernise and utilise the infrastructure of the whole of Flanders. In Barcelona 92 the organisation was also spread up to 100 km outside the city.’ Somers believes that Flanders can cope with such a massive investment. ‘We are talking about an investment that Flanders will ultimately recoup. Look at Barcelona: since 92 it has become an economic and cultural world city.’ The project is more than a city project. It is a project that will also involve the whole of Flanders. In Barcelona 92 the organisation was also spread up to 100 km outside the city.’ Somers believes that Flanders can cope with such a massive investment. ‘We are talking about an investment that Flanders will ultimately recoup. Look at Barcelona: since 92 it has become an economic and cultural world city.’ The project is more than a city project. It is a project that will also involve the whole of Flanders. In Barcelona 92 the organisation was also spread up to 100 km outside the city.’ Somers believes that Flanders can cope with such a massive investment. ‘We are talking about an investment that Flanders will ultimately recoup. Look at Barcelona: since 92 it has become an economic and cultural world city.’
Candidacy for Olympic Games 2016: the comments

FF EDITOR

The Olympic Games of 2016 are being welcomed with a fair degree of enthusiasm in all areas of Flemish society. In addition, the Flemish Government is assuming that it still has room in its budget for 500 million in additional expenditure in its last year of government. It can even achieve this without violating the budgetary standard of the High Council of Finance (Hoge Raad van Financiën, HRF), which imposes a surplus of 307 million euros on the budget. For that matter, the Flemish Government will achieve the HRF standard this year as well: a surplus of 324 million euros. This good news was announced by Budget Minister Dirk Van Mechelen (VLD) at the budget meeting of the Flemish Government on 14 September. Next year the 500 million extra will mainly be devoted to new policy initiatives to encourage economic recovery.

According to Minister Van Mechelen (VLD), in 2004 Flanders will benefit from a number of windfalls. Thus, fiscal capacity has risen. Flemings pay more tax to Flanders. This apparently involves some 63 million euros. In addition, the Flemish Government wants to realise several holdings to generate additional income. In 2004 the sale of shares in the Flemish Water Distribution Company (Vlaamse Maatschappij voor Watervoorziening, VMW), which was actually planned for this year, will have to provide around 75 million euros. The further ‘dismantling’ of the Regional Investment Company of Flanders (Gewestelijke Investeringsmaatschappij Vlaanderen, GIMV) is also intended to provide funds. And perhaps Flanders has other assets elsewhere that can be converted to cash.

On Sunday Van Mechelen had more good news at the budget meeting. In 2004 there will actually be 500 million euros more available than this year. But: most of that has already been earmarked for Collective Labour Agreement VI in education (81 million euros), for the welfare agreement, for the removal of waiting lists, etc. Which brings us straight away to the next good news. If Flanders actually wants to spend more on its employment policy, on innovation, research and development, then it needs more money. As a result all Flemish ministers have been told to make cuts. The occasional indiscretion has revealed that we are talking about more than 175 million euros. According to Van Mechelen, this does not involve ‘savings’ but ‘the restructuring of budgets to focus even more on employment’. On Friday 19 September Employment Minister Renaat Landuyt (SPA) wants to turn up at the Conference on Employment with a full purse. After all, as the Minister is aware, ‘who pays, decides’. People listen to those with money. Does this mean all additional Flemish funds will go to Renaat Landuyt? His colleagues have no need to worry. Education and Welfare will also provide additional employment, as the Flemish Government knows. And environmental technology is being given a prominent place in the innovation policy. In short: everyone will be considered even when it comes to dishing out the funds.

500 million policy margin for election year

The 500 million extra will mainly be devoted to new policy initiatives to encourage economic recovery

BART DOBELAERE

DE STANDAARD • 16 SEPTEMBER

According to Minister Van Mechelen (VLD), in 2004 Flanders will benefit from a number of windfalls. Thus, fiscal capacity has risen. Flemings pay more in personal income tax, which means the Federal administration must pass on more money from this personal income tax to Flanders. This apparently involves some 63 million euros. In addition, the Flemish Government wants to realise several holdings to generate additional income. In 2004 the sale of shares in the Flemish Water Distribution Company (Vlaamse Maatschappij voor Watervoorziening, VMW), which was actually planned for this year, will have to provide around 75 million euros. The further ‘dismantling’ of the Regional Investment Company of Flanders (Gewestelijke Investeringsmaatschappij Vlaanderen, GIMV) is also intended to provide funds. And perhaps Flanders has other assets elsewhere that can be converted to cash. On Sunday Van Mechelen had more good news at the budget meeting. In 2004 there will actually be 500 million euros more available than this year. But: most of that has already been earmarked: for Collective Labour Agreement VI in education (81 million euros), for the welfare agreement, for the removal of waiting lists, etc. Which brings us straight away to the next good news. If Flanders actually wants to spend more on its employment policy, on innovation, research and development, then it needs more money. As a result all Flemish ministers have been told to make cuts. The occasional indiscretion has revealed that we are talking about more than 175 million euros. According to Van Mechelen, this does not involve ‘savings’ but ‘the restructuring of budgets to focus even more on employment’. On Friday 19 September Employment Minister Renaat Landuyt (SPA) wants to turn up at the Conference on Employment with a full purse. After all, as the Minister is aware, ‘who pays, decides’. People listen to those with money. Does this mean all additional Flemish funds will go to Renaat Landuyt? His colleagues have no need to worry. Education and Welfare will also provide additional employment, as the Flemish Government knows. And environmental technology is being given a prominent place in the innovation policy. In short: everyone will be considered even when it comes to dishing out the funds.
Banks see signs of economic recovery

There seems to be an end in sight to the gloomy economic forecasts. The Belgian Bankers Association (Belgische Vereniging van Banken) carried out a survey of five banks (Dexia, KBC, Fortis, ING België and De Groof) which shows that this year the Belgian economy is expected to grow by 0.8% and next year by as much as 1.9%. Not only is the international economic climate on the up, pretty much all Belgian indicators also paint a hopeful picture. Nonetheless, only a small number of new jobs will be created next year, according to KBC chief economist Edwin De Boeck, speaking on behalf of his colleagues. Due to the increase in size of the working population, unemployment will also rise from 7.9 to 8% and the government will have to save one billion euros to balance next year’s budget, he fears (FF).

LUC COPPENS
DE STANDAARD • 17 SEPTEMBER

For corporate investments the tide has now clearly turned, says Edwin De Boeck of KBC Asset Management. Last year they fell by 4%, but this year a rise of 1.9% is expected. Consumption is also getting back on track. This year private individuals will spend an estimated 1.4% more than in 2002. Last year it was 0.6%.

Conversely, among other things, the strong euro will force net exports down this year by an estimated half of 1%. On balance the Belgian banks therefore expect that economic growth in our country will remain limited to 0.8% this year. But in 2004 we will all probably produce 1.9% more than the previous year. In particular consumption, which will grow by 2%, will have to make a major contribution here. Just like exports for that matter, which thanks to an average euro rate of 1.18 dollars is likely to make a positive contribution of 0.3%.

But De Boeck is also warning that growth will not be enough to rapidly improve the situation in the job market. As always this will only react slowly. With a deficit of 0.6% this year and 0.1% next year the government will not achieve its budgetary objectives in either year, conclude the Belgian banks’ economists.

Flemish business leaders see only 20,000 extra jobs

High wage costs, poor economic climate, the failure to find suitable candidates, social legislation and bureaucracy are harmful for employment.

In the run-up to the Conference on Employment VOKA, the joint venture between the Flemish Employers Federation (Vlaams Economisch Verbond, VEV) and the Flemish Chambers of Commerce, had a survey carried out of around 1,400 businesses on their expectations as regards employment. After extrapolating the research data the VEV reached the conclusion that barely 21,000 additional jobs will be created in Flanders by the end of 2004. VOKA also asked its member businesses what factors were harmful to employment. High wage costs, poor economic climate and to a lesser extent the failure to find suitable candidates, social legislation and bureaucracy, it appeared. The businesses questioned therefore feel that the government must firstly reduce wage costs and the tax burden, and encourage flexibility and a willingness to work. The government also has to tackle moonlighting, they feel, as this creates unfair competition between businesses. Based on this survey the VEV drew up its own 2 x 3-job plan with measures at Federal and Flemish levels, in each case in three strategic areas. The VEV sent its plan to the Association of Belgian Businesses (Vereniging van Belgische Ondernemingen, VBO) because it has not been invited to the Federal Conference on Employment, that starts on Friday 19 September (FF).

MARK DEWEERDT • DE FINANCIEEL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 16 SEPTEMBER

Employers expect the Federal Government to do something about cutting labour costs. Compared to in neighbouring countries, Belgian firms pay 6 billion euros too much in social security contributions, says the VEV. In addition to the rapid and unconditional introduction of the promised cut in employer’s contributions, the VEV is pressing for social security contributions to be halved and social security contribution limits to be reintroduced for employees. Of 30,000 employees who are involved in research and development and who are vital to the innovation and growth of the economy, the employer’s contribution must be reduced to 25%. A cut in the VAT rate from 21 to 6% in labour-intensive sectors such as construction and hotels and catering could create a lot of work, says the VEV. Employers want to make employment more flexible with a second Federal lever. Among other things, they are calling for the introduction of a credit of 150 overtime hours per employee per annum that do not need to be recuperated, but are paid to the employee as extra hours. In addition, the VEV wants tempting to be treated as regular employment and office employees to be able to become ‘economically unemployed’ just like workers in the event of temporary difficulties. Finally, the VEV is calling for the abolition of the Rosetta career plan. The first Flemish lever is the public-private collaboration to provide support for the unemployed. Training on the shop floor must receive the same support and recognition as formal, classic training, says the VEV. They expect the Flemish Government to abolish minor burdens such as taxes on power, mill rate and to make it easier to dispose of wastewater. Finally, the VEV is asking the government to take measures to stimulate creativity.

www.vev.be

AMOUNT OF DOMESTIC WASTE DIMINISHES IN FLANDERS (KILOS/INHABITANT)

SOURCE: DE MORGEN
Federal agreement on fiscal regularisation

After weeks of discussions the government has now reached an agreement on fiscal amnesty for Belgians who have stashed their money abroad to avoid paying taxes. Throughout 2004 they will be able to repatriate their capital at the penalty rate of 9%. If they invest it in the Belgian economy straight away for three years, the fine will drop to 6%. These rates are the result of a compromise. Financial Affairs Minister Didier Reynders (MR) had initially proposed 3%, but that was unacceptable to the Socialists on ethical grounds, while Reynders himself felt the rate of 10%, which the Socialists wanted to ask for was too high. Only foreign assets that were abroad before June 2003 are eligible for fiscal regularisation - officially the repatriation is known floridly as 'the one-off discharging return'. The tax administration will not be involved in the operation, the banks all the more so. They will guarantee the 'confidential nature' of the operation via banking secrecy. However, the rules against laundering will still apply. If the banks see suspicious transactions or suspect that the money is of criminal origin, they must report this to the Financial Information Unit (Cel voor Financiële Informatie, CFI), the anti-laundering unit. Belgians who repatriate their capital in 2004 can avoid the heavy fines that will apply as of 2005. That is when the European Savings Directive will take effect, as a result of which European countries will pass information on Belgian savings to the Belgian taxman. For the time being Luxembourg, the fiscal paradise of many a Belgian, is not implementing the Directive, but is introducing an advance levy, which may be as much as 35%, half of which will be handed over to the saver's country of origin. Minister Reynders expects the operation to provide with the treasury between half and one billion euros (FF).

Opinion

STEEFAN HUYSENTUYT
DE FINANCIEEL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD
13 SEPTEMBER

The operation is not primarily aimed at the 'grey shrimps', the small savers who have avoided their advance levy. The operation is primarily concerned with the 'black scampi', the big boys and girls who have stashed a load of black money abroad. However, the rate of 3%, that would apply if someone reinvested black money from his own business in his company, was scrapped. Officially this was done because confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in such cases. In reality a number of members of the inner cabinet found this to be an all too crude form of distortion of competition. It would mean that someone who was guilty of unfairly competing with illicit work against kosher businesses could further remove such businesses from the competition by repatriating his illicit profits that were repatriated at a rate of 3%. The operation must also not serve to help laundering criminal money, the inner cabinet argues. To prevent this, the banks must play police and report all suspicious amounts entering the country to the Financial Information Unit (Cel voor Financiële Informatieverstrekking, CFI). But how this will be achieved in practice is not yet clear. It is also doubtful whether this practice will be sufficiently watertight. Neither the banks nor the CFI are equipped to adequately control the returning capital if the operation is a success. Overly strict controls would also mortgage the success of the operation in advance, since the candidates for repatriation would be scared off. In the meantime, the prudent man who has always been happy to render unto Caesar what Caesar is due is being asked to show a little pragmatism. The returning capital is intended to breathe new life into our economy. Furthermore, and this involves the government first and foremost, the national treasury will receive a further boost in these perilous budgetary times. In short, even in spending this money, nobody has been forgotten, brought the dispute to the surface again.

Socialists focus on initiatives against tax fraud

CD&V Chairman Yves Leterme finds it unacceptable that money on which no income tax or social security contributions were paid is only being taxed at 9%. He is proposing rates of at least 15 to 30%. Belgians who have paid their taxes correctly are being made to look fools, he feels. He is therefore proposing that 'Belgians' who have correctly paid their capital transfer taxes and death duties over the past five years should receive compensation. He is also proposing to lower these capital transfer taxes and death duties. The trade unions have also reacted negatively to the fiscal regularisation. The Socialist trade union ABVV calls the ruling unethical and is pressing for accompanying measures to tackle tax fraud. According to the Chairman of the Christian ACV union, Luc Cortebeeck, it is 'a slap in the face for all those who try honestly to set aside the odd cent through hard work.' SPA Party chairman Steve Stevaert is not 'proud' of the agreement on fiscal regularisation, but in his own words he would rather use the money to 'create jobs' than increase taxes or reduce allowances. The Flemish Socialists point out that the agreement also contains a number of initiatives for tackling tax fraud. They will be transposed into law at the same time as the fiscal regularisation.
Turbulent start to new political season

Score and create a profile are the watchwords

The new political year has begun chaotically. This year the usual interviews produced a remarkably large number of swipes directed at the coalition partners. The Purples seem well on their way to organising their own opposition. At the same time the new ministers in the government are flying one kite after another, proposals that are being made public on a trial basis and will mostly be immediately shot down by another party in the government. Other ministers are launching plans without any prior consultation with colleagues. Chairman of the Flemish Liberals, Karel De Gucht (VLD), is being more pugnent than ever; he took a swipe at Civil Service Minister Marie Arena (PS) when she buried the reform of the Federal Administration in her first interview. Public Enterprises Minister Johan Vande Lanotte (SPA) was warned that he should not interfere with the management of the Post Office and the National Railways. He advised Transport Minister Bert Anciaux that he would be better off dropping his idea of introducing a 30 km/h speed limit in town centres as quickly as possible. The Flemish Socialists in turn gave the Liberal Minister for Economic Affairs Fientje Moereman (VLD) a real roasting when she proposed buying clean air from abroad to allow Belgium to meet the Kyoto standards. And Employment Minister Frank Vandenbroucke (SPA), is warning Premier Verhofstadt (VLD) to be firmer in his leadership of the government. But whether that has much effect remains the question. We are nine months away from the next elections. Score and create a profile are the watchwords. Will there actually be much governing at all? Commentators are divided (FF).

WALTER PAULI • DE MORGEN
13 SEPTEMBER

The prospect of the regional elections in 2004 looks like reducing the Federal Government’s first year to a promotional tour to win voters’ hearts. And so it looks as if every minister and every party in government has the job of scoring well and quickly. But it is not just about the ‘public relations’ of this policy. It is about the government itself: a poor coalition agreement, a very average government policy statement. Verhofstadt II has no goal, no enthusiasm, no cohesion and thus far no coherent policy. The reason: Verhofstadt II is a government without a genuine political project. The Liberals are shamelessly liberal, the PS openly Walloon-socialist and SPA-Spirit wants to be the most likeable party in Western Europe.

ERIC DONCKIER • HET BELANG VAN LIMBURG • 13 SEPTEMBER

Every year in September there are promises and provocations. After which the papers write that the political autumn will be particularly hot. This year is not different, except that there are even more of them. On top of this, we have a new government and new ministers. These are still preoccupied with staking out their territory and so are marking every bollard like puppies. And no one is stopping them, certainly not the Prime Minister. Guy Verhofstadt has a reputation for leading his government with soft hands. And there’s more. Such as the fact that the Liberals and Socialists balance each other out perfectly in this government. Agalev and Ecolo are out of the frame. It is no longer possible to pass the buck onto the Greens in discussions. The Liberals and Socialists are now the same size. Who should listen to whom? And then there is obviously the clear lack of funds. If there were problems between the coalition partners in the previous government, then these were bought off - certainly in the first two years of the term. Score and let score, it was called. That is no longer an option, and in some cases savings even have to be made.

Drawing up the 2004 budget will be the first serious test. It is not expected that this will derail discussions straight away. There are elections next year, and the parties are already busy with their preparations. Internally and in their positioning towards each other. Belgian political history teaches us that parties that bring down a government in the run-up to the elections are never rewarded for it. The Liberals and Socialists are therefore not inclined to let the government fall. Which does not take away the fact that the bickering between coalition partners will continue right up to the elections. Remaining or becoming the biggest is what is at stake.
**ECONOMY**

**Companies**

**Katoen Natie takes over Werf&Vlasnatie**

The logistics group Katoen Natie is strengthening its position in the Port of Antwerp by taking over Werf&Vlasnatie (WVN, turnover 20 million euros). When the shareholders Mercator and the Regional Investment Company of Flanders (Gewestelijke Investeringsmaatschappij Vlaanderen, GIMV) decided to get rid of their holdings of 26% each, WVN was faced with investment plans for 10 million euros and was eying international expansion.

Too much at once, according to WVN managing director Rudy Denutte. WVN therefore opted to join the international group Katoen Natie. According to the boss of Katoen Natie, Fernand Hut, WVN complements KTN’s activities. Katoen Natie has some 100 logistics platforms for petrochemicals, the car industry, basic products and consumer goods in 22 countries and this year is targeting a turnover of 600 million euros (FF).

**Marc de Roo • de Financieel-Economische Tijd • 17 September**

IFernand Hut's: 'WVN is active in storage, packaging and shipment for the petrochemicals industry and fine chemicals. In the Port of Antwerp WVN is mainly active on the right bank, while we are on the left bank.

WVN is a fine company, which invested 32 million euros in warehouses and silo batteries in five years. We will continue the commercial policy and continue to invest. A strong home base can only help further internationalise KTN. The name WVN will stay, as will the 170 employees and the management.' In 1994 WVN was taken over by Zuidnatie, which put it up for sale again in 1999 because it wanted to concentrate on stevedoring and distribution. There followed a management buy-out by General Manager Rudy Denutte, who together with management acquired 40% of the capital. The GIMV and Mercator each paid 1 million euros for 30%. Their interest subsequently fell to 26% each. After the management buy-out WVN resolutely played the logistics card, in imitation of the (much larger) Katoen Natie. Denutte, who was brought in by Zuidnatie to WVN get back on its feet, earned his manager’s spurs at KTN and is now returning as a member of KTN’s management committee.

www.portofanterp.be
www.katoenatie.com

**Action against uninsured drivers**

**FF Editor**

An estimated 100,000 people are driving around Belgium without insurance. They are involved in an average of 25 accidents a day. The damage they cause is paid for by the Joint Motor Guarantee Fund (Gemeenschappelijk Motorwaarborgfonds), to which all drivers who are insured pay a contribution. To clamp down on the phenomenon of the uninsured driver, the Motor Guarantee Fund has decided to compare the databases of the Vehicle Registration Centre (Dienst Inschrijving Voertuigen) with the insurance companies’ data. In the first three months of 2003 alone, 3,200 uninsured drivers were detected. These were immediately sent a reminder. Anyone who failed to react received a registered reminder and the details of drivers who still did nothing after these two reminders are passed on to the police. In some police districts this results in a ban and a fine, in others in the car being impounded, reports Het Laatste Nieuws (17 September).


**VTM contracts slow down growth of profits at Roularta**

**FF Editor**

In the first six months of 2003 Roularta Mediagroep, whose publications include the magazines Knack, Trends and the free local paper De Streekkrant and which is the main shareholder in the commercial TV channel VTM, recorded returns of 7.5 million euros compared with a loss of 2 million euros over the same period last year. Operating profits (EBIT) rose by 5.5%, while those from free papers fell by 8%. Both the commercial channel and the one of Biblo will provide not only extra turnover but also a guaranteed EBIT margin of at least 10%, ensures Roularta boss Rik De Nolf.

www.roularta.be
Epo cannot yet be detected in urine in Flanders

Flemish Sports Minister Marino Keulen (VLD) wants unannounced checks - including outside the racing season and during training - and the taking of blood samples to be made possible again.

According to Keulen, these measures will make the detection of doping more efficient and the tightened controls will apply to both amateurs and professional athletes. Professor Delbeke from the world-renowned doping lab at the University of Ghent (certified by the IOC, UCI, IAAF and the Flemish Community) claims, however, that investments must first be made in equipment for detecting EPO in urine (FF).

Minister Keulen (VLD) wants intensifying the fight against doping. The media attention, which the doping investigation centred on vet Landuyt received (see FF 30), in which, among others, professional cyclists Johan Museeuw and Jo Planckaert are involved, has shown that more thorough checks are necessary. Keulen wants unannounced checks - including outside the racing season and during training - and the taking of blood samples to be made possible again, allowing EPO to be detected. To this end he wants to modify a decree on medically sound sports from 1991. According to Keulen, these measures will make the detection of doping more efficient and the tightened controls will apply to both amateurs and professional athletes. Professor Delbeke from the world-renowned doping lab at the University of Ghent (certified by the IOC, UCI, IAAF and the Flemish Community) claims, however, that investments must first be made in equipment for detecting EPO in urine (FF).

War at VRT summit, a present for VTM?

The appointment question has ended up in a media war between the commercial channel and the public broadcasting company.

The shuffling continues at the public broadcasting company VRT. After the dispute over the editor-in-chief of the news service - who finally tendered his resignation - the appointment of the new general manager for television is now at issue. VRT Managing Director Tony Mary continues to support the only candidate of current Acting Director Aïmé Van Hecke. His politically composed Board of Directors is refusing to follow him because Van Hecke is unable to shrug off the suspicion of combining interests. Specifically, his wife runs a business that provides advice on sponsoring and event marketing, also for the public broadcasting company. This is the second time Van Hecke's candidacy has been rejected by the Board of Directors. But Mary continues to stubbornly refuse to propose other candidates. De Morgen sees the attitude of the Board of Directors as a repudiation of Mary himself. According to this paper, ‘insiders’ are maintaining that the jobs of both Mary and Van Hecke are in the balance. Van Hecke is generally viewed as the great strategist behind the successful VRT programming, that succeeded in beating the commercial competitor VTM with a cunning profiling of the popular TV1 and the quality network Canvas. De Standaard, on the other hand, claims that the appointment question has ended up in a media war between the commercial channel and the public broadcasting company (FF).

The Board of Directors is fighting a minor war with Tony Mary. Mary was too keen in pushing Van Hecke forward as his candidate several months ago. The Board felt it had been overlooked and blew the whistle on Mary. Awkwardly, Mary continued to stand obstinately by his candidate. This led to an impasse. Mary is refusing to put forward other candidates. The Board is accusing Mary of turning a deaf ear. The friends of commercial channel VTM have every reason to stir up the growing malaise at the public broadcasting company. (…)

The appointment question has ended up in a media war between the commercial channel and the public broadcasting company. (…)

Opinion

Peter Vander Meersch
De Standaard • 17 September

The Board of Directors is fighting a minor war with Tony Mary. Mary was too keen in pushing Van Hecke forward as his candidate several months ago. The Board felt it had been overlooked and blew the whistle on Mary. Awkwardly, Mary continued to stand obstinately by his candidate. This led to an impasse. Mary is refusing to put forward other candidates. The Board is accusing Mary of turning a deaf ear. The friends of commercial channel VTM have every reason to stir up the growing malaise at the public broadcasting company. (…)

In a remarkable press and lobby operation the story is being kept warm that Van Hecke is combining interests. It does not benefit the VTM if VRT television is headed up by a professional. (…)

With their separate bunglers the VRT - both the Board of Directors and the Managing Director - are presenting a fantastic present to the commercial broadcaster VTM. After the anchorman and the editor-in-chief of the news service it is now the turn of the strategist and perhaps even the Managing Director to leave the building.

www.vrt.be
**Diary**

**MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE**

- **20 September to 4 October**: Luisa Miller by G. Verdi, director: Guy Joosten, Flanders Opera, Antwerp; info: 070/22.02.02 www.vlaamseopera.be

- **23 September**: Hudson Wayne/Stepani-da Borisova & Pavel FAJT, DJ Kira-Kira, Avant Etoiles Polaires, Festival about polar regions (Canada, Iceland, Lapland), De Vooruit, Ghent; info: 09/267.28.28 www.vooruit.be

- **26 September**: Simon Halsberge, Boys and their toys, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: 09/267.28.28

- **23 en 24 September**: Muziek Lod, Beethoven Academie, Dreamtime, Claron McFadden, Jacqueline Blom, The orchestra conducted by Ton Koopman, Anima Eterna, Collegium Vocale conducted by Philippe Herreweghe with compositions by Schütz and Brahms, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be, www.festival.be

- **23 September**: Bitches Brew/Tacoma, Resas and DeMunt, dance, with music by Myles Davies, CC Hasselt; info: 011/22.99.33

- **24 September**: Orchestre des Champs-Elysées, Collegium Vocale conducted by Philippe Herreweghe with compositions by Schütz and Brahms, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be, www.festival.be

- **24 September**: Eavesdropper & Alex Waterman (cello), Katholieke Hogeschool, Mechelen, www.festival.be

- **24 and 25 September**: Anima Eterna and Jos Van Immerseel with compositions by Franz Liszt, Concertgebouw Bruges and De Singel Antwerp; info: www.concertgebouw.be and www.desingel.be (03/248.28.28)

- **24 to 26 September**: Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui & Capilla Flamenca – Les Ballets C. de la B., Foi, dance, De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be (03/248.28.28)

- **29 September**: Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra conducted by Ton Koopman, Concertos for harpsichord by JS Bach, Flanders Opera, Ghent; info: www.vlaamseopera.be

- **30 September**: Maximal BlINDman with Walter Hus, Thierry De Mey, Peter Vermeersch, Eric Slechim & BlINDman Quartet & Jean-Paul Dessey, Flagey, Brussels; info: www.flagey.be

- **Until 28 September**: The nights of the Botanique with Tom M Cr Rae, Elysian Fields, Ed Harcourt, Killion Joke, Tuxedo-Moon, Zuco 103 and many others, Botanique, Brussels; info: www.botanique.be

**EXPO**

- **From 22 March to 20 September**: Jacques Brel, 'The right to dream', exhibition, Schildeknaapstraat 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, Dnie Spoerri, Henk Visch, Antony Gormley and others, info: coastal tourist offices www.beaufort.be

- **Until 28 September**: Marines in confrontation: Seascapes in painting; PMMK, Ostend; info: 059/70/11/99 www.pmmk.be

- **Until 28 September**: Jan Fabre, Searching for Utopia, exhibition, Zwart Huis, Knokke; info: 050/61.36.65

- **Until 9 November**: Guided by Heroes, exhibition, Z33, Hasselt

- **Until 18 December**: The museum evenings, every Thursday; www.museumverening.be

- **Until 26 October**: Maya-textile, mirror of a world vision, etnographical museum, Antwerp; info: 03/220.86.00

- **Until 9 November**: L’Amour toujours, Wedding pictures from the 20th Century in Antwerp, Museum van Volkskunde, Antwerp; info: 03/248.15.77

- **Until 28 September**: Searching for Utopia, exhibition by Jan Fabre, Het Zwarte Huis, Knokke-Heist; info: 050/61.35.65

- **Until 11 September 2003**: Noıer, Fashion, evening and party dress, exhibition, CC, Knokke-Heist; info: 050/630.430

- **Until 28 March**: Genovanversaceverse, exhibition about Fashion, Antwerp and Genova, Fashion Museum, Antwerp; info: 03/470.27.70 www.momu.be

- **Until 9 November**: John Isaacs (UK), exhibition with sculptures, installations and video-shows, CC, Bruges www.west-vlaanderen.net/brok

- **19 to 28 September**: Eurastricta Antwerp, antiques fair, Bouwcentrum, Antwerp; info: www.eurastricta.be

- **Until 29 February**: Vietnam, Art and culture from Prehisotrian times to today, exhibition, Royal Museum of Art and History, Jubelpark, Brussels; info: www.kmg-mrah.be

- **3 October to 11 January**: Europalia, Italy: a particular Renaissance, Ferrara and the dukes of Este, exhibition, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be

- **Until October**: Master prints: 6 centuries of engravings (150 pieces by Rembrandt, Goya, Picasso, Henry Moore and many others), exhibition, De Markten, Brussels; info: 02/512.34.25