European port directive voted down

On 20 November the European Parliament voted down the European port directive. All but two of the Belgian MEPs voted against, together with the entire Green group and the bulk of the socialist group. The vote was cause for celebration in union circles. After all, Flemish dock workers played a leading role in opposing the directive, which put the future of the Belgian ‘Law Major’ at risk. According to the directive, which contemplates a liberalisation of services, the crews of ships would henceforth also be able to load and unload ships in European ports. The Law Major stipulates that this may only be done by recognised dock workers. However, MEPs warn that in the long term the matter has not yet been resolved and that urgent work has to be done to reconcile the Belgian law with the European rules. State Secretary for Labour Organisation Kathleen Van Brempt (SPA), who at the time helped organise the opposition in the European Parliament, promised to work on this. There was also palpable relief in Antwerp's Port Authority (FF).

MARC BALDUCK • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 21 NOVEMBER

The concern over a possible abolition of the Law Major has hung over the ports for weeks. But what now? Has the matter now been settled? No, warn a great many insiders. The issue has been taken off the agenda for the time being, but a number of parties or groups might well bring the matter before the local or European courts. They can continue to maintain that free competition in the ports is not being respected. Moreover, there are also negative aspects. In the port directive, pilotage services were temporarily protected. That is now no longer the case. A company can present itself in any port whatsoever and submit an application for the pilotage of ships. Eddy Bruyninckx, director-general of the Antwerp Port Authority: 'We are relieved because peace can be restored to the industrial relations. Previously we had a cast-iron reputation in that field, but that has been harmed by the actions of the last few months. It is good that we can guarantee the shipowners a good atmosphere once again. We hope that the problems in the ports between the companies and employees will be resolved again. The European politicians do not have to get involved. We are better placed to find practical solutions to concrete problems ourselves'.

WWW.PORTOFANTWERP.BE

INTRODUCTION

The Vlaams Blok had a stirring week. First the voting right for immigrants was approved in the proper Senate committee, despite the Blok MPs’ opposition. The MP in the obstructionist policy against the bill and despite the very expensive poster campaign with which the extreme right-wing party has been ‘adorning’ the streets of Flanders and Brussels for some weeks now. The next day the Blok had to digest a judgement given by the Court of Cassation. The Court ruled that the racism complaints against the party’s non-profit-making organisations cannot be classified as political offences as the Brussels Court of Appeal had ruled in February. Therefore the proceedings have to be repeated. And next week will probably see the vote on a bill tabled by PS parliamentary party leader Eerdekens, under the terms of which parties that henceforth defend cases violating the European Treaty on Human Rights may lose their allocation. A complaint from a third of a committee, which is ratified by a ruling from the Council of State, will be enough to bring this about. Reactions in the Flemish press were divergent. As always, the key question is whether the Blok problem should be tackled on principle or strategically. De Morgen (19 November) reckons that in principle it is good that the proceedings have to be repeated, because the Court of Cassation is urging for a judgement on the merits, while the courts that were entrusted with the case simply passed on the matter to the Court of Appeal. The Vlaams Blok (De Morgen, 20 November), on the other hand, feels that you do not keep a party like the Blok down with a court judgement or a political cordon sanitaire. On the contrary, Blok voters regard every measure taken against the party as a measure taken against Blok voters. According to Het Laatste Nieuws (20 November), it is no coincidence that the review of the law on party financing and the court judgement follow on so closely from one another. The purple government has decided to adopt a very tough approach to the extreme right under the motto that democracy should not finance its enemies. Flemish liberals (VLD) and socialists (SPA) are letting the French-speaking parties to back the proposal in exchange for their support for an allocation for the N-VA. The paper speaks out against the new proposal for party financing because it is not up to political parties to judge the democratic character of another party. It is not acceptable that they simultaneously play at being judges and parties, the paper says.

Frank Vandeaveye | editor in chief
Racism suit against Vlaams Blok has to be repeated

The Court of Cassation annulled the judgement of the Brussels Court of Appeal which had declared itself not competent in the issue of the legal action for racism brought against the Vlaams Blok.

The legal action for racism brought against the Vlaams Blok has to be repeated. The Court of Cassation annulled the judgement of the Brussels Court of Appeal which had declared itself not competent in the issue earlier this year because the matter at hand related to a political offence and political offences have to be handled by an Assize Court (= Crown court). The Court of Cassation does not follow that reasoning. According to the Court, there is only talk of a political offence if the political institutions are attacked, and a political party does not fall under that category. Consequently, offences committed by non-profit-making organisations of political parties should be handled by an ordinary Criminal Court.

The result of the annulment is that the proceedings have to be repeated in appeal before the Court of Appeal in Ghent. The proceedings were instituted in 2000 by the Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Human Rights League, which accused the Vlaams Blok of inciting race hate and discrimination. Johan Leman, former chairman of the Centre, is extremely satisfied and sees in the ruling the proof that the Centre has a good case and that it was by no means imprudent to bring the action. Politicians and the Centre have a very different role, says Leman: ‘We have to tackle punishable racist utterances and the democratic politicians have to defeat (politically) the Vlaams Blok’. The Flemish party chairmen reacted cautiously, whereas the Vlaams Blok itself is hoping to turn the lawsuit into a campaign theme (FF).

KOEN VIDAL/ RUUD GOOSSENS/ BART EECKHOUT • DE MORGEN • 19 NOVEMBER

‘I was never an advocate of legal proceedings against the Vlaams Blok’, says VLD chairman Karel De Gucht. ‘But well, if things have to come to that, I’d rather have a judgement on the merits which is not open to debate’. According to the CD&V chairman Yves Leterme, politicians should not meddle in the democratic judicial process. ‘But in any case, I fear that the Blok will put this to its advantage again by wallowing in its role as victim’. The N-VA is the only party to adopt a wholly negative standpoint. ‘It is not up to a Belgian court to decide on the democratic content of a political party. Let the voter have the last say’.

The ruling is very inconvenient for the Vlaams Blok. The far-right-wing party says it is confidently awaiting the court’s decision, and in the meantime is sitting tight with sweaty palms. Chairman Frank Vanhecke hopes to turn the legal action into a campaign theme in the run-up to the Flemish elections. Vanhecke points an accusing finger at Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt, who has political responsibility for the Centre. ‘We will ask the voters to give their opinion on freedom of speech and the right to stand up for ‘Flanders first’’. The fact that Vanhecke no longer dares to use the in-house slogan ‘Eigen Volk Eerst’ (Own People First), shows that the Blok has really got the wind up.

Bill strips racist parties of their allocation

At the last moment the bill was toned down with two amendments

With the objective of making the funding of political parties more transparent, a system of public allocations has been worked out since 1989. Parties that are represented in the Upper House (the Senate) and the Lower House receive a fixed amount, plus a parliamentary faction allowance per seat and EUR 1.25 per vote won. Since 1999 there has been a legal exception to this for racist parties, but this has remained a dead letter. PS member Claude Eerdekens wants to make the funding operational and with a new bill aims to financially penalise parties that violate the European Treaty on Human Rights. The bill states that after a complaint from at least a third of the members of the parliamentary election expenditure committee, the Council of State must decide whether the party in question has violated the Treaty. If the complaint proves to be well founded, the party in question may be stripped of its public allocation or a part of it. The Vlaams Blok, which receives an allocation of more than EUR 2 million every year, protested and promised fierce opposition to the bill. After all, on the basis of its 70-point programme - even though the party has recently distanced itself from it - the Blok could expect a complaint. The other Flemish opposition parties, CD&V and N-VA, also opposed the bill. But at the last moment the bill was toned down with two amendments from the majority: the complaints can only relate to events that occur after the law comes into force, and to events that did not occur more than three years prior to the complaint. The Flemish majority parties VLD and SPA support the bill, but not wholeheartedly. According to De Morgen their support hides a deal with the French-speaking parties (FF).

BART EECKHOUT • DE MORGEN • 20 NOVEMBER

For the French-speaking parties, there is a degree of urgency involved. Since the elections of 18 May, the Front National has also a representative in the House and in the Senate, and therefore also receives an ample allocation. The French-speakers want to avoid the extreme right-wing FN getting fat on government aid, as previously happened with the Vlaams Blok. The Blok itself could also be affected by the new law, although they do not have too many fears since the amendment means that past events and incidents do not count. All the same, the bill is forcing the Blok
to forswear its racist past on pain of being given its cards, financially speaking. CD&V and N-VA wholly oppose the measure, whilst VLD and SPA grudgingly support it. The VLD’s and SPA-Spirit’s support is based on a discreet deal with the PS. In exchange for support for Eerdekens’ bill, the French-speaking socialists are prepared to vote in favour of a proposal that would make it possible for the N-VA to receive government financing again. It is strategically very important for the VLD and SPA to see the destitute N-VA receive funding again. After all, if that were to happen, a major incentive for forming a cartel with CD&V would be removed once and for all. The fact that the two proposals are linked to each other is apparent from the fact that they are programmed in close succession in the competent committee.

**Anti-SPA atmosphere at conference of Flemish Greens**

**The Green party will not be entering into a cartel with SPA-Spirit in the province of Limburg**

Despite the poor opinion polls and an electoral threshold that threatens to keep them out of the Flemish Parliament as well (having already suffered the same lot at federal level), the Flemish Greens are going into the regional and European elections on their own. The cartel with SPA-Spirit was voted down at their conference in Brussels. The Green party will not be entering into a cartel with SPA-Spirit in the province of Limburg, the stronghold of SPA party chairman Steve Stevaert, either, even though Agalev’s Limburg division had already opted for a cartel and negotiations on a joint list had already been held. Steve Stevaert was the bogeyman at the conference. To the great irritation of Green minister Ludo Sannen and former party chairman Jos Geysels, Stevaert and his party were the target of a whole string of gibes. On the other hand, the conference was a triumph for the former Government of Flanders Environment and Agriculture Minister Vera Dua, who was elected the new chairperson with 94% of the votes. But not only was a new chairperson - the name of the party was changed as well. From now on Agalev is to become Groen! (Green!), exclamation mark included [FF].

**GUY TEGENBOS/BART DOBELAERE • DE STANDAARD • 17 NOVEMBER**

SPA chairman Steve Stevaert - who was blamed for everything at the conference - said immediately after the conference that he would ‘not entice any Agalev members to the SPA, but would also no longer obstruct those who wanted to defect to the SPA’.

On Saturday, everything seemed hunky-dory for the conference-goers. In an overwhelmingly jubilant atmosphere, something akin to an election victory, Agalev bade farewell to its old name, which had represented more than 20 years’ history, and rechristened itself Groen! Thereupon chairperson Vera Dua secured the support of 94% of the conference participants. Dua hoped, with all those in attendance, that everyone would be running in the same direction from that point on, for she is determined to see Green MPs in the Flemish Parliament after the elections of 13 June (although she was smart enough not to add how many she wants to see elected). There was applause on all sides. But then it came. However much Vera Dua reckoned to have everyone running in the same direction, the conference then inflicted some deep wounds. The Limburg division, which on Thursday had just voted in favour of a cartel with the SPA, was severely admonished. 438 members rejected a local cartel, 286 voted in favour and 60 abstained. Never had the cartel door been slammed shut with greater force. Most of the active conference participants remained euphoric after that decision but some were deeply disappointed.

The Green Limburg big guns Ludo Sannen and Jacinta De Roeck reacted with bitterness. Both want to think things over but they reject the suggestion that they are planning to defect to the SPA. At lower levels in the Limburg division, the questions are resounding even louder. Observers were not surprised that it was Antwerp of all places that had argued most passionately in favour of a Limburg experiment. But disappointment over the decision is also to be heard outside Limburg, in particular among those who were attracted because Agalev was not just Green, but red-Green. Vera Dua therefore knows straight away where she will have to do battle to keep Groen! together.

Steve Stevaert, who was painted as the accursed temper at the conference, says that he does not understand Agalev’s decision. The consequence of a cartel would not have been the SPA winning an extra seat, but Agalev gaining an extra seat. He says that that seat might now go to the conservative Vlaams Blok. He is ‘still receptive to cooperation and the formation of a cartel with the Greens, in a subsequent election’. Yesterday, Vera Dua offered a veiled half-apology to Stevaert: some of the remarks about him had been ‘inappropriate’. She also repeated that the rejection of a cartel does not detract from the fact that the SPA is Groen!’s best ally on a number of issues.

**Opinion**

**FILIP ROGIERS • DE MORGENSEVENDAARD • 17 NOVEMBER**

This weekend Agalev evolved from being a party into a little club, Groen!, for what was all that virulent derision aimed at Stevaert if not a kind of progressive masochism? From people who find it suspicious that ‘a bit of left’ could also be regarded as attractive by people who do not immediately belong to the club! Groen! indulged in severe criticism this weekend without being constructive. Will the party leaders manage to keep the fundamentalist forces in their midst under control? It is to be feared that the SPA bashing was no one-off. The thunderous applause was too deeply heart-felt for that to be the case. The conference was good for the purity of ‘small Green’, but not for the force of the ecological perspective. Mieke Vogels, who had been number one in ‘Stevaert bashing’ prior to 18 May, has evidently gathered more of a following than Jos Geysels.
Senate falls victim to filibustering

VLD, CD&V and Vlaams Blok senators spent an entire night trying to prevent a Senate home affairs Committee voting on the bill that grants immigrants the right to vote in municipal elections. During the debate on three bills ratifying international treaties with Thailand and Costa Rica, it was already clear that the VLD was going to use all possible delaying tactics. VLD senator Jean-Marie De Decker kicked off proceedings in the plenary session with a comprehensive account of the economic situation in Thailand which he read out from a travel guide. The Vlaams Blok asked questions about King Bhumibol. The endless speeches and nonsensical stories that were read out were a textbook example of a filibuster, a tactic used by opponents of a bill to delay the vote for as long as possible. According to political analyst Kris Deschouwer, for a party in office such as the VLD to take part in this is exceptional. He feels that filibusters bear witness more to a culture of open sabotage than a culture of open debate. Most commentators, too, regarded it as a none-too-edifying exhibition or, as some put it more strongly, a disgraceful spectacle (FF).

GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 15 NOVEMBER

‘With a filibuster, politicians simply exhaust all democratic procedural means in order to put a spoke in the wheel of decision making by resorting to the most ridiculous tactics, and knowing full well that in the end they are going to taste defeat.’ In filibusters, says Deschouwer, what is debated is always nonsense, and not the real essence of the issue. ‘For an opposition party, this is an ideal instrument for getting yourself in the picture. But for a party in office it is exceptional, and in fact this is quite possibly the first time that a governing party has resorted to this tactic in our country. In so doing, the VLD is painting a strange picture of this governing party has resorted to this tactic in our country. In so doing, the VLD is painting a strange picture of this governing party which has been suffocated by an alliance of French-speakers and the SPA. For CD&V member Mia De Schampaere, the VLD was, remarkably enough, ‘the major culprit’ for the approval of the voting right for immigrants. ‘After all, it was Verhofstadt who did not make a point of it in the government negotiations. That is where the main responsibility for what has happened here lies’.

Voting rights for immigrants finally approved in senate committee

A fter another marathon session on 18 November, the bill that grants non-EU citizens the right to vote in municipal elections was approved in the Senate’s home affairs committee by a majority of ten to seven. The French-speaking parties PS, MR, Ecolo and CdH, together with the Flemish SPA-Spirit voted in favour. The Flemish opposition parties CD&V and Vlaams Blok and the governing party VLD voted against. On this occasion, the opponents of immigrants’ voting rights did not resort to filibustering, and limited the debates to arguments of relevant content. Only the Vlaams Blok continued to attempt a few delaying tactics. The bill now has to gain a majority in the plenary session of the Senate and Parliament. Although a lot more delaying tactics and noisy debates are expected, it looks as though the law will be voted through without too much difficulty. As for the VLD, although it is common knowledge that the party is opposed to the bill, it feels that the issue is not worth a government crisis. The bill, which was approved, was tabled by the MR and grants all non-EU citizens who have resided legally in Belgium for at least five years the right to vote in municipal elections from the next municipal elections in 2006. The condition is that they report to the municipality as being entitled to vote, and also sign a declaration in which they confirm their allegiance to the Belgian constitution (FF).

BART ECKHOUT/HANNE CATTEBEKE • DE MORGEN • 19 NOVEMBER

In the final vote in the committee, VLD parliamentary party leader Hugo Coveliers again made it patentely clear to his SPA colleagues that they were the only Flemings to have supported the voting right for immigrants. ‘In so doing you have secured a pyrrhic victory, the bill for which will be presented in the none too distant future’. In a voice shaking with rage, his fellow party member Jeanine Leduc added that ‘the voter’s vote has been suffocated by an alliance of French-speakers and the SPA’. For CD&V member Mia De Schampaere, the VLD was, remarkably enough, ‘the major culprit’ for the approval of the voting right for immigrants. ‘After all, it was Verhofstadt who did not make a point of it in the government negotiations. That is where the main responsibility for what has happened here lies’.

Don’t complain, mobilise

Immigrants’ associations are reacting with disappointment at the bill on municipal voting rights for immigrants. They feel that the threshold for going and casting their vote has been placed too high. Mohammed Chakar, who represents the associations of Moroccans in Antwerp, feels that the debate in the Senate committee has once again given immigrants the feeling that ‘they still don’t belong here’ (FF).

Opinion

BART STURTEWAGEN • DE STANDAARD • 20 NOVEMBER

The bitter reaction is a pitiful missed opportunity. After twenty years of debate, you finally have your foot in the door. Don’t go and mope over a glass that you see as being half empty, but celebrate the fact that the glass is half full. It’s also not the right signal to send to those who have taken political risks in order to support this thorny issue. The voting right for immigrants is not some universal remedy that will make all society’s problems suddenly go away as if by magic. It is an opportunity to send out a signal that our society wants to have everyone involved in policy. It is the job of those who believe in that to urge as many people as possible who are eligible, to register and vote. They shouldn’t complain, they should mobilise.

focus on FLANDERS • 15 November - 21 November • Number 40
VEV chairman calls for two-year wage freeze

The conference of the Flemish Employers’ Association (VEV) and the Chambers of Commerce was held in Ghent on 18 November, and was dominated this year by entrepreneurship and growth. Ludo Verhoeven, chairman of the VEV and managing director of Agfa Gevaert, made a plea for entrepreneurship as a key to welfare. He advocated a new consultation model aimed less at confrontation between unions and employers, but striving at continuity in enterprises. In that respect, he made a conspicuous call for the introduction of a wage freeze in Belgium, along the lines of the Dutch example (FF).

EVELYNE HENS • DE TIJD • 19 NOVEMBER

The VEV argued in favour of a two-year wage freeze being imposed, after the fashion of the Dutch example. ‘That means no wage increase whatsoever, and therefore also no index’. He paid ‘tribute to the Dutch trade unions which assume their responsibility’, whilst Belgian unions ‘stick to their principles too much’. Flemish employers are no longer prepared to see inactivity rewarded. ‘Only 42% of the population works, and early retirement still goes down well in the market. That is economic madness’. Verhoeven argued in favour of a simplification of the labour law, and a comprehensive adaptation of the labour market. The employment agreement determines that enterprises undergoing restructuring have outplacement costs reimbursed. Verhoeven calls that a step in the right direction, but wants to see the measure extended to all enterprises. The chairman also championed a modernisation of the social security system. He praised Belgian health care as ‘the best in the world’ but warned about it becoming unaffordable. ‘Every citizen must contribute to the financing of a basic health care package. This first pillar can then be supplemented with additional insurance’, he said, defending the VEV solution. Finally, the chairman called on the solidarity between Flanders and Wallonia to be made transparent. He referred to the German example, where every West German sees on his wage slip what he is paying for the solidarity with the former East Germany.

WWW.VEV.BE

REGIONAL UNEMPLOYMENT RATES IN BELGIUM AND EUROPE (2002)

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source: EUROSTAT, GVA

Flemish biotech region network starts up

After the fashion of the big ‘biotech valleys’ elsewhere in Europe and the United States, the Flemish ‘Biotech Network’ was officially launched in Zwijnaarde on 15 November. Twenty-nine biotechnology companies, including CropDesign, Devgen, Innogenetics, Tigenix, Johnson & Johnson Development Corp., Genencor International and Genzyme Flanders, two investors (GIMV and KBC Investco) and nine university departments in four Flemish universities (University of Ghent, KU Leuven, UA and VUB) have committed themselves to the network for biotechnology. The initiator was the Flemish Inter-university Institute for Biotechnology (VIB). The new forum needs to strengthen Flanders’ reputation as a centre for biotechnology in particular. In addition to the exchange of know-how, the network should make Flemish biotechnology more visible on an international scale, and in Flanders itself the members want to work on a more favourable climate in order to attract more companies, investors and researchers (FF).

KIM DE RIJCK • DE STANDAARD • 15 NOVEMBER

‘Flanders has forty biotech companies in the strict sense of the word, which together employ around 2,000 people’, says An Debbaud, manager of the Biotech Network. If we take a broader view, and include the pharmaceutical industry, the agricultural and food sector, environmental technology and aquaculture, some 230 companies in Flanders rely on biotechnology, representing some 20,000 jobs in the field of ‘life sciences’. And then there are the universities, polytechnics and hospitals, which are important skills centres in biotechnology. ‘Intrinsically we are certainly competitive with the other biotech regions in Europe’, according to Rudy Dekeyer of the VIB. ‘And as regards employment, volume of research and the size of the companies, Flanders also belongs to the leading group in Europe. Moreover, the conversion of academic knowledge to industrial applications - the so-called technology transfer - is certainly not progressing any less smoothly in Belgium than elsewhere’. Imec, Leuven Research & Development, the UA, the VUB, the University of Ghent and the VIB have active technology transfer units. The Government of Flanders’ so-called Interface Decree provides financial support. ‘But we lack visibility’, says Dekeyer. ‘Bio-regions, such as Medicon Valley in Scandinavia, have an efficient marketing machine. By profiling themselves as clusters, they become better known’.

WWW.VIB.BE/TECHTRANSFER/EN/CLUSTER
WWW.INNogenetics.BE
WWW.DEVGEN.BE
WWW.CROPDESIGN.BE
WWW.TIGENIX.BE
Cross-border air pollution plays tricks on Flanders

Fewer pollutants are being released into the air in Flanders than 12 years ago according to statistics released yesterday by the Flemish Environmental Company (Vlaamse Milieumaatschappij - VMM). The VMM measures the air quality in Flanders and inventories emissions into the air. Far smaller quantities of acidifying emissions and carbon monoxide have been released into the air over the last decade. The emissions of ozone-forming matter have also dropped appreciably, but unfortunately this has little effect on the presence of ozone, since it is blown in with polluted air from other countries. The VMM is therefore advocating a European approach.

Last summer, the eastern part of Flanders in particular suffered from high concentrations of ozone whereas concentrations of fine particles are most likely to occur in the industrial areas around Ghent and Antwerp and around busy traffic arteries. Fine particles contain black smut and heavy metals and are harmful for people with lung complaints. For the reduction of the most important greenhouse gas, CO2, things are not looking good. The VMM does not think Flanders will ever meet the Kyoto standard (FF).

KATRIEN VERSTRAETE • DE TIJD • 15 NOVEMBER

The VMM presented two bulky research reports: one on emissions into the air between 1990 and 2002 and one on the air quality last year. With the exception of greenhouse gases, there have been fewer pollutants released into the air by year since 1990. That is the result of the efforts made by industry and the agricultural and market gardening sectors. However, the reduction is also owed to the use of more environmentally-friendly fuels and the increasing number of vehicles with a catalyst. Over the last 12 years, emissions of carbon monoxide, for example, dropped by 37%, whilst acidifying emissions (responsible for acid rain) are down by 42%. Emissions of ozone-forming matter fell by 32%. As a result, there are fewer days on which the European indicative threshold is exceeded in at least one place. ‘But the average annual ozone concentrations are still rising’, warns the VMM. The message is that if we are to avoid ozone peaks, there is no point in taking short-term measures (such as speed restrictions). Only a lasting, drastic European approach can stop the gap.

The global fall in emissions into the air is not proportionally reflected in the air quality, according to a second report. Flanders is a transit region par excellence. ‘And that also goes for air pollution’, says the VMM. Industry and busy traffic in and around our country literally cast a cloud upon ‘Flemish’ air and Flanders can’t do much to remedy that.

The concentration of pollutants in the air only slightly fell last year or stagnated in comparison with 2001, according to the 2002 report on air quality. ‘Nowhere in Flanders are the limit values exceeded’, stresses the VMM. However, the VMM points out that the standards will be tightened in the coming years, and as a result extra efforts will be necessary.

ANTOON WOUTERS • DE STANDAARD • 15 NOVEMBER

Fitting catalysts in cars is good for air quality but bad for the greenhouse effect. It converts the noxious substances in the emission gases into water and carbon dioxide (CO2). Carbon dioxide leads to a slow warming of the earth. We have to bring it down, according to the Kyoto Protocol. ‘Carbon dioxide emissions have been so strong compared with the reference year of 1990 that Flanders is no longer able to attain the Kyoto standard’, says Mie Van den Kerchove, VMM spokesperson. This is the first time that a public body has made such a statement. That brings the escape route of ‘buying clean air in Russia’ ever closer. The Russian economy has collapsed and vast forests turn CO2 into wood, as a result of which the country emits less CO2 than the level permitted by the United Nations. That results in a healthy batch of CO2 rights that Russia can sell to countries that have not been able to attain the Kyoto standard. It looks as though Flanders will belong to that group.

WWW.VMM.BE
Food supplement gives hop cultivation a future again

The Ghent professor Denis De Keukeleire has given hope to the West Flanders hop sector again. Together with the Ostend company Biodynamics, he is the first to obtain a patent for a hop-based food supplement that can limit the unpleasant side effects of the menopause. The hop plant, which for centuries has determined the aroma of certain kinds of beer in the brewing process, contains an ingredient that has a salutary effect on the female hormone system. Biodynamics is bringing the food supplement onto the market under the name Menohop and will hire an extra 50 people for the production. It is a sound alternative to the controversial drugs currently on the market. What's more, hop cultivation, which is visibly dwindling in West Flanders, can thus be given a new future (FF).

DE STANDAARD • 18 NOVEMBER

Few people know that hops have healing power. 'The female flowers of the hop plant contain a yellow powder, lupulin, which has an effect on the female hormone oestrogen', says professor Denis De Keukeleire of the University of Ghent. 'Oestrogen production decreases considerably in women in the menopause'. This goes hand in hand with discomforts such as hot flushes and mood swings. Women who take food supplements with hops will have less trouble from these side effects. The supplements are natural products and not hormones, which are currently taken by many women in the menopause. 'There is debate surrounding those hormones, as they have quite a few side effects', says De Keukeleire. 'It is also claimed they may be carcinogenic. Lupulin, on the other hand, contains a substance that prevents and combats cancer'. Biodynamics started up at the end of the 1980s as a small family business and is now a small SME with a staff of 50. Menohop is only a start, says business manager Francis Maes. 'Our company has concrete plans for the production and distribution of medicines. We want to start up an industrial extraction plant for locally cultivated plants'.

WWW.BIODYNAMICS.BE

Flanders Opera scores abroad

People were a little baffled when Marc Clémeur, the manager of the Vlaamse Opera, announced in the early 1990s that he wanted to produce a Puccini cycle with the then relatively unknown director Robert Carsen. After all the name Puccini had not appeared in the high-quality repertoire that Gerard Mortier had staged in the trend-setting Munt in the nineteen eighties, which had brought about a revival of opera in Flanders. It was thought at the time that Puccini was a crowd-puller who did not lend himself to a more profound approach. With the project, Marc Clémeur wanted to show that another Puccini interpretation was possible. It became a success, even abroad. This season Carsen's 'Tosca' is to be staged 18 times in the prestigious Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona. At the same time performances in Hamburg with a copy of the Tosca set are also being worked on. This year the Vlaamse Opera also sees other parts of the same Puccini cycle performed in Japan, where Seijj Ozawa is directing 'La Bohème', in Luxembourg where 'Gianni Schicchi' is on the programme, in the Leipzig Oper, where 'Madame Butterfly' is to be performed in April 2004, and in Tel Aviv, where 'Il Trittico' opens the next opera season. Clémeur is delighted with the success. The renting out of productions is a major source of income that is desperately needed in order to pay for the costly home-grown productions (FF).

TOM EELEN • DE TIJD • 19 NOVEMBER

Barcelona illustrates that Carsen's staging is still convincing. In the meantime there appears to be no end to the success of Carsen's Puccini cycle, for the Vlaamse Opera has also just hired out 'Manon Lescaut' to the Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona. These successes are not only a matter of prestige; the Vlaamse Opera also financially takes advantage of it. 'The renting out of productions is very important because their preparation is extremely expensive', says Marc Clémeur. 'With the rental on the production for a series of performances, we can quickly recover a good fifth of the production costs. The most common way of co-operating with other opera houses is the renting out of material, such as sets and costumes, so that others can perform the work elsewhere with the same director, but with their own choir and orchestra. Obviously for us it is a matter of great prestige that a Vlaamse Opera production should be staged at the Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona. That will help us, for example, to persuade even more prestigious singers and directors to come to the Vlaamse Opera one day. In addition to this renting out of our own productions, we also exceptionally work on genuine joint productions. In that case, two opera houses agree at the outset which work will be staged with which director. The costs are then usually shared'. The Vlaamse Opera itself also looks for interesting productions abroad. How does Marc Clémeur see the ideal balance between the company's own productions and bought ones? 'Hitherto we have been able to stage two home-made productions a year, out of a total of seven scenic productions', says Clémeur. 'I’d regard it as reasonable if we could put on three new productions a year, two reprisals of works of our own, and two rented performances. Of course I can go and buy productions all over the place, but then you increasingly lose your identity'. When he refers to the company's own identity, Clémeur means the staging of home-grown productions such as 'Achilleus', the young persons' opera by Wim Hendericks which was premiered this year, but also the discovery of new directors with whom a permanent association can be developed, and who, like Robert Carsen, can also consolidate the opera house's reputation abroad. Thanks to the opportunities he was given in the Vlaamse Opera, the Fleming Guy Joosten has also appeared in a major opera house such as Leipzig. Currently playing there are his 'Le Nozze di Figaro', which he produced for us, and 'Freischütz' and 'Les Troyens' which he has created for Leipzig. As a matter of fact, Joosten will also be directing in New York's Metropolitan.

WWW.VLAAMSEOPERA.BE

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Diary

MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE

• 26, 27 and 28 November: Compagnia Pippo Delbono [It] with Guerra and Rabia [8 Nov], theatre, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
• 27 to 29 November: Meg Stuart and Damaged Goods, Visitors only, dance; De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• 28 November: Badly Ensemble [Jran] Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
• 27 November: Spiegel String Quartet with Dvorak, Schumann and Brahms, De Bijloke, Ghent; info: www.bijloke.be
• 30 November: Flemish Radio Orchestra conducted by Yoel Levi with Symphony nr. 7 by Chostakovitch, De Bijloke, Ghent; info: www.bijloke.be
• 27 and 28 November: Sophie Perez, Compagnie du Zeepp [Fr] with Leutti, theatre, Minard, Ghent; info: www.voouruit.be 09/267.28.28
• 28 November: Lee ‘Scratch’ Perry & The Mad Professor, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
• 29 November: Lucie Mishalle and Away (Belgium), De Vooruit, Ghent info: www.voouruit.be 09/267.28.28
• 29 and 30 November: International Jewish Music Festival with Zahava Seewald & The Clezmatics, Verettski Pass, Fuks & Roby
• 3 December: Echo & The Bunnymen

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 18 December: The museum evenings, every Thursday; www.museumvereniging.be
• Until 11 September: 30 November: Urban Drums, photo and film exhibition on urban life, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• Until 28 March: Geno-enversaeservice, exhibition about Fashion, Antwerp and Genova, Fashion Museum, Antwerp; info: 03/470.27.70 www.momu.be
• Until 29 February: Vietnam, Art and culture from Prehistorian times to today, exhibition, Royal Museum of Art and History, Jubelpark, Brussels; info: www.kmkg-mrah.be
• Until 11 January: Europalia, Italy: a particular Renaissance, Forata and the dukes of Este, exhibition, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
• 4 October to 30 November: Michelangelo Pistoletto and Citadellarte, exhibition, Mukha, Antwerp; info: www.mukha.be www.europalia.be
• 7 October to 4 January: The breath of soul. Morandi and still life, exhibition, Groeningemuseum, Bruges; info: www.europalia.be
• Until 30 November: Fort Whealing by Hugo Pratt – Guido Buzzelli, exhibition, Centre Belge de la Bande dessinée, Brussels; info: 02/219.19.80 www.europalia.be

CULTURE

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