KB Lux-affair provides treasury with 313 million

In the summer of 1996 it emerged via a press leak that former employees of the Luxembourg bank KB-Lux, sister bank of the Belgian KBC, had stolen the details of thousands of mainly Belgian customers. Through legal proceedings the Belgian tax authorities also obtained the information. This gave rise to a large-scale fiscal campaign that is still ongoing. The revenue is impressive. Between 1996 and the end of 2002, 313 million euros extra was pocketed from customers of KB-Lux who used the Luxembourg bank to avoid being taxed in Belgium and had to pay fiscal supplements as a result. In addition, administrative and legal proceedings amounting to 135 million euros involving KB-Lux customers are still pending, as is evident from the tax authorities’ 2002 annual report (FF).

From the first official review of the KB-Lux affair it appears that fiscal supplements to the end of 2002 accounted for more than half of the 850 million euros the Federal Government hopes to gather from the fiscal amnesty next year. The annual report also refers to the state of affairs in several other major fraud dossiers. Thus, fraud involving cash companies was often the subject of considerable attention last year. The fight against these systems for transferring funds from a company to an individual was much less successful. True, the taxman levied 347 million euros in tax supplements, but was barely able to collect 14,600 euros. Half the supplements are still the subject of administrative and legal proceedings. For one third of the undisputed supplements the authorities no longer have an address for the companies involved, and another large group of companies has gone bankrupt in the meantime. In total, the fiscal income of the Belgian State rose last year by 3.26% to 74.5 billion euros. This rise is mainly the result of the increase in economic activity. In 2002 the extra revenue from auditing the income of individuals and companies fell, as it did in 2001. However, audits of VAT liabilities provided significant extras: 354 million euros, compared with 218 million euros in 2001.
EMPLOYMENT POLICY

Flemish and Walloon socialists quarrel over service cheques

SERVICE CHEQUES ARE ALREADY USED AT REGIONAL LEVEL. IN FLANDERS THEY HAVE PROVED A SUCCESS. IN WALLONIA AND BRUSSELS THEY HAVE NOT

Flemish and Francophone Socialists have collided in the Federal Government over the extension of the system of service cheques. With such a service cheque each citizen can hire a home-help for 6.20 euros an hour. The government pays the remaining two-thirds of the wage, so that the cleaning lady or washerwoman in question receives a full legal wage and costs the citizen hardly more than ‘a moonlighter’. The service cheque is limited to 500 hours a year, although it does offer the further advantage of being tax-deductible. Only workers who are registered as unemployed and looking for work are eligible to be paid with service cheques. They can only be hired via recognised firms and temping agencies. Service cheques are already used at regional level. In Flanders they have proved a success. In Wallonia and Brussels less so. At last October’s employment conference Federal Minister for Labour Frank Vandenbroucke (SP.A) announced that he wanted to make the system Federal and extend it to around 25,000 jobs. He sees it as a means of stimulating the unemployed, legalising moonlighting and grey work and satisfy the demand for ‘social services’. Vandenbroucke got his plan approved by the Council of Ministers, but encountered opposition from the competent employees of the PS cabinets. The fact that as in Flanders, they can also be distributed by temping agencies and that part-time and temporary work are also eligible, was not accepted by the PS employees and the trade unions - including the Flemish Socialist trade union, the ABVV. They believe that in this way Vandenbroucke will create low-quality jobs - ‘McDonald’s jobs’. The PS wanted service cheques to be distributed by social non-profit organisations and Public Social Assistance Centres (OCMWs), and also wanted to impose a minimum period of employment and conditions for the probationary period of such contracts. Various near-agreements were announced over the weekend and on Monday. The two sides consisted of the PS with minister Onkelinx and all the trade unions on the one hand, and the Liberal government partners the MR and VLD together with the Flemish Socialists on the other (FF).

GUY TEGENBOS • DE STANDAARD • 24 NOVEMBER

Those who will feel the consequences of the decision directly are the 20,000 Polish women who illegally clean Belgian homes. If the service cheques for home-help are a success, most of them may as well pack their bags. Many, both in work and retired, are already familiar with the cheque system and value PWA cheques as a means of allowing the unemployed to earn a bit on the side via odd jobs in families. PWA stands for Local Employment Agency. You will no longer run the risk of ‘being nicked’ for offering moonlighting, and it remains cheap. You buy a cheque for 6 euros, and unemployed people come and clean your house or do your garden for a price that is less than the normal market price, that of the black market. There are, however, disadvantages to PWAs, which would disappear with the introduction of service cheques anyway. The PWA market is limited. Often you have to wait months before an unemployed person becomes available. And the quality of the services provided varies. Controls are almost non-existent. According to those who already use them, the service cheques that have been on the market for a short while have the advantage that it is companies that organise the work, recruit, train and support the staff and control the quality of the work. This translates into an improvement in quality for the customer. But people are biding their time. Whilst nothing is decided, they are managing somehow, without cleaning lady, or with PWA workers, or with illegal cleaning ladies, whether or not from Poland.

The political conflict over service cheques is not about these customers and users, it is about the possible workers. The conflict has placed two parties at odds: the Flemish SP.A and the Walloon-Brussels PS. The SP.A wants to and will create jobs, that is its obsession. It sees that there is a ‘market’ in home-help, and wants to quickly convert this into legitimate jobs, partly to drive back moonlighting and also to be able to offer jobs to the long-term unemployed who are currently saying ‘that there is nothing for them’. The PS is surprised by all that fuss about creating jobs, and is afraid that SP.A Minister Frank Vandenbroucke will use those jobs to exert considerable pressure on the unemployed, while it is not certain whether they are actually well-paid, full-time and permanent jobs. They first want regulations to avoid ‘abuses’. The SP.A feels it would be worse if there were no jobs than if these were not immediately of good quality. The PS is saying: better no work than poor work. In the meantime, the social economy companies, local services, temping agencies and cleaning firms in Flanders already welcome many customers. They notice there is a need for staff, both amongst people with purchasing power and people who can put forward social arguments for receiving a service.

Www.servicecheques.be

HOTEL AND CATERING SECTOR IN BELGIUM (See p. 5)

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SOURCE: DS-INFGRAFIEK

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SOURCE: DS-INFGRAFIEK
Service cheques: agreement clearly shows dividing line

For each service cheque, for which the citizen pays 6.2 euros, the Government will make up the difference with the cost price (19.47 euros per hour)

On 26 November Ministers Onkelinx (PS) and Vandenbroucke (SPA) managed to reach an agreement on service cheques. The basic components of the system will remain federal. In this way the service companies (non-profit organisations, temping agencies, cleaning firms) will be recognised by the Federal Government and the system will be financed at Federal level. In 2004 91 million euros will be set aside for the project, rising to 354 million in 2007. Thanks to the recovery effects (less unemployment benefit to pay out, more income from taxes and social security charges), the actual costs in 2004 will be limited to 17 million euros, and in 2007 to 163 million euros. For each service cheque, for which the citizen pays 6.2 euros, the Government will make up the difference with the cost price (19.47 euros per hour). Because the service cheque is tax-deductible, it will actually only cost the citizen 4.34 euros per hour. A compromise has been worked out for the workers that takes account of both ‘flexibility’ and job security. Unemployed people who work in the system for six months must be offered an open-ended contract for at least a part-time job. But they cannot refuse a job offer in the system, otherwise they will lose their unemployment benefit (FF).

Johan Rasking • De Standaard • 27 November

Since specific realities and visions differ between the regions, the agreement makes room for separate, regional emphases. Thus, each region will be free to use the service cheques for additional activities on top of home-help. Therefore the Flemish Government can, for example, introduce separate service cheques for childcare at home, according to the Federal scheme but financed with Flemish Government money. The Walloon Government has the option of not following suit. Furthermore, each regional government can decide, in consultation with the Federal Government, to change the conditions that must be met by the employment contracts for home-help jobs. For which read: make them tougher. Wallonia cannot exclude temping agencies from the system, but can, for example, make an employment contract mandatory for at least a part-time job from the outset. Such an approach will appreciably lessen the interest of private temping agencies and cleaning firms.

Opinion

Bart Sturtewagen • De Standaard • 27 November

Vandenbroucke is departing from the view that the weakest will suffer most if the social security system encounters problems. The system will only remain viable if it has a sufficiently broad basis. Finding people jobs has a twofold effect. They are no longer (completely) dependent on benefit and in the best-case scenario they even contribute to the system. For the PS the system is crucial. No risks can be taken with it. Its foundations cannot be jeopardised. It is more important to earn a decent wage than who works for it. If the bottom of the coffers begins to show, new revenue will simply have to be found from somewhere.

It is this last view that must be opposed. Anyone who assumes that the system is eternal is in a rut. In the context of a Federal Belgium this is explosive. Because even if you feel that there must be solidarity in this country between those in work and those on benefit irrespective of where they live, it is an insupportable idea that collective funds should be used to make economic activity impossibly expensive instead of stimulating it.

Www.servicecheques.be

Only Flemish green senator leaves new party Groen!

When the Flemish Greens’ conference decided it would not enter into any cartels with a single Flemish province for next year’s regional and European elections, it hit the Limburg division hard. After all, it had spoken out in favour of a cartel in the province, but was now forced to submit to the voice of the majority. Moreover, in Limburg, Groen! still had a senator, in the person of Jac-inta De Roeck. SPA Chairman Steve Stevaert had made the Greens a gift of the seat of co-opted senator after the last elections, perhaps with a view to greater collaboration with the Greens. After that, De Roeck found herself in the SP.A-Spirit parliamentary party as a member of Groen!. Two weeks after the final choice was made by the conference, she has now decided to leave Groen!. However, she is not about to join SP.A-Spirit, but will continue to sit in the senate as an independent with Stevaert’s approval. Groen! Chairman Vera Dua was not surprised. Members who are unable to live with the independent course adopted by Groen! are better off drawing their own conclusions, she says. Earlier, however, Ludo Sannen, Minister in the Flemish Government, a Limburger and also a supporter of the cartel, took the decision to throw in his lot with Groen!.

FF editor

Number of candidate priests in Belgium (See p.6)

Source: Gazet Van Antwerpen

Focus on Flanders • 22 November - 28 November • Number 41
Flemish government tightens belt

FF EDITOR

The weekend edition of De Standaard (22 November) leaked a document (unapproved minutes of a meeting) in which various Secretaries-General of the Flemish administration complain about their tight financial situation. The paper concluded from this that the Flemish Government is suffering from a lack of funds and alleged there is a list of abandoned investments, suspended activities, unpaid telephone and utility bills and unpaid invoices from contractors who work for the Flemish Government and are now raking in interest on arrears of around 9%. All this is the result of the decision taken by Budget Minister Van Mechelen (VLD) this summer to balance the 2003 budget, the paper claimed. At the time Van Mechelen announced in a circular that henceforth one fifteenth, and not one twelfth, of the annual budget would be paid to the administrations each month. In this way 8.5 billion was frozen, although a great many exceptions to this rule were allowed. The comments were grist to the mill of the opposition CD&V. CD&V Parliamentary Faction Leader Eric Van Rompuy says he is not surprised and adds that at the end of October last year there was still 454 million in the coffers, compared to only 17 million in 2003. The budget minister reacted furiously at the weekend and summoned the senior civil servants to his cabinet on Monday. He is angry with them for not first talking the problems through with their specialist minister instead of publicly voicing their worrying opinions. He claims that a number of senior civil servants are playing ‘political games’ with an eye on the coming elections. Afterwards the Minister’s cabinet explained that the whole thing was actually a non-event. Guido Deblaere, Chairman ad interim of the College of Secretaries-General, stated for his part that it had in no way been the intention to sound the alarm and that a solution to the financial stumbling blocks had been worked out. But CD&V Parliamentary Party Leader Van Rompuy believes that Van Mechelen called the senior civil servants together to tell them to keep silent. So he demanded that the civil servants should be heard at a session of the Flemish Parliament.

The three civil servants denied that the Flemish Government was having trouble making payments, as the CD&V had alleged, and pointed out that all complaints referred to the Department of Agriculture, where no Secretary-General had yet been appointed. However, the civil servants were not allowed to join the debate with MPs. Political discussions are still being held with the Minister (for the Budget).

Flemish municipalities feel cheated

THE GOVERNMENTS IN BRUSSELS ARE TAKING MONEY FROM THE MUNICIPAL COFFERS AND FAILING TO COMPLY WITH THEIR ADMINISTRATIVE AGREEMENT, CLAIMS THE VVSG

The storm amongst senior civil servants had hardly died down before another blew up. The Union of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten, VVSG) feels cheated by both the Federal and Flemish Governments. The governments in Brussels are taking money from the municipal coffers and failing to comply with their administrative agreement, claims the VVSG (FF).

GUY FRANSEN • DE STANDAARD • 25 NOVEMBER

Flemish local authorities have a whole list of complaints. Thanks to deregulation, the annual contribution of the energy market (electricity dividends) to municipal coffers has fallen by 350 million euros. The government promised compensation, but according to Ghent Alderman Van Rouversol (VLD), it is now clear that from next year municipalities will lose 175 million a year because the government will only contribute 172 million euros to the 350 million shortfall.

The revenue from the Municipalities Fund will only grow by 1.5%, whereas it would be 3.86% (growth in Gross National Income + inflation) if the Flemish Government kept its promises. This will cost the Flemish municipalities 9.3 million euros. For revenue from the supplementary personal income tax Brussels has planned growth of 1.5%, while according to the local authorities this has for years been 5.7%. According to the VVSG, the 1.5% will barely cover indexing.

According to the VVSG, the Flemish Government also intends saving on subsidies for investments in educational buildings and for rest-homes and hospitals.

According to VVSG Chairman Jef Gabriëls (CD&V), the municipalities can either save on services, drop the already scaled-down investment level even further or increase local taxes.

WWW.VVSG.BE

NUMBER OF CHURCHGOERS DIMINISHES (IN %) (See p.6)

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SOURCE: GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN
42% of businesses make use of illegal workers

The fact that Polish labourers looking to moonlight as painters, decorators or plasterers are freely offering their services in local free-sheets has become too much for a manager of a small plastering company in De Kempen. He recently began cutting out all ‘small ads’ and sending them to the National Employment Office (Rijksdienst voor Arbeidsvoorziening) in Turnhout, but has not yet received a response, reports the Gazet van Antwerpen (25 November). The fact that such practices go on so shamelessly is perhaps characteristic of how widespread moonlighting is in our country. Around 42% of Belgian businesses employ illegal workers. This is evident from the inspections carried out by the Federal Social Laws Inspectorate (Federaele Inspectiedienst Sociale Wetten) among 15,000 businesses last year. Moonlighting is therefore widely accepted. This involves businesses that employ foreign workers, do not register workers with the National Office for Social Security (Rijksdienst voor Sociale Zekerheid) or allow part-time workers to work outside the notified hourly rotas. Earlier the Higher Institute for Labour Studies (Hoger Instituut voor de Arbeid) calculated that this is costing social security 1.7 billion euros. According to international studies, moonlighting represents approximately 16% of the Gross Domestic Product. At the employment conference in October, the Federal Government and social partners agreed to step up the fight against this social fraud. Because by converting moonlighting into legitimate work the Verhofstadt II government will kill several birds with one stone: it will create employment opportunities, procure funds for social security and support bona fide businesses in the market. But for various reasons moonlighting has proved particularly resilient, concludes De Tijd (FF).

Opinion

EVELYN HENS • DE TIJD • 24 NOVEMBER

High wage costs and stringent labour legislation are listed as the main causes of moonlighting. It is much easier to let an experienced retired worker work a day on the side than to wade through the mountain of red tape to hire an inexperienced school-leaver. It is also a whole lot cheaper. The massive gulf between gross and net pay paves the way for Belgians to resort to illegal workers. And moonlighting is also an ideal way for employers to avoid high social charges. A win-win situation, then. Also, it is not as if there is a shortage of willing accomplices. The reservoir of illegal workers is deep. Belgians still work a lot, perhaps even more than previously. Except, they want to do less and less during official working hours. After early retirement, the time credit has now also been discovered as an ideal combination for family-leisure-moonlighting. The Belgians, both those who hire illegal workers and those who provide these workers, have struck a black pact. And that is extremely resilient. The Verhofstadt II government is about to make itself unpopular with a tough fight against moonlighting. Because this will hit almost every Belgian in his wallet, and therefore in his soul.

Hotel and catering sector disappointed about missed opportunity to lower VAT

STEVAERT PUT FORWARD A PROPOSAL TO ABOLISH THE LICENCE FOR SERVING STRONG LIQUOR AND THE TAX-DEDUCTIBILITY OF RESTAURANT COSTS ABROAD

European finance ministers have failed to agree on cutting VAT for the hotel and catering trade from 21 to 6%. For years Belgian hotels, restaurants and cafés have been calling for a lower VAT rate. The Belgian Minister Reynders (MR) and his French counterpart did defend the proposal, but Germany and Denmark, among others, resolutely opposed it, creating a stalemate. On the Flemish side a VAT cut was an election promise by both VLD Ministers Verhofstadt and Daems and SPA Chairman Stevaert, once a café owner himself. The Flemish hotel and catering sector reacted with disappointment at the news that there would be no VAT cut for the time being. A day before the bad news was announced, Stevaert put forward a proposal to abolish the licence for serving strong liquor. The loss of income can be compensated for by simultaneously abolishing the tax-deductibility of restaurant costs abroad, he claims. After all, restaurant abroad are 100% deductible, but in Belgium only 50% (FF).

BART AERTS • HET LAATSTE NIEUWS • 27 NOVEMBER

Frequent inspections, huge taxes, massive wage costs...Things are not going well for the 45,000 Belgian hotel and catering firms. Together they provide an income for 140,000 families and each year the sector is responsible for turning over 7 billion euros. But in recent years the number of bankruptcies in the sector has risen by 30%. That there will be no cut in VAT is a severe disappointment to Luc De Bauw, spokesman of Horeca Vlaanderen. ‘Now the Government will simply have to take different measures,’ he says. Stevaert’s proposal to abolish the tax on strong liquor is not enough for the sector. ‘An effort must be made to tackle the discrimination regarding the deduction of restaurant costs,’ says top chef Frank Fol. ‘Social charges should also be reduced.’ According to Fol, the hotel and catering sector has been ignored for the past thirty years. ‘The current situation with different VAT rates in Europe is unfair. But VAT is one thing. We need a proper master plan to save the hotel and catering trade.’ Premier Verhofstadt said he wanted to continue the fight at European level to make a VAT cut possible.
Pope John Paul II is worried about the situation of the Catholic church in Belgium. The low turnout on Sundays, the low number of church weddings and christenings and in particular the lack of those obeying the call are causing him concern. The prelate informed Cardinal Danneels and the Belgian episcopate of this during their six-day visit to the Vatican City. Apparently there was also a great deal of criticism from one the Vatican ministries of the recent proposal by West-Flanders Bishop Vangheluwe to appoint woman deacons. At the same time he implicitly criticised a number of political decisions such as gay marriages and the euthanasia laws, which he described as ‘changes in the law which could lead people to suspect that Belgian society has turned its back on its Christian roots’. Cardinal Danneels responded to the Pope that the Belgian Bishops had always spoken out against such laws.

The Pope’s comments quickly provoked reactions from the governing parties. VLD Chairman Karel De Gucht labelled the comments the ‘ultra-conservative opinions of a man who is increasingly losing touch with the faithful’. SPA Chairman Steve Stevaert believes that with his comments on Belgian democracy the Pope is attacking the separation of Church and State. And yet Stevaert can hardly be labelled an antipapist, especially not since he seems to have recently begun a charm offensive towards faithful catholics.

Last week the SPA Chairman also let it slip that he would rather see the church weddings full than empty. In De Morgen [24 November] he explained that this comment was primarily a call to his own free-thinking supporters to stop mistrusting the faithful. According to Cardinal Danneels - who according to the American Vatican-watcher John Allen is in the top ten of possible successors to the Pope (Gazet van Antwerpen, 26 Nov.) - the prelate did not exceed his authority. ‘After all, the Pope has not said anything against the government or parliament,’ says the Cardinal in De Morgen. Lecturer in church law Rik Torfs (KULeuven) points out that the Pope is making things very difficult for Cardinal Danneels [FF].

BARBARA DEBUSSCHERE • DE MORGEN • 24 NOVEMBER

Torfs: ‘His first criticism concerns internal church matters. There are too few obeying the call and too few priests in Belgium, perhaps even fewer than abroad. But Danneels and his followers will not be able to do much about the situation if Rome itself does not change. Women are still excluded, and celibacy is still imposed. If there are fewer that obey the call, Rome urgently has to ask itself whether that is not a result of its own policy. After all, the Belgian church cannot simply implement the changes off its own bat.’ To a certain extent, Torfs had expected the Pope’s criticism of the Purple laws. ‘Especially now that the Christian Democrats are no longer in government and Belgium has abortion and euthanasia laws and allows gay marriages, the Pope believes that our country has completely lost its way on an ethical front. It is difficult to determine whether his criticism of these laws is aimed at certain politicians. But I hope he realises that the Christian Democrats are no longer a branch office of the church.’

WWW.KERKNET.BE

A s of this week it is no longer possible to build in flood areas. Environment Minister Ludo Sannen (Groen!) introduced the so-called ‘water test’, as a result of which municipal and other competent authorities must check that there is no risk of any planned building plot ending up under water some time sooner or later. The ban comes in response to the floods that swept through several low-lying areas around Leie and Dender around the turn of the year and led to a whole host of compensation claims from the Disaster Fund. The ‘water test’ is an initiative of former Environment Minister Vera Dua (Groen!) [FF].

WIM WINCKELMANS • HET NIEUWSBLAD • 24 NOVEMBER

Municipalities and authorities that grant building permits must check whether the place where a land developer wants to erect houses is suitable for being built on. If the water test reveals a significant risk of the site being flooded, the building permit can be refused. It is equally possible that land division alone is allowed if the necessary precautions are taken. Thus, the developer may be required to build a dam, install a separate drainage system for rainwater and wastewater or build rainwater drains, so that the surrounding streams and rivers can continue to absorb the water. Conditions can also be attached to individual permits. Just like land developers, they can be forced to install a separate drainage system for rainwater and wastewater or create a rainwater drain. ‘We want to protect people against the risk of flooding. That is our only concern,’ says Minister Sannen. ‘We can no longer allow promoters to sell houses willy-nilly, leaving residents and the government to foot the bill for floods later.’
Dewael calls for introduction of immigration quotas

A European approach and take-back agreements with the countries of origin are vital to an efficient repatriation policy

van Limburg and Gazet van Antwerpen (FF).

ERIC DONCKIER • HET BELANG VAN LIMBURG • 26 NOVEMBER

Dewael's proposal to introduce immigration quotas is part of the immigration policy he wants to apply. These are its main components.
- The Geneva Convention remains the basis of his asylum policy. Anyone who is forced to flee for political reasons, race or religion will find shelter here.
- He wants to reduce the number of economic refugees in the short term to fewer than 1,000 a month. Even shorter procedures and a European deportation policy would help.
- After two arrests, illegal immigrants will be transferred to a secure centre and then repatriated. Dewael is negotiating with Finance Minister Reynders (MR) on a new secure centre.
- The long-term solution is for people to be able to stay in their homeland. To this end the US, Japan and the European Union must increase their development aid, waive the debts of the poorest countries and put an end to their protectionism.
- In the meantime, immigration quotas must be introduced per country and per annum for all EU countries. All non-EU citizens may apply for economic immigrant status. There are three conditions: they must first learn the language of the country to which they are going, they must have an offer of work, and only husband or wife and children may come along as well and they will count towards the total contingent.

Vlaams Blok pops up in NBC series

Dewinter immediately announced he would ask the management of the Flemish Media Company, not to broadcast the episode

Antwerp's Vlaams Blok frontman Philip Dewinter is furious with the top American series West Wing, a programme from NBC. In the fifth episode of the fifth season of the series, which plays out behind the walls of the White House, the American President, portrayed by Martin Sheen, expresses concern over the rise of the 'Flemish Bloc' in the north of Belgium. He accuses his information services of not briefing him properly on this anti-immigration party, whose leaders are described as 'neo-Nazis in three-piece suits'. The series is shown on Kanaal 2, the second channel of the Flemish commercial broadcaster VTM, and has already run for two seasons. Dewinter immediately announced he would ask the management of the Flemish Media Company, which controls the two channels, not to broadcast the episode in question in which his party is mentioned. But the VMM sees no reason to comply with the request. In the United States the episodes in question have already been seen by 14 million Americans. ‘Terrible for our image,’ claims Dewinter (FF).

TOM COCHEZ • DE MORGEN • 26 NOVEMBER

‘The Vlaams Blok, ultra-nationalists, skinheads and neo-Nazis in three-piece suits who have now swapped their aggressive glamour for a cultured use of language.’ Many Flemish political scientists would say exactly the same. Martin Sheen is also known as a liberal, in the Anglo-Saxon sense: a progressive. In the Vlaams Blok they in no way underestimate the power of such politically slanted statements in a prestigious American series. If movie big shots from Hollywood are denouncing the Vlaams Blok as barely dressed-up Nazis, is there no basis of truth in the statement?
In Flanders the series is shown by Kanaal 2. The first and second seasons are currently showing. Flanders still has a while to wait before the fifth season is broadcast. Nevertheless, Philip Dewinter recently sent a letter to the heads of the commercial broadcaster asking them ‘to reflect upon the opportunity of broadcasting the scene’ ‘Censorship!’ ‘No,’ says Dewinter. ‘We’re not imposing arbitrary edicts, but if we were in charge at VTM the scene wouldn’t be shown.’ Nor does the boss of the Blok feel his request implies restricting freedom of expression. ‘It’s not about interpretation or an opinion, it’s about a fictional programme that may well determine the image of the Vlaams Blok more than a piece on the party in a specialist publication. That is manipulative and possibly deliberate disinformation.’ In the meantime the party has also contacted the American chargé d’affaires in our country, asking to be heard on the matter.

The VTM bosses are refusing to comply with the Blok’s letter. The Blok leader also appears to have roused some sleeping dogs. ‘The question of whether we will ever show the fifth season has not even come up for discussion,’ says spokesman Mark Vanlombeek.

The scene is shown on www.kanaaltwee.be
Diary

MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE

• 2 December: Grandaddy, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: www.abconcerts 02/548.24.24
• 3 December: Echo & The Bunnyman, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: www.abconcerts 02/548.24.24
• 4 December: Paolo Pandolfo with JS Bach and KF Abel, Bijloke, Ghent; info: www.bijloke.be
• 5 December: Djivan Gasparyan, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
• 5 December: Minguez (string) Quartett with Haydn and Rihm, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• 5 to 13 December: Jan Fabre and Troubleyn with Angel of death, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• 7 October to 4 January: Opera, Antwerp www.vlaamseopera.be
• 9 December: Grandela Voix with Mappamundii and Romanesque with 15th century songs from Florence, Naples and Milan, De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be
• 11 December: Philharmonic Orchestra of Luxembourg conducted by Alexander Rabinovich-Banakovskii with Debussy, Ravel, Strauss and Beethoven, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
• 11 December: Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Valery Gergiev with Sibelius and Stravinski, De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be
• 13 December: Melodi-Diva Liubojevic (Belgrodu), orthodox songs, De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be
• 15 December: Marie Hallynck – Cédric Tiberghien (violoncello, piano) with Brahms and Mendelssohn, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
• 16 December: Michael Franti o Spearhead, Vooruit, Ghent; info: 09/267.28.28 www.vooruit.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 18 December: The museum evenings, every Thursday; www.museumvereniging.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
• Until 28 March: Genovaansverseviersca, 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.mkmg-mrah.be
• 3 October to 11 January: Europalia, Italy: a particular Renaissance, Feratta and the dukes of Este, exhibition, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
• 4 October to 4 January: Anversa e Genova, A summit in Baroque art, exhibition, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp; info: www.europalia.be
• 7 October to 4 January: The breath of soul, Morandi and still life, exhibition, Groeningemuseum, Bruges; info: www.europalia.be
• Until 10 January: Nel Mezzo del cammin… Dante in seven centuries of texts and images, Bibliotheca Wittokciana, Brussels; info: 02/770.53.33 www.europalia.be
• Until 31 December: Art-deco Jewels, Diamond museum, Antwerp; info: 03/202.48.90
• Until 10 March: Icons of Flemish Design, Lokettenzaal, Flemish Parliament, Brussels; info: www.vlaamsparlement.be
• Until 11 January: Venus Unveiled, PSK, Brussels; www.europalia.be, www.bozar.be
• Until 11 January: Giotto and the art in 14th century Padova (La Capella degli Scrovegni), ING CC, Brussels; info: www.europalia.be
• Until 21 December: In search of the perfect lover, exhibitions, City Hall, Brussels; info: www.europalia.be
• Until 7 December: Corpus, Glass like you never saw it before, Fragile durability, exhibitions, Museum of Design, Ghent; info: 09/224.45.22 www.design.museum.gent.be
• Until 4 January: Exhibitions in SMAK, Ghent: Luigi Ontani with Genthara [europalia] – Feste Italia [young Italian artists, europalia]
• Until 11 January: Johan Tahon, Self Self, sculptures – Silvia Schreiber, Head Quarters, Smak, Ghent; info: www.smak.be
• Until 30 May: Human, all too human, photo exhibition on psychiatry, Museum Dr. Guislain, Ghent; info: www.museumdrguislain.be
• Until 31 March: Undercover, The Prinzhorn Collection. The collection was abused by the Nazi’s to build the exhibition ‘Degraded Art’, exhibition, Museum Dr. Guislain, Ghent; info: www.museumdrguislain.be
• Until 1 November: Ever Meulen, drawings, Zwarte Huis, Knokke; info: 050/61.35.65 www.zwetwarenhuis.be
• 5 to 8 December: Lineart, 150 galeries, 1050 artists, Art fair, Flanders Expo, Ghent; info: 09/241.55.00 www.lineart.be
• Until 19 September: Neanderthal Men in Europe, exhibition. Gallo-Roman Museum, Tongeren; info: 012/67.03.30 www.neanderthaler.be

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• Advisory panel: Luc Demeester [Lanoo], Rik Van Cauwelaert [director Knock], Koen Clement [Manager director, De Morgen], Frans Croels [Director Trends], Francis Decoster [Information Officer, Flemish Community], Mark Dewerdit [journalist, financiel-Economische Tijd], Michael Stabenow [journalist, Belang van Limburg], Jan Van Doren [Deputy Director, Vlaams Economisch Verbond], Bernard Bulcke [De Standaard]
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• Telephone: 051/42.42.99
• Fax: 051/40.11.52
• E-mail: frank.vandecaveye@lanoo.be