Purples dealt blow in opinion poll

According to the latest opinion poll by De Standaard and VRT (Table p. 3), the Flemish elections promise a neck-and-neck race between the three main parties, the CD&V, SP.A-Spirit and the VLD. If in last October’s poll it still looked as if the battle to become the biggest party would be between the Purple coalition partners, the VLD and SP.A-Spirit, then January’s poll shows a sharp recovery by the opposition CD&V (24.5%, +3.1% compared to Federal elections) and Vlaams Blok (20%, +1.8%). The Purple government parties have all lost ground. For SP.A-Spirit (23.5%) that remains limited to 0.5%. For the VLD (22.5%) the loss is greater (-2.2%). Compared with October’s poll the loss for the Purples is even more striking: -3.7% for the VLD, -1.3% for SP.A-Spirit. Thanks to a small miracle the VLD has taken a beating. And that is the way it is for now: the VLD has taken a beating. And may not be such a bad thing. Which given the alteration of the government, the CD&V now has such weight in the political debate or places the government in difficulties so often, but simply because it is there: a reliable and quiet alternative, far from the clucking hens that dominate the image of the Purples. The VLD has taken a beating. And once again the oldest rule in political marketing has been proven: put your opponent’s theme on the agenda and they will immediately and gladly reap the rewards. In this way the Blok scaled the heights of 20% for the first time. That is the second surprise: that the Blok’s gains are not even greater, despite the group of politicians from other parties who are doing all they can to make the far-right party rich with no effort on its part. Instead, and fortunately, it is the CD&V that is reaping the rewards. Not because the CD&V now has such weight in the political debate or places the government in difficulties so often, but simply because it is there: a reliable and quiet alternative, far from the clucking hens that dominate the image of the Purples.

Opinion

YVES DESMET • DE MORGEN • 6 FEBRUARY

The VLD has taken a beating. And once again the oldest rule in political marketing has been proven: put your opponent’s theme on the agenda and they will immediately and gladly reap the rewards. In this way the Blok scaled the heights of 20% for the first time. That is the second surprise: that the Blok’s gains are not even greater, despite the group of politicians from other parties who are doing all they can to make the far-right party rich with no effort on its part. Instead, and fortunately, it is the CD&V that is reaping the rewards. Not because the CD&V now has such weight in the political debate or places the government in difficulties so often, but simply because it is there: a reliable and quiet alternative, far from the clucking hens that dominate the image of the Purples.

Flanders wants an effective, proper administration that addresses real issues and not symbolic dossiers such as immigrant voting rights. If the Purples fail to grasp that and cannot release themselves from their bickering and noise, the CD&V will continue to get rich with no effort. Which given the alternative, the continued rise of the Blok, may not be such a bad thing.

WWW.STANDAARD.BE

INTRODUCTION

O Friday 30 January a number of raids in and around Antwerp led to a crisis council between Antwerp’s mayor, public prosecutor and police. A day earlier a Colruyt store was raided for the second time in a short period of time. The chain promptly decided to hire a private security firm. Other department store chains such as Carrefour and Delhaize have also taken extra security measures. A day later on 31 January there was a violent raid on a Nissan garage. Here too there was hardly any loot, but several people were wounded. Since then any failed raid on a paper shop is front-page news. Both shop-owners and the general public are terrified. Should we be talking of a plague of raids? Not according to Antwerp’s Office of the Public Prosecutor. After all, in January 2004 they recorded only 31 raids compared with 49 in January 2003, and they were not more violent than those of last year. But that makes no difference, claims Gazet van Antwerpen (3 February). Whether or not the figures confirm it, unrest and a feeling of danger have again peaked in the region around the port city. Together with the organisation for the self-employed, UNIZO, the paper once again reminded the government that it is its job to guarantee a basic level of safety. Because small shop-owners cannot afford private security. And it is not enough to announce that the ‘feelings of terror’ are exaggerated, because then ‘the people’ will turn against the government, for example by buying a firearm or expressing a ‘protest’ vote (for the Vlaams Blok), the paper claims. On 6 February Gazet van Antwerpen was able to report that 30 extra patrols, eight of them Federal, and a helicopter had been deployed. Blok leader Dewinter also demonstrated this time that he is always on the lookout to exploit increasing feelings of insecurity. The mugshots of one of the main suspects appeared on the Blok’s website, and were short-lived. The Antwerp’s Office of the Public Prosecutor, which pointed out that this initiative was damaging the investigation. Which makes of course little impression on Dewinter, who claims that he wanted to avoid that the investigation would be covered up because it clearly involves an immigrant. How did Dewinter obtain the mugshots? As has been the case in the past: via a fair wind within ‘a frustrated’ police force.

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief
No conflict of interest over immigrant voting rights

Eric Van Rompuy (CD&V) and Filip Dewinter (Vlaams Blok) give Minister-President Bart Somers (VLD) a roasting over ‘the lack of leadership within the Flemish Government’

The fierce attacks by SP.A-Spirit in De Standaard and De Morgen on its coalition partner the VLD were sufficient for opposition leaders Eric Van Rompuy (CD&V) and Filip Dewinter (Vlaams Blok) to give Minister-President Bart Somers (VLD) a roasting in the plenary session of the Flemish Parliament over ‘the lack of leadership within the Flemish Government’. Somers reacted with a summary of the eleven draft decrees the government has already approved this year and the programme it still had to complete before the elections. He also rejected responsibility for the stance taken by the VLD parliamentary group in the Parliament. The VLD’s support for a conflict of interests against immigrant voting rights and its proposal for direct mayoral elections came from individual VLD MPs, he explained. If three-quarters of Flemish MPs get behind such a motion, discussion of the draft in the federal Chamber can be suspended for at least sixty days. Barely a few minutes later a vote was taken on the motion against immigrant voting rights: 85 MPs, including those of the majority party, the VLD voted for, 36 (Groen! and SP.A-Spirit) voted against. Running short seven votes for the required three-quarters majority (FF).

BART HAECK • DE TIJD • 5 FEBRUARY

For Andre Denys (VLD), the conflict of interests set alarm bells ringing. Approving a change in the law that was not supported by the majority in Flanders could have far-reaching consequences for relations between Walloons and Flemings, he said. ‘If you really believe there is a link between voting rights and integration,’ Denys said to Groen! and SP.A-Spirit, ‘then the conflict of interests offers us a chance for consultation. After all, integration policy is a Flemish matter.’ Herman Lauwers, Spirit’s Parliamentary Group Leader, said that immigrant voting rights had nothing to do with integration, but everything to do with giving people the right to have a say. By blocking the Federal discussions, the Flemish Parliament is giving the signal that non-EU citizens are second-class citizens, he claimed, justifying the negative vote by SP.A-Spirit. Groen! agreed with Lauwers.

Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde split back on agenda?

It comes down to a small institutional atom bomb

FF EDITOR

If the Francophones push through immigrant voting rights against the majority of Flemings, why after the elections on 13 June could the Flemings not use their numerical majority in the Federal Parliament to force through an old Flemish demand, namely the splitting up of the bilingual constituency of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde, wonders VLD Chairman Karel De Gucht. At the end of last year the Flemish Parliament almost unanimously ratified a resolution to split this constituency together with Brussels judicial district before the elections on 13 June, making it impossible to vote for Francophone parties in the Flemish Region. The resolution came after 22 Flemish mayors from the Flemish part of the constituency threatened administrative disobedience if the split was not made before the elections. The mayors are threatening to boycott the European elections by not compiling lists of persons entitled to vote. The Flemish Municipalities Minister, Paul Van Grembergen (Spirit) felt the mayors’ demand was justified. Van Grembergen also says no action will be taken against municipalities that boycott the European elections. Even the Court of Arbitration has already ruled that the splitting of the constituency is in violation of the Constitution.

Opinion

BART STURTEWAGEN • DE STANDAARD • 5 FEBRUARY

We will again see a time when a coalition agreement ends on a sentence, saying that no acts or decrees can be approved in Parliament that do not have the backing of all coalition partners.
Flemish government gets afloat

TENSION BETWEEN SP.A-SPRIT AND THE VLD WAS HEIGHTENED EVEN FURTHER WHEN IT EMERGED THAT THE VLD PARLIAMENTARY FRACTION HAD SUBMITTED ITS OWN DRAFT DECREES ON DIRECT MAYORAL ELECTIONS.

After the shameful display of filibustering in the Senate a few weeks ago, the Home Affairs Committee of the Federal Chamber managed to hold discussions on 3 February using arguments for and against immigrant voting rights. Although he is defending a lost cause, VLD Chairman Karel De Gucht again explained his party’s stand, at the same time going to great lengths to emphasise ‘that there was a huge’ difference with the views of the Vlaams Blok. Most Flemings are against it, and in the Netherlands voting rights have not furthered the integration of immigrants, he states. For his party, acquiring Belgian nationality remains the best way to integrate. According to SP.A-Spirit spokeswoman Els Van Weerd, there is no demonstrable link between integration and voting rights, even though this already exists in eight of the fifteen European Member States. According to her party, anyone who lives, works and pays taxes here should have the right to help decide what happens locally. Meanwhile the opposition CD&V and Vlaams Blok are doing all they can to highlight the untenability of the VLD’s position. ‘Your trousers are round your ankles,’ gibed CD&V Parliamentary Party Leader Pieter De Crem at de Gucht in the Chamber.

In the Flemish Parliament the CD&V even tried to turn immigrant voting rights into a conflict of interests with a motion by MP Johan Sauwens (see page 2). Tension between SP.A-Spirit and the VLD was heightened even further when it emerged that the VLD parliamentary faction had submitted its own draft decree on direct mayoral elections. On 30 January the submission of the draft decree on direct mayoral elections was postponed until after the elections, mainly due to Socialists. The SP.A is split internally over the desirability of direct mayoral elections, De Tijd (3 February) believes. The SP.A is not in the least happy that the VLD has now come up with its own proposals and simply pretends it is not the right moment for this issue (FF).

BART BRINCKMAN • DE STANDAARD • 4 FEBRUARY

SP.A Parliamentary Party Leader Bruno Tobback is angry because last Friday the Flemish Government decided ‘in consensus’ to no longer deal with the municipal decree before the elections. ‘I understand that the VLD does not agree with it. Nor does the SP.A with each compromise it has reached. But surely a bit of faith in your coalition partner is not too much to expect? A word is a word. We find it remarkable to say the least that the VLD is extracting part of that municipal decree - direct elections - to create a profile for itself shortly before the elections. After all, the local authorities don’t benefit from it.’

According to Bruno Tobback, the VLD is currently turning ‘everything on its head’: ‘Flanders can’t be properly governed in this way.’ He wants Bart Somers to resume control of the Liberal parliamentary faction. ‘After all, I’d like to see the Flemish Government continue to operate efficiently until June. At the end of the day we expect a bit of cohesion.’

Opinion

YVES DESMET • DE MORGEN • 5 FEBRUARY

According to Stevaert and the SP.A, the Flemish Parliament has already put far too much time and energy into the new electoral legislation. Now blocking the agenda again with a discussion on mayors could well give the impression that these politicians are always worried about themselves, and not the people, he believes. People don’t like that, so soon before the elections. So avoid the discussion now, and put the decree, of which a large majority is after all in favour, on the agenda after the elections. There’s plenty of time, the first new mayors will not be in place until 2006. It is a very simple but accurate analysis. The ministers in the Flemish Government cottoned on quickly. Now their parliamentary parties have too.

WWW.VLAAMSPARLEMENT.BE
VLD keeps immigrant voting rights at top of agenda

Last weekend the spotlight was firmly on the Flemish Liberals. Chairman Karel De Gucht increased the tension on the VRT radio news on 30 January. The topic of conversation was the VLD conference on 6 and 7 February. There the Young VLD-Antwerp will present three resolutions against municipal immigrant voting rights, one of which makes the VLD’s continued participation in government dependent on a vote at the conference. If the conference feels that immigrant voting rights are worthy of a government crisis, there will be a government crisis, confirmed Karel De Gucht in the radio interview. Suddenly the possibility that the government would fall over immigrant voting rights seemed very real. And yet it had been agreed in the federal coalition agreement that immigrant voting rights would not be a matter for government. Had the VLD changed course? That same evening on the VRT programme Villa Politica Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt once again confirmed what the coalition agreement states: immigrant voting rights are not worthy of a government crisis. There was considerable confusion, and Karel De Gucht spent the whole weekend bending over backwards to qualify his tough stand of Friday evening in journals and political discussion programmes on VRT and VTM, and in so doing did not spare his federal SPA and MR coalition partners in particular. With his bold comments De Gucht merely wanted to stress the stakes and importance of the vote on immigrant voting rights, both to supporters and to coalition partners, was the message after the meeting of the VLD party executive on 2 February, where the party’s communication was streamlined. The VLD’s leaders are situating the explanation for the stubborn opposition on the other side of the linguistic border. It had hoped that the opponents of immigrant voting rights in its sister party, the MR, would ultimately vote no. But the vote in the Senate revealed the opposite, and those in the VLD no longer doubt that the MR will vote en bloc in the same way in the Chamber. Or did the anger also have something to do with rumours of a poll in which the Vlaams Blok ended up as the second Flemish party just ahead of the VLD? (FF).

WIM VANDE VELDEN/ MARK DEWEERDT • DE TIJD • 3 FEBRUARY

At the conference the party’s leaders will defend the position that immigrant voting rights must be dealt with in Parliament. That was set down six months ago in the coalition agreement and ratified by the VLD conference. Whether conference delegates will follow the leaders on Saturday remains the question, including for the Liberal leading lights themselves. Members will be faced with a choice: do immigrant voting rights count for anything as a ‘symbolic dossier’ compared with the important socio-economic dossiers on which the VLD can leave a blue stamp in the government? The problem is that the VLD’s leaders have made a ‘symbolic dossier’ out of immigrant voting rights themselves. That will also be flung into the faces of the Liberal heavyweights at the conference: how were things able to go this far? De Gucht & Co. have already established their line of defence. There was an ‘error of judgment’, they claim. The VLD had counted on the support of the opponents of immigrant voting rights in the other majority parties, especially in the Francophone Liberals of the Mouvement Réformateur (MR). But they were silenced and subjected to party discipline, to bring about an alternating majority with the cdH and Ecolo. At the conference, the leading lights of the VLD will therefore be left with only one choice: to lash out at their coalition partners, who did not play by the rules and ‘picked the pockets’ of the VLD. That is a dangerous game, since coming down on the coalition partners like a ton of bricks could well convince the conference delegates to forsake the government and bring the Purple Coalition to a standstill. And even if things do not get that bad, the Purples will still be left behind as the losers. Mistrust of the majority will be great in the run-up to the elections on 13 June. There will be no more concessions. And the position of Premier Guy Verhofstadt and the VLD will suffer as a result. There is a great deal of dissatisfaction with the way in which the VLD is approaching immigrant voting rights, not only among the Socialists, but also among the Francophone Liberals.

N-VA holds election conference

The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, the small radical Flemish-nationalist party that can call itself the successor to the Vlaams Blok, desperately wants to emerge above the electoral threshold on 13 June. To do this, it needs 50,000 more votes than in the Federal elections of 18 May last year. It will be all or nothing, with the continued existence of the party in the balance. The chief villains of the election campaign are the Socialists on both sides of the linguistic border. That emerged at the party’s first election meeting in Hasselt (FF).

JOHAN CORTHOUTS • DE MORGEN • 2 FEBRUARY

According to the chairman, a vote for the N-VA offers a chance to break the dominance of the Belgian Socialists. ‘The PS and SPA form a single solid front, they call the shots. People who want to vote against the PS vote for the N-VA,’ claims Bourgeois. He hopes to have enough elected officers so that his party can if necessary help a coalition of the VLD and CD&V to a Flemish majority. The N-VA is going to the elections with four priority themes: family, education, jobs and greater Flemish self-rule, with the party calling for an independent Flemish republic. The party supports fiscal reform in favour of families and a sharp rise in child benefit. It is also calling for compulsory education to be made completely free. To create more jobs the N-VA wants all socio-economic powers to be in Flemish hands. Healthcare must be financed by a Flemish national insurance. ‘We’re sick of Flemings paying far too much for a government that gives far too little in return. It’s hard-working Flemings who have to foot the bill of Socialist freebie policy and the transfer of billions to Wallonia,’ said Bourgeois.

WWW.N-VA.BE
Generation 2016 wants to give VLD progressive direction

WITH A MANIFESTO THE GROUP IS PRESENTING ITSELF AS THE SUCCESSORS TO THE VERHOFSTADT-DE WAEL-DE GUCHT TRIO

O
n Friday 30 January De Morgen ran a story that a group of sixteen thirty-somethings based around Minister-President Bart Somers, federal State Secretary Vincent Van Quickenborne and the Flemish Ministers Patricia Cayssens and Marino Keulen was planning a ‘progressive raid’ on the VLD party conference to be held on 6 and 7 February. The group is calling itself ‘Generation 2016’, in reference to the Olympic Games they want to organise in Flanders in that year. They want the VLD to remain a modern party and not get bogged down in ‘conservatism, contradiction and bitterness’. With a manifesto the group is presenting itself as the successors to the Verhofstadt-De Wael-De Gucht trio, albeit with the discreet approval of these same party leaders. It was therefore overdoing it a little to say that they were planning a raid. The manifesto was published in De Standaard on 31 January, but due to the carry-on over the weekend involving immigrant voting rights the press conference was postponed to 4 February (FF).

The group has opted for a progressive direction in its manifesto. ‘Generation 2016’ wants to get rid of narrow-minded prejudices and rejects contrasts such as employer-employee or man-woman. It is calling for the abolition of seniority as a criterion for determining salary, the abolition of tax on labour for labour-intensive sectors, and maximum freedom for each school, etc. Some observers see this as an attack on the current Liberal top trio. Something along the lines of what Guy Verhofstadt did at the PVV conference in Kortrijk back in 1979. As youth chairman, he launched his ‘Radical Manifesto’. Three years later he was chairman. And there are in fact similarities. As in 1979, young people today also have the [discreet] backing of the party leaders. And Bart Somers has in fact been named as successor to Chairman Karel De Gucht. And the VLD does in fact need faces which must be able to take up the torch. But the main reason why this Manifesto is being presented now can be found in tactical electoral considerations. The VLD has to do something if it wants to remain the biggest people’s party in Flanders. Its chief competitor, the SP.A, has significantly expanded its electoral pool in recent years. There are continual attempts to expand the former recruitment field of the old SP both to the left (Groen!), the right (the Christian workers’ movement, the ACW) and towards young people (Spirit). Not without success, either. If the VLD wants to remain on course to emerge as the biggest Flemish party on 13 June, it has to broaden its traditional support. Young people in particular are being targeted, since it is assumed that they are generally rather more progressive than the classic VLD platform.

PAUL GEUDENS • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 31 JANUARY

More repatriations point to stricter asylum policy

S
ince 2002 Belgium has clearly employed a stricter asylum policy than in previous years. Last year, 7,742 failed asylum-seekers and illegal immigrants were repatriated by air. Under the policy of Home Affairs Minister Antoine Duquesne (MR) and his successor Patrick Dewael, that number has risen significantly. The increase is also the result of the setting up of closed asylum centres and of agreements that Belgium entered into with various countries to ensure a smoother repatriation. For ‘cases that are difficult to repatriate’, that offer resistance, in other words, the new strategy from Ghent Professor Etienne Vermeeersch is eagerly awaited. An incident in which the Nigerian woman Semira Adamu lost her life made this imperative (FF).

GUY FRANSEN • DE STANDAARD • 5 FEBRUARY

Last year, 3,548 people were picked up or immediately expelled at Belgium’s borders, at airports, at ports and in train stations, compared with 6,081 four years ago. According to the Immigration Service [Federal Home Affairs], the drop is largely due to the bankruptcy of Sabena and the loss of direct flights from Africa. Last year, 2,820 people returned voluntarily, a little less than in the three previous years. If all compulsory and voluntary removals are added together, 14,110 people left the country in 2003, whereas in 1995 that figure was 7,953. In addition to repatriations, in 2003 the Immigration Service also issued 6,028 warrants to leave the country. These warrants assume – sometimes to no avail – that those concerned will leave voluntarily within five days. After the commotion with asylum seekers in Zeebrugge the Home Affairs Minister, Patrick Dewael (VLD), announced that any illegal immigrant picked up for a second time at the port would immediately be locked up and repatriated. Following the conviction of the former gendarmes who were escorting Sémira Adamu, this same minister decided to have the Ghent moral philosopher Etienne Vermeeersch draw up a new strategy for compulsory deportations. The Vermeeersch report will be ready in March.

WWW.GENERATIE 2016.BE

WWW.DOFL.FGOV.BE

POLITICS AND IMMIGRATION POLICY

PARTIES

GSM SALES IN 2003
(IN MILLIONS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOKIA</td>
<td>179,340</td>
<td>33.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOTOROLA</td>
<td>75,440</td>
<td>14.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAMSUNG</td>
<td>53,000</td>
<td>9.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIEMENS</td>
<td>45,340</td>
<td>8.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LG ELECTRONICS</td>
<td>27,100</td>
<td>5.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td>13,270</td>
<td>2.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>533,360</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: TIJD GRAPHICS
Practical compromise for Ryanair and Charleroi Airport

The Irish low-cost airline Ryanair, which has a fifteen-year agreement with the Walloon Region and the airport authority of Charleroi Airport, must immediately repay at least 1 million euros of the 15 million euros it received in government subsidy. This was the decision of the European Commission at the instigation of Transport Commissioner Loyola de Palacio. In so doing the Commission is not rejecting support measures for the development of a regional airport such as Charleroi. However, Ryanair must repay the discount it was granted in recent years on landing rights at Charleroi, the support for the opening of new routes is to be cut from fifteen to not more than five years and the support for ground handling is also to be cut. In any event this implies a revision of the existing fifteen-year contract. In total Ryanair can keep around 75% of its support, says de Palacio. Michael O’Leary, Managing Director of Ryanair, sees the decision as in breach of the principle of the free market in the EU. He sees the ruling as an attack on budget airlines such as Easyjet and Virgin, are also to be cut. Business with operating costs for the government and revenue for your own accounts: not difficult to become a highly profitable company this way. Despite the ceaseless lobbying by Wallon and Irish politicians that was able to get it off the ground, Ryanair has been ordered to pay a deserved fine.

GUIDO MEEUSSEN • DE TIJD • 4 FEBRUARY

Budget airlines have become a permanent fixture in the world of aviation. They offer regions the chance to develop, create jobs and have given a new boost to making travel more democratic. But just as national airlines had to adapt to the rules of the free market, the budget carriers now have to accept the limits of that free market. And that is what O’Leary has trouble with.

WWW.RYANAIR.COM
WWW.WALLONIE.BE

Opinions

YVES DESMET • DE MORGEN • 4 FEBRUARY

Back in May 2001 an extensively documented report was published in De Morgen on how the Irish low-cost carrier Ryanair managed to charge such low fares. By keeping costs to a minimum, certainly, but also and primarily by extracting scandalous numbers of subsidies from the government in Charleroi and Wallonia. Not only was there the ‘small discount’ on landing rights granted by the government: BEF 5,000 instead of 60,000. The airport also made some of its staff, who via an accounting loophole appear on the payroll of the Walloon Region, available to Ryanair free of charge. The company was also given free offices at the airport, a reduction of as much as 75% on handling, 4 euros in promotion costs per passenger, which financed a large number of free tickets. And the jackpot was not yet empty. Overnight accommodation costs for staff, training expenses... Ryanair asked, the Walloon Region paid. The rationale behind that improbable package was a certain number of new jobs, but above all a very good pretext to have Charleroi airport continually re-developed by local contractors. As the company kept costs low, the revenue for your own accounts: not difficult to become a highly profitable company this way. Despite the ceaseless lobbying by Wallon and Irish politicians that was able to get it off the ground, Ryanair has been ordered to pay a deserved fine.

WWW.RYANAIR.COM
WWW.WALLONIE.BE

Unemployment keeps rising, as does number of vacancies filled

The economy is picking up, consumer and employer confidence are on the rise and even the job market is showing a positive trend. But for the time being there is little evidence of all this in the unemployment figures and in developments in the number of bankruptcies. At the end of January Flanders had 17,468 non-working job seekers more than in January 2003. At 8.07%, unemployment was also half of one per cent higher. One positive aspect, however, is that unemployment is rising less than a month by month. On an annual basis it came to 8.8% in January. In December it was still 9.2%, in October and September more than 10%. In Wallonia, conversely, unemployment continues to rise. In Flanders, unemployment seems to mainly affect the industrial regions such as Kortrijk (West Flanders) and Limburg, reports De Tijd [3 February]. The number of businesses that went bankrupt is also 3.4% higher than in January 2003, according to the commercial information agency Graydon. On the job market, however, the number of vacancies rose sharply in 2003, reports the VDAB. Of the 245,000 vacancies, 84% were filled, compared with only 78% of the 219,000 vacancies in 2002.

WWW.VDAB.BE
WWW.GRAYDON.BE

EVOLUTION OF FLEMISH UNEMPLOYMENT (NON-WORKING JOB SEEKERS)

Source: TIJD Graphics
Belgium blocks cultivation of GM rapeseed

Federal Environment Minister Freya Vanden Bossche (SP.A) and Public Health Minister Rudy Demotte (PS) have rejected the application of chemical giant Bayer AG (Crop Science) to cultivate genetically modified (GM) rapeseed in Europe. It can, however, be imported and processed in food. That is, in short, the recommendation they gave the European Commission. If less than half the European Member States go against that recommendation, the growing of modified rapeseed will be banned throughout Europe. Ironically, the Ghent-based biotech firm Plant Genetic Systems developed the genetically modified rapeseed (FF).

TOM COCHEZ • DE MORGEN • 3 FEBRUARY

The main argument against the cultivation of genetically modified rapeseed comes from a large-scale investigation carried out on British soil. The conclusion of that investigation, which took place with the co-operation of Bayer, prompted the British Biosafety Council to point to the dangers for biodiversity. The Belgian recommendation that was passed on to Europe yesterday falls into two parts. Under strict conditions, genetically modified rapeseed can be imported into and processed in Europe, but cannot be grown here,' says Freya Van den Bossche. 'To be processed in food, the European Food Agency must first give its approval. It can be imported under certain conditions. The minister puts forward two reasons for the ban: the direct risks to the environment and the link Bayer makes between modified rapeseed and the use of an extremely powerful herbicide. Rapeseed pollen can be spread up to 27 kilometres, with all the risks this implies for the infection of normal rapeseed by genetically modified rapeseed. In Belgium we have many wild variants of rapeseed that threaten to disappear. The use of Bayer’s rapeseed also implies a new agricultural practice. A very powerful herbicide is used throughout the entire production process that kills everything apart from the rapeseed, which has been so genetically modified that it is resistant to the herbicide.’ Environmental organisations are happy with the ban on cultivation, but VELT (Association for Ecological Living and Cultivation) points out that with this decision Belgium is simultaneously instigating the repeal of the European moratorium on GMOs. ‘That moratorium stipulates that new GMOs are not allowed to enter Europe and has been in place since 1998. Up to now Belgium has supported that moratorium.’

http://europa.eu.int/commission/food/plant
http://europa.eu.int/commission/agriculture/publi/gmo

Stella Artois Music gives local music scene helping hand

THE FLAG OF STELLA ARTOIS MUSIC IS FLUTTERING ABOVE FESTIVAL FIELDS AND IN CONCERT HALLS, AND SOON THE LOGO WILL ALSO APPEAR ON CD’S

On 1 February a new Belgian record label called Stella Artois Music® will be launched. With this label, the Belgian brewer Interbrew is giving a helping hand to local artists whose contracts have been terminated due to the continuing malaise in the music business. Admittedly, big Belgian names like Novastar, K’s Choice or DEUS are still with international record companies, but others, such as Gorki or Arid, still popular locally, have been given the boot. Two years ago Marcel Heymans, Chairman of IFPI, which represents the major record companies, warned that local artists would find the going tough if the large-scale illegal copying of music continued. Interbrew’s initiative is a gift from the Gods for local artists. Even though the brewer also wants this to remind young people that alongside breezers and soft drinks there is also something called beer. The first release on Stella Artois Music® is expected by mid-February (FF).

STEF VAN WOENSEL • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 3 FEBRUARY

New record companies are springing up like mushrooms. They keep costs down, and often do good things in a modest scale. Until they can go no further, because often they do not have any links abroad. Sometimes the Netherlands wants to tag along, but it stops there. Never before has Flanders companies such as Pepsi and Budweiser have long associated their name with concert tours and record releases. But the Stella Artois Music label is going a step further and giving the beer brand the allure of an artistic Maecenas: ‘Stella Artois will save Belgian music.’

WWW.POPSUBSIDIE.BE
WWW.STELLAARTOISMUSIC.BE

Enter Stella Artois Music. A bright initiative by a brewer that has already been targeting young people from stages for the past six years. The flag of Stella Artois Music is fluttering above festival fields and in concert halls, and soon the logo will also appear on CDs. Patronage? Obviously not. Stella Artois wants to bring beer within reach in a market in which young people are increasingly reaching for soft drinks or breezers and in the worst case can prolong an evening with a pill. That own label is a clever move, with the brewer basing itself on the sober assumption that an incredibly large number of talented musicians currently have to set up their own little companies. Music sponsoring is not new. American companies such as Pepsi and Budweiser have long associated their name with concert tours and record releases. But the Stella Artois Music label is going a step further and giving the beer brand the allure of an artistic Maecenas: ‘Stella Artois will save Belgian music.’
**Diary**

**MUSIC, DANCE THEATRE**

- 10 February: Maria Joao Pires and Ricardo Galhardo (piano) with Schubert and Chopin, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- 10 and 11 February: Needlapb, Need Company, theatre, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: 09/267.28.28 www.vooruit.be
- 12 February: A Night at the Zoo, with Schubert, Sibelius and Bar-loyd Orchestra conducted by Etienne Siebens, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
- 12 February: Spectra Ensemble conducted by Filippo Delocca with Christina Ascher (mezzo-soprano), compositions by Luciano Berio, De Bijloke, Ghent; info: www.debijloke.be 09/269.92.92
- 12 to 14 February: Merten Spangenberg (Sw) with All All Over All All Artists’ talk, Kaaitheaterstudio’s, Brussels; info: 02/201.59.59 www.kaaitheater.be
- 14 February: Javier Pereda, Flamenco, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248/28/28 www.desingel.be
- 11 February: Omer Sosa Trio (Guba), Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
- 12 February: Need Company, no comment, theatre, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: 09/267.28.28 www.vooruit.be
- 12 February: Bill Laswell & Material, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: 09/267.28.28 www.vooruit.be
- 12 February: Jigsaw Circus, International Music Video Festival, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: 09/267.28.28 www.vooruit.be
- 12, 13 and 14 February: Flanders Sympho-ny Orchestra conducted by Etienne Siebens with Schubert, Sibelius and Bartok, Concertgebouw Brugge, Conservatory Brussels and De Singel, Antwerp, info: 09/225.42.90 www.symfonieorkest.be
- 13 February: Prashant Shah, India, dance, Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
- 13 February: Jan Rzewuski & Band, Coming Together/Atica, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: 09/267.28.28 www.vooruit.be
- 13 February: Patricia and Emilia Kopa-sińska, Mihalea Ursuleasa and Viktor Kopatsińska, with Ravel and Händel, Händelbeurs, Ghent; info: www.händelbeurs.be
- 13 and 14 February: Christina Branco (Portugal), Fado, AB, Brussels (www.abcon-certs.be) and Handsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.händelbeurs.be
- 14 February: Wu Man, China, concert, Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
- 14 February: Piano Manuel, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: 09/267.28.28 www.vooruit.be
- Until 15 February: Berio, ten days non-stop theatre, dance, concerts and parties, opening of Beurschouwburg, Brussels, info: 02/550.53.50 www.beurschouwburg.be
- 15 February: Two clavichords with Anne Galowich, Concertgebouw, Bruges; info: 07/22.33.02 www.concertgebouw.be
- 16 February: Destihloharmonie conducted by Daniele Cagieni with Stravinsky and Strauss, Konigin Elisabethzaal, Antwerp, info: 0900/00311
- 17 February: Eric Watson (piano) and Bo-tian Zhan (Partitas, Bartok), double concert, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- 18 February: Ilya and Naum Grabert (piano) and Dimitri Pertshinkov (violincello) with Brahms, De Singel, Antwerp, info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- 18 to 22 February: Ricardo Barta, El Espacio Artista, Argent, Spanish spoken, super titles in French and Dutch, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- 19 to 23 February: Prague in Brussels, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- 19 February: Prazak Quartet with Suk, Janacek and Dvorak, Conservatory, Brus-sels, info: www.bozar.be
- 23 February: The Nits, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.händelbeurs.be
- 23 February: Urna Chagar, Tugchi (Mon-golia), concert, Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
- 20 February: Małgorzata Koszela (mez-zosoprano) and Malcolm Martinseau with Mahler, Dvorak, Rössl and Ravel, Conservatory, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be
- 21 February: Prague Philharmonia conducted by Jiri Belohlavek with Dvorak, Conservatory, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- 23 February: Flemish Radio Orchestra conducted by Jan Latham-Koenig with Chopin and Janacek, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be

Focus on Flanders provides a weekly overview of articles from the Flemish press and appears in English, French and German. This newsletter is published by Uitgeverij Lannoo nv, Kasteelstraat 97, 9000 Tielt and can also be obtained by e-mail.

**EXPO**

- Until 28 March: Genovanverssevicesvers, 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.kmkv-mrah.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 exhibition was abused by the Nazi’s to build the exhibition ‘Degraded Art’, exhibition, Museum Dr. Guislain, Ghent; info: www.museumdrguislain.be
- Until 25 April: The art of the Islam, exhibition, Museum of the Cinquantenaire, Parque du Cinquantenaire, Brussels
- Until 9 May: Fernand Khnopff, retrospective exhibition, KMSK, Brussels; info: 03/213.49.49
- Until 21 March: Dream extensions with Mariko Moro, Jane & Louise Wilson, Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven, Georgina Starr, SMAK, Ghent; info: www.smak.be
- Until 29 February: Once upon a time, Belgian art in the nineties, MUDA, Antwerp; info: www.muhka.be
- Until 29 February: Stalking Hieronymus with works by Hans Vandekerckhove, Anselm Kiefer and AR Penck, PMMK, Ostend; info: www.pmmk.be
- Until 23 March: Henry Laste, Art Deco, exhibition Museum for Architecture, Elsene (Brussels)
- Until 29 February: 100 years, 100 objects, Design Museum, Ghent
- Until 14 February: L’Eau et les Rêves, exhibition with Israeli and Palestinian artists; Witte Zaal, Ghent; info: 09/235.42.90
- Until 15 February: Antiques Fair, Brussels; info: 02/513.48.31 www.antiques-fair.be
- 13 February to 4 April: B-Architects, exhi-bition De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248/28/28 www.desingel.be

**Focus on Flanders • 31 January - 6 February • Number 5**

**Editor in chief:** Frank Vandecaveye
**Production & Distribution:** Luc Decoster [Lannoo], Rik Van Cauwelaert [director Knock], Wim Coensens [Managing director, De Morgen], Frans Croghs [Director, Trends], Francis Decoster [Information Officer, Flemish Community], Mark Deweerdt [journalist, Financieel-Economische Tijds], Michael Stabenow [Correspondent, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung], Luc Standaert [journalist, Belang van Limburg], Jan Van Doren [Deputy Director, Vlaams Economisch Verbond], Bernard Bulcke [De Standaard]
**With thanks to:** Concentra nv, De Vijt nv, De Vlaamse Uitgevermaatschappij nv, De Persgroep nv, Uitgeversbedrijf Tijd nv and Roularta Media Group nv and their editorial teams for supplying the articles.