De Gucht sidelined by VLD party top

‘An empty box’ is how VLD Chairman, Karel De Gucht, referred to a circular the government intended to add to the bill on immigrant voting rights (see p. 2). The circular was a compromise solution, which was agreed surprisingly quickly and approved by all majority parties. Everyone, including the VLD, wanted to remove the issue of immigrant voting rights from the agenda as soon as possible, because according to recent opinion polls only the opposition was gaining from it. The VLD regained its unanimity at the party conference and accepted the defeat on immigrant voting rights with honour. All expectations pointed to the fact that the country could now be ‘governed’ again. However, this did not take into account the stubborn efforts of Karel De Gucht, who manfully continued his battle in parliament. He submitted an amendment for the further limitation of immigrant voting rights, which was swiftly voted out. This was the proverbial straw. Two weeks earlier he had already angered the prime minister by declaring that the VLD was prepared to face a government crisis in order to reinforce its opposition to immigrant voting rights. Using his amendment he again looked for a confrontation with the coalition partners SPA-Spirit, PS and MR and the premier this week. In an interview published in De Morgen on 12 February, De Gucht again highlighted his ‘steely’ party logic. But his fate had already been decided the night before at a crisis meeting in the prime minister’s official residence involving the entire party top except for De Gucht. The trigger for this meeting was a secret opinion poll held amongst VLD voters, according to which the VLD would lose one third of its voters as a result of its approach to the immigrant voting rights dossier (FF).

Opinion

Luc Van der Keelen • Het Laatste Nieuws • 13 February

The opinion poll showed that the strategy, based on making the immigrant voting rights issue a hanging matter, was completely undermining the party. Guy Verhofstadt knew that he had to act quickly to deal with the way in which Karel De Gucht was endangering the government and VLD’s new favour acquired at Saturday’s conference. Verhofstadt must have been well aware that De Gucht was steering the VLD ship towards the opposition and that a lack of action on his part would also undermine the coalition partners’ faith in him.

INTRODUCTION

Thursday, 12 February, will remain etched in the memories of many Rue de la Loi watchers for a long time to come. No fewer than three parties, VLD, MR and Green! were facing a serious crisis. The Limburg section of the Green! party is threatening to break away. And the majority in the Flemish Parliament is preparing to face the next elections in a cartel with SPA-Spirit. The sector refuses to abide by the decision made at the latest party conference to stand independently. Flemish Environment Minister, Ludo Sannen, supports those in favour of a cartel and has already made it clear that he will not be a candidate on the Groen! list at the next elections. The French speaking MR liberals were no less affected. Their Brussels figurehead, Daniel Ducarme, was forced to resign as minister-president of the Brussels region. It had been known for some time that Ducarme was in trouble with the taxman. Vers l’Avenir published details on this subject on 12 February. Ducarme’s tax returns had allegedly not been completed, or completed late, for a period of five years. Ducarme emphasised that this was not a case of fraud but that he could no longer live with the insinuations. He was replaced that same day by Jacques Simonet. In Flanders attention was obviously focused on the power struggle in the VLD top. The high-handedness of party Chairman, Karel De Gucht, on the subject of an amendment on the tightening of immigrant voting rights was the straw that broke the camel’s back. Following a crisis meeting involving all VLD ministers as well as ex-party chairman Willy De Clerck, Annemie Neyts and Herman Decroo, Karel De Gucht was asked to resign. De Gucht refused knowing full well that he could only be unseated with a motion of distrust at a party conference, which amounted to a political impossibility four months before the elections. However, ‘in the interest of the party’ he was prepared to hand over the political leadership to premier Verhofstadt and to Flemish Minister-President, Bart Somers. De Gucht will remain in charge overall but, according to Het Laatst Nieuws, this merely relates to ‘flowerpots and party buildings’. Many press observers doubt whether the combination of government leader and political leader is a feasible option. An ambiguous emergency solution according to De Standaard and De Tijd. Both papers feel that Verhofstadt will find himself in a position in which he is very vulnerable to attacks from the opposition and his coalition partners.

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief
No voting rights for rejected candidate Belgians?

Belgians and immigrants are treated on an equal footing

The day after the VLD party conference, during a transmission of the VRT programme ‘De Zevende Dag’, Chairman Karel De Gucht announced that he would submit an amendment on immigrant voting rights, whereby immigrants with a criminal past would be refused voting rights. SPA fraction leader, Dirk Vander Maelen, did not reject this outright, but appealed for another solution - for instance a ministerial circular - as a new amendment would have to be resubmitted to the Senate, where it has already been approved in the meantime. Louis Michel (MR) also considered this a ‘logical and reasonable’ proposal. Only the PS suspected delaying tactics. De Gucht wants to establish what the reason for the refusal was for the 25% of immigrants whose naturalisation applications were rejected. He is of the opinion that in cases involving membership of integristic organisations, involvement in prostitution, in the drugs trade or human trafficking, or serious convictions, voting rights should be refused. The Home Affairs Minister, Patrick Dewael (VLD), reported in De Standaard (9 February) that he would be prepared to implement the proposal with a circular. ‘That way Belgians and immigrants are treated on an equal footing. Belgians with a criminal record can also lose their voting rights,’ the minister pointed out (FF).

MARK DEWEERDT • DE TIJD • 10 FEBRUARY

The circular met with judicial objections. Paul Van Orshoven, professor in public legislation at the University of Leuven, stated that with a circular no exceptions can be made with respect to legal definitions. It has been agreed, however, to apply the Electoral Code, according to which an individual who incurs a criminal conviction will definitely lose his/her voting rights. Individuals who are sent to prison for at least four months temporarily lose their voting rights (minimum 6, maximum 12 years).

Circular has no substance, opposition and De Gucht say

By Monday lunchtime, 9 February, the majority parties spurred on by Guy Verhofstadt had agreed that the tightening of the immigrant voting rights act would be coordinated via a circular. However, the circular does not at all reflect what party Chairman De Gucht implied with his original amendment proposal, but Verhofstadt wants to get the issue of immigrant voting rights over and done with as soon as possible. During the parliamentary debate on the act on 10 February the opposition parties CD&V, Vlaams Blok and N-VA continually reminded VLD Chairman De Gucht that the circular had no substance. As a result De Gucht threatened with another amendment, to the great annoyance of the socialist coalition partners and of his own party executive (FF).

ISABEL ALBERS • DE STANDAARD • 10 FEBRUARY

Following the approval of the bill on immigrant voting rights the Interior Ministry will send a relevant circular to local authorities. The same happened in 1999 with the introduction of municipal voting rights for non-Belgians in the European Union. The circular stated that local authorities had to verify whether EU citizens, registering as voters, were/were not excluded from voting on the basis of the municipal criminal records. These regulations are now extended to non-Belgians originating from outside the European Union, who will get municipal voting rights. A new feature is the fact that local authorities can contact the Naturalisations department of the Chamber to verify whether or not a non-Belgian from outside the European Union, registering as a voter, has convictions that would remove his/her voting rights.

Yvo Belet from VRT to CD&V

FF EDITOR

Yvo Belet, anchorman of the information programme Ter Zake of the public broadcasting company VRT, has been awarded third place on the European list of CD&V. This implies that he is following in the footsteps of his ex-colleague, Dirk Sterkx, who was awarded a place on the European VLD list during the previous European elections and is currently a member of the European parliament. Belet, who sees himself as a ‘progressive Christian democrat’, started his career as a trainee in the CD&V delegation at the European Parliament. With the VRT he specialised in Euro reporting for some time, later became anchorman and currently deputy chief editor, but also the responsible for the election programmes. According to what he says the European credibility of CD&V was the deciding factor for his decision. Current MP, Marianne Thyssen, will be second on the list. Party Chairman Yves Leterme assured us that we would know by end of March whether or not Jean-Luc Dehaene will lead the list. In all probability Leterme will lead the list for the regional elections in West Flanders. Former European list leader Miet Smet is transferring from the European list to second place on the regional list for East Flanders.

WWW.FED-PARL.BE

WWW.CDENV.BE

focus on FLANDERS • 7 February - 13 February 2004 • Number 6
Stubbbon one-man campaign by De Gucht leads to question marks

Much to the dissatisfaction of the coalition partners, SPA, PS and MR, VLD Chairman Karel De Gucht did after all submit his amendment for the tightening of immigrant voting rights to the Commission of Internal Affairs in the House. But, as expected, it was voted out and immigrant voting rights were approved. With his one man campaign De Gucht opposed an agreement between his party leadership and the coalition partners. Does De Gucht’s initiative point to a serious split between the premier and the party chairman? Or is there more to this (FF)?

STEVEN SOMERS • HET LAATSTE NIEUWS • 12 FEBRUARY

The SPA concludes as follows: ‘From now on we will differentiate between the VLD party and its chairman. We continue to put our faith in the party, but I would rather not make any statements about its chairman,’ states SPA member of the house, Philip De Coene. Meanwhile all is not well between Premier Verhofstadt and Karel De Gucht.

On Monday the VLD party leadership had approved the agreement within the government that the tightening would be implemented on the basis of a circular and not via an amendment to the law. De Gucht is oblivious of any guilt: ‘I am merely implementing what congress decided on Saturday - we remain opposed to immigrant voting rights in parliament. My amendment is completely in line with that decision. It is not a delaying tactic. My text can also be approved by the Senate within 14 days.’ De Gucht denies that there is a problem between himself and the prime minister. ‘He is the VLD leader within the government, for whom I have the greatest respect. I am not at war with anyone, but I do notice the ‘spin’ being created around me.’

Reserved reactions after Kabila’s

On 10 February the Congolese head of state, Joseph Kabila, staged an historic address to the Belgian Senate. He appealed for a stop to the disputes of historic past and the murder of Patrice Lumumba, in order to concentrate on future Belgian/Congolese cooperation. He even paid homage to the colonial past and the more stringent Congolese controls the official export of diamonds from Congo has doubled to 640 million dollars, reports Christian Dietrich, expert for the International Peace Information Service (IPIS) in Antwerp (De Standaard, 12 February). But Kabila’s foreign policy, has been brought to an end. The UN representative Monuc, continues to monitor events.

Dewael warns mayors of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde district

22 mayors in the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde district are threatening with governmental disobedience if their district is not divided before the regional and European elections on 13 June. The mayors feel that a verdict of the Court of Arbitration, which declared the district unconstitutional, supports their claim. The Court urges the legislator to abolish a constituency that cuts right through the constitutional classification of communities, regions, language regions and provinces as soon as possible (at the latest before the federal elections of 2007). Yet, the Interior Minister, Patrick Dewael (VLD), has issued a warning that mayors who do not observe their legal obligations during the European elections could be suspended or unseated. According to the minister mayors are entitled to express an opinion on a political question, but this should not affect the political rights of their citizens.

WWW.ARBITRAGE.BE

STATE REFORM

NEWCOMERS IN FLANDERS (2003)

WHERE DO THEY COME FROM?

1. Morocco
2. Turkey
3. Russia
4. Yugoslavia
5. China
6. Poland
7. Congo
8. India
9. USA
10. Iran
11. France
12. Germany
13. UK
14. Afghanistan
15. Ghana
16. Algeria
17. Philippines
18. Bulgaria
19. Thailand
20. Iraq

SOURCE: HET LAATSTE NIEUWS
Conference decides VLD remains in government

Enthusiastic conference participants described the event as a milestone in internal party democracy and a catharsis following months of internal division.

More than 83% of VLD members present at the party conference at the Heizel in Brussels opted for continued government participation and for a valorisation of the coalition agreement with the governing partners. Initially the opponents of government participation had the most sway. Annick De Ridder, chairwoman of Young VLD Antwerp, the department that managed to collect the necessary signatures (1150) to convene the conference, requested her party to table the dossier with the government and to wait and see whether the coalition partners SP.A-Spirit, PS and MR were really prepared to bring down the government on the issue of immigrant voting rights.

Three hours of discussions demonstrated that the majority of those present were against immigrant voting rights, but that there was no consensus on which conclusions the party should draw from this. But then Willy De Clercq, member of the European Parliament and erstwhile chairman of the PVV (that changed its name into VLD in 1992) for many years, took to the rostrum. In an emotional appeal to party members he asked them to support Verhofstadt and his government. He received a standing ovation. Then the prime minister, visibly moved to tears, addressed the audience. He asked for and received the conference’s vote of confidence. In an outburst of ‘fair play’ Annick De Ridder, who tabled the motion, then admitted defeat and joined the majority. Enthusiastic conference participants later described the event as a milestone in internal party democracy and a catharsis following months of internal division. (FF).

LUC STANDAERT • HET BELANG VAN LIMBURG • 9 FEBRUARY

Willy De Clercq implicitly addressed the conference participants as ‘the wise old man’ and implored them not to approve the motion of Young VLD Antwerp. ‘If you vote for the resolution it will be a motion of distrust against the party executive! Then the executive will have to go! This will create a major crisis within the party just a few weeks before the regional elections! That means we will vote out the prime minister and create a government crisis! We will suffer huge losses!’ was his emotional appeal to the conference. He received a standing ovation. De Clercq’s plea also touched a chord in the next speaker, Guy Verhofstadt. He stammered that he was ‘greatly moved’ by the appeal from the man he considered to be his political father, who had made his way to the conference even though his wife was seriously ill. With emotion in his voice and tears in his eyes the prime minister started to address the conference. He listed the achievements of his government, evoked the spectre of the Christian democrats returning to government, returned to the start of his political career and decided to ask for a vote of confidence from the conference ‘for the seventh time in my life’. The question then was how large the majority would be that would reject the proposal to turn immigrant voting rights into a government issue and how many liberals would be prepared to vote ‘against their prime minister’. In a state of euphoria the conference almost unanimously approved both resolutions tabled by Young VLD Antwerp, which implies that VLD is now demanding a referendum on immigrant voting rights.

Opinion

PAUL GEUDENS • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 9 FEBRUARY

Credit where credit is due. The VLD conference was directed to perfection. With exceptional actors. Willy De Clercq’s emotional plea was a masterly move and a brilliant performance. If anyone within VLD holds sway with the dark blue, conservative old guard, it is Willy De Clercq. His intervention removed any remaining doubts. De Clercq managed to convince many of the minor critics and enabled Verhofstadt to continue in government.

WWW.VLD.BE

Reactions following the opinion poll

Following the gains in the opinion polls in De Standaard, in which CD&V emerges as the largest and its major competitor VLD received a dressing down, Yves Leterme is predicting in De Standaard ([7 February]) that the Liberals and Socialists will maintain the current coalition between red, blue and green if necessary at any cost. The statements made by Minister-President Somers ([7 February]) in Gazet van Antwerpen also point in that direction (FF).

BART BRINCKMAN/BART DOBBELAERE • DE STANDAARD • 7 FEBRUARY

The CD&V likes to condemn the electoral deception in particular by the SPA. He does not intend to be guilty of this sin. If he is elected he will join the Flemish Parliament, although that is not actually his intention. His main aim is to break up the majority. ‘We do not intend to sell our souls merely to help out. But I have no illusions - they will only ask us if they cannot live without us. The Socialists and Liberals have agreed to continue after 13 June. If they have to, they will include the greens. Consequently, the voter can vote again for a few more years of purple-green, as is the case now. Or for us - a stronger, more credible and more serious government. Not just flashy, but producing results.’ However, progress should be possible in the Flemish Government, even if the Federal Government remains purple. ‘This type of asymmetric government will appear sooner or later,’ states Leterme.

ERIC DONCKIER • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 7 FEBRUARY

Minister-President Somers: ‘If the voter honours all four of the departing Flemish governing parties, it is natural that this coalition will occur. If the voter decides to rearrange the cards, we will have to adapt. Guy Verhofstadt has already voted for purple, also at Flemish level. Somers can identify with Verhofstadt. The same coalition at all government levels makes governing easier. But other coalitions at different levels should also be possible. I think we should finally start to respect the logic of federalism. Obviously we will have to get used to it initially, but you can get used to anything.’
Criticism of police reform, also in government circles

Both the PS and SPA recently demanded that the coalition agreement that provides for the additional recruitment of 2,500 police men/women would be implemented ASAP.

The federal police is related to the success, or failure of the integration of the various forces. The federal police has remained too much of a ‘gendarmerie’. As a result it continues to struggle with a very rigid, hierarchic and bureaucratic organisation, in which former members of the CID still feel orphaned, have never integrated nor disarmed. Not only do former CID members feel discriminated against, according to the Arbitration Court they are, which implies that parts of the new police statute will have to be rewritten.

The federal Interior Minister, Patrick Dewael (VLD), has proposals to deal with the objections of the Arbitration Court and to introduce more flexibility into the rigid arrangements for night and weekend shifts. But the unions are up in arms and intend to take action. They feel that Dewael wants to undermine their recently acquired statute.

More flexibility comes at a price, they argue. And the objections of the Arbitration Court can only be met by disconnecting function and level, again at the expense of the government. It seems that the police reforms will get even more expensive. And that presents a problem in the political domain, in particular if the huge funds already invested have not resulted in a significant improvement in performance from the federal police.

The safety adviser recognises that the government is partly to blame for the problems. The single statute is too complex. He is of the opinion that simplification and flexibility are an absolute necessity. De Ruyver hopes that the police unions and the Federal Interior Minister, Patrick Dewael (VLD), can still come to an agreement on this.

The unions are planning a national protest march on 18 February. All negotiations with the unions have been suspended until that date (FF).

Opinion

STEFAN HUYSENTRUYT • DE TIJD • 10 FEBRUARY

The police reforms cost an arm and a leg. The final figure amounts to 325 million euros on an annual basis, or almost three times the 125 million euros originally allocated. With the local police the price/quality ratio of the reform is less than optimum but at least the ratio is positive. Not so with the federal police where matters are worse than before the reforms. The difference in performance between the ‘local and the federal police is related to the success, or failure of the integration of the various forces. The federal police has remained too much of a ‘gendarmerie’. As a result it continues to struggle with a very rigid, hierarchic and bureaucratic organisation, in which former members of the CID still feel orphaned, have never integrated nor disarmed. Not only do former CID members feel discriminated against, according to the Arbitration Court they are, which implies that parts of the new police statute will have to be rewritten.

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BelgiumExel takes on long distance flights for Thomas Cook

Following the bankruptcy of Sobelair another newcomer has entered the Belgian aviation market. From the end of this month BelgiumExel, part of the Dutch aviation concern Exel Aviation Group, will handle all flights for tour operator Thomas Cook to Cuba, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Kenya and Zanzibar. After the demise of Sobelair Thomas Cook, which provided more than 30% of the charter company’s turnover, managed to cover part of the activities with its own aircraft, but was still looking for a partner for long distance flights. For the time being BelgiumExel has based one Boeing 767-300 in Belgium, which will be used exclusively for Thomas Cook flights. The two companies have signed an eighteen-month agreement. The company has already announced that it has 50 cabin crew vacancies.

BART EECBHOUT • DE MORGEN • 11 FEBRUARY

The federal police itself does not accept this attack. ‘The management of the federal police feels that this criticism of its operations is unjust and over simplified,’ declares a brief statement. Police management is demanding an ‘urgent meeting’ with Prime Minister Verhofst tad and Ministers Dewael and Onkelinx. Top police management is not happy in particular with the criticism relating to bureaucracy. The criticisms of Vandermeersch and De Ruyver have focused political attention back on to the police reform problems. Their critical remarks coincide with another surfacing criticism from socialist government side.

Both the PS and SPA recently demand-
**ECONOMY AND MOBILITY**

**COMPANIES**

### Gores acquires 83% share in Real Software

Following an assumption of debt, which will be converted into a capital increase, the Gores Technology Group (GTG) will acquire an 83% share in Real Software. The American investment fund has reached an agreement with the banks on the surrender of Real Software’s bank debt. The latter amounted to 200 million euros. This is on condition, however, that it can obtain backing from the old shareholders and non-banking creditors (FF).

**PASCAL DEN DOOVEN • DE STANDAARD • 12 FEBRUARY**

Gores will contribute 155 million euros of the nominal debt as a capital increase. As a result Gores acquires 151 million new Real Software shares as opposed to the 30.44 million existing ones. This provides the American fund with an 83% interest in the 181.44 million shares. With Gores the watering-down effect is more significant than in the scenario based on a contribution by the banks, as was proposed in November of last year. Gores contributes considerably more debt, but at a higher exchange rate, i.e., 1.02 euros per share or in excess of yesterday’s stock market quotation of 0.70 euros. Gores is maintaining a debt of 45 million euros in Real Software and is allowing the company a two year payment delay for capital repayments (until June 2006) and interest payments. Real Software is entitled to repay the 45 million-euro debt completely within the first two years at a 50% discount. Gores is also injecting 10 million euros working capital into Real Software, on the basis of a loan that can be converted into capital. This of course reinforces the watering-down effect. Overall Gores is investing approximately 30 million euros in the takeover of Real Software.

An important aspect is the fact that the agreement between Gores and the banks is conditional upon Gores receiving backing for the debt contribution from the old Real Software shareholders, including Rudy Hageman, the ASQ branch and Anthylis (Luxembourg). Gores also needs to reach an agreement with Hageman, ASQ and the French Real Software branch. The company has until the extraordinary annual general meeting (6 April) to obtain the necessary agreements. The annual figures for 2003 will not be published until 27 February.

**WWW.GORES.COM**

**WWW.REALSOFTWARE.BE**

### Antwerp Companies ask for free Liefkenshoek tunnel

On 10 February the first major preparations were set in motion for the complete refurbishment of all lanes of the Antwerp ring road (R1), which will commence on 18 June. The ‘minimum hindrance’ works, as the preparatory operations are referred to, should ensure that the refurbishment of the Antwerp ring road does not create a traffic ‘heart attack’. However, on that same day miles and miles of traffic jams created havoc near Merksem, where operations started to introduce a fourth lane on the ring road to and from the Netherlands. During a press conference Voka, the employers’ alliance of the VEV and chambers of commerce, and Unizo, the Union of Independent Entrepreneurs, warned about successive problems (FF).

**MARC DE ROO • DE TIJD • 11 FEBRUARY**

Director designate of Voka, Philippe Muyters, wonders whether these preparations are in proportion to their impact on mobility. This month Muyters also demands clarification on the financing of the NMBS plan. In order to absorb some of the impact of the expected traffic problems the railways have developed an ambitious train plan for Antwerp with additional trains and stations. Cost: 7.6 million euros. NMBS has no money to implement the plan. The Flemish Government claims to have invested more than enough in the ‘minimum hindrance’ operations and refers to the Federal Government for more funds. It’s about time that this ping pong game between NMBS, the federal and the regional government came to an end,’ states Muyters. Voka and Unizo are also requesting that the Liefkenshoek tunnel (LHT) be made free of charge as an alternative to the Kennedy tunnel, for the duration of the refurbishment, between June and November 2004 and May and October 2005. According to Unizo top man, Kris Peeters, companies are extremely unhappy about the level of communication. ‘Communications about the preparatory work came too late. And the information on rerouting, accessibility and public transport availability is less than satisfactory.’ In order to assist companies in finding solutions for actual bottlenecks during the operations, Voka has set up an online pool of experts, who will develop solutions at the request of companies via the Internet, www.ondernemersnet.net.

**WWW.VOKA.BE WWW.UNIZO.BE**

**STATE EARNINGS FROM TABACCO (IN 1000 EURO)**

- **Source:** Trends
Ubizen takeover battle is becoming tense

A poison pill was used against Ubiden in order to safeguard the chances of both bidders

The takeover battle for the network protection company Ubizen, between the Ubiden financial consortium and the American technology company Betrusted, is becoming more tense and complicated by the day. The main shareholders of Ubiden include its founder, Stijn Bijnens, the University of Leuven and the Concentra press concern. Together they hold a 38.17% interest, which was injected at the time of the public takeover bid for Ubiden. This financial consortium is offering 0.95 euros per Ubiden share. Meanwhile Concentra is demanding its shares back from Ubiden, as the American security company Betrusted had made a counter offer of 1.20 euros. Concentra could not justifiably turning down the increased counteroffer to its shareholders. Ubiden replied it had no intention of returning the shares. Furthermore, Ubiden tried to get hold of Ubiden without submitting a higher counteroffer by introducing a capital increase of 12 to 16 million euros and appointing two new directors at an extraordinary shareholder’s meeting, with a view to gaining a majority share in Ubiden. The AGM must take place at the latest by 25 February, i.e., before the offer from Betrusted expires. But this was opposed by the Ubiden Board, which on 11 February decided to increase the capital by 10% and to introduce these shares as a poison pill to the opposing party, Betrusted. In other words the poison pill is used against Ubiden in order to safeguard the chances of both bidders. The next day Betrusted announced that it was increasing its bid from 1.20 to 1.32 euros (De Tijd, 13 February), as a result of which the odds have increased considerably in favour of the American technology company during the past few days.

PASCAL DENDOOVEN • DE STANDAARD • 12 FEBRUARY

The shares placed at Betrusted generate a benefit in Ubiden of 9.09% for the counter bidder. However, Betrusted owns more shares of Ubiden. During the past few days the Americans have been buying a considerable number of shares on the open market via the stockbrokers Puilaetco. It is estimated that Betrusted built up an interest of approximately 4.5% before the capital increase. On 9 February 1 million shares transferred ownership. The share price did not falter. On 11 February another half a million shares were traded before the supervisory body CBFA decided to suspend the share price. Ubiden has not yet bought in the open market and its interest, disputed by some, has decreased from 38.17 to 34.7% as a result of the capital increase. Betrusted, which is estimated to be in possession of 13%, can now prevent the financial consortium from taking the reigns at the shareholders’ meeting requested by Ubiden. Because of the latest developments it is now clear that Betrusted is to stay in the race for Ubiden. As a result the small shareholder now holds completely different cards. Ubiden is now a company with an industrial shareholder (Betrusted), a financial shareholder (Ubiden) and in a strong financial position. The pressure to play safe and sell the shares has now abated. It remains to be seen how Ubiden will react. By judicial or financial means? Ubiden can decide to launch an increased offer of 5% up to two days before closure of the Betrusted bid.

WWW.UBIDEN.BE
WWW.BETRUSTED.COM

Minister Keulen appeals for permanent sports network

At the end of this month the public broadcasting company, VRT, will publish the name of the temporary Sports network that will be available on cable between 31 May and 3 September. The network was created in order to program the huge range of sporting events this summer. In addition to 125 hours of European football cup and 85 hours of Olympic games, 160 hours of cycling (with the Tour de France as the high point) and 125 hours of tennis (Wimbledon, Roland Garros) will be programmed. For the time being the VRT is still struggling with a gap in the programmes scheduled between 25 July and 13 August, when no multiple day sports events are scheduled to take place.

VRT also wants to advertise on the net. Flemish Media Minister, Marino Keulen, is in favour of the idea but proposes to divide the advertising profits equally between VRT and VTM and VT4, the commercial broadcasters. The Flemish media decree needs to be amended in order to facilitate advertising by the public broadcasting company.

But Keulen has an even more radical proposal, i.e., cooperation between the commercial and public broadcasting companies in order to exploit a joint permanent sports network. The idea originates from the Flemish MP Jan Roegiers (Spirit). The opposition party CD&V is also in favour and their media specialist, De Caluwé, proposes to extend the station on the basis of the Dutch model, whereby advertising income is distributed between the various broadcasting companies via the Stichting Etherreclame (Ster) (Advertising in Broadcasting Foundation). With the proposal De Caluwé also foresees an end to the bidding for expensive sports rights between broadcasters (De Morgen, 6 February). The broadcasters have reacted cautiously and are awaiting a meeting with the minister. With his proposal Keulen wants to prevent sporting events from being broadcast solely via pay channels such as Canal + (Het Nieuwsblad, 7 February).

WWW.VRT.BE
WWW.VTM.BE
WWW.VT4.BE
CULTURE

MUSIC, DANCE THEATRE

• 16 February: Defilharmonie conducted by Daniele Calegari with Stravinsky and Strauss, Koningin Elisabethzaal, Antwerp; info: 0900/00311
• 17 February: Les musiciens du Louvre-Grenoble conducted by Marc Minkovsky, GF Haendel, Arcis and Galatea, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
• 17 February: Eric Watson (piano) and Bojan Zulfikarpasic (piano), double concert, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• 18 to 22 February: Ricardo Bartis, El Sportivo Teatral (Argent), Spanish spoken, superstitles 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, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
• 19 February: The Nits, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.desingel.be
• 19 February: Urna Chagar, Tugchi (Mongolia), concert, Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp, info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
• 20 February: Magdalena Kozena (mezzosoprano) and Malcolm Mounce with Mahler, Dvorak, Rössler and Ravel, Conservatory, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
• 21 February: Prague Philharmonia conducted by Jiri Belohlavek with Dvorak, Conservatory, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
• 20 February: Artis Quartet and Stefan Vladar with Mozart, Mendelssohn and Schumann, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
• 21 February: Sexteto Mayor (Arg), concert, Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp, info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
• 22 February: Piet Kuyken, Olivier Robbe, Judit Morvay and Rajmund Glowczynski with Mozart and Schumann, OL-Vrouwekapel, Antwerp; info: 0800/21.036
• 22 February: Flemish Radio Orchestra conducted by Jan Latham-Koenig with Chopin and Janacek, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
• 24 February: Dropkick Murphys, AB, Brussels; info: www.abconcerts.be 02.548.24.24
• 26 February: Damien Rice, AB, Brussels; info: www.abconcerts.be 02.548.24.24
• 27 February: Anima Eterna conducted by Jos Van Immerseel, WA Mozart, concertos and 40th symphony, Concertgebouw, Bruges; info: www.concertgebouw.be
• 27 February: Sergej Leiferkus and Simion Skigin with songs by Tchaikovsky, Borodin, Rachmaninov and Moussorgski, Flanders Opera, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be
• 28 February: Mauro & The Grooms, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
• 28 February: Finado, A Freak out, Ethiopian music, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: www.vooruit.be 09/267.28.28
• 28 February: Champs d'action and Slagwerkgroep Den Haag with Philip Glass and Steve Riley, Concertgebouw, Bruges; info: www.concertgebouw.be

EXPO

• Until 28 March: Genovaanversaesviceversa, 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 10 March: Icons of Flemish Design, Lokettenzaal, Flemish Parliament, Brussels; info: www.vlaamsparlement.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 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: www.kmsk.be
• 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, MUHKA, Antwerp; info: www.muhka.be
• Until 29 February: Stalking Hiéronymus with works by Hans Van Denderkhoove, Anselm Kiefer and AR Penck, PMMK, Ostend; info: www.pmmk.be
• Until 23 March: Henry Lacoste, 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: 09/225.42.90
• 13 February to 4 April: B-Architects, exhibition De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be

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