Dutroux trial: incident between judge and press

The first week in the Dutroux trial provided plenty of surprises. On Wednesday Marc Dutroux suddenly gave a completely different version of the facts from what he had maintained for the past seven years. On Thursday it was the turn of Marc Connerotte, the examining magistrate who was removed from the investigation as a result of the spaghetti-ruling. He made it perfectly clear that he had been hindered, shadowed and probably also bugged in his investigation by the State Police (Rijkswacht) at the time. He also indirectly blamed the State Police for the girls not being found alive in 1995, because they had withheld information. The first week of the trial also provided its first incidents. The lawyers fell out with the Order of Flemish Bar (Orde van Vlaamse Balies), who believe that they should be a little less forthcoming in their explanations to the media. And Dutroux asked not to be filmed or photographed. The chairman of the court partly acceded to this wish. He could only appear in the media having been ‘made unrecognisable’. Initially the media accepted this, but after mutual discussion the Flemish press decided to stop paying heed to the ban. Unabridged photos of Dutroux appeared in Het Laatste Nieuws on Wednesday and in the Gazet van Antwerpen and Het Belang van Limburg on Thursday. Since then, photographers for these papers have not been allowed into the courtroom. But when an exclusive series of photos of Dutroux in Aarlen prison appeared in Paris Match and La Libre Match, this led some journalists to suspect that Dutroux did not want to be photographed because he had sold the rights to his image to Paris Match (FF).

INTRODUCTION

On 4 March the Flemish Infoline and the Flemish ombudsman service were celebrated in the Flemish Parliament. Both Flemish government services are exponents of the increasing desire to better inform people and above all to listen to them more. In this way the government hopes to close the gulfs between it and the people in a customer-oriented fashion. People can take their complaints to the ombudsman service, even if a large number of these are actually requests for information. Of the 5,000 genuine complaints received by the service over the past five years, more than half proved justified. In 60% of these complaints the person concerned received redress. The number of complaints is no longer on the rise. Understandable, for since the Complaints Decree came into force in 2002, every Flemish administrative body has its own complaints manager, who deals with so-called primary complaints. It is also evident from the nature of the complaints received by the ombudsman how important housing and the environment are to Flemings. They frequently relate to building permits, housing ‘in the wrong zone’, unoccupancy levies or environmental pollution.

The Flemish Infoline is a downright success story. The service has existed since 1999 and is actually a call centre supported by public-relations civil servants. In 2003 the Infoline had to deal with some 583,000 questions, 2,370 a day on average. Flemings can call with questions on study grants, taxes, energy-saving premiums and so on. Because this Flemish Infoline has been such a success, Flemish Economic Affairs Minister Ceyssens (VLD) also wants to make it the engine of her e-government. Together with the Flemish Infoline, all e-government services will be bundled together in a customer-oriented organisation known as Contact Point Flanders (Contact-punt Vlaanderen). The Contact Point is intended to make government information more accessible to both public and business. Its top priority will be user-friendliness and the quality of the Flemish portal site www.vlaanderen.be. Despite their efforts to become more accessible, even popular government channels such as the Info-line are still suffering from an almost unbridgeable gulf. Studies show that only 3% of users are poorly educated. The Flemish Government is now trying to partly span this gulf with adverts on TV and radio. Another initiative is the Infomobile, a mobile Infoline, which tours Flanders manned by Infoline staff. Flemings can take their questions for the government to it on their own doorstep, as it were. It makes a change from politicians on election campaigns.

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief

Opinion

STEPHAN VANDERHEYDEN • DE TIJD • 5 MARCH

If the prison photos of Dutroux were paid for, several papers will seize this opportunity to say that unmasked photos are allowed. The reason is that Dutroux’s request for privacy was merely intended to cash in on a possible exclusivity contract. In the absence of incident at the Dutroux trial, the media decided to create one. This can only benefit sales and viewing figures, since public opinion generally believes that Dutroux does not have the right to demand any privacy. In the end these papers will demonstrate that the assise chairman took the wrong decision over

CONTENTS

Justice
Third racism trial starts in Ghent 2
Dutroux: the trial of the century 3
Politics: VLD-Eurolist is ready 3
Economy and Mobility
The Belgacom stock market operation 3
Economic growth expectations show a dip 4
Interbrew and Ambev negotiate 5
InterbrewAmbev: biggest brewery in the world 5
Retail trade against Ikea act 6
VLD wants Flemish trains on Belgian rails 7
Social Policy
Service cheques for day care 5
Culture
A testament of cultural policy 7

focus on FLANDERS • 28 February - 5 March 2004 • Number 9
Third Racism trial begins in Ghent

If the Court does not find the Blok guilty, it will legitimise the party. If it does find the Blok guilty, it will give the party its cherished role of victim.

While in Aarlen the focus is firmly on Dutroux, on the same day a second historic trial began in Ghent Court of Appeals. There the case was brought against three non-profit organisations of the Vlaams Blok for breaches of the Anti-Racism Act of 1981. That the party itself is not on trial has to do with the fact that a party itself has no legal personality. It was the Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Human Rights League that first instituted proceedings against the non-profit organisations in 2000. In their charge they referred extensively to passages from conference texts, pamphlets, brochures and journals of the Blok. But they came away empty-handed in both 2001 and 2003, because both the Court of First Instance and the Court of Appeal in Brussels declared themselves unqualified. The offence was a political one, they said, which could only be heard by the Assize Court with its people’s jury. However, the Court of Cassation revoked the Court of Appeals’ ruling in 2003 and referred the case to the Court of Appeals in Ghent. Ghent Court of Appeals is unlikely to declare itself unqualified a second time. There will therefore most likely be a ruling on the question of whether the Vlaams Blok is guilty of racism or not. And most likely before the elections of 13 June. That strengthens the conviction of Vlaams Blok leader Dewinter that the trial is a political one. Meanwhile he announced that he will appeal against the ruling before the Court of Cassation. That Court will then suspend the ruling, allowing the Blok to participate in the elections without problems. But if the Court of Cassation also finds against the Blok before 13 June, the Blok will be forced to create a new party. An emergency scenario is ready and waiting. If need be, Dewinter wants to have the elections of 13 June cancelled. On the first day Public Prosecutor Louis Vandenberghe had the floor and followed the interpretation of the Court of Cassation of ‘political offences’ (FF).

INGE GHIJS • DE STANDAARD • 2 MARCH

According to the Court of Cassation, a political offence is an offence in which a direct attack is made on the function of political institutions. ‘A political party is an association that defends certain interests and is not a political institution. The provision of training, the dissemination of publications, the collaboration on radio and TV broadcasts, the supporting of election campaigns, these actions are clearly not attacks on existing political institutions,’ claims Vandenberghe.

According to Vandenberghe, the three non-profit organisations are guilty of breaching Article 3 of the Anti-Racism Act. ‘The racism of the Vlaams Blok is evident from the wording of the bills, in which no distinction is made between nationalities but on the basis of ethnicity, appearance, origin, language and religion.’ He quoted a number of statements which he believes are evidence of racism: ‘Moroccans are still Moroccans even if they are Belgian, and this also applies to Asians. We are one people, not a catch-all community. Foreign peoples are pampered. Someone does not become someone else culturally because they have five nationalities. And bills: reducing child benefit for non-EU citizens, the desire to bring about a racially homogeneous Europe, to create a separate education network for Islamic immigrants.’

According to the Solicitor-General, it is clear that the Vlaams Blok promotes discrimination and that the statements are the result of a well-thought-out point of view that foreigners do not belong here, even if they are Belgian. ‘They are inciting hatred and this could bring down democracy, always a delicate flower.’
Monday 1 March was the first day in ‘the trial of the century’. As with any assizes trial, the first day was spent appointing the jury. A dreary task. Clearly that is what the main defendant Marc Dutroux also felt. He decided to grab forty winks, even though he had waited seven years for this trial. To the great irritation of the victims’ parents and their lawyers. Nor were they happy about the fact that Dutroux did not want to be filmed or photographed. The press even less so. Not much else of note happened on the first day of the trial, except from one hilarious moment when the back door of the heavily escorted prison van banged open as it hurtled through the streets of Aarlen. Would Dutroux pull another stunt? Apparently not. A minor flaw, a police spokeswoman, who reassured us that there was a second armoured partition between the door and Dutroux and his companions. Despite the lack of news, the first day took up the lion’s share of air time on radio and television. Yet sometimes the only thing to report was that the cold in Aarlen gave the journalists who did their stand-up for their broadcasters cold feet. The massed ranks of national and international press could follow the first day of the trial on three big screens in a separate room. Meanwhile, Dutroux lent further weight to the ‘network theory’ by stating just before the start of the trial on Monday that he had acted on behalf of ‘the Mafia’. The evening before the trial he even named Michel Nihoul as the key figure in the network (FF).

Opinion

ROGER VANHOUTTE •
GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 2 MARCH

Can the so-called ‘trial of the century’ save Belgium’s reputation? The question is asked because in the second half of 1996 that reputation was damaged as never before. Many countries have had to deal with multiple murderers. But the Dutroux case is different. When I was in Ireland in 1997, a woman put it very simply. ‘There are serial-killers everywhere, but in your case it was organised by politics and the courts themselves.’ In other words, Dutroux is a creation of Belgium itself. This is the so-called truth, as it has thus far been sold abroad. There the colourful story is nurtured that Dutroux in fact lent his services to the so-called high-ranking officials in the political and legal worlds. This is clearly much more attractive and exciting than the tedious story of a couple of perverted criminals. Obviously this is devastating to the good name of a country.

The network theory is no more than a hypothesis in the Dutroux case. There is no conclusive evidence. The assertion that these networks are maintained to satisfy the perverse tendencies of high-ranking officials goes even further. There is not a shred of evidence for this either.

The Assize Court of the Province of Luxembourg is now expected to reveal the truth. That is a task it will never be able to bring to a happy conclusion. If the plot theory with the ‘high-ranking officials’ is not confirmed, that will be declared by the involvement of the Court, which creates cover-ups. Minds were so poisoned in 1996 and 1997 that this will certainly not be resolved by an Assize Court.

The Assize Court is even the worst possible method. If the truth is to be sought, this should consist of factual evidence. And that is where the Assize Court is not particularly strong. Where it is strong, conversely, is in wild emotions and theatre. In contrast to all other courts, the Assize Court does not need to give reasons for a judgment. Belgium must show the world that it is a normal country from a legal viewpoint. But it must do this with an ‘emotionless court’ that takes a whole day to appoint a jury.
Biggest stock market operation in Belgian history

Analysts put the market value of Belgacom at 12 billion euros

On 22 March the Belgian telecoms company Belgacom is to float on the Euronext exchange. It will be the biggest stock market operation in Belgian history. Analysts put the market value of Belgacom at 12 billion euros. That should give a price of 30 euros per share. It is the minority shareholders SBC (US), Teledanmark and Singapore Telecommunications that are selling. Together they hold some 178 million shares (44.4%). Of these, Belgacom itself wants to take over 1 billion euros' worth. After this buyout operation there will still be an estimated 4.55 billion euros or 37.9% of the shares on the market. At least 15% are intended for private Belgian investors. Belgacom employees can buy shares at a discount of 16.6%. KBC and Dexia will put their shares (3.75 million each) on the market if demand outstrips supply (in the so-called green shoe). The Belgian State (50%+1 of the shares) is selling 185 million euro of shares (De Tijd, 5 March). Sofina is not selling.

On 3 March Belgacom published its prospectus, in which it outlines its financial position. On 7 March it will announce the ceiling and floor prices of the initial bid (the price fork) and on 8 March any Belgian interested can sign up at his/her bank (FF).

BERT BROENS • DE TIJD • 4 MARCH

An attractive Belgian market, a market leader, a clear and focused strategy and healthy finances. These are the four reasons Managing Director Didier Bellens gives why it is appealing to invest in Belgacom. When he took up his post in spring 2003, not long after the merger talks with the French Cegetel had fizzled out and almost a year after the failed merger with KPN, Bellens announced that finding a bride was not a priority for Belgacom. First become operationally efficient - 'best in class'. ‘Everyone in Europe knows Belgacom and is aware of our strong balance sheet. We have a very positive image,’ says Bellens.

Belgacom intends setting 50 to 60% of the net profit aside for dividends. Bellens feels this is reasonable given the balance sheet and cash-flow. But he added that this dividend policy can always be modified if Belgacom engages in takeovers. The stock-exchange listing is an extra trump card for takeovers. Not only will Belgacom have 10% of the shares in its own portfolio after the entire operation. The company can use this for incentives for staff but also to pay for take-overs.

WWW.BELGACOM.BE

Economic growth expectations show slight dip

The number of unemployed and bankruptcies rose again during February. At the end of last month, Flanders had 213,586 unemployed job-seekers. That is 10% more than in February 2003. In January the increase was 8.8%. The number of bankruptcies rose by 5.6% over the past two months compared with the same period in 2003, noted the commercial information bureau, Graydon. Confidence among business leaders also fell again for the first time in five months.

In contrast, however, a number of economic indicators point to a positive trend. The number of vacancies at the VDAB (Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training) is significantly higher than last year, 11% in January. And according to the National Bank, consumer confidence is at its highest level for eighteen months. Finally, the Institute for National Accounts (Instituut voor de Nationale Rekeningen) also increased its growth estimate for 2004 from 1.8 to 2%.

WWW.VDAB.BE
WWW.GRAYDON.BE
WWW.INB-ICN.FGOV.BE
WWW.NBB.BE

SHARE OF TURNOVER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mobile phone services</th>
<th>Fixed line telephone services</th>
<th>International carrier services</th>
</tr>
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<td>37%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>11%</td>
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</table>

SHAREHOLDERSHIP AFTER IPO*

- BELGACOM 10%
- Belgian state 50%
- Public 37.9%
- Sofina 2.1%

*AT A SHARE PRICE OF 30 EURO

CONSOLIDATED RESULTS BELGACOM

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<td>Netto group profit*</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>764</td>
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</table>

*without non-recurring elements

END OF 2003:
| Number of fixed telephone lines: | 4,25 million residential, 966,000 on business market |
| Number of mobile phone customers: | 4.2 million |

ff EDITOR
InterbrewAmBev biggest brewer group in the world

John Brock will become Managing Director of InterbrewAmBev, while Pierre Jean Everaert will be the new Chairman

On 3 March Interbrew and the Brazilian brewer AmBev issued a joint statement to the world’s press that they had reached an agreement on a partial merger. Interbrew is to acquire a 21.8% interest in AmBev. In exchange AmBev is to take over Interbrew’s Canadian subsidiary, Labatt. The new InterbrewAmBev will be the biggest brew group in the world, with a global market share of around 14% and a turnover of 9.5 billion euros (FF).

DE TIJD • 3 MARCH

Interbrew is to acquire a 21.8% economic interest in AmBev. This will be achieved by the takeover of 100% of Braco, the holding company of AmBev’s reference shareholders. For this Interbrew will issue 141.7 million new shares intended for Braco’s shareholders. Braco and its 98.64% subsidiary ECAP together hold 8.25 billion AmBev shares, which represents 52.8% of the voting rights. AmBev will take over Interbrew’s Canadian subsidiary, Labatt, including the latter’s 30% interest in Femsa Cerveza and the latter’s 70% interest in Labatt USA. For this AmBev is to issue 9.5 billion ordinary shares and 13.8 billion preferential shares, intended for Interbrew, and will also take on a debt of 1.5 billion dollars. If the transaction is approved by the relevant competition authorities, it is expected to be completed in the second half of 2004.

Interbrew and AmBev hold talks over share transactions

Interbrew, the Leuven-based brewer, is holding talks with the Brazilian brewer Companhia de Bebidas das Americas (AmBev) over a ‘major transaction’, headlined De Tijd on 2 March. According to the Brazilian media, the two were about to merge. AmBev accounts for two-thirds of the Brazilian beer market and is the largest brewer in Latin America with brands such as Skol, Brahma and Antarctica and its own soft drinks. Geographically the two complement each other: AmBev in South America, Interbrew in North America, Europe, Russia, China and South Korea. But there is almost no overlapping. Meanwhile, Interbrew shareholders have reacted negatively to the news. In a statement to the press on 2 March Interbrew clarified the nature of the talks. They were apparently centred on a significant share swap between Interbrew and AmBev and/or their subsidiaries. On 3 March both brewers then issued a joint statement to the world’s press that they had reached an agreement on a partial merger (FF).

Opinion

ERIK DE LEYE • DE TIJD • 2 MARCH

The merger has few direct consequences for the employees of Interbrew because the activities of Interbrew and the Brazilian brewer do not overlap. This means no job cuts. Interbrew’s shareholders nevertheless suffered indirectly following the report. On 1 March the price of the share fell by 3.4% to 23.38 euros. The negative reaction highlights the frustration over the fluctuating state of mind in Leuven. The Belgian concern announced around a year ago that it was time to put its house in order and place the emphasis on organic growth and improving profitability. At the time Interbrew had climbed into the top five in the world following a long series of (costly) takeovers. At the time it was said that Interbrew did not per se have to become the biggest. Less than a year later the situation has changed. A brewer with a tradition stretching back more than 600 years should be more consistent.
Retail trade feels targeted by ‘Ikea act’

At the summit in Gembloux the Federal Government decided that it wanted to further liberalise the law on commercial establishments. It would become easier for large chains of stores to open a new store in our country. The new act comes after a number of failed attempts by furniture giant Ikea to open new sites in Belgium and has therefore been christened the Ikea Act. Henceforth, municipalities will alone decide whether or not a chain can open a site. Up to now a committee of civil servants could refuse a licence. 400 dossiers, good for 5,500 jobs, which have been refused since 2000, would be revised. Unizo, the association for the self-employed and the retail trade, is protesting loudly, claiming that only 200 dossiers were refused, good for barely 1,900 jobs (FF).

JOHAN CORTHOOUTS • DE MORGEN • 28 FEBRUARY

Unizo finds it unacceptable that dossiers already refused are to be re-examined. The SME organisation fears that a battle for the major stores will flare up. Municipalities will bid against each other, without thinking about the consequences for the independent retail trade. Unizo is also fuming over the short deadlines given to municipalities to deal with applications for new stores. ‘If municipalities fail to reach a decision, then under the new act the dossiers are automatically approved,’ says Unizo spokesman Ronny Lannoo. ‘Our priority lies in the inner cities. We want attractive, livable neighbourhoods, more safety and better mobility,’ says Unizo boss Kris Peeters. ‘There is a danger that large chains will bleed existing commercial centres dry. We don’t want any new shopping centres like the one at Wijnegem in Antwerp.’ Unizo also challenges the view in government circles that there is too little room for large commercial establishments in our country. Belgium has 3.5 million m² sales space for large stores. The Netherlands, which has almost 70% more inhabitants, only allows large stores 2.3 million m² sales space. ‘If the law is relaxed, Belgium will get another 300,000,’ says Peeters.

www.unizo.be

Agreement on service cheques for day care

Around ten days ago Minister-President Somers (VLD) and Employment Minister Renat Landuyt (SP.A) announced at a press conference that an agreement had been reached on the use of service cheques for day care in Flanders. But Welfare Minister Adelheid Byttebier (Groen!) promptly announced that there was no such agreement. And yet the three ministers had reached agreements on this subject earlier at a Flemish employers’ conference. In the meantime, however, the trade unions of the staff in the official day-care centres had week after week loudly proclaimed their dissatisfaction in the press and on the street outside the ministers’ offices. The trade unions see the service cheque as a threat to day-care centres, as they allow parents to pay a child-minder at home entirely legally, possibly taken on via a temping agency. Minister Byttebier initially came down on the side of the unions and called for greater control over day care. She also wanted to limit the role of the temping agencies. Her demands were met. But the trade unions remain unhappy, as does the temping sector, which feels its sphere of action is being significantly restricted (FF).

GUY TEGENBOS/WIM WINCKELMANS • DE STANDAARD • 4 MARCH

It is a relatively costly system, but it is the biggest promoter of these cheques, Employment Minister Renat Landuyt (SP.A). For Groen! the contribution of the private sector to day care cannot be taken for granted. Nevertheless, Groen! has to swallow the pill. A gilded pill, true, since Byttebier managed to pull some concessions out of the fire. For her it is important that Kind & Gezin is given a major role. This organisation should become the gateway to the system: temping agencies and other private players can take their chances on the day-care market, but they will first be supervised and recognised by Kind & Gezin, and checked afterwards. In an initial phase, new players will also be given a very restricted area in which to work: one province to be chosen, and then one town. This restriction is at the request of Kind & Gezin, which says that it cannot cope with more control. But the temping agencies and their organisation Federgon think differently. They see it as a way of giving preference to the traditional players for a while. This is because the existing day-care initiatives, including after-school care, can organise this day care at home straight away, and can therefore also be paid in service cheques. ‘We could not put any more concrete guarantees in terms of quality down on paper,’ beamed Ministers Landuyt and Byttebier. They are hoping that the demonstrating sector is reassured. But that is not the case. Walter Cornelis of the LBC, the Christian trade union of the non-profit sector, reacted with bewilderment at the ‘scandalous’ agreement, which in his view goes much too far.

Opinion

MATHIAS DANNEELS • Het Nieuwsblad • 4 MARCH

The unions are mistaken when they claim that children of dual-income parents must by definition be accommodated in day-care centres run by the government. Quite a few couples with small children ask to organise that independently and ‘on the up-and-up’. And preferably via a temping agency that relieves them of a pile of paperwork. The unions are deceiving the public when they maintain that the private sector is taking over the area. Much more important is that the Purple-Greens managed to break the deadlock. No one had a workable solution for reducing moonlighting on the domestic circuit. This solution is now in place. With the service cheque, the black domestic market has been laundered.

www.kindengezin.be
www.fedegon.be
Sterckx wants Flemish trains on Belgian rails

On the eve of the important reforms of the railways company, the NMBS, VLD Chairman Dirk Sterckx has launched a proposal to let the Flemish transport company De Lijn use trains on the national NMBS network. The recent NMBS agreement splits the railways company up into a transport company and an infrastructure manager. Both parts are subsumed within a single holding company. Following this split, private companies will also be able to run trains on NMBS rails for a fee within a few years. Sterckx believes De Lijn, which is responsible for public buses and trams in Flanders, must also take advantage of this. De Lijn could take over some of the NMBS’s loss-making lines, he suggests. Sterckx, who is also an MEP, puts forward his proposal in De Morgen and Het Laatste Nieuws on the day the European Commission is discussing a proposal from Commissioner Loyola de Palacio to deregulate international passenger travel by train in 2010. Sterckx’s proposal comes down to running Flemish trains on Belgian railways. In other words: a regionalisation. He can therefore expect stubborn resistance from Francophone ministers in the Federal Government, as well as NMBS management and trade unions (FF).

FREEK SMETS • DE MORGEN • 3 MARCH

‘De Lijn trains!’ Sterckx thinks that the public-transport model that exists in Flanders should also be extended to trains. ‘We now have a decree on basic mobility. In this the government places certain orders with De Lijn, which determines strategy and then implements it, where applicable with private partners.’ For example, De Lijn has already been ordered to allow schoolchildren and pensioners to travel for free, for which it will be compensated by the Flemish Government. But the transport company itself determines how it meets these demands and as is well known already employs private bus companies to implement government orders. This ‘partial privatisation’, Sterckx believes, should also be applied to trains. By entering into partnerships with the NMBS, for example, De Lijn could take over some of the loss-making regional lines and in Flanders, for example, you could work on developing transport networks around major towns and cities. The Walloon transport company TEC and Brussels’ MIVB could also adopt the model, although Sterckx says that they must make their own moves in this direction.

But therein lies the rub. The trade unions, government and NMBS management are scared to death of regionalising the railways and are holding fast to the idea of a single railways company for the whole country. ‘For my part, De Lijn can use the infrastructure of an NMBS that retains a unitary structure,’ says Sterckx. ‘But if the NMBS doesn’t want to know and says ‘we alone will continue to transport passengers by rail’, then we’ll have lost the spirit of the European liberalisation directives.’

WWW.DELIJN.BE
WWW.NMBS.BE

The testament of the minister of Culture

On 1 March the Culture Prizes of the Flemish Community were collectively awarded for the first time. The winners were jointly treated like kings and queens in the hilarious décor of a superette (small supermarket) and its staff. The Ghent theatre producer Eric De Volder was the big winner of the ‘general cultural merit’ category. Other prize-winners included: jazz composer Kris Dewort and visual artist Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven. But organisers and mediators were also rewarded, such as Jan Declercq (Cinema Novo, Third-World film festival), Fons Dierickx (Heemkunde Vlaanderen-study of folklore and local customs), Tinne Vanden-sande (King Baudouin Foundation - Koning Boudewijnstichting) and Marc Jacobs (Flemish Centre for National Culture - Vlaams centrum voor volks-
cultuur-popular culture). At the end of the evening, Flemish Culture Minister Paul Van Grembergen (Spirit) gave an address that fell half way between a political testament and a cultural profession of faith. In short, a farewell speech, since after 13 June Van Grembergen will no longer be Minister for Culture, he announced (FF).

GEERT VANDERSPEETEN • DE STANDAARD • 3 MARCH

Van Grembergen had brought a message: certain priority choices that he would make as the next Culture Minister. A purely virtual message, he added to be on the safe side. His greatest concern concerns Dutch, which he sees losing its richness because it is under considerable pressure. Van Grembergen called for greater ling-
guistic sensitivity to be developed in schools. His second recommendation, an intense collaboration between culture and education, betrayed his disappointment over the failed protocol with his colleague Marleen Vanderpoorten (VLD).

He sees the development of cultural competence as the task of the complete educational cycle, from pre-school to higher education. The fact that in the same breath he also called for more subsidies for authors and literary organisations left a particularly bitter taste in the mouths of the liberal arts sector. This is currently suffering under the cuts Van Grembergen himself introduced. Too little attention has also been paid to the cross-border dimension in past years, and on this the Minister beat his own breast. He admitted that the international exchange of cultural initiatives had received inadequate support. But not making choices would be cowardly, Van Grembergen feels. He warned sectors that are only in it for themselves. He cautiously called for a varied landscape in which major theatre houses and small companies stood shoulder to shoulder.

His credo rang a little lovey-dovey: art
is useful. Not easily ready-made art, where the media focuses a little too much on to Van Grembergen’s taste. And certainly not the artistic climate in which the word intellectual is used as a term of abuse [a reference to the aversion of Steve Vlaert, SPA Chairman, to intellectuals, ed.]. Rather, art that can be prophetic, moving and difficult.

With his reflections the Minister formulated a sort of state of the union, which he consciously passed over earlier this season in the midst of the budgetary crisis. The awarding of the Culture Prizes has now been given the necessary weight. The combining of distinctions into a talked-about event and the inventive approach of the ceremony can help the awarding of prizes further gain in importance.

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**CULTURE**

**Diary**

**MUSIC, DANCE THEATRE**

- 10 March: Concert version of Il pirata by Vincenzo Bellini, conducted by Ivan Törzs, Bijloke, Ghent and Koningin Elisabethzaal, Antwerp, info: www.abconcerts.be
- 9 March: Juanes (Col.), AB, Brussels, info: www.abconcerts.be
- 10 March: Living colour, AB, Brussels, info: www.abconcerts.be
- 10 to 13 March: Cluster #2 Goodbye Stranger with photo exhibition: odd fishes composed by Mudas Dekker, Union Suspecte (dance performance), De Singel, Antwerp, info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- 10 March: Salisa Ni Seydou (Burkina Faso), dance, De Singel, Antwerp, info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- 11 March: The String Quartet with a portrait of Jörg Widmann, Bijloke, Ghent, info: www.bijloke.be
- 12 March: Alim Qasimov (Azerbaijan), Bijloke, Ghent, info: www.bijloke.be
- 12 March: Ricercar Consort and Philippe Pierlot, Conjuratio with Weckmann and Bach, De Singel, Antwerp, info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- Until 16 March: Peter Grimes by Benjamin Britten, opera, conductor: Kazushi Ono, director: Willy Decker, De Munt, Brussels, info: www.demunt.be
- Until 21 March: Cinema Novo, Film Festival, Brussels, info: www.cinemanovobe.be
- March: Films by director Hans-Jürgen Syberberg in Cinas and Film Museum, info: www.filmchearfe.be
- 10 to 19 March: Creatie 2004, Rosas [dance], Rosas performance space, Brussels, info: www.kaaitheatre.be

**EXPO**

- Until 30 May: Human, all too human, photo exhibition on psychiatry, Museum Dr. Guijlain, Ghent, info: www.museumdrguijlain.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. Guijlain, Ghent, info: www.museumdrguijlain.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
- Until 21 March: Dream extensions with Mariko Mori and Anne Louise Wilson, Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven, Georgina Starr, SMAK, Ghent, info: www.smak.be
- 13 February to 4 April: B-Architects, exhibition De Singel, Antwerp, info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- Until 23 May: Marijke Van Warmerdam, video installations, SMAK, Ghent www.smak.be
- 27 February to 16 May: Une saison en enfer, exhibition on symbolist poet Arthur Rimbaud, PSK, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be, 02/507.82.00
- 27 February to 16 May: On symbolism, photography and painting in the 19th century, PSK, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be, 02/507.82.00
- Until 6 June: Hans Arp, the invention of the form, exhibition, PSK, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be
- Until 31 March: Syberberg/Paris/Nossendorf, exhibition on work and life of Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, Goethe-Institut, Brussels, info: 02/230.39.70

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