11 March illustrates vulnerability of public transport

The terrorist attacks of 11 March in Madrid were greeted in the Flemish press, as everywhere else in Europe, with horror and bewilderment. The commentators state that this kind of mindless, wholly indiscriminate terrorism has now also reached Western Europe. The most alarming fact of all is that, despite the tightened security measures in the run-up to the Spanish elections, the terrorists nonetheless succeeded in placing 13 bombs in trains and stations unnoticed. The terrible images therefore also have commuters in Belgium shuddering. Despite surveillance cameras and increased alertness, public transport remains especially vulnerable to terrorism. It cannot be denied that Brussels, with the NATO headquarters and the European Commission, has everything to make it a prime terrorist target, although the Interior Ministry’s crisis centre points out that there is no proof of this whatsoever (FF).

TOM YSEBAERT • DE STANDAARD 12 MARCH

Public transport, precisely because it is ‘public’, is very vulnerable. Anyone can freely walk into and out of a train or bus station. ‘You can’t start carrying out strict controls in stations without drastically restricting the service,’ says Leen Uytervooren of the Belgian railway company NMBS.

It is the Interior Ministry’s crisis centre that determines the risk, after the intelligence services have assessed the threat. The centre can then instruct the railway police and the transport companies to take measures. After the WTC attacks of 11 September 2001 and during the war in Iraq, all companies were asked to be especially vigilant. For example, all rubbish bins were sealed in the underground, and rail and underground staff were asked to be watchful for suspicious packages or suitcases that had been left behind.

But the terror threat is not top of the list for the train and underground security services. They are concerned with ‘the security of passengers and staff’. ‘By that we mean social control, cases of theft, and intervention in the event of squabbles,’ says Uytervooren.

‘A station such as Brussels Midi/Zuid is a city in itself, with shops and 120,000 people passing through every day. That is a setting for petty crime.’ In a nutshell, for the railway police, too, is a city in itself, with shops and 120,000 people passing through every day. That is a setting for petty crime.

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief
Dreadful poll results for purple government

Nine months on, nothing remains of the Liberals’ and Socialists’ resounding victory of May 2003

In the opinion poll carried out by Le Soir and the French-language broadcasting company RTBF, the Flemish government parties VLD and SP.A-Spirit have been given a hiding. Whilst in the elections of 18 May the VLD was still the largest party in Flanders with 24.2% of the votes, it has fallen in this poll to 17.4%, and the VLD-Vivant alliance would thus only come out on 18.7%. Coalition partner SP.A-Spirit has also lost quite a bit of ground, falling back from 23.5% to 20.1%. Major gains have been recorded, by the opposition parties CD&V, N-VA and the Vlaams Blok. Were the elections to be held now, the CD&V-N-VA alliance would clearly emerge as the largest party, with 29.6%. By way of comparison, in the federal elections the CD&V-N-VA alliance would clearly emerge as the largest party, with 22.3%. The Flemish Greens are also scrambling to their feet after the major blow they suffered last year, and rise from 3.8 to 6.2%. Nine months on, nothing remains of the Liberals’ and Socialists’ resounding victory of May 2003. However, the poll has to be taken with a large pinch of salt, a warning even echoed by CD&V chairman Yves Leterme. There is a margin for error of 3%, and a quarter of the respondents were undecided and did not give an opinion in the telephone survey. The poll came at an extremely opportune moment for the government parties, as it was conducted in the last week of February, when the whole carry-on in the parliament and the media on the subject of the immigrants’ voting rights was just over, and the internal power struggle in the VLD between Guy Verhofstadt and Karel De Gucht was being given extensive coverage in the media. The brand-new VLD chairman Dirk Sterckx is not letting himself be discouraged, although he has cause enough for concern. On the Francophone side, the Liberal MR is also losing ground, but on the other hand the PS is getting stronger, and a coalition of socialists and christian-democrats without Liberals would therefore appear no longer to be out of the question [FF].

The reactions have been predictable. The Vlaams Blok is jubilant. Groen! chairperson Vera Dua is heaving a sigh of relief. CD&V chairman Yves Leterme is warning his grassroots not to get their hopes up too high: ‘I only want to take into account what happens at the finishing line’. And in the VLD camp, there is wringing of hands. In an e-mail, chairman Dirk Sterckx urged the Flemish Liberals to bear up. ‘I don’t need to point out that this poll was carried out at a time when painful things were happening in our party’, he said, reminding his grassroots supporters of the still undigested change of chairman. ‘This poll is an aftershock of that earthquake. We’re beginning to rebuild’, Sterckx continues, firing up his troops. ‘As a mandatory you form part of the backbone of our party. This cannot be allowed to give way as a result of the snapshot taken today’.

Opinion

PIET PIRYNS • KNACK • 10 MARCH

The Le Soir/RTBF opinion polls are not held as the most reliable. The Leuven professor Swyngedouw pointed out that you automatically get a distorted view if you only ring people who have a fixed-line telephone. Contacting many young people is only possible by mobile phone. Some 16% of the interviewees immediately hung up and 23.2% said that they had not decided which way to vote. But does that mean that a poll such as this is meaningless? In American politics it is a well-known phenomenon: people happily vote for the person tipped to win. The tremendous success achieved by Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands was largely down to this bandwagon effect. Send a brass band onto the street and you will soon have a parade forming. Polls, irrespective of how unreliable they are, influence not only people’s voting patterns, but also politicians’ behaviour. The quarrel between Verhofstadt and De Gucht had less to do with bruised egos than with the virtual reality of disastrous polls. And the question remains as to whether Geert Bourgeois (N-VA) and Yves Leterme (CD&V) would have fallen into each other’s arms if the N-VA had not come off so badly in a poll carried out by De Standaard/VRT.
Vlaams Blok can make Brussels ungovernable

Every political decision in the Brussels Region has to be taken with a majority in the Flemish language group

The poll result achieved by the Vlaams Blok is alarming in Brussels not only for the Liberals, but for all democratic parties concerned with the continued existence of the political institutions.

With 37% of the Flemish votes, which is equivalent to barely 8.4% of the Brussels votes, the Blok wins enough votes for a majority in the Flemish language group in Brussels. As a result, the party can make the Brussels Capital Region ungovernable, because French-speakers will never want to form a Regional Government with the Blok. All this is the result of a very unusual arrangement in the capital. Every political decision in the Brussels Region has to be taken with a majority in the Flemish language group. This arrangement between Dutch-speakers and French-speakers in this country is aimed at ensuring that the French-speakers, who are numerically in the majority in Brussels, cannot push through their decisions against the will of the Flemings.

With its argument in favour of a tougher aliens’ policy, the Blok seems to be securing a large number of votes among Francophones in the capital as well, among other things also thanks to the deployment of French-speaking police commissioner of Schaarbeek Johan De Moul. The Blok has always loudly proclaimed that it wants to ‘blow Belgium apart’, and may now be able to do just that, cynically enough, with the help of French-speakers’ votes. Some Flemish politicians are attempting to avoid panic breaking out, by saying that things won’t come to that; unlike in opinion polls, in elections there is a built-in barrier for French-speakers.

In the last few days a number of leading French-speakers have pitched in, saying that a reform is urgently needed. The Flemish members of the Brussels regional Government Vanhengel (VLD), Smet (SP.A) and Chabert (CD&V) think that a reform so close to the elections would be ill advised. For that matter, none of them believes that the Vlaams Blok will actually secure a majority on 13 June, because virtually all the other Flemish parties are entering into an ‘electoral pact’ (which collects and divides the residual votes, ed.) (FF)

WIM VANDE VELDEN • DE TIJD • 6 MARCH

Everything is put into perspective in the Dutch-speaking camp. French-speakers who want to vote for the Blok first have to opt for Dutch in the Brussels regional elections, which is not the case in opinion polls. And that preliminary choice of language is a barrier, as is apparent from the sizeable difference in the number of votes that the Vlaams Blok won in Brussels on 18 May for the House and the Senate.

Opinion

STEFAN HUYSENRUTUYT • DE TIJD • 6 MARCH

The blocking of Brussels institutions by the Blok is the big worry, not only for the other Flemish parties, but even more so, if that were possible, for the French-speaking parties. In the so-called Lombard agreement, a complicated anti-blocking system was included, at the latter’s request, which was aimed at preventing the Blok, with a majority in the Dutch language group in the Brussels Parliament, from being able to block the formation of a Brussels government. But the system was annulled by the Court of Arbitration. The alarming polls may lead to a new anti-blocking system quickly being approved before the elections. For if that does not happen, and the Blok wins the majority in the Dutch language group on 13 June, legally highly questionable interventions will be needed to unblock the Brussels situation.

ANJA OTTE • DE STANDAARD • 10 MARCH

‘It is our collective responsibility - and also that of the French-speaking parties - to explain the consequences of voting for the Vlaams Blok. The PS, MR and CDH all too readily call this a Flemish problem. They have to puncture the Blok’s lies as well. Most residents of Brussels are very much attached to federal Belgium’. In 2003 the Blok received quite a lot of votes from French-speakers, which has led to it gaining considerable ground. According to Vanhengel, the party is distributing leaflets in French in which it says that it does not want to touch the status of Brussels and that it does not want to block the Brussels - and therefore the Belgian - institutions. That is inconsistent with the Blok’s programme.

Chabert and Smet are calling on French-speaking voters to vote for a Flemish democratic party in order to reduce the proportional weight of the Blok with respect to the other Flemish parties. This voting pattern would not alter anything in the balance between the language groups, since that is established by the Lambermont agreement.

WWW.BRUSSELS.IRISNET.BE

14 March puts the spotlight on Technology

FF EDITOR

Sunday 14 March will see the second ‘Technology Day’ take place in Flanders. One hundred and sixty-five companies and academic institutions will be letting the public take a glimpse behind the scenes. For many companies, universities and colleges of advanced education, this is an opportunity to explain their technological innovations in a manner comprehensible to the general public. The Technology Day is the successor to the technology trade fair Flanders Technology, which petered out at the end of the 1990s. The concept of exhibiting technology in a single room appeared outdated, according to De Standaard (11 March). This year an extra effort will also be made to make the participating companies and research centres attractive to secondary-school students. After all, companies are contending with a shortage of industrial engineers and Polytechnic colleges are recording a waning interest in technical disciplines. It is felt that a Technology Day should contribute to re-arousing that interest.

WWW.DAGVANDETECHNOCLOGIE.BE , VLAAMSE INFOLIJN: 0800/30201

focus on FLANDERS • 6 March - 12 March 2004 • Number 10
Union chairwoman Devits to head SP.A-Spirit list

De Vits must now personify the choice for a ‘social Europe’. She is not only aiming for the votes of her own Socialist grassroots but also intending to poach votes from the Christian labour movement ACW.

After the CD&V-N-VA and VLD-Vl-vant alliances, the third alliance SP.A-Spirit has now announced the candidate who will be heading its list in the elections to the European Parliament. Mia De Vits is leaving the Socialist trade union ABVV and will be heading the SP.A-Spirit list on 13 June. SPA chairman Steve Stevaert’s choice is not really a surprise. There had been rumours for some time that Stevaert had been trying to persuade De Vits to head the list, but the trade union woman refused to commit herself. Stevaert wanted to avoid having to head the European list himself, out of necessity. However, a conflict with the Walloon wing within the union prompted De Vits to take the decision to move into the political arena. After De Vits come MEPs Anne Van Lancker and Said El Khadraoui in second and third place. The final name on the list is that of Spirit figurehead Bert Anciaux. With her trade union Gennez has paved the way with her book Beste Europa (‘Dear Europe’). As a member of the board of directors of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), De Vits comes fully prepared. She can outline the need for social Europe perfectly suited to the task. The SPA wants to pursue a ‘euro-sceptic’ campaign. Deputy chairperson Caroline Gennze has paved the way with her book Beste Europa (‘Dear Europe’). As a member of the board of directors of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), De Vits comes fully prepared. She can outline the need for social Europe like no-one else. She is also well placed to warn against the dangers of liberalisation and privatisation. The importance of the person heading the list of candidates cannot be underestimated, however. De Vits is not brimming with charisma, and at a time when people vote out of a gut reaction for a person rather than a body of ideas, that is an unqualified risk. The former trade union woman also brings an image with her. In recent years the SPA has succeeded in shaking off a corny label, and the new young SPA voters do not want anything to do with the former leader of what is undoubtedly the corniest trade union in Belgium. After partially gobbling up Groen!, Stevaert has his sights set on the ACW. According to him, De Vits is invariably approached by ACW people during demonstrations. ‘Mia is the ordinary person’s candidate. All working people should vote for Mia’, he said. In Flanders the ACV is by far the largest trade union. However, it would be strange for ACV sympathisers first to vote for their own union in the union elections and then, six weeks later, put their trust in an icon of the ABVV. De Vits will then be able to point to some European experience, as she will be up against some tough competition in the form of Jean-Luc Dehaene (CD&V) and Guy Verhofstadt (VLD), two old hands when it comes to campaigning. Chairman Stevaert’s gut feeling has already served the SPA well in the past. On 13 June we shall see whether Mia De Vits turns into Steve’s second staff blunder, after Anissa Temsamani [who was forced to resign as a state secretary after only a couple of months in office, ed].

WWW.SP.BE

De Vits came up against the indomitability of wallon trade union federations

De Vits wanted to modernise the union, increase its financial transparency and adapt the union to the evolution of the labour market. But this modernisation went off much more fluently in Flanders than in Wallonia.

The departure of chairperson Mia De Vits has exposed the discord between the Flemish and Walloon wings of the Socialist trade union. De Vits is leaving, as she herself put it, because she no longer felt supported by the FGTB, the Walloon wing of the union. The FGTB criticises her for taking too little account of Walloon sensibilities and for leaning too closely to the SPA, where she sat on the party executive. The FGTB thus did not agree with the increased monitoring of the unemployed, which was introduced by federal minister Vandenbroucke (SPA) and opposed a partial regionalisation of the employment policy, which was advocated by Minister of the Government of Flanders Landuyt (SPA). Moreover, the FGTB still swears by the militant unionism of the old school. De Vits, who came to the top job in 2002, wanted to modernise the union, increase its financial transparency and adapt the union to the evolution of the labour market. But this modernisation went off much more swimmingly in Flanders than in Wallonia, she concedes. Nonetheless, according to her, she always tried to maintain unity, but recently that evidently wasn’t possible any more. For the time being De Vits is succeeded by the union’s no. 2, the French-speaking André Mordant. He will have to lead the ABVV in the campaign for the union elections to be held in May. A special conference will be held in June to decide on a new chairperson (FF).
Dehaene unveils his vision of Europe

DEHAENE HIMSELF DENIED HAVING ANY AMBITION OF BECOMING COMMISSION PRESIDENT

A few weeks after SP.A deputy chairperson Caroline Gennez published her euro-sceptical work on Europe, it was the turn of Jean-Luc Dehaene, the candidate heading the CD&V’s list, to unveil his vision of Europe in a book. ‘The European Challenge: from Enlargement to Integration’ tells the story of the European Union’s enlargement and examines in greater depth his work as deputy chairman of the European Convention. The introduction and presentation of Dehaene’s book was provided by Luxembourg’s Christian-Democrat Premier Jean-Claude Juncker. Even more so than Dehaene, Juncker is being tipped as a possible successor to Commission President Romano Prodi. During the hour or so of questions, the Luxembourg PM surprised many by announcing that he would not be competing for the presidency of the Commission. He added that his preference went to Dehaene - whereupon Dehaene himself denied having any ambition of becoming Commission President.

In an interview in Knack (10 March), Dehaene outlines the main themes of his book and his forthcoming election campaign. He makes use of the opportunity to reject the SP.A’s euro-sceptical position and emphasises the importance of Member States making a proportional effort to enable the ten new Member States to keep pace (FF).

PATRICK MARTENS • KNACK • 10 MARCH

Dehaene: ‘I support the European Commission which wants to help the new EU Member States, among other things with the European Structural Funds. I do not share the attitude of France, Germany and other Member States who regard themselves as net payers and feel that the EU’s own financial resources should be cut from 1.27 to 1% of Gross Domestic Product. That is directly at odds with the discourse of enlargement’.

According to Dehaene, the European Convention was the first real institution of the reunited Europe. But more has to be done to avoid getting stuck in inertia. ‘Firstly, decision making by qualified majority has to be generalised. Secondly, the central role of the European Commission will be lost if it cannot form a coherent team with a small number of members. Thirdly, the EU currently does not have any resources of its own. It receives allocations from the Member States and these are putting their foot on the brake because the allocations are making budget deficits bigger. Therefore I am in favour of European taxation’.

The fact that the SP.A has broken through the Belgian consensus on Europe and has called the EU a techno-bureaucracy with a liberalising tendency, is not without its dangers, he warns. ‘I do not think that Karel Van Miert (SP.A, former commissioner) and Willy Claes (SP.A, former NATO chief) think along those lines. I agree with some of the criticism, for example that Europe wants to liberalise in too many fields. But is it necessary to elicit anti-European sentiment on account of that? Our employment and our prosperity depend in large measure on Europe. We have Europe to thank for peace and stability on the continent. A sensible approach to immigration and security can only be brought about at European level. Anyone who forgets all that is playing with fire.’

WWW.ABVV.BE

Flight distribution plan is being implemented, Anciaux says

WWW.SPREIDINGSPLAN.BE

NOISE POLLUTION

The distribution plan devised by Transport Minister Bert Anciaux (Spirit) for the night flights over Brussels and its environs is to be implemented as planned. A working group is to be set up, whose job it will be to check whether the noise pollution for the people living in the area is distributed fairly, and at the end of the year Anciaux’s plan will be evaluated on the basis of a noise register. The Brussels Court of Appeal ruling, which ordered a maximum spreading of the night flights, has in the meantime been rejected by the Court of Cassation. The matter is being referred to the Court of Appeals in Ghent. But according to Anciaux that does not alter the implementation of the distribution plan in any way.

WWW.CDENV.BE

POLITICS

EVELYNE HENS • DE TIJD • 9 MARCH

De Vits’ path soon proved to be strewn with obstacles and the internal opposition proved greater than expected. Shortly after taking up her post, a financial scandal broke out in the Brussels division of the Socialist employees’ union BBTK. The senior official Albert Faust was dismissed and several people were committed for trial. De Vits saw this as all the more reason to carry on fighting for greater financial transparency in the union. This struggle was met with opposition from various professional federations, which did not want anyone looking into their coffer. De Vits was also soon confronted with the widening chasm between the Walloon and Flemish wings. In matters such as service cheques, monitoring of unemployed persons and the trade union kidnapping of members of boards of directors, these differences of opinion led to tough discussions. On each occasion the Walloon ABVV wing always rejected a different approach for Flanders and Wallonia. ‘In a trade union it’s good to have discussions. But you must listen to each other - the Flemings to the Walloons, but also vice versa. And that’s where the problem lies’, said De Vits.

WWW.ABVV.BE
Belgacom valued at 8.1 to 9.3 billion Euro

Belgacom is being floated at between EUR 23 and 26.5 per share. This price bracket values Belgacom at EUR 8.1 to 9.35 billion. That is relatively low, but according to managing director Bellens in De Tijd [March], a fair price. The price bracket came about after the supervising banks had sounded out the interest of some 300 institutional investors. The price is also a compromise between the Belgian Government as majority shareholder and Belgacom on the one hand, and the minority shareholders of the ADSB consortium on the other. It is in Belgacom’s interest for the price to be kept as low as possible, because it will be buying in shares itself to the tune of EUR 1.3 billion. It is the government’s and the management’s interest to see the initial public offering succeed and the price of the share rise as soon as it is quoted. The minority shareholders are selling, and are therefore interested in seeing as high a price as possible. Including the over-allotment operation, whereby Dexia and KBC are selling their shares, some 147 million shares are going public. According to De Tijd, in the best-case scenario the minority shareholder ADSB will receive EUR 5.23 billion, including the EUR 1.3 billion in shares that Belgacom wants to buy. That represents an enormous return - almost three times the original investment of EUR 1.82 billion eight years ago. For the prudent investor, the Belgacom share is worth the investment. The dividend varies between 5.1 and 5.85%, gross.

WWW.BELGACOM.BE

Greenhouse Gases

Belgium finally has its Kyoto plan

The federal authorities will be taking responsibility for 7.24 million of the 14.03 million tons of CO2 to be removed

The federal government and the regional governments have reached agreement on the distribution of the efforts that Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels and the federal level will make in order to attain Belgium’s Kyoto objective, namely 7.5% fewer emissions of greenhouse gases in the period 2008-2012 than in the benchmark year 1990. Belgium had to submit its plan to the European authorities by the end of March. With this deadline hanging over it, the National Climate Conference, chaired by Federal Environment Minister Freya Vanden Bossche (SP.A) has managed to reach an agreement. In 1990 Belgium emitted 146.24 million tons of CO2 gases. That volume rose to 149.3 million tons in 2001. By 2008 that figure should have been cut to 135.27 million tons - the difference having to be removed therefore amounting to 14.03 million tons. The federal authorities will be taking responsibility for 7.24 million tons of this. Since Flanders had already made greater efforts, it can have emissions reduced at a slower rate than Wallonia: 5.2% in comparison with 1990, as compared to 7.5% for Wallonia. Brussels will even be permitted a 3.48% increase in emissions. The emission rights that the federal government will buy abroad will therefore be to the benefit of Flanders and Brussels (FF).

DOMINIQUE MINTEN • DE STANDAARD • 9 MARCH

Should Flanders save less than Wallonia? Minister Vanden Bossche: ‘That is a form of inter-regional solidarity. A great many chemical companies that are established in Flanders are among the top ten in their sector as regards energy-saving technology. We do not want to pester these companies by imposing senseless measures on them. For that matter, these companies have already signed energy-saving agreements with the Authorities of Flanders’. But that solidarity was also included in the first climate plan, and that was rejected by Flanders. Therefore Van den Bossche is going even further with federal solidarity. For this, she is primarily using ‘flexible mechanisms’. This means that Belgium will buy emission rights abroad. This is the purpose of the Kyoto fund, set up by the government in 2002, into which around EUR 25 million is pumped every year. ‘The federal authorities can buy 2.46 million tons in emission rights’, says Van den Bossche. The bulk of this - two million tons - will be to the benefit of Flanders. Wallonia will not receive anything from this, whilst the remaining 0.44 million tons will be for Brussels’.

This buying of emission rights is not equivalent to the buying of clean air. These are investments in foreign projects that help in the reduction of greenhouse gases. The projects concerned will be in the former East Bloc and in the third world. Finally the federal authorities are entering into concrete commitments which will reduce emissions on the territory of the regions. This commitment amounts to 4.8 million tons of CO2 emissions.

The list of concrete measures that the federal government will be taking is to be announced at the council of ministers meeting on quality of life on 20 and 21 March. Prime Minister Verhofstadt is pleased with the agreement. ‘We have made the Kyoto problem manageable again. I am also satisfied that we will attain the norms. After all, our measures are estimated on the conservative side. In fact, there is a real chance that we will save more’.

WWW.ENVIRONMENT.FCGOV.BE

Most important IPO’s in Belgium

* ESTIMATED INTRODUCTION PRICE OF 36.50 EURO

** MOST IMPORTANT IPO’S IN BELGIUM

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** ESTIMATION

SOURCE: FORTIS - EURONEXT - DE TIJD GRAPHICS

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Government presents Diabolo rail project

How did Rubens' paintings find their way abroad?

FF EDITOR

In Het Laatste Nieuws (10 March), Public Enterprises Minister Johan Vande Lanotte (SP.A) presented his plan to make faster rail links possible with the airport at Zaventem and Brussels. This will involve among other things getting rid of bottlenecks and detours on the eastern Liège/Hasselt-Brussels route and the northern route from Antwerp. Thus a new railway line will be built on the airport via a tunnel, without the detour via the capital. Commuters will also benefit from this and will see their journey times sharply reduced. The faster link from Hasselt should be ready by 2006. The Diabolo project, as it has been called, will cost EUR 400 million, for which Vande Lanotte is reckoning on the contribution of private investors. The matter is on the agenda of the special council of ministers meeting to be held on 20 and 21 March in Ostend.

www.nmbs.be

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CONSIDERABLE GAIN IN TIME (IN MINUTES)

Government presents Diabolo rail project

How did Rubens' paintings find their way abroad?

On the occasion of the Rubens exhibitions in Antwerp and Lille, De Morgen asks how the Antwerp master’s paintings ended up in museums abroad. For example, how did the eleven Rubens paintings, including some monumental altarpieces, find their way to museums in Lyon, Grenoble, Marseille, Lille and Nancy? Simply because the French revolutionary troops confiscated a whole host of works of art and church property after the annexation of the Austrian Netherlands in 1794 and took them back to Paris. After the Treaty of Vienna in 1781, and with his Journey Through Flanders and Holland, writes what amounts to a catalogue of what was held in private collections. This prompted a number of lords to come and see what would still fit in their dining room.’

Why were so many sold? ‘These were quite difficult times in our region, and therefore there was a readiness to sell. On top of that was the fact that the Holy Roman emperor and ruler of Austria Joseph II abolished the Jesuit Order, which resulted in a lot of paintings coming onto the market and disappearing abroad.

But the biggest blow was the invasion of the French. They had a system whereby the paintings they confiscated in the areas they conquered [Northern Italy, Spain, part of Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium] were transported to the Louvre, where a selection was made from these thousands of works. The French had set up large provincial museums, in Grenoble, Nancy, Toulouse, Bordeaux, but also in Mainz, which was still French at the time, and Brussels [the only museum for the whole of our country]. More or less something of everything was sent to these museums - not the cream of the crop, as that remained in Paris, but an assortment representative of the history of art, since all of these cities had an academy in need of study material.’

Is it war booty? ‘Yes, it certainly is. But at the same time I ask myself the question: what would we do if we had these works returned to us? This is virtually out of the question after so many years - there is a kind of preclusion by lapse of time that comes into play. I now look upon these Rubenses as our ambassadors abroad. That’s the healthiest attitude to take, I think. My feelings have changed on this. I used to think it was a scandal, and perhaps it is, too. Because these works really are spoils of war, unlike what you find hanging in Spain or Austria. The Spanish King Philip IV...
bought a great number of Rubenses, but the French pinch them and they still don't really entirely realise that. But let's not forget that the museum in Brussels gained a great deal from the French 'redistribution'.

WWW.RUBENSONLINE.BE

CULTURE

Diary

MUSIC, DANCE THEATRE

• 10 to 19 March: Kassandra, Rosas (dance), Rosas performance space, Brus-
sels; info: www.kaaitheater.be 02/201.59.59
• 16 March: Beethoven Academie con-
ducted by Oswald Sallaberger, De Sin-
gel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
• 17 to 21 March: Concerts ([Colours of Music) with defilharmonie, Raymond
van het Groenewoud, Sarah Bettens,
Joost Zwicker, and Ibernic MacBean,
with Tango and rap dance acts, Het
Kuijpe Ghent; info: 070/25.30.20
• Until 16 March: Peter Grimes by Ben-
jamin Britten, opera, conductor: Kazushii
Ono, director: Willy Decker, De Munt,
Brussels; info: www.de.munt.be
• 17 March: Thou, Ancienne Belgique,
Brussels; info: www.abconcerts.be 02/548.24.24
• 18 March: Joanna Mc Gregor with
Schubert, van Beethoven and Piazzolla,
Handelsbeurs, Ghent;
info: www.handelsbeurs.be
• 19 March: Viktoria Mullova [violin) and
Katharina Labècque (piano) with
Schubert, Ravel and Stravinsky,
De Vooruit, Ghent; info: www.vooruit.be
• 20 March: Ictus, Sur les bords de la
camerà, Bozar, Brussels; info:
www.kaaitheater.be 02/201.59.59
• 20 March: Eline Rodrigues (piano) with
Wendy De Bijloke, Ghent; info: 09/233.68.78
www.bijloke.be
• 19 March: The Orchestra of the Age of
Enlightenment, conducted by Emmanuelle Haim,
Opera David and Jonathan by Antoine
Charpentier, PSK, Brussels;
info: www.bozar.be
• 20 March: Radio Vienna Connection
de Vooruit, Ghent;
info: www.vooruit.be 09/267.28.28
• Until 21 March: Cinema Novo, Film
Festival, Bruges;
info: www.cinemano.be
• March: Films by director Hans-Jürgen
Syberberg in Cifas and Film Museum;
info: www.museumdrguislain.be
• 21 March: Les Lambchop, Ancienne Bel-
gique, Brussels;
info: www.abconcerts.be 02/548.24.24

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EXPO

• Until 28 March: Genovanversaevice-
ersa, exhibition about Fashion, Antwerp
and Genova, Fashion Museum, Antwerp;
info: 03/470.27.70 www.momu.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 exhibi-
tion 'Degraded Art'; exhibition, Museum
Dr. Guislain, Ghent;
info: www.museumdrguislain.be
• Until 25 April: The art of the Islam,
exhibition, Museum of the Cinquante-
naire, Parque du Cinquantenaire, Brussel-
s
• Until 9 May: Fernand Khnopff,
retrospective exhibition, KMSK, Brussels
• Until 21 March: Dream extensions
with Marko Moro, Jane & Louise
Wilson, Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven,
Georgina Starr, SMAK, Ghent;
info: www.smak.be
• Until 23 March: Henry Lacoste, Art
Deco, exhibition Museum for
Architecture, Elseen (Brussels)
• 13 February to 4 April: B-Architects,
exhibition De Singel, Antwerp;
info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
• Until 25 March: Marijke Van Warmer-
dam, 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 13 March: From Delacroix to
Courbet, Rubens under discussion,
MSKA, Antwerp;
info: www.rubens2004.be
• Until 13 June: A heart for books, The
library of Rubens, Plantin- Moretus mu-
• Until 51 March: Syberberg/Paris/
Nossendorf, exhibition on work and life
of Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, Goethe-Insti-
tut, Brussels; info: 02/230.39.70
• 19 to 28 March: Eutrantica Brussels,
antiques Fair, Brussels Expo, Brussels;
info: www.eutrantica.be 0800/57.007