DHL’s logistics centre probably not to be built in Zaventem

The chances of the airport at Zaventem being the chosen site for a new European sorting centre for the courier company DHL have become considerably slimmer. The major rival, the German airport of Leipzig/Halle, can receive a state subsidy of EUR 70.8 million from the German government if DHL builds its logistics centre there. De Tijd reports that the European authorities have given this operation the OK. If DHL’s investment in Zaventem does not go ahead, the thousands of jobs it would have led to will not materialise. But that also means that there will be no increase in night flights – an issue that has been the subject of bitter disputes (FF).

Next week the European Commission will approve a German state subsidy of EUR 70.8 million for DHL. Our editorial staff has learnt this from German sources, and EU circles have confirmed the news. The aim is to be used for the building of an ‘Air Logistics Centre’ at Leipzig/Halle, in Saxony. The building of the centre involves an investment of EUR 253 million. Leipzig is located in a European ‘Objective 1’ region. That means that government aid can be granted up to 28% of the investment amount. Given that EUR 70.8 million corresponds exactly to the maximum permitted amount, the Commission is approving the request. A similar grant for DHL in Zaventem is not allowed because Belgium’s national airport is not in an ‘Objective 1’ region. Together with Leipzig/Halle and Vatry in France, Zaventem is one of the main candidates for the building of a European sorting centre for DHL. A spokesman for Deutsche Post, DHL’s parent company, repeated yesterday that a decision would be taken in the autumn. He could not deny that the approval of government aid was a point in Leipzig’s favour, but other pros and cons are also being weighed up. DHL expects strong growth in the express post market and needs greater capacity on account of the incorporation of Danzas, AEI and VGL.

GUIDO MEEUSSEN • DE TIJD • 16 APRIL

INTRODUCTION
Twenty-five of the 35 Flemish municipalities from the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde constituency are threatening to boycott the forthcoming elections or have them subsequently declared unlawful if their consituency remains bilingual and voters can continue to vote on Francophone lists. The mayors of the municipalities have received the support of the Flemish Parliament, the provincial council of Flemish Brabant and more than 113 municipalities, and feel backed, among other things, by a ruling of the Court of Arbitration declaring the district to be in contravention of the constitutional division of the linguistic regions. However, Interior Minister Dewael feels that it would be unbelievably foolish to settle this question just before the elections, because Flanders would have to make far too many concessions to the French-speakers in exchange. Therefore he wants to put the split of the electoral district on the agenda of the Forum for Institutional Affairs, which is being set up after the elections.

In Brussels itself, things remain relatively quiet on the linguistic front, although people fear a Vlaams Blok majority among Dutch speakers. But the far-right-wing party mobilises chiefly around the themes of security and immigrants, and much less on the issue of linguistic sensitivity. For the capital is no longer the linguistic powder keg that it was in the 1970s, says journalist and staff member in Minister Chabert’s (CD&V) office, Guido Fonteyn in Knack (7 April). The hostility of French-speakers towards Flemings has waned over the years, in particular because the Flemish Community has gained in influence and prestige. It has chosen Brussels as the seat of its institutions, and turned Dutch-language education into a success story in the capital. What is more, a new generation of Flemings has settled in the centre of Brussels and now help define the cityscape. They are ‘free of complexes and self-assured’, and no longer feel discriminated. Some, such as political researcher Kris Deschouwer (Knack, 7 April), recently advocated in a Brussels manifesto the setting up of a multicultural Brussels bilingual community, more in line with the capital’s international character. Fonteyn does not regard that as a good idea, but does feel it is high time that the French- and Dutch-language Communities finally concluded a cultural co-operation agreement. Perhaps more pressing is a transfer of competencies from the 19 Brussels municipalities to the Brussels Capital Region. The problems in the capital are crying out for a larger-scale approach in socio-economic and town and country planning policy, according to Flemish views. Further to the recent Lombard agreement of 2001, Brussels is perfectly able to adapt its local government legislation in that direction, says De Schouwer. Only then can the Region champion a new financial arrangement at the Forum to offset the tax revenue that now flows to rich Walloon Brabant and Flemish Brabant, the political scientist says.

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief
Politicians with company mandates are vulnerable

Flemish Minister-President Bart Somers (VLD) said he did not understand how a former prime minister like Jean-Luc Dehaene could be co-operating in Interbrew’s move and thereby jeopardising the Flemish economy.

Interbrew, one of the few large multinationals that Belgium can boast, is considering moving its registered office to Luxembourg. Finance Minister Didier Reynders (MR) does not understand Interbrew’s attitude. This government offers companies the possibility of agreeing on a ‘ruling’ (a fiscally advantageous arrangement) with the tax office. But Interbrew has never applied for such an arrangement, according to the minister, who immediately added that companies such as Interbrew only moved their head office to a fiscal paradise in order to give their directors better and fiscally more attractive conditions. Jean-Luc Dehaene, who heads the list of candidates for the Flemish Christian Democrats in the European elections and is a director of Interbrew, thereby indirectly came under fire. A little later Dehaene also came in for a lashing from the Flemish Minister-President Bart Somers (VLD), who said he did not understand how a former prime minister could be co-operating in Interbrew’s move and thereby jeopardising the Flemish economy and employment in Flanders. Earlier Dehaene had been quoted in De Standaard as saying that he felt it was ‘normal’ that, after its merger with the Brazilian company Ambev, Interbrew should wonder about the ideal location for its registered office. He dismissed the criticism voiced by his political opponents as symptoms of electoral fever and declined to make any further comment. But that prompted newspapers such as De Standaard and De Tijd to raise questions about the combination of an active political career and a director’s post in a company. Sooner or later there emerges a conflict of interests, they concluded. Ten years ago, in the framework of the negotiations on the new political culture (NPC), the political parties agreed that at the beginning of the legislature all members of parliament would submit a declaration of assets and a list of their mandates. But this has still not been voted on in parliament. It only strengthens the negative image of the politician as a hunter of posts and positions, and a money-grubber. De Tijd carried out a survey and concluded that less than 20% of the Flemings in the Federal Parliament and the Federal Government are full-time members of parliament or government (FF).

STEFAN HUYSENTRUYT • DE TIJD • 10 APRIL

More than 80% combine their parliamentary or government job with one or more additional mandates - on average as much as 2.5 mandates, in fact. These may be commercial, non-commercial and municipal mandates, or a combination of these. Fifty-four of the 140 Flemish federal elected representatives also have one or more commercial mandates, 65 also have one or more non-commercial mandates and 88 are also active in municipal politics. Only 24 of the 140 do not combine their job with any other posts.

Elected representatives of SPA-Spirit and the Vlaams Blok are those who indulge in plurality of offices the least, and relatively speaking have the highest number of ‘full-time’ MPs. With the CD&V and the VLD, the situation is reversed. Out of 30 elected representatives, the CD&V can only point to two who are full-time MPs. The VLD has six full-time members of parliament or government out of a total of 42, and SPA-Spirit 14 out of a total of 41. Finally, the Vlaams Blok has four full-time MPs out of a total of 26.

Opinion

STEFAN HUYSENTRUYT • DE TIJD • 10 APRIL

MPs who devote themselves 100% to their parliamentary mandate are financially worse off than those of their colleagues who pluralise offices. It is true that colleagues who combine offices can receive a maximum of one and a half times the parliamentary salary, but this threshold only applies to MPs who combine political mandates. There is no limit to the extra money that can be earned by an MP who adds commercial posts to his or her political office(s). On top of this comes the fact that it is precisely when a commercial post is added to the political mandate(s) that conflicts of interest rear their head. Besides, no kind of plurality of offices does the image of the politician any good in the eyes of public opinion. Reason enough, then, to abolish all combinations of offices! It is not as simple as that. If you want to maintain a high quality of political staff, the job of member of parliament has to be made sufficiently attractive. And one way of doing this is to permit plurality of offices. There are not only disadvantages in the combining of offices, either. For example, the combination of a parliamentary office with a mandate in local politics ensures that there is sufficient knowledge in parliament of the local domain - even if that knowledge is currently undoubtedly present to an excessive degree. Allowing political office to be combined with a non-political mandate ensures that parliament is not peopled solely by career politicians. Counterbalancing the risk of conflicts of interests is the knowledge of the non-political field that these pluralising MPs bring to the hemisphere. Their knowledge of the political field is indeed often the reason why they are offered a non-political mandate. They help companies to go beyond the narrow commercial logic and take account of factors other than mere profit maximisation. This does not detract from the fact that clear limits have to be set for parliamentary combination of offices. Anyone who takes his parliamentary mandate to heart has a full-time job on his plate, and the room for additional mandates is therefore limited.

WWW.INTERBREW.BE
Olympic games are feasible, says Somers

‘A Feasibility Study Commissioned by a Government Should First and Foremost Show that the Government’s Plans are Feasible’

The auditing firm Deloitte has put the cost of staging the Olympic Games in Flanders in 2016 at EUR 4.1 billion. Minister-President Bart Somers (VLD) has thus concluded that it would be feasible to bring the Olympic Games to Flanders. Of the EUR 4.1 billion, the authorities would only have to cough up EUR 823 million themselves. And that amount could easily be recovered thanks to the jobs created by the organisation and the additional income tax revenue. The bulk of that amount would come from television rights, sponsorship, private investors and ticket sales. But not everyone is as optimistic as the Minister-President. The Belgian Olympic Committee is already expressing doubts as to that official cost price. The cost price in Athens (EUR 8.5 billion) is twice as high, the Sydney Games cost EUR 2.4 billion more, and in all host cities (Atlanta, Barcelona), the real cost price has far outstripped the estimate. The publication of the figures was received in the papers with a good deal of scepticism. Both De Morgen and De Standaard agree that a feasibility study commissioned by a government should first and foremost show that the government’s plans are feasible (FF).

Opinion

BART STURTEWAGEN • DE STANDAARD • 14 APRIL

It is important that the issue be debated on the merits. Why should we be afraid of holding the plan up to the light? Surely if Greece, with a more or less comparable population and a weaker economy, can do it, then it can’t be impossible for us! That does not mean that we should pursure a prestigious project at any cost or for political reasons. Making a bid for a large-scale undertaking such as this is an act of will. In particular, it is also an exercise in collective thinking, planning, financing and organisation. It gives a society focus and dynamism. But focus and dynamism are not enough. Getting the nation moving is one thing, deciding on the direction and the paths to be taken is another. Our region has challenges aplenty without the Olympic Games. We are aware of what they are and we know what levers are required for them. Our trump card has to be a knowledge-based economy in which many highly trained people can find a good, secure job. This should create enough added value so that those who are unable or no longer able to participate in it nonetheless still belong there. For the next phase of the discussion should determine how the one is to be fitted into the other. Will the Olympic Games of 2016 support the priorities for the strengthening of our socio-economic fabric, or will energy and resources be diverted for short-lived glory? That is the core issue.

GASTON TUUCH • HET BELANG VAN LIMBURG • 14 APRIL

Nobody in this country is waiting for a prestigious project of these dimensions. All the more so since so many other priorities in our economic and social order are awaiting attention. What would we be doing with hugely expensive outdoor stadiums for baseball, softball, hockey, swimming, equestrianism and shooting, when we barely have more than one or two individuals competing in those disciplines? What would Flanders be doing with a new rowing centre? Or with an Olympic Stadium that would henceforth make the King Baudouin Stadium redundant? And that’s not to mention the ramshackle existing infrastructure for indoor sports that would first have to be demolished before the ‘redevelopment’ could begin.

WWW.VLAANDEREN.BE/START/DOCUMENTEN/ACTUALITEIT/RAPPORT_OS2016

focus on Flanders • 10 April - 16 April • Number 14
Vilvoorde pact given first assessment
THE REPORT ‘IS NOT CAUSE FOR GREAT CELEBRATION, ALTHOUGH IT DOES SHOW OPPORTUNITIES FOR KEEPING FLANDERS AT THE TOP’, SOMERS SAYS

On 11 July 2000, the Flemish Community’s holiday, Patrick Dewael (VLD), the then Minister-President, gave the starting shot for ‘Kleurrijk Vlaanderen’ (Colourful Flanders), a project aimed at giving Flanders a modern identity. The project took concrete form in the Vilvoorde Pact. In 21 ambitious objectives, the Dewael government wrote out its long-term plans in the field of education, training, employment, enterprise, care and cultural participation. It did this in consultation with the social partners and the broader centre-field. Plans were worked out for all areas of competence of the Flemish Government, aimed at turning the federated state of Flanders into one of Europe’s top regions by 2010. The statistics would be updated every year, so that Flanders’ growth path would gradually become clear. Last month the Flemish Community’s Planning and Statistics Department issued its first progress report on the pact. Minister-President Bart Somers gave some explanatory comments on the results in De Morgen (10 April) (FF).

BART ECKHOUT • DE MORGEN • 30 MARCH

The statistics in themselves contain little new, but as an impressive whole they do show that on crucial points Flanders is peddling but going nowhere. Flanders is finding the going very tough in the socio-economic field, in particular, it appears. The aim of having 66.5% of the active population in work by the end of the period of office is called ‘unfeasible’. In the corporate world, the then Minister-President, Somers, argued that in a different way. ‘The antithesis between hard and soft, between prosperity and welfare, no longer holds true. Companies invest in regions where the quality of life is high, where there is a high cultural development and where tolerance prevails. The fact that the investments made by this Flemish Government in welfare and culture are showing a return can be seen from the statistics. Cultural participation is higher than ever, and all environmental indicators are heading in the right direction. The number of places in day nurseries, care of the elderly and the handicapped persons’ sector has risen by a phenomenal degree.’ Otherwise, the average Fleming’s confidence in ‘politics’ does remain low. Somers: ‘I see the subtle distinctions. Confidence in the Flemish Government is a good deal higher in all confidence barometers than confidence in the other governments. That is the difference between the rue de la Loi and the ‘Village street’. In the rue de la Loi, in political reporting too, the federal level continues to be the political centre of gravity, to which everything else is subordinate. The ‘Village street’ experiences that in a different way.

www.kleurrijkvlaanderen.be

Olympic Games in Flanders 2016 according to Deloitte

| BUDGET |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| Total budget | 4.1 billion euro |
| Olympic budget | 2.7 billion euro |
| Revenues from organisation committee (OCOS) | 1.8 billion euro |
| Additional expenses | 560 million euro |
| Costs for organizing authorities | 823 million euro |
| Revenues of organizing authorities | 828 million euro |
| Credit balance for authorities | 16 million euro |
| Beneficial effect on labour market: | 35,600 jobs |

New infrastructure

| Olympic stadium (250 million euro) |
| Big indoor sports hall (18,000 seats) |
| Four to eight large indoor sports halls |
| Velodrome |
| Swimming pool hall |
| Outdoor stadiums for equestrianism, baseball, softball, hockey, tennis and shooting |
| Adjustment of existing infrastructure |

SOURCE: DE MORGEN

Focus on Flanders • 10 April - 16 April • Number 14
BUDGET POLICY

2004 federal budget balanced

For the fifth year in succession, and after its budget audit of last week, the purple government has presented a balanced budget for 2004. Meanwhile France, Germany, Italy and possibly even the Netherlands have not been able to keep within the limits of the Stability Pact. Is Belgium therefore suffering so much less from the poor economic climate? Only partially. Last year the Belgian economy grew by 1.1%, whilst economic growth in France and Germany stagnated. Paradoxically enough, it is chiefly the towering public debt that is yielding the excellent budget results. Since 2000 the fall in interest rates on these debts has neutralised a worsening of the net primary balance (the fiscal balance without interest charges) to the tune of 1.2%, concludes De Standaard (6 April). And then there are of course the extensive ad-hoc measures, such as the taking over of the Belgacom pension fund in 2003 or the tax amnesty in 2004 (FF).

PATRICK MARTENS • KNACK • 14 APRIL

He government has raised the figure for economic growth in 2004 to 2%. Furthermore, it is only making a few ‘micro-surgical’ interventions in order to reduce or defer expenses for ‘smaller projects’. This double movement will mean that the debt mountain will fall by the end of this year to below 100% of Gross Domestic Product for the first time since 1981, no cuts will have to be made in social security expenditure, and some money will even be left over for new social measures and for security and justice. That’s as far as it goes as regards the glad tidings concerning the purple government’s finances, for there are also shortcomings. The social security system, for example, suddenly appears to show a surplus, yet nobody mentions any more the fact that the government decided some time ago to cream off EUR 1.5 billion from tax revenue in order to be able to maintain the rate of expenditure for health insurance, unemployment and pensions. The budgetary balance is also a balance of all authorities (federal, regional and local) together. And then it emerges not only that the Federal Government has a shortfall of more than EUR 1.4 billion for its ordinary expenditure, without interest charges, but also that it is calculating the surplus of the cities and municipalities to be EUR 85 million higher this year than those local authorities themselves even remotely dare surmise. The success or failure of the purple government’s budgetary outline also still depends on the EUR 850 million that it is reckoned the tax amnesty will bring in this year. If this ‘liberating’ income proves disappointing, the International Monetary Fund and the European Commission will unfortunately be proved right in their criticism of such one-off budgetary measures, another of which was the Belgacom operation of last year.

WWW.BEGROTING.BE

POLITICS

ELECTIONS

Rebellion of Flemish mayors in Flemish Brabant

Five mayors from the Flemish periphery around Brussels are demanding for it no longer to be possible for voters to vote on Francophone lists in their municipality. They are calling for the electoral district of Halle-Vilvoorde to be split before polling day on 13 June. A little later a further five municipalities joined in backing the rebels. They are threatening not to draw up electoral rolls, so that no elections to the Flemish Parliament can be held in their municipalities. The initiative originates from the SPA mayor of Kapellen-op-den-bos Leo Peeters and the VLD mayor of Lennik Willy De Waele. According to the mayors, it is not acceptable that Halle-Vilvoorde, which belongs to the Dutch linguistic area, continues to form a single constituency with bilingual Brussels for the European and federal elections. This anomaly means that French-speakers can submit electoral lists in 35 Flemish municipalities, whilst Flemings cannot do this in any French-speaking municipalities at all. For the elections to the Flemish Parliament on the contrary, Halle-Vilvoorde forms part of the provincial constituency of Flemish Brabant. The mayors are sick of this situation. Interior Minister Patrick Dewael (VLD) also advocates a split, but wants to settle this after the elections. He stated that the elections would go ahead in any case. He feels that taking steps to bring about the split now would be foolish. The Flemings would have to pay far too high a price for it in the negotiations (FF).

DE STANDAARD • 13 APRIL

In protest at there being no split forthcoming in the bilingual constituency of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde, 25 of the 35 municipalities in Halle-Vilvoorde are refusing to establish the electoral roll or will only do so subject to conditions. They regard it as unacceptable that people in Flanders still have to be called upon for nominations for the Francophone electoral college. They are now adding force to a demand that goes back forty years, to the effect that votes can only be cast in Flanders on Dutch-language lists. The opposition places Dewael in a difficult predicament. Personally he, like his party, supports the split. But the VLD has not been able to force this in the federal majority. Moreover, as minister he also has to see to it that the elections go off smoothly. Dewael: ‘I shall call on the statutory possibilities in order to intervene. It would be inadmissible if some citizens were not able to go and vote. If the mayor refuses to establish the electoral rolls, the chairman of the head office may do so. Paul Van Grembergen (Spirit), the Flemish Internal Affairs Minister, has supervisory authority over the mayors and the benches of aldermen, but I am responsible for the regulations in the elections. I have no intention of passing that duty over; it’s my job. With the judgement of the Court of Arbitration [which rubbed the failure of a split to be forthcoming, ed.], I expect a breakthrough after the elections. But trying to force a split of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde now, before the elections, would be madness. The Flemings would have to pay a ridiculously high price for that to the French-speakers.’

WWW.DERAND.BE
WWW.VL-BRABANT.BE
WWW.13JUN2004.BE
Flemish endive farmers call for higher quality

Flemish and Dutch endive farmers propose raising the quality standard, but the French, who market endives of a lesser quality, refuse

On 8 April representatives of the Flemish, Dutch and French endive sector and auction delegates from the three countries met with a view to taking measures, in consultation, aimed at raising the price of endives. Flemish and Dutch endive farmers propose raising the quality standard, but the French, who chiefly market endives of a lesser quality, will have none of that. In recent years France has increased its production to 250,000 tons per year. In Belgium the number of endive farmers has fallen from 900 to 550 since 1995, and there has been a large-scale switch to capital- and labour-intensive hydroponics. Belgium currently produces around 72,000 tons a year, the same amount as in the Netherlands. But Flemish endive farmers are up to their necks in difficulties. They are selling their endives at 60% of the production cost. And the market position of the ‘Belgian Endives’ is gradually being jeopardised (FF).

BART MOERMEN • HET NIEUWSBLAD • 15 APRIL

‘Our endive farmers are working at a loss. That cannot go on,’ sighs Farmers’ Union spokesman Roger Saenen. ‘The production cost is EUR 1.25 per kilogram, but our farmers are only receiving 80 cents. We can’t go on like that.’ The days when endive cultivation was the reserve of Brabant farmers are long gone. The Roeselare area [West Flanders] is a major producer, and the Dutch are also moving up. But it is above all the French who are on the march. Because grain no longer pays, many wheat farmers have switched to endive. They have enough land, so they opt for mass production rather than quality. That has nothing to do with the difference between hydroponics and endives grown in the ground, says Saenen. The difference in quality concerns the core or kernel of the endive: in the cheaper variety the hard part is much larger. The European norm specifies that this may be no more than three-quarters of the length of the endive. The result is that when it is cooked, a large thick part first has to be cut away. The Flemish Flandria quality label only accepts endives with a core up to half the length, and the Dutch also comply with this standard. The endive farmers had hoped that the French would also go along with this. But in the talks their reaction was: ‘then it has to be war, if that’s the way the Flemings see things.’

Gores wins takeover struggle for Real Software

The Flemish software company Real Software has fallen into the hands of the American investment fund Gores Technology Group. Gores is taking over Real Software’s debts for a sum of EUR 20 million and is promising to invest EUR 10 million in the company. On 6 April Real Software held a crucial general meeting of its shareholders, where it emerged that the only alternative to the takeover by Gores was bankruptcy. The banks had made it clear that a deviation from the Gores plan would immediately lead to a demand for EUR 9.4 million in interest and capital repayment, according to De Tijd (8 April). Real Software would be unable to cough up this amount of money. Rudy Hageman, founder and former manager of Real Software and the French company Airal were the fiercest opponents of the agreement. Both parties still had outstanding amounts receivable from Real Software and supported an alternative takeover by the Flemish entrepreneur Tony Gram and Franky Carbeneze. But they had to give in, when it emerged that Gores had a definitive agreement with the banks which showed that they had become outright owners of the EUR 157 million in total claims held by Real Software’s other creditors. The suspensive condition that the debt commutation was dependent on the conversion of the debts into Real Software shares had disappeared. Airal and Hageman had their backs to the wall and agreed to the Gores proposal just before the shareholders’ meeting. In exchange for going along with the acquisition, Rudy Hageman

received EUR 2 million in Real Software shares, EUR 1 million in cash and a consulting assignment, reports Trends (15 April). A Real Software claim to the tune of EUR 26 million against Hageman is also dropped. A little later the general meeting approved the conversion of the debts into Real Software shares, so that Gores became the holder of 83% of the shares. With the appointment of eight American directors, Gores now well and truly has control of the company. There was relief among the 1,400 employees. The day after the announcement of the acquisition, the market price of the Real Software share rose by 14%.

WWW.REALSOFTWARE.COM
WWW.GORES.COM

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<th>OLYMPIC GAMES IN FLANDERS 2016 ACCORDING TO DELTIOTTE</th>
<th>ACkomodation Capacity Required on a Daily Basis</th>
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<td>Total</td>
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Sony lays off 110 engineers in Zaventem

The worldwide reorganisation plan being implemented by the Japanese electronics group Sony has also produced casualties in Belgium, with 110 of the 190 engineers at Sony Europe in Zaventem being laid off. Sony will now be negotiating with the unions to work out how the engineers who are being made redundant can best be given support (FF).

RENÉ DE WITTE • DE TIJD • 9 APRIL

In October it was said that nothing indicated that Belgium would be affected by the reorganisation, but now it has been. Engineers who were involved in television development are losing their jobs, because this activity is being combined in two plants in the United Kingdom and Spain. Professional web services are also no longer being provided from Brussels, and parts of the development activities, in network technology for example, are being concentrated in Japan. Some of the remaining engineers in Brussels are continuing to work on developments for Sony’s PC and laptop division Vaio. The layoffs at Sony in Belgium contrast with the dozens of vacancies for engineers at fellow electronics company Philips, at its plants in Bruges, Leuven and especially Turnhout. An estimated 800 engineers work for Philips in Belgium.

www.sony.com

Chinese Henan museum lends superb collection

Most of the pieces have been unearthed in the last forty years and have never before left China.

ARCHAEOLOGY

The Kunsthall of Ghent’s Sint-Pietersabdiij is hosting the exhibition ‘The Realm of the Dragon’, on Chinese animal symbolism through the ages. Running until the end of August, the exhibition was put together by Nicole de Bisscop, who was able to persuade China’s Henan Museum to lend 150 jade, bronze and porcelain pieces portraying animal symbolism for the show. Most of the pieces have been unearthed in the last forty years and have never before left China (FF).

JAN BRAET • KNACK • 14 APRIL

‘The lion is not the king here, the dragon is,’ says art expert and dealer Nicole de Bisscop. The lion only makes its appearance from the first century, with the advent of Buddhism. Then he becomes almost as powerful and dangerous as elsewhere, and is stationed together with a second lion at the entrance to buildings in order to ward off the forces of evil.

Just about the oldest of the pieces in the collection on display has to be an urn dating from the third millennium BC. Decorated with a frieze depicting fish, it symbolises fertility and abundance, generative energy, spring or luck in battle. The most recent piece, a bowl in the shape of bats, referring to happiness and joy, dates from the nineteenth-century Qing dynasty. In all that time, some 5,000 years, everything remained unchanged: all forms of life are one, plants included. There is no story of creation; everything has always been there, and has been in movement and metamorphosis. People change into pigs, sheep or owls. Bears, bats and hares turn into people. The dragon is responsible for most transformations, metamorphosing in time, colour and physical appearance. That is why it always defeats everything and everyone. The dragon decides whether it will rain or not. The dragon became the symbol of the Emperor, whilst people saw the Empress portrayed in the phoenix bird. The ordinary Chinese were very fond of dogs. Dogs helped in the hunt, and warned of approaching thieves or evil spirits, and were therefore often depicted barking. But above all, they tasted good.

www.gent.be

Heritage Day with a family theme

FF EDITOR

Sunday 18 April will see the fourth edition of the Heritage Day (‘Erfgoeddag’). This year the theme is ‘it’s in the family’.

Dozens of museums, archives and libraries - 447 to be precise - are opening their doors and organising tours on heritage and the family, naturally explained from their specific point of view. De Standaard has a list of fifteen tips. The exhibition in Antwerp’s AMCV-Language and Literature Centre, in particular, is given considerable attention. The ACMV offers a series of nostalgic photographs of Flanders’ most famous writers. In the Schoonselhof, Antwerp’s famous cemetery, there will be a tour of the graves of Antwerp’s most illustrious families (information: 03/829.16.03). The Antwerp Photography Museum offers an overview of the family photograph through the ages. Mechelen is staging ‘Railway Men, from Father to Son’ at the Central Railway Workshops (information: 015/41.65.68).

In Ghent the Museum Dr Guislain investigates the relationship between hereditary talent and environmental influences and the Archive and Museum of the Socialist Workers Movement in Ghent are staging the exhibition ‘The Key to Happiness’, with socialist election posters aimed at the family instinct.

In Blankenberge on the coast, a fishing family gives an explanation of their way of life in the only remaining fisherman’s cottage in the resort.

www.erfgoeddag.be
Diary

MUSIC, DANCE THEATRE

- 19 April: Ian Bostridge (Tenor) and Leif Ove Andsnes [Piano] with Robert Schumann, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- 23 April: Volker Staub & Michael Weilacher (trumpet, vocals, percussion), Concertgebouw, Brussels; info: www.concertgebouw.be

• 22 April: Harmonia meets Frank Zappa, Harmonia Ensemble, Bijloke, Ghent; info: 09/233.68.78 www.bijloke.be

- 23 April: Alia Musica conducted by Miguel Sanchez with Puerta de Veluntad (Jewish-Andalusian songs), Bijloke, Ghent; info: 09/233.68.78 www.bijloke.be


- 25 April: Trio Agri Zaratê Falascu [Arg], Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderpershuis.be

- 28 April: Laïs, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be

• 28 April: Aki Kaurismäki [Finland] in Filmmuseum, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be

- 29 April: De Philharmonie conducted by Michael Schwaenwandt and Ralph Kirshbaum [Cello] with Friedrich Kuhlau, Edward Elgar and Carl Nielsen, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be

- 29 April: Maccar by Melike [Iraq, Turkey, Belgium], Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderpershuis.be

- 30 April: Sparkling Red, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: 09/267.28.28 www.vooruit.be

- 30 April: Barbara Bonney [soprano] and Wolfram Rieger [piano] with Lieder by Mozart, Strauss and Liszt; info: www.concertgebouw.be

- 20, 25 and 28 April: I Masnadieri by Giuseppe Verdi, conductor: Pier Giorgio Morandi with Jose Van Dam, PSK, Brussels; info: www.demunt.be

- 20 April: The Gipsy Kings, Royal Circus, Brussels; info: 02/507.82.00 www.springsessions.be

• 25 April: Cesaria Evora, De Werf, Aalst; info: www.demunt.be

- 28 April: John Zorn Electric Masada, Royal Circus, Brussels; info: 02/507.82.00 www.springsessions.be

- 30 April: Cesaria Evora, De Werf, Aalst; info: 053/73.28.11 www.springsessions.be

- 30 April to 2 May: Indian Film Festival, Open Dock; Turnhout; www.opendock.be

EXPO

• Until 30 May: Human, all too human, photo exhibition on psychiatry, Museum Dr. Guislain, Ghent; info: www.museumdrguislain.be

• Until 25 April: Art of the Islam, exhibition, Museum of the Cinquantenaire, Brussels

• Until 9 May: Fernand Khnopff, retrospective exhibition, KMSKA, Brussels

• Until 23 May: Marijke Van Warmerdam, video installations, SMAK, Ghent

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• Printing: Druckerij Lannoo nv, Tielt
• Responsible editor: Luc Demeester, Marke

Focus on Flanders

The Flemish community

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