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Parties react to Blok ruling

SPA CHAIRMAN STEVE STEVAERT CALLED THE JUDGEMENT A GOOD RULING. CD&V CHAIRMAN LETERME FELT THAT THE TIMING WAS LESS THAN OPPORTUNE

The judgment of the Ghent Court of Appeal branding the Vlaams Blok as a racist party continued to dominate the political scene over the weekend. Initially, on 21 and 22 April, the other parties were sparing with their comments. They wanted above all to respect the separation of powers. According to De Tijd (24 April), strategic considerations also played a part. The election campaign is now in full swing and the party head offices want at all cost to avoid the Vlaams Blok deciding what the themes of the election will be.

Karel De Gucht, statutory chairman of the liberal VLD, was the first to break through this strategy. On the evening of Thursday (22 April), he took part in an open debate with Blok figurehead Flip Dewinter on the commercial television channel VTM. De Gucht felt that the strategy of remaining silent was inspired too much by the fear that the Vlaams Blok would garner electoral gain. As he sees it, he who cares about democracy should not avoid debate. When the Blok presented the ruling as a curtailing of the freedom of expression, Prime Minister Verhofstadt and SPA Chairman Steve Stevaert also reacted on 23 April. Freedom of expression has nothing to do with abuse and racism, said the Premier, pointing out that the Court of Arbitration and the European Court of Justice had already made it clear that Belgium's Anti-Racism Act does not violate freedom of expression. And he explained that it was not the Blok voters, but the points on the Blok's manifesto that were being labelled as racist or vindictive. For his part, SPA Chairman Steve Stevaert called the judgement a good ruling. CD&V Chairman Leterme felt that the timing of the ruling in particular was less than opportune (FF).

RUUD GOOSSENS • DE MORGEN • 24 APRIL

Stevaert: ‘Of course I think it’s good that the Vlaams Blok has been condemned. The only thing is that as a politician I cannot judge or condemn any ruling. It is not my place to give judges marks out of ten. And anyway I didn’t need any ruling to tell me that the Vlaams Blok is a racist party, just as I don’t need a cordon sanitaire to be able to affirm with complete certainty that the SPA will never govern with the Vlaams Blok.’ The SPA chairman defended himself against the interpretation that he wanted to keep silent immediately after the ruling. ‘I didn’t want to react with a quote of 20 seconds. This is a serious matter, which you must be able to explain in a proper and respectable manner. I say that this is a good ruling. To claim that this is about freedom of expression is nonsense. This ruling is about racism. Tolerance is a duty, intolerance is not a right.’

DIRK CASTREL • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 24 APRIL

On Monday evening Storme and the other members of the party executive reached an agreement: he would resign from the executive but would stay on as a member of the party, and would sign a declaration in which he, together with the party executive, calls on people to vote for another party. The Catholic University of Leuven (KUL), where Storme lectures in law, is considering a disciplinary inquiry against him. ‘I think that it is precisely the duty of a rector to guarantee the right to speak of his staff,’ reacted Storme. In that respect, the professor has his party behind him. ‘Of all institutions, it should be the university where critical reflection is of primary importance,’ said Bourgeois yesterday. ‘Denying a professor in the study of justice the right to criticise laws and judgements is therefore inadmissible. It would tarnish the image of the University of Leuven if a sanction were to be imposed on an eminent jurist such as Storme.’

Storme is still a member of the N-VA and signed a declaration in which he, together with the party executive, calls on people to vote for the CD&V/N-VA alliance.

WWW.N-VA.BE

Mathias Storme resigns from N-VA party executive

In the CD&V/N-VA alliance, there was reason enough to react cautiously to the racism ruling. On 24 April N-VA executive member and professor Matthias Storme said in an interview in De Morgen that he felt it was almost a moral duty to vote for the Vlaams Blok. Storme is a prominent figure in the Flemish movement and, according to De Morgen, is not alone in conservative circles in his declaration of support for the Vlaams Blok. According to the paper, this explains the restraint with which Yves Leterme, chairman of cartel partner CD&V, reacted to the Vlaams Blok’s censure. N-VA member Storme also signed the petition ‘for freedom of speech’ on the website that the Vlaams Blok set up in the wake of last Wednesday’s ruling. N-VA Chairman Geert Bourgeois reacted very sharply, saying that Storme had placed himself outside the party on account of his remarks. After the weekend Storme softened his stance somewhat and resigned from the N-VA party executive, although he remains a member of the party (FF).

BART HAECK • DE TIJD • 27 APRIL

On Monday evening Storme and the other members of the party executive reached an agreement: he would resign from the executive but would stay on as a member of the party, and would continue to support the party in the run-up to the elections. The N-VA blames Storme for adopting a disloyal stance for the second time, without the slightest consultation and without any prior notification. On a previous occasion, Storme had joined the executive of the former committee against the right to vote for immigrants, a Blok initiative. Fundamentally the N-VA does not have any problem with a party member condemning the Anti-Racism Act and criticising the ruling of the Ghent Court of Appeal. What cannot be tolerated, says Chairman Geert Bourgeois, is for a member of the party executive to exhort people to vote for another party. The Catholic University of Leuven (KUL), where Storme lectures in law, is considering a disciplinary inquiry against him. ‘I am not directing any criticism at all at the ruling, but there is the risk of it dominating the election campaign. The Blok will use the ruling in its campaign, wallow even more in its martyr’s role, and use the theme of ‘freedom of expression’. Besides, I am of the view that we should combat the Blok with a good policy.’

WWW.N-VA.BE
A probable election victory and a quite probable hangover

LOUIS TOBACK THINKS THAT THE BLOK WILL NOT HAVE ANY CHOICE AFTER THE ELECTION BUT TO FOLD

The other parties may be satisfied with the ruling that has condemned a large part of the Vlaams Blok’s body of thought as punishable by law, but most observers think that the party is on the road to its umpteenth election victory. The Blok will do everything in its power until 13 June to divert as much attention as possible away from the actual censure of its racist ideas, and onto its role as a victim of a political process. This is also the interpretation given by Hugo Schiltz (Spirit), Minister of State and former chairman of the Volksunie, quoted in Knack. Former SP Chairman Louis Tobback on the other hand thinks that the Blok will not have any choice after the election but to fold (FF).

HAN RENARD AND PATRICK MARTENS • KNACK • 28 APRIL

Schiltz forecasts a resounding election victory for the Blok: ‘For the first time in a long time there is once again an amalgam of Flemish displeasure and other grumbling. In the past this has always been the motor for major political shifts. There is a feeling that the French speaking minority is laying down the law, because Verhofstadt is so indulgent towards Elio Di Rupo. On top of that there is now the censure of the Blok, and the perhaps fruitless opposition of mayors in the Brussels Periphery, in addition to the already existing dissatisfaction with the voting rights for immigrants’. Schiltz is not in favour of legal actions against the Vlaams Blok. ‘This Anti-Racism Act is a poor law. But, well, I belong to the old school that feels that there is a fundamental difference between opinions and deeds.’ Moreover, Schiltz has also heard insinuations that the judges of the Court come from the French speaking Flemish middle classes. ‘I’m not saying that’s true, but such assertions are easily swallowed by Flemings. Judge for yourself: ‘800,000 able-bodied Flemings (Blok-voters, ed.) humiliated by three Francophone Flemings in Ghent’. However, if the judgement is confirmed by the Court of Cassation, the Blok will be left with a mighty hangover in the wake of this ruling. The party is arriving much more quickly than planned, at the point where it will have to take the divisive decision either to radically change its programme, with the risk of thereby alienating its grassroots, or continue along the path it is currently taking, under pain of new legal censures and a dead-end situation of political isolation. Louis Tobback: ‘The Blok has recently made considerable efforts to become socially acceptable’. But for all its troubles the party’s number is up. After all, who is going to be willing to share their table with racists? VUB political researcher Kris Deschouwer: ‘Even if they win 30%, what is the Blok buying for that? If the party really wants to do something with the result, it will be forced to eat humble pie’. The racist standpoints that have now been reprimanded are not merely an incidental circumstance for the Blok. They are the party’s electoral thread and are part and parcel of its programme. For those reasons Tobback regards as foolish the idea that it would be enough ‘to adjust the content here and there’ whereupon the Blok would be able to continue with the same heavyweights as before. ‘If the Blok wants to get rid of this sentence in a credible manner, it will have to change the ‘merchandise it offers’ and the ‘sign advertising it’.’
Verhofstadt launches offensive against CD&V

The Court did indeed declare itself competent, allowing a judgment on the merits to be passed for the first time

After the lost battle against the voting right for immigrants and the row between Guy Verhofstadt and former party chair Karel De Gucht, the VLD is no longer the political market leader in Flanders, according to the latest opinion polls. The VLD programme conference of 25 April was intended to be an initial step towards revival. The central theme at the conference was the plea in favour of a further tax cut in Flanders to the tune of EUR 1 billion, in the form of more holiday pay and lower death duties. Chairman Dirk Sterckx announced the end of the cordon sanitaire around the Vlaams Blok. According to Sterckx, that cordon sanitaire has now become redundant because no democratic party can now consider working with a racist party. But Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt fired most of his arrows at the opposition party CD&V (FF).

WIM VANDE VELDEN • DE TIJD • 26 APRIL

In a cleverly structured speech, Verhofstadt sounded the starting shot for a political boxing contest between the VLD and CD&V. He showcased the Liberals’ achievements at federal and Flemish level in some detail, and wondered out loud what things would have been like had the CD&V been in office. Verhofstadt: ‘With the opposition in power, we would not have seen any tax cuts carried through at all. Labour costs would not have been reduced. Corporation tax would not have been cut. The taxes on shift work would not have come down. How do I know? It’s very simple. Because the opposition has voted against every tax cut in parliament over the last five years.’ The Prime Minister concluded: ‘CD&V is bad for the taxpayer. CD&V is not good for our economy.’ Verhofstadt also targeted the Christian-Democrats’ conservatism: ‘No progress would have been made on any ethical issue whatsoever. No regulation would have been forthcoming for euthanasia, for blameless divorce, and for gays and lesbians who want to get married. That’s called respect’. Verhofstadt went on to mention Iraq: ‘If the Christian-Democrats had been at the helm, our young men would be in Iraq right now under enemy fire, caught up in a relentless and pitiless conflict’.

www.vld.be

The CD&V/N-VA alliance: between purple and the brown alternative

Dehaene called on those present to persuade Blok voters that only a democratic and constructive alternative can offer a solution

Until last week the CD&V/N-VA alliance had a substantial lead in the opinion polls. The purple élan had been broken. The VLD had cooked its own goose in the wake of the internal struggle between party Chairman De Gucht and Premier Verhofstadt. And the ‘everything for free’ policy espoused by Socialist Stevaert and his party has lost some of its appeal. At least that is what many a CD&V member thought until last week. Since the Blok ruling, however, there is a competitor abroad. The Blok could take votes away from the CD&V/N-VA, as members of the alliance are now realising themselves. Therefore the message in the speeches given by Yves Leterme and Jean-Luc Dehaene, the candidate heading the party’s list for the European election, is that it is the alliance, and not the Blok, that is the alternative to the purple coalition. Dehaene referred to the alternative offered by the Blok as merely negative, and called on those present to persuade Blok voters that only a democratic and constructive alternative can offer a solution (FF).

STEVEN SAMYN • DE STANDAARD • 26 APRIL

The Christian-Democrats want to offer a ‘positive alternative’ to the purple coalition. Despite this positive message, the speeches were often peppered with attacks against the bungles made by political opponents. Dehaene criticised Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt for running as a candidate on the VLD’s European list. ‘Candidates who do not take up their seat are a danger to democracy. European elections are not a popularity poll. But if Verhofstadt wants an assessment of his policy, then he can have one.’

In his closing address, Leterme fired with live cartridges. He called for a restoration of the ‘political morality’ and described the purple-green minis-
Flanders not in favour of tolls on motorways

THE WALLOON REGION IS NOW ALSO CONSIDERING INTRODUCING A KILOMETRE LEVY FOR LORRIES ON ITS MOTORWAYS

In 1999 Belgium, together with the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Denmark, Sweden and Germany, introduced 'eurovignettes' for lorries heavier than twelve tons. These lorries pay a lump sum every year according to their weight. By 2003 Germany announced its intention to replace the vignette with a kilometre tax via GPS, a kind of télépéage (a motorway toll system based on the electronic tagging of vehicles). Technical problems have postponed that until 1 January 2005. The Walloon Region is now also considering introducing a kilometre levy for heavy goods vehicles on its motorways, after the German example. It anticipates a European directive scheduled to give the scheme the go-ahead by 2007. The Walloon Government Transport Minister Michel Daerden (PS) reckons that a kilometre levy for heavy goods vehicles on its motorways, after the German example. It anticipates a European directive scheduled to give the scheme the go-ahead by 2007. The Walloon Government Transport Minister Michel Daerden (PS) reckons that a European directive will generalise the kilometre levy after 2007. The eurovignette would then disappear and the EUR 21.5 million that it brings in every year for Wallonia would be offset by the kilometre toll. But Daerden does not want to take an initiative without the other regions. The Flemish Government Transport Minister Gilbert Bossuyt is against the plan (FF).

Joris Vandenbroucke, spokesman for the Flemish Government Transport Minister Gilbert Bossuyt (SP.A), says that Flanders ‘is by no means planning to take such an initiative.’ ‘It would be pointless to levy a toll if the countries round us are not doing the same. Our competitive position would be prejudiced. In Flanders it’s technically impossible to install tollgates, like in France, because there are so many motorway slip roads and exits here. Satellite navigation is the only workable solution, but that system does not work yet.’

Vandenbroucke says that there will be negative effects on the rest of the road network if tolls are levied on the motorways. ‘People will drive through villages and towns instead of taking the motorway. Drivers are prepared to pay tolls on long journeys because there’s a considerable time saving involved in those cases. In Belgium you’re talking about distances of 50 or 100 kilometres, so the time saving is relative, which means drivers would opt to avoid the toll roads.’

According to the haulage sector, the European directive primarily signifies a technical harmonisation of the toll systems. ‘There’s all that much unanimity as regards content - i.e., how to levy the toll, and according to what tariff and what parameters,’ says Isabelle De Maezt of the Belgian haulage federation Febtera. The sector is not opposed to a kilometre levy as such, provided all the revenue is pumped back into the roads, and does not get channelled into other state purses and is not used for other modes of transport such as subsidisation of the railways. Lode Verkinderen, secretary-general of the Flemish hauliers’ association SAV, feels that the kilometre levies do not solve congestion problems but have an inflationary effect. ‘Haulage companies operate on tight profit margins and would bill on the amount they have to pay on the levy. At the end of the day the consumer in the shop would end up paying more for his products.’

PASCAL DEN DOOVEN • DE STANDAARD • 29 APRIL

In 1981 Barco was still a virtually bankrupt family business, but it subsequently grew into one of the figureheads of Flemish technology companies. For a long time Barco consisted of two companies (Barco Industries and Barco Electronics), with the then Acec (the Generale Maatschappij) and the GIMV splitting the two Barcos between them. At the end of 1988 GIMV bought out Acec, whereupon the two Barcos could again be amalgamated. For the GIMV, which was only set up in 1980, Barco was the perfect success story. It provided for a stable flow of income, whilst Barco could continue to grow under the GIMV’s wing. Critics did remark on occasions that the GIMV had held on to Barco for too long. The sale of the Barco shares provides the GIMV with substantial liquid funds. Over the last couple of years the investment company has been short of cash, and even borrowed money just before a dividend had to be paid out. Herman Daems, chairman of the GIMV, says that the GIMV is studying various investment files although a swift re-investment of the liquid assets ought not to be expected. ‘You have to make sure you’ve got funds up your sleeve in order to be able to take advantage of opportunities.’ The telecoms company Telenet is now the GIMV’s largest shareholder. Merchant bankers expect Telenet to go public next year.

GIMV sells EUR 2.5 million Barco shares

T H E F L A N D E R S R E G I O N A L I N V E S T M E N T C O M P A N Y (GIMV), originally intended to invest in the equity of unlisted companies, has reduced its stake in the visualisation group Barco from 29.6% to 9.5%. The GIMV has sold 2.5 million shares at an average selling price of EUR 66.50, landing it a capital gain of EUR 127.3 million. The West Flanders company, which has recently been making waves worldwide with its high-resolution LED image walls, has seen a revival in its fortunes since 2002, and this is reflected in its share price. Reference shareholder GIMV felt that it was a good time to sell. De Standaard recalls that Barco represented the perfect success story for the investment company (FF).

TO M YSEBAERT AND MIEKE BOONE • DE STANDAARD • 29 APRIL

Joris Vandenbroucke, spokesman for the Flemish Government Transport Minister Gilbert Bossuyt (SP.A), says that Flanders ‘is by no means planning to take such an initiative.’ ‘It would be pointless to levy a toll if the countries round us are not doing the same. Our competitive position would be prejudiced. In Flanders it’s technically impossible to install tollgates, like in France, because there are so many motorway slip roads and exits here. Satellite navigation is the only workable solution, but that system does not work yet.’

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CMB buys largest tankers in the world

They will be sailing under the Belgian flag

The Antwerp shipping group Com- pagnie maritime belge, and more especially the tanker shipping company Euronav, has acquired a 50% stake in the ownership of four giant tankers. The ships in question are the Helle- spont Alhambra, Hellespont Tara, Hellespont Fairlax and Hellespont Metropolis, which were built in 2002 and 2003 by the Korean company Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering. At the moment they are still the property of the American group Loews and are operated by a Greek shipowner. They are the largest double-hulled tankers in the world, and with a length of 380 metres, width of 68 metres and 442,500 dead weight tonnage (dwt), they belong to the ‘Ultra Large Crude Carriers - Vplus’ (ULCC-Vplus) category. According to CMB CEO Marc Saverys, each of the tankers costs EUR 112 million. From now on they will be sailing under the Belgian flag [FF].

GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 27 APRIL

CMB has the wind in its sails. On Monday it was announced that CMB had bought four brand-new ULCC-Vplus ships with the Tankers International Pool. Tankers International is a group of ULCC shipping companies such as CMB and OSG. The tankers will be delivered during May and June 2004, and renamed TI Asia, TI Europe, TI America and TI Africa. They will be deployed in the ‘Tankers International Pool’. Shipowners often work with a jointly managed pool - a cost-effective and commercially more attractive operating method. There are at present 46 super-tankers or VLCCs in the Tankers International fleet.

The four ships in the V-plus category that Euronav is now buying are a good deal larger than the VLCCs (330 metres long, 55 metres wide and a dead-weight capacity of 300,000 tons or 2 million barrels of crude oil). Tankers of the V-plus class are 380 metres long and have a dead-weight capacity of 3 million barrels of crude oil. ‘They have 50% greater capacity,’ says Marc Saverys, managing director of CMB. The four colossal tankers are unique. The ships are to be bought by a new Belgian company and operated under the Belgian flag. All the high-ranking officers will also be Belgians. ‘This will put Belgium right back on the shipping map,’ says Saverys. In his view the purchase is partly the result of the new Belgian legislation aimed at getting more ships to sail under the Belgian flag.

PAUL VERBRAEKEN • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 27 APRIL

‘Given their volume, these are ships that are profitable mainly on long-distance routes, such as supplies to North America, although we’re also placing a lot of faith in China. The Chinese hunger for oil is widely known. Oil imports there in the first quarter of this year were 33% higher than in the first quarter of 2003. We have already held talks with the Chinese authorities, and with minimal adaptations a couple of terminals there could accommodate these ships. Last year the last single-hulled ULCCs from the 1970s were turned to scrap. But according to Saverys those single-hulled tankers cannot be compared in any way whatsoever to the double-hulled tankers that Euronav has purchased. ‘The oil market is on the up again, so Loews was visionary. So far it has been the only company that has dared to launch this kind of ship. And for the time being it is still the only one. Not only are there few shipyards able to build ships like this, but you’d have to wait until 2008 for delivery of an order. Above all, you’ve got 66,000 tons of steel in one of these ships, and with steel prices the way they are at the moment, no yard would dare prepare a quote for such an order. We are 50% owners, and the rest is being brought in by one or two partners from Tanker International and by financial groups.’

‘This is fantastic news,’ was the reaction from Marc Nuytemans, manager of the Belgian Association of Shipowners. ‘At the beginning of this year we had 1.4 million tons under the Belgian flag. With this contribution that figure will certainly be doubled and Belgium will become one of the most important tanker registers in the world.’

www.cmb.be

The Australian port transhipment company P&O Ports, a subsidiary of the British shipping group P&O Ports, has now also signed its concession agreement with the Antwerp port authority for the operation of a container terminal on the Deurganck Dock. Antwerp Gateway, as P&O has christened the terminal, has 1,650 metres of wharfage and in an initial phase is due to handle 1.4 million tons of containers per year. In addition to P&O Ports itself (67.5%), the other investors are the shipping group P&O Nedlloyd (25%) and Duisport (7.5%), the investment subsidiary of the German company Rijnhaven Duisberg. The container terminal will be developed in two stages. Antwerp Gateway is investing EUR 160 million this year and next year in expanding the wharves, which should be able to accommodate 1.4 million containers by 2007. The second stage in the development will start in 2007. The total investment amounts to EUR 450 million. When the terminal is completely ready and operating at full capacity, it will be possible for 3.5 million containers to be loaded and unloaded every year. P&O Ports has been active in the port of Antwerp since 2000, after acquiring the container division of the Katoennatie and Antwerp Combined Terminals. Hesse-Noord-Natie is the other major operator alongside P&O Ports on the Deurganck Dock. Hesse-Noord-Natie was taken over by the Port Authority of Singapore in 2001.

www.antwerp.be
**ECONOMY AND CULTURE**

**ENERGY**

**Electrabel cuts electricity prices in Flanders**

According to the consumer association Test-Achat and the Federal Minister for the Economy Fienje Muyermans (VLD), electricity prices for residential consumers in Belgium are 4.5 to 11.5% higher than in the neighbouring countries and prices for natural gas are 13 to 26% higher. Electricity producer Electrabel disputes this. The company, which has held a monopoly on the market for years, attributes the difference to higher taxes and distribution rates.

However, Electrabel is nonetheless making a conspicuous gesture. As of 1 July, the company will automatically be switching all its consumers in Flanders over to its cheapest price formula. In this way a good 2 million of Electrabel’s 2.5 million Flemish customers will be better off (FF).

**ERIK DE LEYE • DE TIJD • 28 APRIL**

As of 1 July the electricity producer will automatically be switching all its consumers in Flanders who have not sought a new supplier over to the new price formula. Instead of a standing charge and a fixed rate per kilowatt hour, the new price formula consists of the production price, the rates fixed by the government for the transmission and distribution of electricity, plus the VAT and all levies. ‘It is a transparent system whereby everyone can compare our prices with those of the competition,’ says spokesman Grifnée. The competitors only play with the production of electricity, the other items are the same for every player because they are set by the government. Anyone entering into a contract for a year can reckon on a discount of 2% on the production price of the electricity supplied. Anyone who arranges for a standing order at the bank for the payment of his electricity bills will receive a one-off discount of EUR 10. Flemish families who already have a new contract with Electrabel will enjoy the same commercial conditions. Only for families in regions where the distribution network rate is more expensive will the bill be higher. Families in Wallonia and Brussels will not be eligible for Electrabel’s campaign, because the Walloon and Brussels market has not yet been fully liberalised.

**WWW.ELECTRABEL.BE**
**WWW.TEST-AANKOOP.BE**
**WWW.CREG.BE**

**FILM**

**Van Grembergen believes in Flemish Audio-visual Fund**

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On 25 April the manager responsible for the Flemish film industry Luckas Vander Taelen presented the first annual report of the Flemish Audio-visual Fund (VAF), in the Flagey building in Ixelles. In 2003, the first full operating year, the Fund handled no fewer than 500 applications for support, a third of which were accepted. Vander Taelen, who in a previous life worked as a documentary maker with the VRT and was an MEP for the Greens, is proud of the fact that this support goes to a very wide-ranging mix of audio-visual work, from commercial films and director’s movies through to experimental media art. The Flemish Government’s Culture Minister Paul Van Grembergen (Spirit) gave a positive assessment of the VAF’s first operating year. Among other things, he praised the efficient organisation, the assessment of dossiers by external readers, the attention paid to experimental media art and the development of international relations (FF).

**SASKIA VEREENOOGHE • DE TIJD • 26 APRIL**

“Now work has to be done on important points which have arisen sporadically during the busy first year”, he said. For example, the policy view has to be clearly outlined and converted into both a long-term strategy and a concrete action plan. In this process the debate with the parties concerned should not be given a wide berth, as was still happening too often according to Van Grembergen.

Vander Taelen says that the VAF does consult with every sector, and plans to carry on doing so. ‘The VAF tries to make the gap between the subsidising authority and the field as small as possible’. He added. ‘We even explain face to face why a particular film project has not been accepted’.

‘The VAF is not able to and does not want to determine what is screened in Flanders,’ says Vander Taelen. ‘We do not follow a dirigiste course, but look at what is strongest qualitatively speaking among what is offered. In doing so we aim for as great a diversity as possible. The VAF is the only major source of funding for audio-visual productions in Flanders. We adhere to the Maoist slogan, ‘let a hundred thousand flowers bloom’, and subsidise both ‘cultural’ and ‘commercial’ films, although we endeavour to pay extra attention to less commercial work.’ Last year the bulk of the subsidies (71%) went to fiction. ‘The VAF was also active in other fields,’ says Vander Taelen. ‘The communication and promotion department, Flanders Image as was, had a strong presence on foreign markets and at festivals. Promotion for individual projects was also carried out abroad. We are trying to close the gap between production and promotion, one of the shortcomings in the Flemish film industry.

In 2003 the VAF began to develop international activity in the field of networking and presence in a broader context of European funds. Last year a workshop activity was also started up, with a view to discovering young talent and offering opportunities. The fiction workshop started up in 2003, with documentary and screenwriting workshops getting under way at the beginning of 2004. Animation and experimental media art will be offered later this year.

Vander Taelen is also very pleased with the change that the VAF has brought about in the field of documentaries. ‘We talked at length with the Flemish television channels about the need to make good the shortfall in documentaries. Both VRT and VTM are now about to shoot a number of major documentaries.’

‘In this first operating year attention focused almost entirely on getting our organisation developed’, concludes Vander Taelen. ‘From 2004 more in-depth attention paid to experimental media and international relations’.
production policy is the realisation of the co-operation with the Netherlands.

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CULTURE


• Until 13 June: German silver after Bauhaus, Zilvermuseum Sterckshof, Antwerp-Deurne; www.zilvermuseum.be info: 03/360.52.50

• Until 30 May: Everything under the Sky, recent developments in Chinese art, MUHKA, Antwerp; info: www.muhka.be

• Until 5 May: Freespace with Gabriel Lester, Highlight, Plan B, exhibition, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be www.nice.be

• Until 31 May: Splendour and Glitter, 5 ages of European of goldsmith’s trade, ING-culturcentrum, Brussels; info: 02/547.22.92

• Until 31 May: Exhibitions in Newly renovated Museum of Photography, Antwerp; info: www.fotomuseum.be

• Until 31 May: International Photo Festival Knokke-Heist; CC Scharpoord; info: 050/63.04.30 www.knokke-heist.be

• Until 6 June: Tea & Coffee Towers, Design Museum, Ghent; Info: www.design.museum.gent.be

• Until 28 August: The Realm of the Dragon, exhibition, St Pietersabdij, Ghent

• Until 31 May: Christophe Mourthé, Photo exhibition Scharpoord, Knokke-Heist; info: 050/63.04.30 www.fotofestival.be

• Until 31 May: Short stories, Fotomuseum, Antwerp; info: 03/242.93.00 www.fotomuseum.be

• 30 to 20 June: Abalos & Herreros, architects from Madrid, exhibition, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be

• Until 17 October: Animals in Architecture, Museum of Architecture, Brussels

• Until 26 June: The rest of the world, Colors magazine shows psychiatry, Museum Dr. Guislain, Ghent; www.guislain.be

• Until 5 September: Speaking Sculptures, the Songye, Museum of Africa, Tervuren; info: www.afrikamuseum.be

• Until 23 May: retrospective exhibition, KMSK, Brussels

• Until 6 June: Hans Arp, the invention of the form, exhibition, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be; 02/507.82.00

• Until 11 May: Everlast, De Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be

• Until 31 May: exhibitions in newly renovated Museum of Photography, Antwerp; info: www.fotomuseum.be

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Focus on Flanders

work will be carried out across the board. High on the agenda for foreign