VLD and SP.A promise split of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde district

The mayors of most municipalities in the district of Halle-Vilvoorde have for some time been calling for the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde constituency to be split, partly by refusing to co-operate in the organisation of European elections in their municipalities. As a result a stalemate has arisen between the mayors and Internal Affairs Minister Patrick Dewael, who is responsible for the smooth running of the elections. Dewael wants to push the split through after the elections, and has now received the backing of the chairs of the VLD and SP.A, who have formally undertaken to split the constituency after the elections and are calling on all other Flemish parties to make a similar pledge (FF).

MARK DEWEERDT • DE TIJD • 7 MAY

Dewael wants the elections to pass off without a hitch and has asked the Governor of Flemish Brabant, Lodewijk De Witte, to mediate. On 27 April De Witte had talks with the mayors and sent Dewael a written report. In his letter he says that the mayors are standing by their objective and ‘are insisting on a written undertaking from the Flemish democratic parties, at the level of the party chairs or the federal MPs, to urgently push through the splitting of the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde constituency.’

Yesterday Dewael sent a letter to the chairs of the VLD, CD&V, SP.A, Spirit, N-VA, Groen! and Vivant in which he informs them of the mayors’ position, as outlined by the governor. The letter can be seen as an implicit invitation to a joint undertaking to set to work on splitting Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde straight after the elections on 13 June. The chairs of the VLD and SP.A, Dirk Sterckx and Steve Stevaert, reacted yesterday evening and gave a formal undertaking to push through the splitting of the constituency ‘swiftly and without delay’. After the elections the two parties will place the matter ‘as a top priority on the agenda of the community forum’. If that fails to produce a result, they are prepared to use the simple Flemish majority in the Federal Parliament to push the split through. Stevaert and Sterckx called on ‘all Flemish democratic parties’ to make a similar commitment.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2001 the criminologist Marion Van San produced a report for the then Justice Minister Marc Verwilghen. In it he warned of the growing youth crime, which due to the questions it asked “are immigrant youths more inclined towards crime?” - was greeted with much criticism. The report did not give any recommendations for a policy, although Van San has since regularly called for a tough approach to crime. The Flemish Welfare Minister, Michel Vogels (Groen!), immediately commissioned follow-up reports. These were to focus not so much on statistical data, but on the causes of this youth crime, which required new and interdisciplinary research teams from the universities of Ghent and Leuven headed by Professors Patrick Hebberecht and Marie-Claire Foblets. In March 2004, 30 April, Dewael, 3 May. It appeared from the study that young people turn to crime through a concurrence of circumstances. They grow up in concentration schools (with high concentrations of immigrants), live in concentration districts and later feel discriminated against in the job market. As a reaction to their feeling of disadvantage they seek solace in tough adolescent behaviour and group behaviour. They have adopted the competitive spirit from our own Western European set of values, and measure success by material well-being, but they notice that they do not get any chances and are doomed to go through life as losers’. Efforts at school and on the job market have mostly proved disappointing. And then the temptation is great to earn a fast buck and take the step into crime, concludes Hebberecht (De Morgen, 3 May). What is striking is that after serving their sentence, a great many delinquent youths would rather not return to their concentration district because they do not want to end up back amongst their criminal friends. In addition, they do not have a problem if the system comes down hard on them, as long as the punishment is justified and not based on discrimination. As a result, it is not enough simply to invest in police and justice, claims Hebberecht. An alternative method such as the use of immigrant ‘neighbourhood fathers’ in districts seems just as unsuccessful. The authority of immigrant fathers is clearly accepted at home, but not on the street. Yet that of the police is, provided it is not arbitrary or discriminatory. Moreover, young people realise all too well that with their behaviour they themselves are responsible for the success of the Vlaams Blok. The researchers are therefore advising the policy-makers to invest in education. They can also point to the importance of immigrant ‘neighbourhood fathers’ in districts and later feel discriminated against in the job market.

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief
Three cartels with an almost equal voter potential

**POLITICS**

**ELECTIONS**

A survey by the respected Institute for Social and Political Research (ISPO) shows that in the first quarter of 2004 - on the eve of the election campaign, let’s say - barely half (50.6%) of the Flemish electorate already knew which party they will vote for on 13 June. This should come as no surprise, since last year, in the federal elections, 46% of the electorate made their decision during the election campaign. Those who have already decided are mostly loyal to one party. Just like last year, 90% of the group of voters who have decided will vote for SPA-Spirit, the CD&V, Vlaams Blok or N-VA. Party loyalty is less in the case of the VLD and Groen! Based on this figure of 50.6% of voters who have already decided, the CD&V/N-VA cartel is already certain of 14.9% of the votes, the Vlaams Blok would get 12.7%, SPA-Spirit 12.2%, VLD-Vivant 9.2% and Groen! 2.2%. On the understanding that the survey viewed the CD&V and N-VA as separate parties. If we add to this the votes of those as yet undecided voters who highlighted a single party as a possible choice, SPA-Spirit is in second place with 14.2% behind the CD&V/N-VA (17.3%) but ahead of the Blok (14%). VLD-Vivant remains stuck on 10.6% and Groen! on 2.3%. To get an idea of how the large group of undecided voters will vote on 13 June, the potential market share was calculated for each party (FF).

**MARK DEWEERDT • DE TIJD • 5 MAY**

The researchers calculated the potential market share of each party by taking into account the answer to the question of which parties undecided voters were considering voting for. The CD&V/N-VA has the biggest potential market share (39.7%), followed by SPA-Spirit (35.9%) and VLD-Vivant (33.6%). The Vlaams Blok has a maximum market share of 23%. Groen! has a votes reservoir of 11.2%. Competition between the three cartels is the greatest, say the ISPO researchers. What is at stake is a group of 400,000 to 450,000 voters. Groen! and SPA-Spirit are fighting for the favour of 265,000 voters.

Based on voting behaviour in 2003, the researchers attempted to determine what piece of the market share a party can obtain. For the CD&V/N-VA they come to 25.4 to 26.7%. For SPA-Spirit the fork is 23.1 to 24.8%, for VLD-Vivant 20.4 to 24%, for the Blok 17.5 to 19.1%. Groen! would get between 3 and 5%. The difference between the three cartel lists is relatively small, the ISPO researchers note. From a statistical viewpoint it is not possible with these figures to predict with any great degree of certainty which of the three cartels will become the biggest on 13 June, although in any hypothesis the CD&V/N-VA cartel stands out as the biggest.

http://www.kuleuven.ac.be/sociologie/onderzoek/ispo/

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**PARLIAMENT**

Flemish parliament closes its doors

**A NUMBER OF DECREES IN EXTREMIS REACHED THE FINISH**

On 5 May the Flemish Parliament met for the last time. The final decrees were approved at full speed. Actually the doors should have closed at the end of April, but the decree on religious services, which governs the financing and estate management of the Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox churches, but also of the Jewish religion and Islam, met with filibustering from the Vlaams Blok. The party, which was recently convicted of racism, is against the subsidising of mosques and expressed that as clearly as possible. A number of other decrees, which were debated for weeks, such as that on the introduction of service cheques for day nurseries, the vacancy levy on slum dwellings, the fate of campsite residents and the establishment of a peace institute, in extremis reached the finish (FF).

**BART HAECK • DE TIJD • 6 MAY**

The majority parties were long divided over the role that temping agencies should be allowed to play in the regulation governing service cheques for day nurseries. The decree states that they may be involved in day nurseries, albeit in one province and one urban area. After two years the trial project will be assessed. As a result, Kind en Gezin (Child and Family, the responsible public service) will continue to play a central role. The CD&V and N-VA voted against the measure. The Flemish Parliament also modified the vacancy levy. Over the next two years, owners of vacant dwellings will not be sent any new demands. The levy has been in place since 1996, but was inadequate. In the new regulation an owner will be notified that his house is on a list of vacant dwellings. He then has four months to arrange for it to be re-occupied. The decree also increases the fines for rack-renters to a maximum of 50,000 euros. That is 25 times higher than at present. Another decree stipulates that anyone who has been living permanently on a campsite since 1 January 1998 can remain there. They only have to leave if they obtain suitable social housing. The CD&V and N-VA abstained from the vote. The decree with which the Flemish Parliament ended its legislature was that concerning the peace institute. The Flemish Government will support this with scientific research into arms exports. The institute cannot advise on concrete export licences or countries.

www.vlaamsparlement.be

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Compulsory declaration of assets for MPs to become law

For the past ten years the main parties have been in political agreement on the proposal that all MPs should submit a declaration of assets and a list of their administrative mandates. Greater transparency in their own property and activities was intended to help close the gap between politicians and citizens, so it was believed at the time of ‘the new political culture’. And yet the two bills implementing the regulation have still not been approved. It is a public secret that some MPs are not too happy with a regulation that makes it possible to inspect their assets and accumulated mandates. The regulation was recently the subject of renewed speculation in the press on the occasion of Jean-Luc Dehaene’s comments on rumours circulating that the fiscal relocation of Interbrew to Luxembourg. Dehaene heads the European list for the CD&V and sits on Interbrew’s Board of Directors. In an interview in De Standaard on 3 May, Parliamentary Chairman Herman De Croo (VLD) gave the impression that he again wanted to put the bill implementing the regulation on the back burner. He said he would give the Chamber’s legal service the task of debugging the current bills because ‘they are the result of shoddy workmanship’. Dirk Vander Maelen, the SP.A’s Parliamentary Chairman in the Chamber, has for some time been pressing for a quick vote on the bill and opposed De Croo’s approach vocally. His party is refusing to accept any modifications to the text. Other parties and Premier Verhofstadt himself also let it be understood in the light of De Croo’s interview that they were counting on a definitive approval before the summer recess. Finally De Croo himself promised to make an effort to close the dossier before the elections (FF).

RENAAT SCHROOTEN • DE TIJD • 4 MAY

Almost all parties in the French- and Dutch-speaking parts of the country let it be known that they wanted the declaration of assets dossier to be closed before the summer recess. At a meeting of the VLD’s party executive, Premier Verhofstadt also repeated that he was insisting on the two bills being quickly approved before the elections.

The reactions flooded in after De Croo had been unclear in an interview with De Standaard as to the viability of definitive approval before the summer recess. According to the Chamber Chairman, the bills are incomplete. It would therefore be best if they were modified, which meant they also had to be re-approved by the Senate. This would make it difficult to complete the parliamentary procedure before 13 June. Yesterday De Croo reiterated that the bills were incomplete. But it would be politically unwise to postpone their approval. The acts could and would have to be adapted later. De Croo: ‘We find ourselves in an electoral period in which the dossier has great symbolic value. No politician wants to go to the voter and create the impression that they do not want to provide transparency with regard to their property and mandates. I have made enquiries among the parliamentary parties and it seems clear to me that we will approve the Senate’s incomplete texts unchanged. The texts will then have to be amended relatively quickly next session to rectify the shortcomings. But if we want a perfect act from the outset, we will never have an act at all.’

De Morgen • 5 May

The system of successors: a disgrace for democracy?

For 33 of the 124 Flemish MPs, the last session of the Flemish Parliament on 5 May was a final farewell. For a minority of MPs, whether they are still there after 13 June will depend on their election result. But a number of new MPs have got it made. It makes very little difference whether they get no votes or several tens of thousands. They are ‘successors’ and are replacing a senior politician who will become a minister or take up another mandate. A stain on the blazon of democracy, says De Morgen (FF).

Opinion

YVES DESMET • DE MORGEN • 6 MAY

That all heavyweights are raked up to rustle up votes for seats they will never occupy, is not really a disgrace for democracy. With too many elections for too few political personnel and with ever-larger constituencies it is understandable that election after election the parties are obliged to put their electoral big shots in the shop-window. The current media-based political marketing gives them no other choice. Which is all right as far as it goes. What should not be allowed, however, is that they have themselves replaced by people who are chosen by them, not by the voter. If a senior politician chooses not to take up his mandate, that is his right. If the voter does not approve of this he can punish this politician by giving his vote to another actual candidate. But this choice must be honoured. If a seat has to be filled because an MP has withdrawn, that seat must go to the first non-elected candidate on the actual list, because at that moment this person has the most democratic representativeness, let’s say the most votes. Instead of this we currently get lots of servile party creatures whose seat was won not on their own merit but was handed out by their party. This gives us a parliament with noble-minded unknowns for whom no one voted.
SP.A begins election campaign on 1 May

The Socialists' chief ogres are 'the Conservatives', both nationally and in Europe

For Steve Stevaert and the other SP.A heavyweights, the May Day celebrations gave the starting shot for the Socialist election campaign. Also, former trade union leader Mia De Vits emerged for the first time as the leading European candidate for the SP.A-Spirit cartel. The Socialists' chief ogres are "the Conservatives", both nationally and in Europe. Those Conservatives want to cut back social protection and against this attack a vote for the Socialists is the best defence, cried the SP.A figureheads in Beringen, Ostend, Leuven and Ghent, where Stevaert, Johan Vande Lanotte, Frank Vandenbroucke and Mia Devits and Freya Vanden Bossche respectively gave May Day addresses. Unlike the Liberals, who want to spend the additional Flemish revenue (1.5 billion euros each year) on extra holiday pay, Stevaert wants to spend it on developing Flemish care insurance. Stevaert wants to apply the so-called maximum bill in the federal health insurance - which reimburses above a certain limit all costs incurred for doctor and medication - to non-medical care costs. Earlier Stevaert also announced a maximum bill for school costs. In Ostend Vande Lanotte said that an agreement had been reached between the Federal Government and the Brussels transport company MIVB on the extension of free commuter travel to the Brussels metro, trams and buses (FF).

LUC VANDER KELEN • HET LAATSTE NIEUWS • 3 MAY

Six weeks to go until the elections on 13 June and Stevaert and his followers left no doubt as to what the Socialists want to do. Govern. Stevaert repeated it time and time again in Beringen. 'The government needs the Socialists. The Conservatives in Belgium and Europe - the Liberals, Christian Democrats and right-wing extremists - are threatening our social protection,' said the chairman. Mia De Vits sounded the alarm in Leuven: 'We are turning against a conservative Europe where the law of the strongest rules.' Frank Vandenbroucke agreed:

'The Progressives must combine their forces to put social progress on the European calendar'. And Johan Vande Lanotte held his own in Ostend. 'A progressive Europe will not allow cheap labour from Poland and the Czech Republic to come and work in Belgium for less money. People should not expect social destruction from us.'

There can be no election without promises, and things were no different this 1 May. Stevaert promised to extend the maximum bill in healthcare to Flemish care insurance for non-medical costs. The contribution is currently limited to 90 or 125 euros and that is not enough. Therefore the Socialists also want to introduce a maximum bill for non-medical care costs.

WWW.ZORGVERZEKERING.BE

130 extra hours a year in construction sector

DE STANDAARD • 3 MAY

Since March, federal civil servants and employees of state enterprises have been able to travel to the capital by train for free. From 1 January 2005 employees in the private sector will also be able to do so, provided their employer pays 80% of the subscription. The Federal Government will contribute 20%. The measure is part of the federal environmental policy to reduce the number of vehicles on the roads and cut carbon dioxide emissions. The SP.A man has also been won over to extending the measure to Ghent and Antwerp. Discussions on this with De Lijn [Flemish public buses and trams] are yet to begin. In Brussels this was met with surprise. Brussels Transport Minister Jos Chabert (CD&V) denied an agreement had been reached. Vande Lanotte then corrected his message: the idea fits in with the existing NMBS (railways) - MIVB combined subscriptions. There is an agreement here, and the free part is simply an extension of it.

WWW.SF.BE
WWW.NMBS.BE
Social elections in 6,000 companies begin

AN ANALYSIS OF THE LISTS OF CANDIDATES SHOWS THAT THE NUMBER OF CANDIDATES HAS Risen BY AN AVERAGE OF 50%.

For the next six weeks, Belgium will be in the grip of election fever. Not only are there regional and European elections on 13 June, but within a very short time social elections too. In some companies these begin this week. Until 19 May, some 1.4 million employees in 6,000 companies can elect a trade union representative. In all these companies a health and safety committee will be elected to monitor working conditions. In around 3,000 companies with more than 100 employees a trade union representative will also be elected to sit on the works council. The works council supervises the company’s economic and financial policy, but also staff policy.

The Christian trade union, the ACW, is expected to remain the largest trade union. In the social elections in 2000 it received 53% of the votes, compared with 37% for the Socialist trade union, the ABVV. The Liberal trade union, the ACLVB is much smaller. The balance of power between the unions has not always been like that. Until the end of the 1960s the Socialist trade union was the largest, but with the slow departure of the heavy industries it lost more and more ground to the ACW, which was very active in the non-profit sector (hospitals and other originally Catholic institutions). An analysis of the lists of candidates for the social elections carried out by the social secretariat SD-Worx shows that the number of candidates for the mandates to be granted has risen by an average of 50%. According to the trade unions, the number of candidates for the election lists has risen again this year. The social secretariat SD-Worx speaks of 26% more candidates per mandate for the works council in the ACV and 34% for the committee. The ABVV apparently has 41% more candidates for the works council and 56% in the committee. The Liberal ACLVB even has 164% more candidates, according to SD-Worx. On 21 May State Secretary Kathleen van Brempt (SP.A) will hold a press conference on the first results of the social elections.

Liberal trade union is in no way a contradiction in terms. ‘We present ourselves as a party that consults openly with the employer.’ That basic principle appears to be a success, as the ‘Blues’ have begun to grow steadily in recent years.

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Janine Meijer • De Morgen • 4 May

It would be a real turn-up for the books if the ACV did not again become the largest union this year. In recent years the Christian organisation has become too strong to be simply outstripped. However, there are several ways of depicting the results of the social elections. Apart from the distinction between Flanders-Wallonia-Brussels, separate figures are also published for the profit and non-profit sectors. Then there are the separate lists for office employees and workers.

The traditional differences in support have blurred slightly, but four years ago the ABVV was still the largest party in Wallonia for the profit sector, and in the non-profit sector the ACV still has significantly more members than in the profit sector. For years the ABVV has been saying that the results of the social elections are consistently badly presented, and wants a greater distinction between profit and non-profit.

The Socialists are also claiming that if there were social elections in state enterprises such as Belgacom and the NMBS, the balance of power would be quite different. At present, social elections are not held in the public sector.

The third trade union of any significance in our country is the ACLVB. The Liberals are traditionally well supported in East Flanders. On a sectoral level they score highly in banking and insurance and in the car, textile and aviation sectors.

According to Chairman Guy Haaze, a
Light broadband Internet supports e-government

Last year Federal Minister for Consumer Affairs, Freya Vanden Bossche (SP.A), and State Secretary for Computerisation, Peter van Veltoven (SP.A), had already insisted that Internet providers make available cheaper fast Internet connections for home users, like those in the Netherlands. At that time all there was in Belgium was fast broadband connections for a fixed monthly fee of 40 euros, which was too much for many ordinary users. The Dutch provider Versatel immediately took advantage of this and at the end of last year offered an ADSL-light package for a fixed monthly fee of 20 euros and a package for 4.25 euros a cent. That appeared to be a success. In barely one week the biggest providers of broadband Internet, Telenet and Belgacom, have now also launched their own light version of broadband connection. Both versions are around 8 times slower than an ordinary broadband connection, but still much faster than an ordinary dial-up connection. Telenet is offering Internet via cable in Flanders, Belgacom via its telephone network across the whole of Belgium. Telenet’s ComfortNet package and Belgacom’s ADSL-light package have a download speed of 512 kbit/s (compared with 3.3 Mbit/s for an ordinary ADSL connection) and both cost around 30 euros a month. Nevertheless, Belgacom, which launched its offer a week later than Telenet, is claiming the most inexpensive package, because with it 400 megabytes of information can be downloaded each month compared to 200 megabytes with Telenet. In any event, the Van Veltoven cabinet finds the new offer a windfall for the ambitions of e-government, the electronic communication between government and citizen. Last year Belgium fell from ninth to eleventh place in the international e-government table of the consultancy firm, Accenture. But after the great leap forward with the launch of the portal site www.belgium.be, this points to a stabilisation of its position, claims Van Veltoven (FF).

GUY TEGENBOS • DE STANDAARD • 5 MAY

For a long time Belgium lagged behind when it came to e-government, the electronic communication between governments and citizens over the Internet. Last year our country suddenly climbed from 16th to 9th place (out of 22 countries). That was the result primarily of the silent work behind the scenes that had taken place in previous years. Our country scores particularly well in the field of social security. The Crossroads Bank for Social Security is a model in Europe. Almost all returns for social security are fully electronic. Despite the loss of 2 places Peter Van Veltoven, Federal State Secretary for E-Government, is satisfied with Belgium’s results in the Accenture study. "Above all it shows that the differences between countries have become small, and you can win or lose with one or two minor adjustments here and there." He says that Federal Belgium is mainly working in depth with regard to e-government and will therefore make rapid advances in time. He sees the electronic tax return and electronic ID card as promising. He also believes that he and the governments must communicate more about their e-government applications. He stresses that many more citizens must become active on the Internet. The cheaper ‘light’ version of broadband subscriptions recently launched by Telenet and its competitors are very important in this respect.

WWW.ACCENTURE.BE

Transport sector fears competition from central Europe

In recent months more and more HGVs from Central and Eastern Europe have appeared on our roads. Now these countries have joined the EU their numbers will increase further, predicts the Belgian transport sector, which fears for the future of small haulage firms. Until 1 May, HGV transports between Eastern and Western Europe were restricted to a maximum number of trips, e.g., 45,000 between Poland and Belgium. Polish hauliers invariably used up their full quota. As of 1 May there are no more restrictions and all customs formalities have disappeared. With their low wages, which are 50 to 20% of those in Western Europe, Eastern European hauliers have an insurmountable competitive advantage. After all, the wage cost is 40% of the total cost for a haulage firm (FF).

TOM YSEBAERT • DE STANDAARD • 1 MAY

“With such differences in pay the national market has to be protected,” says Isabelle De Maagt of the transport federation, Fefetra, “but that’s typically EU: first deregulate, then harmonise.” What will remain banned for a further two years is the so-called cabotage, or national haulage. An Eastern European firm will be able to travel from Brussels to Paris but not from Antwerp to Brussels. ‘But in time this ban will also be lifted and then a Romanian driver will be able to deliver a package to your front door,’ predicts Lode Verkinderen of the Flemish Hauliers’ association SAV. Competing on international routes to the East is lost cause. The only option open to the Belgians is to set up a subsidiary in an Eastern European country or enter into a joint venture with a local firm. This last option is what mainly seems to be happening. The Dutch are more inclined to set up subsidiaries in situ. ‘That’s fine for large firms,’ says Verkinderen, “but Flemish freight transport is run by family-based SMEs. They don’t have the money for foreign expansion. For them the expansion could be the kiss of death. In 2003 the number of bankruptcies rose by a third.” Officials at the Federal State Enterprise for Mobility (Federale Overheidsdienst Mobiliteit) find the unrest in the sector a little excessive. When Spain and Portugal joined everyone expressed the same fear, and this proved unfounded. ‘Firms over there are also frightened,’ says a civil servant. ‘With their capital, efficient organisation and extra logistical service, the West Europeans could outclass local businesses.’

WWW.FEBETRA.BE
WWW.SAV.BE
Van Grembergen warns of unhealthy municipal finances

At the presentation of his administration’s 2003 annual report, Internal Affairs Minister Van Grembergen took the opportunity to assess municipal policy in Flanders. It came across as a political testament, since Van Grembergen is stepping down as Flemish minister on 13 June. In recent years the municipalities have been forced to increase the supplementary municipal tax on income tax (9%), and the surcharges on the mill rate by 20%. Nevertheless, the Flemish Government has played its part, he claims. The funds in the Municipalities Fund rose by 23% during this legislature. But according to him, the Federal Government failed badly (FF).

BART HAECK • DE TIJD • 5 MAY

Don’t think that municipalities increase their taxes when it isn’t necessary, said the minister. Although he recognised that many municipalities apply ‘a dynamic’ (and therefore more expensive) policy, he attributes the tax increases primarily to the Federal Belgian Government, ‘which imposes additional charges, does not pay promised compensation and still acts as if municipalities are “subordinate” administrations and not partner administrations, which is how the Flemish Government sees them.’

‘Many municipalities are eating into their reserves,’ said Van Grembergen in a cautionary tone. And then there is still the ticking time-bomb of the rapidly rising pension expenditure. Part of this is that the municipalities are currently still paying a much lower pension to their contractual staff than to their permanent staff.

Van Grembergen regretted that the Flemish Government failed to wrap up the Municipalities and Provinces Decree in this legislature. ‘In the beginning the coalition partners agreed on everything. Later they were split on the political reforms in the decree: the direct election of mayors and so on. As a result, nothing came of the purely administrative reforms which the municipalities have been waiting for for years.’ Alongside financial reorganisation, that will be the first main task of the next Flemish government. According to Van Grembergen, the key tasks debate - internal Flemish state reform and the reallocation of tasks between municipalities, provinces and Federal Government - was a success, ‘only the financial conclusions were not drawn’. If powers were transferred, the money was not transferred with them.

WWW.BINNENLAND.VLAANDEREN.BE

A museum of Sport: the Sportimonium

On 7 May a brand-new museum opens in Hofstade, near Mechelen. It has been labelled Sportimonium, literally a combination of sport and heritage (patrimony) and this indicates what it will be exhibiting: sport as a living legacy. Why Hofstade, of all places? Because Bloso, the sports administration of the Flemish Community, currently runs a site there where it is possible to participate in several watersports. But also because with its lakes, Hofstade historically played the role of the sea for less affluent holiday-makers. In the 1930s it was the poor person’s sea for local workers. This is why Tourism Flanders is one of the partners in Sportimonium alongside Bloso and the Province of Flemish Brabant (FF).

MISJOE VERLEYEN • KNACK • 5 MAY

The museum is situated in part of the Beach Building. This is the largest wooden building in Belgium, was built in a modernist style and constructed from Congolese timber, which has survived decades of neglect - due to a lack of funds. The long-awaited restoration also meant a chance to house the museum there. Finally, because the plans date from 1985. It all began back in 1973, when Roland Renson, Professor of Sports History at KULeuven, began to systematically collect information on Flemish national sports together with his students. Renson: ‘All these sports have their origins in the Middle Ages.’ The investigation was quickly opened: ‘In Belgium, the nineteenth century gymnastic circles were not only the hired gangs of political parties, they also enjoyed massive competitions. Modern sports such as rowing, athletics, football and tennis came over from England. There it was all about leisure time for people who had enough time and money to get tired’.

Sport and history complement each other. The permanent collection is in the former changing rooms, some of which have been restored so that visitors can picture what they used to look like. Most of them have become showboxes in which objects are displayed. Sportimonium also has a popular sports garden where enthusiasts can play local versions of petanque, croquet and popinjay shooting. Plans for the future include a survey of the Olympic Games and a sports lab.

WWW.SPORTMONIUM.BE

SPORT AND CULTURE
Diary

MUSIC, DANCE THEATRE

• 12 May: Till Fellner (piano) with JS Bach, Concertgebouw, Bruges; info: www.concertgebouw.be
• 13 May: Curating the Library with photographer Dirk Braeckman and William Forsythe [lecture]; De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03248.28.28
• 14 and 15 May: DefiHARMONIE conducted by Philippe Herreweghe with 2nd and 6th Symphony by L van Beethoven; De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03248.28.28 and OL Vrouwekathedraal, Antwerp
• 15 May: Jazzactuel presents Bugge Wesseltoft and special guest Dhiafer Yarssesf, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
• 15 May: Pianomania with Frederik Coene, Gabor Csalog and Miki Skuta (Hungr); De handelsbeurs, Ghent, info: www.handelsbeurs.be
• 15 to 17 May: William Forsythe, Ballet Frankfurt with Kammer/Kammer, De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03248.28.28
• 15 May: Laura Vitali (Andalusia), Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp, info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
• 18 May: Trilok Gurtu (India), Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp, info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
• 18 May: Cassandra Wilson, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
• 18 May: Devendra Banhart, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
• 18 May: Fred Wesley and Moiano, De Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
• 19 May: Loudon Wainwright III, solo, De Handelsbeurs, Ghent, info: www.handelsbeurs.be
• 19 May: Hagen Quartett with Heinrich Schiff (Cello) with Debussey, Schubert and Mozart PSK, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be
• 20 to 23 May: Jazz Brugge 2004 with European Jazz with 24 bands, Concertgebouw Brugge, organisation: De Werf, info: www.jazzbrugge.be

• 21 May: Angelique Ionatos (Greece), De Handelsbeurs, Ghent, info: www.handelsbeurs.be
• 22 May: James Chance, Botanique, Brussels; info: 02/218.37.32
• 27 May: Chick Corea Trio, Flagey, Brussels, info: 02/641.10.20 www.flagey.be
• 27 May: DefiHARMONIE conducted by Daniele Calegari with Cristina Ortiz (piano) with Legley, Rachmaninov and Chostakovitsch, De Bijloke, Ghent, info: 09/269.92.92 www.debijloke.be
• 28 May: Orlando di Lasso, Il Canzoniere (Petrarca), Huelgas Ensemble, Kaaitheater, Brussels, info: www.kaaitheater.be

EXPO

• Until 30 May: Human, all too human, photo exhibition on psychiatry, Museum Dr. Guislain, Ghent, info: www.museumsguislain.be
• Until 23 May: Marijke Van Warndam, video installations, SMAK, Ghent info: www.smak.be
• Until 16 May: Une saison en enfer, exhibition on symbolist poet Arthur Rimbaud, PSK, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be; 02/507.82.00
• Until 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 May: From Delacroix to Courbet, Rubens under discussion, MSKA, Antwerp, info: www.rubens2004.be
• 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 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, Gent
• 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 April to 20 June: Abaros & Heteros, 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 6 June: The Wherehouse project with the Rugs media collective (India), contemporary art, PSK, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be
• Until 3 October: Marcel Breuer, Design & Architecture, exhibition CIWA, Brussels, info: www.ciwa.be
• Until 22 August and 5 September: SMAK exhibitions: Juan Uslé, Open Rooms and Sam Durant with ‘12 Signs. Transposed and illuminated, Ghent; info: www.smak.be

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