Vlaams Blok shuts down ‘grass-line’

At the beginning of this week the Vlaams Blok took a remarkable initiative in Antwerp. It spread folders, which announced the start of a complaints office for illegal migrants. This was designed to encourage people to report houses, flats or yards where illegal migrants live or work to a Vlaams Blok mobile number. The party would then pass on the information to the local authorities or the police, it promised. The other parties reacted with indignation in the Federal Parliament to what they are all calling a ‘grass-line’. Internal Affairs Minister Patrick Dewael (VLD) labelled the initiative unlawful and morally reprehensible. It made him think of the darkest period in Flemish history, the 1930s, he claimed. According to the Minister, the Blok is thus revealing its true colours, namely that it is bent on violent confrontation between Belgians and Foreigners. An hour later Blok boss Filip Dewinter announced that his party was dropping the initiative. He denied that his party, recently convicted of racism, was afraid of legal action and had therefore abandoned its resolution (FF).

FRANK WILLEMSE •
HET LAATSTE NIEUWS • 14 MAY

According to Dewael, there are at least two reasons why such a ‘grass-line’ is unlawful. ‘It is a crime to remain in this country illegally and crimes must be reported. To the police, not to a party that wants to play police. That is prosecutable as a minor offence. It also clearly violates the privacy laws. That is punishable by heavy fines,’ said Dewael in Parliament. For this he received the applause of all parties, the Blok apart. The Internal Affairs Minister has the power to order the Privacy Committee to begin an investigation. ‘I have already given that order. Whether the act on police duties has also been breached is a matter for the Public Prosecutor’s Office. But if someone lodges a complaint against the ‘grass-line’, there will be an investigation in any case,’ Dewael explained afterwards. As the Minister was saying that, the Public Prosecutor’s Office was already busy investigating on what grounds the ‘grass-line’ was in breach of the law. That investigation was stopped as soon as the Blok announced it was abandoning the initiative. According to Filip Dewinter, the ‘grass-line’ was nothing more than a prank of a scoundrel.

INTRODUCTION

13 June is fast approaching and community tensions are on the rise, but these are being overshadowed on the Flemish side by the urge of the parties to create a distinctive profile in the election campaign. The result is there for all to see: the Flemish front that is calling for the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde constituency to be split is showing major cracks one week after the demonstration in Halle. The front of 28 Flemish mayors, who threatened to boycott the European elections, is also coming apart. Following discussions Minister-President Somers, competent Minister Paul Van Gentreren (Spirit) and the party chairman of the SPA, VLD and Spirit together with the mayors signed a declaration in which they agreed to place talks on the split on the federal agenda. If these come to nothing, they threaten to approve a bill in Parliament supported by all Flemish parties. The opposition CD&V, N-VA and Groen! stayed away, however, and those CD&V mayors present did not sign the declaration. The opposition of the Flemish CD&V-N-VA cartel and the Vlaams Blok wants the split to be made before the elections. A CD&V-N-VA bill did not receive the support of the Flemish major- ity, since it would have inevitably led to the collapse of the Federal Government. But the CD&V-N-VA opposition knows that community tensions will play into their hands. CD&V Chairman Leterme is therefore giving the majority a choice: a split or no CD&V in the next Flemish Government. Which prompted Minister-President Somers to comment that the VLP (the former CD&V) had led governments for 35 years, during which time it had never pushed through the split. In an interview in De Standaard (12 May) Louis Michel, on behalf of the French speaking part, poured even more oil on the fire by just as firmly saying no to the split. It was in this rather tense community climate that Guido Fonteyn, former Standaard journalist and Wallonia expert, launched the book ‘Afscheid van (farewell to) Magritte’, in which the world-famous painter symbolises the prosperous Wallonia of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries (Knack, 12 May). In it he also describes the migration of hundreds of thousands of impoverished Flemings to the rich Walloon industrial basins, the economic collapse of the region after the Second World War and the impotence of Walloon politicians after- wards. On this period he cites trade union leader Fonteyn spent half a century sitting in a corner moaning and blaming the Flemings for everything. But Fonteyn recently observed a change in this attitude. They have stopped whining and moaning and are trying to allow Walloon institutions to function as efficient- ly as possible, he believes. Minister-President Somers was present at the launch of the book in La Louvière. He promised that Flanders would not leave Wallonia in the lurch (De Standaard, 13 May), but that they wanted to determine their own fate. Unfortunately the rational approach will find little support in the current climate, De Standaard concludes.

Frank Van de Veen | editor in chief
Belgians are on average the wealthiest Europeans

Financial assets consisted in 2002 of 30% deposits, 28% shares, 24% bonds and 17% insurance reserves.

In relation to Gross Domestic Product, Belgians have the greatest financial assets of all Europeans. In 2002, savings and investments together amounted to 666 billion euros, which is as much as 256% of GDP. The Dutch and British share second place with 247% of GDP. The British had to vacate their position as leader after 2000 as a result of the weak stock market. In Belgium over the same period, the financial assets of families fell from 299 to 265% of GDP. Together with a drop in financial assets, Eurostat noted a rise in the financial debts of European families. In the EU, debts rose from 61% of GDP in 2000 to 65% of GDP in 2002. Belgium is an exception to this development. Over the same period, Belgians’ financial debts fell from 43% to 42% of GDP. As a result of the poor performance on the stock markets, Europeans fled shares between 2000 and 2002. In 2000, 32% of assets were still invested in shares, and in 2002 only 24%. In 2002, 32% of the financial assets of European families consisted of deposits, 8% of bonds and 33% of insurance reserves.

**BUDGETARY COST OF THE AGEING POPULATION (IN % OF GDP)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2030</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pensions</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability to Work</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Retirement</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family allowances</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other social expenses</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Commission for the Ageing of Population

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**Declaration of assets and notification of mandates made compulsory**

*The information on a politician’s assets will remain in a sealed envelope*

On 12 May the bill on the compulsory declaration of assets by politicians was unanimously approved in the Chamber Committee for Constitutional Reform. The entire Chamber will approve the bill next week. This has already happened in the Senate. The bill obliges ministers, their principal private secretaries, MPs, mayors, aldermen and senior civil servants to make public not only their assets but also their administrative mandates. The information on a politician’s assets will, however, remain in a sealed envelope, which may only be opened by an investigating magistrate if the politician is suspected of corruption or a conflict of interests. The list of administrative mandates for each politician will be published annually in the Bulletin of Acts and Decrees (FF).

**STEFAN HUYSENTRUYT • DE TIJD • 13 MAY**

The laws on mandate lists and declarations of assets came into being back in 1995, but remained a dead letter because of the lack of two implementing acts. The handling of the draft implementing acts in Parliament has become a long, hard road. The reason for this is quite simple: no one happily lets people inspect his assets and mandates, including MPs and senators. And yet at the end of the previous legislature the end of this long, hard road appeared to be in sight. For the past year the drafts simply lay in the drawer of Parliamentary Chairman Herman De Croo, also Chairman of the Committee for Institutional Reform. He wanted to finally get them out from under the dust, but on condition that the Committee would discuss the matter in depth. According to the Parliamentary Chairman, they display a number of technical deficiencies, which means the implementation will create problems. De Croo wanted to let the Committee remove these deficiencies. But if the drafts were amended by the Chamber, they would again have to pass through the Senate, and for the majority parties that was just too much of a good thing. Another postponement just before 13 June would not go down well with public opinion. And so the whistle was blown on De Croo, who has never concealed the fact that he is a ‘cool lover’ of declarations of assets and mandate lists. The Committee has now agreed that any deficiencies will be rectified subsequently with an amendment act, so that both drafts can take effect on 1 January next year.

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**ASSETS**

**JIM LANNOO • DE TIJD • 12 MAY**

The financial assets of European families took a severe blow as a result of the malaise on the stock markets that set in in 2000. In the twelve countries for which Eurostat has figures, financial assets in 2000 still amounted to 18,958 billion euros, or 228% of the joint GDP of these countries. In 2002 that was 17,462 billion euros, or 197% of GDP. Due to the weak stock markets the British had to surrender their position as wealthiest Europeans. In 2000 the financial assets of British families amounted to 325% of the UK’s GDP; in 2002 that percentage fell to 247%. In Belgium over the same period, the financial assets of families fell from 299 to 265% of GDP. Together with a drop in financial assets, Eurostat noted a rise in the financial debts of European families. In the EU, debts rose from 61% of GDP in 2000 to 65% of GDP in 2002. Belgium is an exception to this development. Over the same period, Belgians’ financial debts fell from 43% to 42% of GDP. As a result of the poor performance on the stock markets, Europeans fled shares between 2000 and 2002. In 2000, 32% of assets were still invested in shares, and in 2002 only 24%. In 2002, 32% of the financial assets of European families consisted of deposits, 8% of bonds and 33% of insurance reserves.
**Politics**

**Elections**

**Splitting of constituency again heads political agenda**

Mayor Leo Peeters (SPA) appealed to the party chairmen, Minister-President Somers (VLD) and Flemish Internal Affairs Minister Van Grembergen (SPIRIT) to enter into a formal undertaking to split the constituency.

In a demonstration on Sunday 9 May around 13,000 Flemings declared their support for the 28 mayors from Halle-Vilvoorde who are demanding that the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde constituency be split up. The mayors are refusing to collaborate in the organisation of the European elections because Francophones in their municipality, on Flemish territory, can vote on Brussels Francophone lists. Nowhere in Francophone Belgium, conversely, can Flemings vote on Flemish lists. Ruling of the Court of Arbitration declared the current regulation in breach of the Constitution and calls for a new regulation for the next federal elections in 2007. At the end of the demonstration Luc Deconinck, Chairman of the Halle-Vilvoorde Committee, called on Flemish party chairmen to make a Halle-Vilvoorde pact with the mayors and approve a bill for the split in unison in the Federal Parliament before the elections. The opposition CD&V-V-N-VA has already tabled just such a bill. Mayor Leo Peeters (SPA), the figurehead of the municipalities’ opposition, appealed to the party chairmen, Minister-President Bart Somers (VLD) and Flemish Internal Affairs Minister Paul Van Grembergen (SPIRIT) to sit down at the table with the 28 mayors. Together they must enter into a formal undertaking to split the constituency. Somers wholeheartedly agreed. CD&V Chairman Yves Leterme rejected the offer. He wants the split before the elections of 13 June (FF).

**Opinions**

**Dirk Castrel**

_Gazet van Antwerpen_ • 10 May

This dossier has been dragging on for decades. Throughout that time, all the Flemish parties that have been in power have been jointly responsible for the split not happening. The coalition agreement of the outgoing Flemish Government stated that the split had to be implemented in the first half of its period of office. However, this government neglected to make it a priority. Despite urgent requests from the wide Flemish Movement. Despite resolutions that the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde constituency be split up. The split will undoubtedly be quickly ‘raised’ at the Forum for Community Discussions. If it is up to the Francophone parties, this will become an informal coffee morning. Unless they can bargain there.

**Bart Sturtewagen**

_De Standaard_ • 10 May

All Flemings, even those who demonstrated yesterday in Halle, have to realise that anyone who wants to see this time-honoured Flemish demand carried out must also accept the consequences. Last week eminent professors published a study, which shows that the Flemish political presence in Brussels is coming under greater pressure. That can be rectified by specific protective measures, but this sort of thing triggers community horse-trading, which puts the Brussels Flemings in the balance with the Francophones in the bordering communes. The Flemish position is that the privileged representation of Flemings in Brussels and parity in the Federal Government are inextricably linked. In response the Francophones flourish the European Minorities Convention. That is, in short, an institutional morass. Therefore, Flemings and Francophones in this federal country: is it not time for a new approach? Brussels’ calling is that of an international, multicultural city, the capital of a European Union with 25 Member States. Brussels is our window onto the world. The challenge is to seize this incomparable chance with our gaze firmly fixed on the future, not on the rear-view mirror. The solution does not lie in drawing borders. Borders have had their time.

Leterme turns splitting of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde into election theme?

On 12 May the opposition’s demand to have its bills relating to the splitting of the Halle-Vilvoorde constituency placed on the agenda by the majority parties was voted down. This has made a split before the elections on 13 June absolutely impossible. A proposal by the CD&V to organise a hearing with the mayors of Halle-Vilvoorde was also voted down. On that day the Federal Chamber was the stage for intense discussions and recriminations between Flemish opposition and majority parties. The CD&V and Vlaams Blok accused the majority VLD and SPA-Spirit of having already approved resolutions on the split three weeks ago in the Flemish Parliament, but of not wanting to push these through in Parliament with a Flemish majority. The majority parties do not want that for the obvious reason that it would immediately lead to the collapse of the Federal Government. Flemish Minister-President Bart Somers tried a different approach and invited all mayors and party chairmen to adopt a joint Flemish position. In so doing he wants to raise the split after the elections at the Forum of the various governments, which deals with community problems. The CD&V, however, was playing hardball, and turned the invitation down. Worse still, Chairman Leterme is doing everything he can to make the split a central election theme. In a letter to Minister-President Somers he states that his party would refuse to join a Flemish Government if the splitting of the constituency was not implemented. Groen! Chairwoman Dua also turned down Somers’s invitation. In _De Standaard_ on 12 May the Francophone MR leader Louis Michel uttered a forceful ‘never’ against any form of split.
On Saturday the SP.A's big guns campaigned in a highly unusual manner. They headed off by bus on a ‘study visit’ to the Dutch harbour city Rotterdam where they were met by Wouter Bos, Chairman of the Dutch sister party, the PVDA. What Party Chairman Stevaert had announced several weeks ago as a visit by disaster tourists to the mismanagement of Dutch Christian Democrat Balkenende, therefore became a study visit on the consequences of cutbacks in Dutch public transport and the lack of security in Dutch schools. It was Stevaert’s intention to demonstrate the impact of a conservative policy on daily life. At the same time, Bos called on the people of Rotterdam to vote for his party in the European elections. In short, it looked like a joint transnational SP.A-PVDA campaign (FF).

During a tram ride with Wouter Bos, Stevaert made an extensive plea for free public transport. Apparently with success, as the PVDA leader also wants Dutch municipalities to experiment with it. ‘The Belgian example shows that more people use public transport, that it does not push up costs and that it lessens the burden on the environment,’ said Bos.

A horde of cameramen, photographers and journalists and pretty much all the SP.A’s big guns followed Stevaert on his Dutch visit. Among them the Ministers Johan Vande Lanotte, Renaat Landuyt, Feya Vandenbossche, and Frank Vandenbroucke, State Secretary Kathleen Van Brempt and leading European candidate Mia Devits. All together they spent barely three hours in Rotterdam. After the trip by tram Stevaert, still with Wouter Bos, distributed folders at the local flower market, as the PVDA leader urgently needs to recruit votes for the European elections. Stevaert and Bos then held another debate in a local library, with education and yet again public transport as its main themes. Bos was happy with the visit of his Flemish peer. ‘We’re not campaigning for each other, but with each other. Above all we want to show that you can have the same ideas on certain topics.’ For Stevaert the trip is intended to initiate a tradition, ‘because Socialists must work together in Europe. We can clearly learn from each other.’ The SP.A visit was partly disrupted by MP Hendrik Bogaert (CD&V) and Bart Dewever (N-VA), who also travelled to Rotterdam with a caravan full of anti-Purple slogans. Bogaert and Dewever wanted to convince the Dutch that the Belgian Purple coalition only leads to chaos.

The VLD also chose a bus trip to get its campaign under way. The Liberal party has been battling with an image problem since the internal conflict between prime minister Verhofstadt and former chairman Karel De Gucht. For weeks the party was portrayed by the opposition as a load of incorrigible bickerers. Now it wants to change that image by spending two days touring Flanders as cheery friends. For the VLD - given the poor results in the opinion polls - what is at stake in the elections is no longer to make the VLD the biggest party in Flanders, but a government with or without Liberals. And according to the party that comes down to choosing whether to further cut or raise taxes. According to the VLD, the CD&V’s accession to power will be accompanied by tax increases. The aim is to launch taxes and the economy as the central election theme with the slogan ‘Verhofstedt seeks work’ and to enter into a debate on this with the CD&V. During an interview it appeared that the optimism of Premier Verhofstadt remains indestructible even in these tough times. Asked whether his party would get back on its feet, he answered: ‘The polls are all about the past. The campaign begins today. The VLD is the best guarantee of work.’ For the time being he will not hear talk of the fact that the elections could also have an impact on the Federal Government: ‘There are Flemish and European elections. On 18 May we achieved a solid majority. We have to translate that to Flanders as well.’ (De Tijd, 11 May).

### OPINION POLLS (see p. 5)

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RESULT FEDERAL ELECTIONS 18 MAY 2003 (IN %)</th>
<th>OPINION POLL DE STANDAARD/VRT APRIL 2004 (IN %)</th>
<th>OPINION POLL LE SOIR MAY 2004 (IN %)</th>
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<tr>
<td>VLD-VIVANT</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>17.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>SP.A SPIRIT</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>23.6</td>
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<td>CD&amp;V-N-VA</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VLAAMS BLOK</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GROEN!</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: DE STANDAARD/AND LE SOIR

WWW.SP.BE
WWW.PVDA.NL
WWW.VLD.BE
The latest opinion poll by De Standaard and VRT consolidates the trend that had already become clear in previous polls. The Liberal VLD-Vivant cartel has fallen further away to 18.8%. In the October 2003 poll it still stood out as the biggest, with 27.1%. Compared with the elections of May 2003 it has already lost 7.1%. The opposition cartel of Christian Democrats and Flemish nationalists (CD&V-N-VA), which had taken over at the top in the January poll, has increased its lead over the other parties, ending up with 30.3%. That is a gain of 4% compared with the 30% it obtained in last year’s federal elections. The Vlaams Blok has also continued its rise. With 21.7% it has already gained 3.5% compared with last year’s results. Its conviction as a racist party produce a stable combination. A majority to continue. But that will never be exercised mainly by the PS MR of Louis Michel either, in Wallonia and in particular in Brussels. The tormented Liberals could in principle simply cling on to power. But then they would have to accept that this power would be exercised mainly by the PS and SP.A. That is a recipe for further defeats.

Opinion

BART STURTEWAGEN • DE STANDAARD • 8 MAY

Politically the most important consequence of the predicted shifts is that the doom scenario of an unavoidable large three-party coalition on a Flemish level as a final barrier against the Vlaams Blok is drifting away. In contrast, a clear Orange-Red (CD&V/N-VA and SPA-Spirit, ed.) majority is emerging. Other combinations are mathematically possible, but politics is more than simple addition and subtraction. With its current score, Groen could perhaps adopt a small handful of MPs, and in so doing enable the current Flemish minority to continue. But that will never produce a stable combination. A CD&V-VLD tandem is also theoretically feasible, but that would place a bomb under the Federal Government. The key question, therefore, is what happens at federal level if the elections produce a Flemish Leterme I Government, with the CD&V, N-VA, SPA and Spirit. In theory, nothing will change. But things do no look promising for the MR of Louis Michel either, in Wallonia and in particular in Brussels. The tormented Liberals could in principle simply cling on to power. But then they would have to accept that this power would be exercised mainly by the PS and SP.A. That is a recipe for further defeats.

WWW.STANDAARD.BE
WWW.VRT.BE

Belgians work many unpaid extra hours

When Federal Employment Minister Frank Vandenbroucke (SP.A) recently announced a doubling of the number of permitted extra hours in the construction sector, he labelled this a significant precedent and immediately announced for the autumn a debate on a more flexible labour market. That was greeted with enthusiasm by employers. However, the social secretariat SD-Worx calculated that two in three Belgians work extra hours, on average around 22 a year. But on top of this is a whole load of unpaid extra hours. Above all salaried employees, and more specifically executives, are the champions of unpaid extra hours (FF).

EVELYNE HENS • DE TIJD • 12 MAY

The social secretariat assumes that many employees also work unpaid extra hours. SD-Worx confirmed that suspicion with a survey of 3,000 employees. This shows that an average worker who works full-time in the private sector works around two extra hours a week. That is an average of 5% above his contractual work scheme. For a salaried employee the figure is as much as five hours a week, some 11% above the work scheme. Above all it is executives who drive up that average. It is striking that the majority of employees work extra hours off their own bat. 7.5% of those questioned do it out of love of work, 43% out of a sense of responsibility. 7.8% say they do it because ‘everyone works extra hours’. And a further 14.6% admit working extra hours at the explicit request and initiative of their employer. One in four employees works extra hours because he is attracted by the return, such as compensation leave (18.4%), career opportunities (1.1%) or money (7.5%).

focus on flanders • 8 May - 14 May 2004 • Number 18
The nano-electronics research centre IMEC is on top of the world. This explains why the centre recently had a lightning visit from the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao. On 7 May, in the presence of Science and Technology Minister Dirk Van Mehelen (VLD), IMEC opened a new clean-room on its campus in Heverlee (near Leuven), a dust-free laboratory for research into the further miniaturisation of chip technology. The new research hall cost 84 million euros. Of this, the Flemish Government contributed 37.2 million euros. By 2007 a further 320 million euros will be made available for the installation of new equipment. IMEC currently employs 1,300 people and has a budget of around 160 million euros for 2004 (FF).

JOHAN CORTHOUTS • DE MORGEN • 8 MAY

IMEC is the main European research centre for the development of ever-smaller chips. Together with the main chip producers constant work is carried out into the further miniaturisation of transistors, the building blocks of chips. The centre is currently working on chips of less than 45 nanometers. A nanometer is one thousandth of one millionth of a metre. Applications of this research can be seen everywhere. In computers and mobile phones, but also in healthcare and the packaging industry.

‘With its research IMEC is four to six years ahead of the technology currently being marketed by the industry,’ says the Director of Chip Technology Luc Van den Hove. Precisely because the research in Leuven is ahead of actual marketing, IMEC is able to work with the main chip manufacturers. Intel, Samsung, Texas Instruments, STMicroelectronics, Infineon, Philips and Matsushita make use of IMEC’s know-how. They are the strategic partners of the Leuven-based institution. The joint venture is profitable for both IMEC and the chip manufacturers. ‘Research has become far too expensive. Chip manufacturers can no longer conduct research themselves. In a partnership with IMEC they only pay for a small part of the research,’ says General Manager Gilbert Declerck. Together with its partners IMEC is now planning a mega-investment to maintain its position as world-leader in nanotechnology. Over the next three to four years a further 800 million euros will be invested in Leuven. For IMEC, which last year had a budget of 160 million euros, that is a huge sum. It is the industrial partners who will have to cough up the majority of this investment.

WWW.IMEC.BE

Flemish amusement park Bobbejaanland taken over

The Bobbejaanland amusement park is being taken over by the Spanish theme park group Parques Reunidos. Bobbejaanland, which has around 50 attractions spread over 35 hectares, was the last big independent amusement park in Belgium. In 1959 founder Bobbejaan Schoepen, a well-known entertainer from the pioneering years of Flemish television, bought 30 hectares of marshland in the Antwerp Kempen, built a theatre and created two kilometres of beach around a lake. From the 1970s the amusement park attractions followed. Schoepen himself will be made honorary chairman of Bobbejaanland and continue to live on the site with his wife. His son Jacky is to become operational director. For the 80 permanent and 400 additional members of staff during the high season, nothing will change. Even the name Bobbejaanland will stay. Buyer Parques Reunidos has 15 attraction parks in Spain, including animal parks and waterparks (De Tijd, 12 May). The group was itself recently acquired by the American venture capitalist Advent International. In 2002 the Boudewijnpark in Bruges was taken over by Aspro Ocio, also a Spanish group. Last month Six Flags, the second biggest amusement park operator in the world after Walt Disney, sold its Six Flags Belgium park (former Walibi, in Wavres) and Bellewaerde Park (in Ypres) together with its other European parks to the British venture capitalist Palamon Capital Partners.

WWW.BOBBEJAANLAND.BE
WWW.WALIBI.BE
Watergate at Electrabel

SPY SOFTWARE WAS INSTALLED ON THE PC OF THE HEAD OF INVESTOR RELATIONS.
JEAN-PIERRE HANSEN, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF ELECTRABEL, AP-
PARENTLY LET THE TEAM IN WITH HIS BADGE.

FF EDITOR

A bizarre bugging scandal has come to light at the Belgian electricity producer Electrabel that could have far-reaching consequences. On 19 February, without the management’s knowledge, spy software was installed on the PC of the head of investor relations, Patrick Devos, in the Brussels headquarters by the French software firm ICS. Jean-Pierre Hansen, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Electrabel, apparently let the team in with his badge. On 26 February computer scientists of the company discover that the computers have been tampered with and Willy Bosmans, Electrabel’s Managing Director, is notified, who then informs the police. The situation became even more mysterious when on 15 March Devos’s PC was found smashed to pieces on the ground, with his office window wide open. The police’s computer crime unit was then asked to investigate the suspected spying after it had discovered that a further three PCs had been broken into. Hansen, however, was able to explain the installation of the spy software to the Board of Directors. Both Hansen, who is also number two in the French majority shareholder Suez, and the Chairman of that same Suez, Gérard Mestrallet, had heard that the Spanish electricity producer Iberdrola was preparing a hostile takeover bid.

The baritone of Lionel Lhote has not gone unnoticed in recent months. He can be heard on, among other things, a recent recording of the global creation of the ‘Triverius Concerto’ by Christi-

Hansen said that he therefore wanted to test computer security at Electrabel. Nevertheless, Hansen had no explanation for the break-ins on the other three computers. One obvious conclusion is that Iberdrola had a ‘mole’ at Electrabel and Suez, claims De Morgen (12 May). Another line of an internal settlement with the aim of discrediting Hansen is being pursued in De Tijd, De Morgen and De Standaard. This theory is given strength by the fact that Mestrallet is continuing to deny that Suez is involved in Hansen’s initiative, despite the fact that the software firm had been engaged by Patrick Ouart, General Secretary at Suez.

WWW.ELECTRABEL.BE
WWW.SUEZ.COM

Queen Elisabeth Competition for song

TWO BELGINS REACHED THE FINAL

The fifth Queen Elisabeth Competition for Song is approaching its denouement. On 12 May, in Bozar in Brussels, the first of the four finals of this world-famous competition takes place. On 15 May, after the last evening, we will know the winner from the total of 106 participants. In contrast to the Elisabeth Competitions for Violin and Piano, the Belgians have performed exceptionally well in the Song competition. Four won through to the semi-finals. Two of these, the Francophone Lionel Lhote and the Lebanese Belgian Shadi Torbey, reached the final. The female preponderance in the field of competitors - 83 women compared with 23 men - was partly redressed. The finalists comprise seven women and five men, but the preponderance of sopranos (six out of twelve) remains striking (FF).

DE TIJD • 12 MAY

The baritone of Lionel Lhote has not gone unnoticed in recent months. He can be heard on, among other things, a recent recording of the global creation of the ‘Triverius Concerto’ by Christi-

Van Lysebeth, former director of Brussels Conservatory of Music [Muziekkonservatorium van Brussel], and also consists of 15 singers, among them José Van Dam, Joan Sutherland, Andreas Scholl, Tom Krause and Helmut Deutsch. They will mark each candidate out of 100 and their points will immediately disappear into an envelope. What is striking is that during the competition the jury members may not discuss the candidates’ performances. On Saturday evening the sealed envelopes will be opened, the points added together under the watchful eye of a bailiff and the winner announced. He or she will receive a prize of 20,000 euros and naturally he or she can also expect a significant number of concerts. If a majority of the jury members agrees, special prizes can also be awarded to the winners for Baroque song, Opera or Lied. After the competition the winners will perform with, among others, the orchestras of the Flemish Opera, the Opéra Royal de Wallonie, La Petite Bande of Sigiswald Kuijken and the European Union Baroque Orchestra. A week after the final a CD recording of the competition will also be released.

WWW.BOZAR.BE
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**CULTURE**

**MUSIC, DANCE THEATRE**

- **18 May:** Triëlok Cartsu (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 Quartet with Heinrich Schiff (Cello) with Debussy, Schubert and Mozart PSK, Brussels, info: www.flagey.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 Janotis (Greece), De Handelsbeurs, Ghent, info: www.handelsbeurs.be
- **22 May:** James Chance, Botanique, Brussels, info: 02/218.37.32
- **22 May:** Until 5 June: Arabella by Richard Strauss, director: Francesco Negri, Flanders Opera House, Antwerp, info: www.vlaamseopera.be
- **25 May:** Czechomor (traditional music), Flagey, Brussels, info: www.flagey.be
- **26 May:** Alban Berg Quartett and Tebea Zimmermann, string quartets by Mozart and Urbanner, Bozar, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be
- **26 May:** Steven Houben and Emil Vicki licky, Jazz, Flagey, Brussels, info: www.flagey.be
- **27 May:** Chick Corea Trio, Flagey, Brussels, info: 02/641.10.20 www.flagey.be
- **27 May:** Defilharmonie 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
- **28 May:** Trio Chae with Mendelssohn and Mozart, Flagey, Brussels, info: www.flagey.be
- **28 May:** Philippe Pierlot and Dhruba Ghosh, Captaine Tobias Hume’s journey to India, De Singel, Antwerp, info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- **28 May:** Tour Coute with Mendelssohn and Mozart, Flagey, Brussels, info: www.flagey.be
- **29 May:** Night of Romanticism with de Filharmonie, Koningin Elisabethzaal, Antwerp, info: www.defilharmonie.be
- **2 June:** Once by Rosas, dance, Kaaitheater, Brussels, info: www.kaaitheater.be
- **4 to 5 June:** Frak Pay & Poni, Project 1, Kaaitheaterstudio’s, Brussels, info: www.kaaitheater.be

**EXPO**

- **Until 30 May:** Human, all too human, photo exhibition on psychiatry, Museum Dr. Guislain, Ghent, info: www.museumguslain.be
- **Until 23 May:** Marije Van Warmerdam, video installations, SMAK, Ghent info: www.smak.be
- **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-cultuurcentrum, 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 30 May:** Christophe Mourthé, Photo exhibition Scharpoord, Knokke-Heist, info: 050/63.04.30 www.fotofestival.be
- **Until 31 May:** Short stories, Photo-Museum, Antwerp, info: 03/242.93.00 www.fotomuseum.be
- **30 April to 20 June:** Abalos & Herreross, 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 Raqs media collective [India], contemporary art, PSK, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be
- **Until 3 October:** Marcel Breuer, Design & Architecture, exhibition CIVA, Brussels, info: www.civa.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
- **Until 1 August:** The invention of Landscape, exhibition, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp, info: www.rubens2004.be
- **Until 22 August:** Flee from the War, historical exhibition, Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres

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