Flemings are carrying more and more weight in economic decision-making in Belgium, claims a survey by the editorial team of De Tijd, which examined the annual reports of 132 Belgian listed companies, added up the directorial mandates and assigned points according to the weight of the mandate. Of the fifteen directors with the most important mandates, eleven are from Flanders. Four years ago this figure was only five. The top man in the Belgian directorial world however is still a Walloon: Daniel Janssen of Solvay (FF).

Each directorial mandate is worth one point. A position in a company listed in the Bel20 or on the continuous market is worth extra points. Chairs, vice-chairs or managing directors also get more than ordinary directors. The list contains 897 different names. Most only have one mandate. Twenty-one men and one woman have at least four. Two directors have seven mandates: Daniel Janssen and Luc Bertrand. Janssen is Chair of Solvay, Tubize and Obourg, Vice-Chair of UCB, Managing Director of Solvac and a Director of Fortis and Sofina. All these mandates are good for 20.5 points. This puts Janssen at the top of the list. Bertrand has the same number of seats, but they are worth less in weight. The Managing Director of Ackermans & Van Haaren is also Chair of Solvus and a Director of Quick, Sipèf, Atenor, Leas-invest and Agridec. Bertrand gets 13.5 points and moves up from eighth to second spot. Antwerp's Pol Barnelis jumps all the way from 28th to 3rd place. In 2002 he was already Chair of Agfa Gevaert and a Director of Bekkaert, but he now also sits on the boards of Recticel, Innogenetics and Sioen. Luc Van Steenkiste of Recticel Bekaert, but he now also sits on the boards of Recticel, Innogenetics and Sioen. Luc Van Steenkiste of Recticel is the third Fleming in the top 5. A comparable study was carried out in 1992. Then only two Flemings made the top 15: André Leysen and Philip Saverys. And in 1999 André Leysen, Valère Croes, Philippe Saverys, Philippe Vlerick and Jan Huyghebaert were the only Flemings to figure in the top 15.

PIERRE HUYLENBROECK
DE TIJD • 10 SEPTEMBER

On 18 and 19 September the Federal Government will sit in budgetary conclave. There it will agree, among other things, how it will plug the 1.2 billion euro hole in social security in 2005. This has added momentum to the social security debate. Health and Social Affairs Minister Rudy Demotte (PS) explained to De Tijd (8 September) why there would still be a deficit of 310 million euros in Belgian health insurance in 2004, despite a 4.5% increase in his budget. He promised drastic savings, for both 2004 and 2005. But the main challenge for social security lies in the longer term, he claims. Not only pensions, but also healthcare will become a money-guzzler due to the ageing of the population. Demotte and his colleague in Employment Freya Vandenberg Bossche (SPA) are therefore urging employers and trade unions - the main sources of funding for social security - to investigate other possible methods of financing for social security after this government (2007). The contributions from work (34 billion euros) with which social security (budget: 46 billion euros) is currently larded for the most part will no longer suffice in the future, he claims. Even higher levels of employment with more elderly people in work will not generate sufficient revenue. Demotte is mainly targeting employers because thanks to the social security cuts granted them cumulatively between 1999 and 2005 they have provided as much as 12% less income. Many Flemish politicians favour the idea of only financing work-related risks (accidents at work, pensions and unemployment) with work-related contributions. Child benefit and health insurance would then be financed via normal taxes. But because that scenario leaves the door open for these matters to be transferred to the regions, it is not open to discussion as far as the Francophone Demotte is concerned. According to De Tijd (8 September), Demotte wants to re-open the debate on the general social contribution (ASB). The ASB would be levied on all income, including that of companies, the self-employed and capital. For years the trade unions have been calling for an ASB. But the ASB is in turn not open to discussion in the eyes of the Liberal VLD and employers. The employers’ organisations Unizo and the VBO want the expenditure side of social security to be examined. They believe it is logical for deficits to arise if an expenditure item can rise by 4.5% annually while economic growth does not exceed 2 to 2.5%. De Tijd believes Demotte is putting the horse before the cart. The paper first wants a debate on what sort of social security we want. And yet the paper sees little sign of a government conflict. There is nothing in the coalition agreement about the structural alternative financing of social security. Little is therefore likely to come of it during this term of office, claims the paper.

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief
New sources of income for social security required
Together with Freya Vanden Bossche (SP.A), Demotte sent a letter to trade unions and employers

The Federal Minister for Social Affairs, Rudy Demotte, is promising to keep health-insurance expenditure under control. When the Federal Government was formed in 2003 it was decided that this expenditure should not rise by more than 4.5% annually. But this year the budget already risks being exceeded by 300 million euros. He has therefore prepared a whole series of economy measures designed to bring the budget back on track in both 2004 and 2005. Together with his colleague in Employment, Freya Vanden Bossche (SP.A), Demotte send a letter to trade unions and employers, he explains in De Tijd (8 September) in which he asks them to submit proposals for funding social security in the future. He suggests a method other than that of taxing employment (FF).

BART EECKHOUT
DE MORGEN • 9 SEPTEMBER

There have long been calls on the Flemish side for only benefits substituting wage income (pensions, unemployment, disablement) to be financed by employment charges, while supplementary benefits (child benefits, health insurance) can be financed out of general funds.

Because this could be a first step towards regionalisation, Demotte, and with him the whole of the PS, reject it. ‘Institutional discussions on health insurance are not on the agenda,’ he warns. ‘I won’t allow our system to be tampered with.’ This does not leave many alternatives for the financing of social security. Demotte is not saying so in so many words, but nevertheless seems to be suggesting at least a sort of general social contribution (the ASB, a contribution from all forms of income). His PS colleague Laurette Onkelinx suggested this once before but was blocked by the VLD. After all, an ASB smacks suspiciously of income tax increases, a Liberal taboo.

VLD Chairman Bart Somers is also now firmly rejecting the PS’s suggestion. ‘At the end of the summer the PS traditionally comes up with an idea for raising taxes,’ says Somers. ‘I’m sorry, but there’s nothing about that in the coalition agreement.’ Somers ‘fundamentally disagrees’ with Demotte’s analysis. ‘It’s true that considerable investments have been made in social contribution cuts, but you cannot say that social security income has dropped proportionally. The problem lies at least partly with expenditure.’ Employers’ organisations are echoing this sentiment.

They challenge the claim that the cuts in employers’ social security contributions have had no effect on employment. Pieter Timmermans, Director-General of the VBO, emphasises that social security expenditure is growing more quickly than the economy, ‘I’d ideally we want a debate on social security, but all aspects. Including healthcare.’ The same is being said at Unizo. ‘The starting point has to be the overall picture, including expenditure.’

www.unizo.be
WWW.VBO.BE
WWW.BELGIUM.BE

Early retirement is cheapest option for social security

Early retirement is up for discussion. ‘This summer the employers’ association the VBO even called openly for its abolition. The governing parties feel that would be going too far, but seem to be prepared to make the system less attractive to new candidates for early retirement. If early retirement becomes less attractive, older workers will remain in their jobs longer, pushing up levels of employment, runs the argument. However, the research department of the Socialist trade union the ABVV is warning against over-hasty action in the early retirement dossier. Older workers risk ending up in systems that cost more in social security than early retirement (FF).

EVELYNE HENS • DE TIJD • 7 SEPTEMBER

Jef Maes of the ABVV warns against ‘collateral damage’. He points out that many 50-somethings will end up elsewhere within the social security system. Since the stricter policy on early retirement, more and more 50-somethings have been registered as older unemployed people. The number of people taking early retirement fell from 137,350 in 1992 to 109,700 in 2004, but this gap was filled by part-time career-interrupters from the age of 50 and above all by older unemployed people (from 64,750 in 1992 to 137,000 in 2004). Maes points out that these movements are not budgetarily neutral for social security. ‘Early retire-
Half of Flemish exports go to neighbouring countries

The Flemish economy also accounts for 82.1% of all Belgian exports

In the first quarter, Flemish businesses exported almost 39 billion euros or 5.86% more than in the same period last year. This is evident from figures published by the Institute for National Accounts (Instituut voor Nationale Rekeningen, INR). Half of these exports were intended for neighbouring countries. Only exports to the USA are doing less well, falling as they did by 4.5%. The Flemish economy also accounts for 82.1% of all Belgian exports. Wallonia is good for 6.9 billion euros or 14.5% of exports, while Brussels exports only 4.3%. Flemish imports were worth 36.9 billion euros, giving a positive balance of trade for the first quarter. The new figures no longer take account of where economic production occurs, and that gives a much truer picture of the economic reality, claims Koen Allaert, General Manager of Export Vlaanderen (FF).

Johan Rasking
De Standaard • 6 September

Allaert explains. ‘Up to now, export details were spread across the regions according to where companies’ headquarters were located. And there was no information on the regional spread of imports. Now the concept of added value is taken into account, which better reflects the economic reality. The emphasis is no longer on the identity of the shipper or the owner of the goods, but on where the economic (production) processes took place. The head office effect has therefore been almost entirely taken out of the equation.’

The biggest sales market for Flemish firms is and will remain the immediate neighbouring countries and, looking slightly further afield, the former version of the European Union with its fifteen Member States. Almost three-quarters of Flemish exports remain within these geographical perimeters. Germany heads the list of export countries, ahead of fellow neighbours France and the Netherlands. Including Luxembourg, the countries bordering Belgium account for half of all exports. What is striking is the drop in the share of Flemish exports to the United States, down to 4.5%. Asia is a far more important export continent, with a share of 10.8%, compared with 5.8% for South and North America together. Flanders exported goods worth 1.16 billion euros to India in the first quarter, for example. The chemicals and pharmaceuticals industries and the automotive sector are the main export sectors for Flanders, with 16 and 15% of the total respectively. Antwerp’s all-important diamond sector accounts for 8%.

The Export Vlaanderen report also contains details of imports of goods and services. In the first quarter, imports for the whole of Belgium amounted to 46 billion euros, of which 36.9 billion or 80.2% was for Flanders. The balance of trade – exports versus imports – is most entirely taken out of the equation.

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Social economy

Cleaning sector booming thanks to service cheques

Demand is largely outstripping supply, particularly in the cities

The introduction of the service cheque appears to have been a great success. In the case of cleaners paid with service cheques, demand is largely outstripping supply, particularly in the towns and cities, where there are now waiting lists for those looking for a cleaner. According to De Standaard (7 September), 10,000 new white jobs have been created in one year. 700 businesses that are eligible for a service cheque scheme have now been recognised. These include cleaning businesses, temping agencies, non-profit organisations such as Familiehulp, local councils, Public Social Assistance Centres (OCMWs) and local employment agencies. Despite the less favourable economic climate, the cleaning sector is booming (FF).

Guy Tegenbos
De Standaard • 7 September

All firms that have to work with the cheques are wrestling with waiting lists. Familiehulp, which used to only have to send people to families ‘requiring help’ and now has to send them to all families, is looking for 300 workers ‘to start immediately’.

The shortage of candidates is particularly acute in the towns and cities. Ladies who worked on the grey circuit switched over more quickly than those on benefit who really were moonlighting. But wherever the Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training (VDA) introduces ‘intensified support programmes for the unemployed’, the number of candidates rises sharply. ‘There are also ladies who come along with the set of customers they’ve already been working for for years on a black or grey basis and who now want to work in the white,’ says one cleaning business. If it appears that training is being given and the job is being made somewhat more professional, it will suddenly become more attractive. Training remains a sticking point. ‘Many people simply don’t need any straight away,’ many people are saying.

The training programmes of temping agencies and cleaning businesses often target office cleaning. The office of federal Employment Minister Freya Van den Bossche says that the government promised 25,000 jobs in this sector by the end of its term and that 12,500 will already have been created by the end of this year.

Focus on Flanders • 4 September – 10 September 2004 • Number 30
For years the Francophones have not been happy with the Peeters circular, which puts a restrictive interpretation on the facilities system. A minor modification of the linguistic laws could neutralise the circular. The Francophones are pressing for the European Minorities Treaty to be ratified, which they see as a basis for an extension of the ‘rights’ of the Francophones who live in Flanders. The Flemings, who are opposed to a change in the linguistic laws and ratification, could be convinced by better arrangements on the use of languages in Brussels. This question has also poisoned Belgian politics for decades.

WWW.DERAND.BE
WWW.DE-GORDEL.BE

**TOP-15 OF DIRECTORS**

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**MARK DEWEERDT**

DE TIJD • 6 SEPTEMBER

**Split of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde: Verhofstadt broods on compromise**

**MINISTER-PRESIDENT LETERME (CD&V) STATED THAT NO POLITICAL PRICE WOULD BE PAID FOR THE SPLIT, BECAUSE IT WAS MERELY IMPLEMENTING A RULING OF THE COURT OF ARBITRATION**

On Sunday 5 September in glorious sunshine around 86,000 Flemings took part in the 24th edition of De Gordel, a cycle ride and ramble that was originally intended to highlight the Flemish character of the Rand area (Periphery), but which has in recent years taken on more of a sporty sheen. That the mayors of the Flemish Rand seized the event to press home their demand for the constituency and judicial district of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde to be split gave it more of a Flemish tinge. That same day Minister-President Leterme (CD&V) stated on the VRT programme ‘De Zevende Dag’ that no political price would be paid for the split, because it was merely implementing a ruling of the Court of Arbitration. His Brussels colleague Picqué (PS) warned in Le Soir that the split was a step towards confederalism and hopes that in that case Flanders will not prevent Brussels from seeking a rapprochement with the Walloon Region.

Chamber Chairman Herman Decroo (VLD) advised caution and reminded the Flemings that a prior agreement with the Francophones was required. Otherwise the dossier will end up with the Federal Government via the ‘alarm bell procedure’ and according to him that would bring down the government.

At the request of the Nieuwe Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA) De Croo asked the Council of State for emergency advice on the bill of Geert Bourgeois, which proposes two constituencies in the old province of Brabant: Flemish Brabant and Walloon Brabant. It is a proposal that was tabled alongside the proposal for a legally watertight ruling on the split. The mayoral proposal has the broad backing of all Flemish government parties and splits Brabant into three constituencies: Flemish Brabant, Walloon Brabant and Brussels.

For the Flemings the split is the logical application of the constitutional division of Belgium into linguistic regions, and is necessary to stop the further Frenchification of the area and encourage the Francophones to integrate in Flanders.

Federal Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt (VLD) is seeking a solution in discreet talks with the Flemish and French speaking majority parties (FF).

It is immediately clear why the Francophone parties are against the split. The Francophone residents of Halle-Vilvoorde would lose their actual electoral and judicial facilities. And, not insignificantly, Walloon and Francophone politicians in Brussels could no longer win votes in the Flemish municipalities of Halle-Vilvoorde. In last year’s federal elections these numbered around 73,000.

What might the ingredients be of the compromise on which the Premier is brooding? Undoubtedly facilities. The actual electoral and judicial facilities could be retained one way or another.
The Vlaams Blok: where to after 13 November

KAREL DE GUCHT LET HIMSELF BE PERSUADED BY VERHOOSTADT AND DEWAEL (VLD) TO GIVE UP HIS CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE VLD IN EXCHANGE FOR THE MINISTERIAL POST OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

If the Court of Cassation ratifies the conviction of the Vlaams Blok for racism on 13 November, the party risks missing out on subsidies if it fails to change policy. So what direction should the Blok take? The party executive has drawn up a strategic plan in which the party breaks with the past to avoid further legal problems. This involves a new name - ‘Het Vlaams Belang’ or ‘Nieuwe Vlaamse Volkspartij’ are some of the current suggestions - a new logo, but also a new party charter and a new manifesto. The 100-strong party council will decide on the matter on 11 September. In the meantime, the internal debate will be openly followed in the press for the first time in the party’s history. Brussels Blok MP Filip De Man is opposed to a change of name and labelled the party leaders ‘scaredy-cats’ in newspaper interviews. Chairman Vanhecke pays too much attention to the suggestions of lawyers, he feels (FF).

LIESBETH VAN IMPE
DE MORGEN • 8 SEPTEMBER

The party leaders (Chairman Vanhecke, Dewinter and Annemans) are by their own admission in agreement. ‘No changes are being made to content or manifesto. But the tactics have to change.’ Although the leaders are not saying so in so many words, Blok members nevertheless realise that a change in tactics implies a break with the past not only will there be a new name, but above all a manifesto with no sharp corners. The question is how many edges can be filed down without changing the content. Old campaigner Filip De Man has no time for this. He is afraid that a watered-down message can no longer win over voters.

And De Man is not alone, admits Dewinter to De Morgen: ‘De Man is certainly not the only one within the party to think like this. The matter is under discussion. I admit, opinion is divided. It’s just not our custom to conduct that in the press.’ The fact that that is nevertheless happening shows how this discussion has touched the essence of the Blok.

Dewinter is doing all he can to avoid a rupture. In so doing he is displaying considerable sympathy for the critics: ‘It’s not easy to abandon the symbols. But the party won’t win anything in a pure battle of symbols.’ And yet he himself wants to go far: ‘Yes, my 70-point plan is also a symbol, so it won’t be taken along into the new party.’ If Dewinter remains friendly towards the dissidents who ‘have some trouble’ with the new course, Annemans is wading in like a bull in a china shop. ‘The real scaredy-cats are in De Man’s camp,’ he says. ‘They’ve misunderstood the signal of 13 June, our colossal victory. They’re clinging to the past like a lifebuoy without knowing where it’s drifting to’.

VLD and PS opposed in DHL dossier

WITHIN THE FLEMISH GOVERNMENT IT HAD BEEN AGREED THAT MINISTER-PRESIDENT YES LEITERME (CD&V) AND ENVIRONMENT MINISTER KRIS PEETERS (CD&V) WOULD PREPARE THE Dossier

With the expansion of its European hub in Zaventem, courier firm DHL can create around 16,000 jobs. But that would also mean doubling the number of night flights over Zaventem, with all the extra noise that would entail. So reveal studies commissioned by the province of Flemish Brabant. The courier firm wants a definitive answer from the three governments involved by the end of September: the Flemish, Brussels and Federal. From Barcelona, where she is on an economic mission, the brand-new Economic Affairs Minister Fientje Moerman (VLD) has already said that she supports DHL’s expansion. Her party is all in favour of jobs. Federal VLD Ministers Verhoostadt and De Gucht have also made it clear that for them jobs are an absolute priority. Moerman’s comments were not to the liking of the CD&V. Within the Flemish Government it had been agreed that Minister-President Yves Leiterme (CD&V) and Environment Minister Kris Peeters (CD&V) would prepare the dossier. Through its Flemish MPs the Christian Democratic party let it be known that Moerman had spoken out of turn (FF)

EVELYNE HENS • DE TIJD • 31 AUGUST

The VLD cannot understand the agitation and points to Federal Vice-Premier Laurette Onkelinx (PS). She already commented on this issue last week. In De Tijd she stated that she ‘cannot see a possibility for the expansion of DHL in Zaventem. And: ‘If someone has a solution, could they let her know.’ In short: it appears that the VLD and the PS are diametrically opposed on this issue.

And the SP.A? This party does not want to get its fingers burned with bold statements. Naturally the Socialists believe employment is important, but ‘the preparatory negotiations are well under way, we don’t want any controversy, the dossier is already sensitive enough’.

After all, it is a dossier that throws the choice between economy and ecology into sharp relief. For if DHL does not get its expansion, the courier firm is likely to relocate to Vatry in northern France or Leipzig in Germany.

It is also a dossier that is playing the various regions off against each other. Extending the number of night flights would only be acceptable to Flanders if the Brussels Region accepted its share of extra night flights. That does not sit particularly well, for example with Laurette Onkelinx who lives in Brussels.

WWW.BIAC.BE
WWW.DHL.BE
Omega Pharma has European strategy

The pharmaceuticals group Omega Pharma, which is listed on the stock exchange, has raised 285 million dollars (231 million euros) via a bond issue among Anglo-Saxon investors, insurance companies and pension funds. To achieve this it held roadshows in London and eight American cities. It is with this sizeable financial injection that Omega Pharma took over the Swedish pharmaceutical firm ACO Hud (turnover: 30 million euros) and the Italian Medestea (expected turnover: 21 million euros). These takeovers cost around 100 million euros, as a result of which this year Omega Pharma is targeting a turnover of 580 million euros. Together with the take-over of 60 Pfizer products earlier this year, these are significant steps towards heading the European market in OTC products (medicines and health products available without prescription), claims Managing Director Marc Coucke (FF).

DAVID ADRIAEN
DE TIJD • 4 SEPTEMBER

‘At the end of May Omega Pharma strengthened its OTC products division with 60 brands of the American company Pfizer. However, around 40% of a turnover of 80 million euros from these products was achieved in markets in which Omega Pharma was not yet active, such as Italy, Scandinavia, Ireland, Switzerland and Austria. New sales offices or local takeovers were required to overcome that problem. The takeover of the activities of Turner-based Medestea was announced yesterday. The company’s leading product is the cosmetics brand Sant’Angelica. The group also produces dietary supplements and anti-cellulitis products. Omega Pharma is taking on thirty Medestea workers and a team of 25 sales agents. The management is being boosted by a number of managers from Pfizer Italy. Adding Medestea and the Pfizer products will make is one of the biggest OTC players on the Italian OTC market, which generates 2 billion euros, explains Coucke. From next year Omega will also be launching other products of its own there, for which the sales team will be enlarged. The takeover of Stockholm’s ACO Hud with 56 employees was according to Coucke ‘the best complementary takeover’ in Omega Pharma’s history. ‘ACO’s cosmetics, skin-care products and pregnancy test kits will be sold exclusively in pharmacies, just like those of Omega Pharma. Also, earlier this year ACO was itself interested in taking over Pfizer brands in Scandinavia, as these fit in perfectly with its own products.’ However, after Omega Pharma had taken on the Pfizer brands, Coucke submitted a takeover proposal to ACO. He was particularly happy with ACO’s brand awareness and the group’s own research centre. Through ACO, Omega will become active in Sweden, Finland, Norway and Denmark.

A small takeover has already been pushed through in Ireland. Switzerland and Austria will get their own sales offices, although takeovers are not being precluded.

WWW.OMEGAPHARMA.BE

Crime continues to fall in Antwerp

Crime in Antwerp is continuing to fall for the third year in succession. At least this is what the figures from the first half of 2004 suggest. Of the six crimes to which the police devoted the most time and energy, five were smaller in scale. Only car thefts and car break-ins rose by 15%. Mayor Patrick Janssens is talking of a small step in the right direction. The Vlaams Blok, which in the past had made a tradition of challenging the figures, this time kept strangely quiet (FF).

GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 7 SEPTEMBER

In the first six months of this year, crime in Antwerp fell by 7.2%, while the figure for the whole of 2003 was 12.4%. Alderman for Security Dirk Grootjans (VLD): ‘It appears that de positive trend of 2003 is continuing. But let’s wait for the figures for the second half of the year.’ Theft from cars is the only one of the Antwerp police’s six priorities not to fall. The others are moving in the right direction. For example, the number of instances of pick-pocketing has fallen by 10%. ‘Pick-pockets operate mainly in busy shopping streets such as De Keyserlei and Meir. Around 48% of thefts occur in the street. Almost 30% on buses or trams and 17% in shops,’ explains Police Chief Eddy Baelemans. Others to fall are house break-ins (-21.4%), office and shop break-ins (-14.9%) and vandalism (-10.2%). ‘The drop in house break-ins accounts for one fifth of the total drop. One of the reasons is effective collaboration with the Federal Police,’ says Baelemans.

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CONSOLIDATED RESULTS OF OMEGA PHARMA (IN MILLIONS OF EUROS)
**Number of bankruptcies peaks in Anwerp city centre**

Local shopkeepers are asking for their social-security contributions and VAT payments to be deferred to relieve the most urgent needs

The number of bankruptcies in Antwerp city centre peaked this year, concluded the editorial team of *De Tijd* (6 September) after it had disentangled the figures for the district of Antwerp. According to the paper there is no doubt that there is a demonstrable link between the work on the HST line at the Central Station, the construction of the new Court of Justice, the work on the Ring Road and above all the re-construction of the central artery, De Leien. Businesses that are practically inaccessible all the time are suffering major losses. The paper immediately adds that the government responsible had scheduled alternative solutions for the transport problem that caused all this work, but not for the economic harm suffered by shops and other small businesses. There is particular bad feeling about the nine-month delay in the re-construction of De Leien. The competent minister Kris Peeters (CD&V) and his budgetary colleague Van Mechelen (VLD) visited Antwerp to sound out feelings and promptly decided that the delay would be made good with the deployment of more manpower. Meanwhile, local shopkeepers are asking for their social-security contributions and VAT payments to be deferred to relieve the most urgent needs. Local Blok leader Filip Dewinter lost no time in complaining about ‘the shambles’ on De Leien, demanding a compensation fund and exemption from social and fiscal contributions (FF).

**Taste of Flanders Arts festival in Osaka**

The actor Jan Decleir will shortly be the most important guest at the eleventh edition of the Osaka European Film Festival

In November the Flanders Center in the Japanese city of Osaka will celebrate its thirtieth anniversary with the arts festival ‘Taste of Flanders’. The cultural centre has devoted all this time to promoting Flanders culture in Japan. This third edition of ‘Taste of Flanders’ is intended to encourage artists to capture a place in the Japanese market. The first edition coincided with the visit of the then Minister-President Luc Vandendaele Brande to Japan. Actor Jan Decleir, director Dirk Brossé, flower-arranger Daniel Ost and youth writer Bart Moeyaert flew to the country of the rising sun for the occasion (FF).

‘This edition has deliberately been spread over eleven days,’ says Bernard Catryssse, Director of the Flanders Center. ‘It’s also larger in scale, more varied and of higher quality. This is the first time there has been a campaign of Flemish cultural events of such substance in Japan.’

The actor Jan Decleir will shortly be the most important guest at the eleventh edition of the Osaka European Film Festival. Following in the footsteps of Bernardo Bertolucci and Wim Wenders, Decleir will accept the honorary chairmanship of the film festival during Taste of Flanders. As a tribute to his long career, he will also receive the ‘Prize of the city of Osaka’. On 22 November ‘De Zaak Alzheimer’ will première in Osaka. The actor will also open an exhibition of his own work. With his floral installations in the Ninna-ji temple, world-renowned florist Daniel Ost is seeking out the confrontation between East and West. Another famous name is that of the composer and director Dirk Brossé. Brossé is a regular guest in Japan as musical director of the Tokyo International Music Festival. At ‘Taste in Flanders’ he is directing the Osaka Municipal Band. The programme includes a number of works by Flemish composers. The Rubio Quartet will also be performing in Osaka. The string quartet will also be giving masterclasses on the fringe of the arts festival. For the first time the Flanders Center is venturing a literary afternoon, in collaboration with the Dutch embassy. Fleming Bart Moeyaert and Dutchman Toon Tellegen will read from their own work in Tokyo and Osaka, after which the same texts will also be presented in Japanese. The young photographer Layla Aerts will present her work in Japan under the title ‘A Slice of Life in Osaka’.

**Opinion**

Patrick Martens • Knack • 8 September

This message is somewhat different from that of former Public Works Minister Bossuyt (SP.A). He was incensed that Antwerp’s city council had been criticised because of the delays. Ministers cannot do anything about the fact that residents slow the work down themselves by fighting the building permit before the Council of State. Nor can they chase Antwerp’s city archaeologists from the site, since they can fall back on the Malta Convention to dig the site for the remains of a Spanish rampart. But it is still surprising that four years after the call for tenders and with all the preparatory time, the ‘departments concerned’ still have to be urged ‘to treat this dossier with the highest priority.’ The new Flemish Government has drawn a line under ‘the Purple politics of promises’. If the promises of Peeters and Van Mechelen again come to nothing, however, we won’t be far off. And then the political consequences for 2006 will already become clear (in the local elections, ed.).
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