DHL: Bierset again surfaces as an alternative location

After fourteen days the negotiations between the DHL senior management and the government have reached breaking point. Minister Vandevante Lanotte is accusing DHL of going back on its word because the company, as of last week, is now suddenly demanding 16 night flights with noisy MD11 aircraft until 2012, whereas only four such flights were mentioned in the negotiations. The MD11 is the only aircraft in the DHL fleet that can fly on intercontinental routes. Together with the 13 Airbus 300s, it manages a Quote Count 11, making it appreciably noisier than the 35 B757s (QC4) in the fleet. DHL can guarantee the replacement of the Airbus by a quieter aircraft by 2010, but cannot guarantee the replacement of the MD11. For that matter DHL denies that it had previously been working on the basis of four night flights, but the government does not accept that explanation and sent the management a letter containing a final proposal based on four MD11 night flights. The DHL management has confirmed that it has received the letter. To exert pressure on the government and the DHL management, the courier company’s trade unions brought the airport to a standstill today, 1 October, between 1 and 2 p.m. On 30 September La Libre Belgique reported that DHL had contacted the airport of Bierset, to look into whether it might be able to build its extension there. However, it emerged that the initiative came from the airport itself (FF).

STEVEN SAMYN AND TOM YSEBAERT • DE STANDAARD • 1 OCTOBER

Yesterday the Liège airport of Bierset once again surfaced as an alternative site to house DHL. According to a report in La Libre Belgique, the courier company had asked the airport manager SAB in a fax whether Bierset would be able to accommodate the new hub. Later the same day it was announced that it had not been DHL that had taken the initiative, but SAB. A communiqué by DHL stated that: ‘SAB sent us a letter. We did not ask for any proposal or commitment’. The directors of SAB, led by José Haspart, are bidding DHL welcome. The Wallon Government is being more prudent, however. It does not want to take part in the poker being played around the company, and only wants to consider the move if no agreement with Zaventem is possible. Deputy Prime Minister Laurette Onkelinx (PS) stated that ‘DHL has to stay in Belgium. If Zaventem is not possible, then at Bierset’.

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Opinion poll: Vlaams Blok largest party in Flanders

If elections were held now in Flanders, the Vlaams Blok would emerge as the largest party. At least, that is what the first opinion poll since the regional elections of 13 June clearly indicates. The poll was commissioned by VTM, Het Laatste Nieuws, RTL and La Libre Belgique, and was conducted by means of 2,000 face-to-face interviews between 2 and 15 September. In the elections the CD&V-N-VA alliance was the largest formation in the country. But the alliance falls back from 26.1% in the elections to 24.1% in the September poll. It is thus overtaken by the Blok, which registers a gain of 0.2% - enough to put it into first position (24.3%). The left-wing alliance of SPA-Spirit gains ground (21.3%), rising 1.6%. Meanwhile there are minimal shifts recorded for the liberal VLD-Vivant (20.3%, up 0.5%) and Groen! (7.7%, up 0.1%)(FF).

Yves Leterme, the Flemish Minister-President (CD&V), seeks the explanation, by word of his spokesperson, in the tripartite coalition that was formed. ‘A number of voters chose us as an alternative to the ‘purple’ formation. They are perhaps disappointed that we have now formed a Flemish government together with the SPA and VLD. But the survey was carried out before we have been able to demonstrate that we can offer an alternative administration.’

No less than 44% of Flemings feel that the Vlaams Blok should have been in the coalition. Except for Vlaams Blok voters, this percentage includes a great many CD&V-N-VA voters. ‘I had a meeting with the Vlaams Blok and this proved that the party is chiefly based on models of conflict. That is not our policy,’ came Leterme’s reaction. The Blok sees the result as a means of putting the cordon sanitaire under pressure. Chairman Frank Vanhecke: ‘CD&V/N-VA carried out a campaign against the ‘purple’ formation, but has now entered a government without having secured any essential issues. The alliance is being punished for not having had serious talks with the Vlaams Blok.’ According to VLD chairman Bart Somers, it is logical that the result is still similar to that of the elections, at a time when the political year had yet to get under way. ‘I expect the VLD, which is the only party to maintain a consistent line on the DHL issue, will now gradually fare better.’ However, Somers, like his SPA colleague Stevaert, surmises that the impace surrounding DHL will mainly play into the hands of the Vlaams Blok. Premier Verhofstadt is once again the most popular politician in Flanders, according to the poll, ahead of Vlaams Blok heavyweight Filip Dewinter and Steve Stevaert (SPA). Confidence in the federal government has also grown somewhat, compared with the poll taken before the elections.

Brussels receives eur 400 million from treasury

De Tijd calculated the amount of money that flows from the federal government to the Brussels Region and the 19 Brussels municipalities.

SPA chairman Steve Stevaert threatened to cut the supply of funding to Brussels if the Brussels Government was not prepared to make concessions on the DHL question (see page 4). So how much money is involved here? De Tijd calculated the amount of money that flows from the federal government to the Brussels Region and the 19 Brussels municipalities. In total the amount involved comes to around EUR 400 million, of which EUR 137 million goes to the municipalities in implementation of the Financing Act, which stipulates that every region in which the revenue from personal income tax per inhabitant is under the national average is entitled to a solidarity allowance. Both Brussels and Wallonia are eligible for this. In addition to that, EUR 265 million goes to the Brussels Regional Government as remuneration for the costs which the city’s role as national capital and its international vocation bring with them (FF).

The Brussels Region receives EUR 100 million per year (an amount to be raised to EUR 125 million by 2007) exclusively for investments helping Brussels’ national and international role. The Region can also reckon on the so-called mortmain (EUR 29.3 million in 2004). This is a compensation for the exemption from advance levy on income derived from real estate from which the countless government bodies and international institutions in Brussels benefit. The city of Brussels can also count on an indexed exceptional allocation which is granted to it annually by the federal authorities, and which this year amounts to EUR 86.5 million. The Brussels police zones receive EUR 25 million extra every year for the costs associated with the European summits, although in practice that money is simply used to finance the police zones. The money originates from the EU and is forwarded by the federal authorities. Finally, further to the Lombard Agreement (the Brussels section of the last state reform operation, ed.), the federal authorities distribute a kitty of 25 million indexed euros (EUR 26.6 million in 2004) among the Brussels municipalities that have a Flemish alderman or OCMW (public social welfare centre) chairman. The federal funds flowing to Brussels do not prevent the region from complaining about a shortage of funding. Up until recently there was talk of the refinancing of Brussels being used as small change for the splitting of the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde constituency. It is not clear whether this line of thought still has a chance of success after Stevaert’s declarations.

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focus on FLANDERS • 25 September – 1 October 2004 • Number 33
Federal government sends DHL ultimate proposal
THE GOVERNMENT DECIDED TO SEND DHL A LETTER DEMANDING THE REPLACEMENT OF THE MD11 AIRCRAFT BY LOW-NOISE AIRCRAFT

On Monday 27 September in the evening there appeared to be a breakthrough in the DHL talks between the various governments. In order to accommodate the Brussels Government - which has agreed an upper limit of 25,000 night flights in its coalition agreement - a way of reducing the number of night flights was found: the quietest aircraft would simply not be counted. These are aircraft types with a low quota count (QC). This solution was described in most newspapers as a cheap trick, a way of getting a compromise at any cost.

But the next day the optimistic mood changed completely. Public Enterprises Minister Johan Vande Lanotte (SP.A) and Prime Minister Verhofstadt (VLD) had learnt in talks with the DHL senior management that the company could not give any guarantees on paper as to the promised 1,400 new jobs. A second point of contention appeared to be even more crucial, however. The company was assuming that it could still operate 16 flights per night using the very noisy MD11 aircraft, which its deploys on its intercontinental flights. The management points to a business plan, which was submitted to the Federal Government. According to the government this is a completely new piece of information, since it had been basing itself reluctantly on four such flights per night. This thesis is confirmed by airport operator BIAC, which claims that it was only informed on 23 September of an increase in the number of MD11 flights. An increase in the number of noisier aircraft is unacceptable for all parties. After a meeting of the federal inner cabinet on Wednesday morning 29 September the government decided to send DHL a letter demanding the replacement of the MD11 aircraft by low-noise aircraft. Should DHL fail to go along with this request, the negotiations on an extension of DHL’s establishment will be discontinued, confirmed deputy prime minister Onkelinx (PS) (FF).

DE TIJD • 29 SEPTEMBER

Various parties suggested on Tuesday that there could be no talk of an extension of DHL’s activities if the company maintained its standpoint. The Flemish Employment Minister Frank Vandenbroucke (SP.A) spoke of pure blackmail. ‘It is difficult to believe that in July DHL agreed to four night flights with the MD11 aircraft, and that now all of a sudden it is demanding sixteen such night flights. That is unacceptable,’ he said. However, DHL is sticking by the 16 flights, or 14 at the very least.

On Tuesday all parties were heard to say that negotiations could not be continued with the company if it continues to stick to its position. This would result in there no longer being any talk of an expansion scenario, and the option being chosen to keep the situation as it is at the moment, without any additional jobs. Only the VLD left the door slightly ajar.

The compromise proposal made by the federal government is based on 25,000 night flights over Zaventem, not counting the least noisy flights, humanitarian flights and government flights. Of these, 22,100 are reserved for DHL. In exchange for the expansion, the houses around the airport will be insulated, 1,400 extra jobs will be created, and DHL will renew its fleet with quieter aircraft. It is in particular this last requirement that DHL appears unable to accept. In the event of an expansion, cargo would also have to be flown to Hong Kong and Singapore, and that is only possible with MD11s.

For the Flemish Minister-President Yves Leterme (CD&V), a lot of technical questions remain unanswered. For example, it emerged from an urgent opinion that the Flemish Government had drawn up by a Brussels firm of lawyers that the reserving of 22,000 out of 25,000 night flights for one company might be in contravention of the European competition rules (De Tijd, 29 September). Furthermore, it is possible that DHL’s guarantee that it would purchase 65 hectares of industrial estate may not be legally watertight.
24 Sept: Stevaert threatens Brussels government

While the Flemish Government already had a unanimous standpoint on 22 September on the spreading of the night flights over Zaventem in the event of the courier firm DHL extending its activities at the airport, the Brussels Government failed to arrive at an agreement internally. The CdH's absolute requirement that the number of night flights be limited to 25,000 resulted in the VLD walking out of the talks and Minister-President Picqué (PS) having to go to the federal government without an agreement. The blocking in the Brussels Government is making a great many politicians on the Flemish side particularly nervous. SPA party chairman Steve Stevaert brought out the heavy artillery in the TV news magazine Terzake. On the programme he said that a situation in which small Brussels parties such as CdH and Ecolo take the country hostage cannot be tolerated. He felt that it was unacceptable that the Brussels Region, with its 22% unemployment rate, was preventing Flanders from securing thousands of jobs. Therefore he threatened regionalising the airport and reviewing the financial solidarity with the capital (FF).

BART EECHKOUT/WALTER PAULI • DE MORGEN • 25 SEPTEMBER

Stevaert: ‘Flanders has a sound proposal for DHL. If necessary, we’ll have to go and talk to the company on our own initiative. Then that does mean that the airport at Zaventem will have to be regionalised. Then we will assume our complete responsibility for employment at the airport’. The SPA leader also means what he says about ‘reviewing’ the solidarity. Stevaert: ‘We must review that in complete tranquillity. A large number of co-operation agreements still have to be concluded between Flanders and the Brussels Region. So Brussels will need us. Of course we are not abandoning our solidarity with the 22% of unemployed persons in the capital, but a few small Brussels parties, which are not necessarily speaking on behalf of the people of Brussels, are making it hard for us.’

Opinion

PETER VANDERMEERSCH • DE STANDAARD • 27 SEPTEMBER

The stubborn position adopted by the Brussels politicians only reinforces their image of other-worldly fighting cocks who do not look much further than their metropolitan drawing rooms. They are living on the time bomb of a 22% unemployment rate, in a region which is ailing economically, begging for the desperately needed refinancing, and is inextricably linked to and dependent on Flanders. But they are adhering to noise standards that are stricter than the Flemish ones and a sacred upper-limit figure enshrined in a coalition agreement, which leaves no room for further development.

Brussels, be warned. It is not the community quibblers who in the last few days have expressed severe - and well-considered - threats. It was the socialists Steve Stevaert, Hans Bonte and Louis Tobback who were at the forefront. Only later were they followed by the N-VA mandataries. Brussels should know that Stevaert and his colleagues are putting into words what is experienced in many Flemish circles - among progressives and conservatives alike; among extremists, but also among moderate Flemings.

27 September: Leterme in talks with DHL management

To build a main airport hub in Europe, we need a capacity of 34,000 night flights, said Peter Kruse at the opening of DHL's European IT centre in Prague. According to De Tiid (25 September), this means that Zaventem, with its 28,000 night flights (only 22,100 of which are for DHL), quite simply cannot become DHL's main hub. But DHL has not yet decided whether it will opt for an operational model with a single central main hub. The development of various regional sub-hubs is also an option. After these comments by DHL's chief executive, the Flemish Minister-President Yves Leterme (CD&V) requested a meeting with the DHL management in order to ascertain in greater detail what the company's specific plans were.

In those talks he learnt that the new deadline that the company is giving the governments is 30 September, and reported this during the opening session of the Flemish Parliament on 27 September. However, he was not prepared to reveal anything more about the content of the talks. In the meantime the trade unions are threatening to bring the airport of Zaventem to a standstill for an hour (FF).

BART DOBBELAERE • DE STANDAARD • 28 SEPTEMBER

There is not much room for negotiation. Either reductions are made or the courier firm only serves the Benelux from here from now on. With a good 22,000 flights Zaventem would be the largest DHL establishment in Europe. Yves Leterme did not join in with SPA chairman Stevaert, but did not desert him either: ‘In the short term that threat does not offer any solution, and we really have to get ourselves out of this problem in the short term.’ Leterme did not offer anything more than a fresh call for Brussels' loyalty. He had also looked into whether the ordinances (the Brussels laws) of the Brussels Region on emission standards could be overruled. The answer was no. And so Flanders remains almost powerless looking out for Brussels' indulgence.
**ECONOMY**

**AIRPORT**

Biac regards charter airlines as more important than DHL

The new shareholder can gain a maximum of 70% of the airport operator

The Belgian Government wants to reduce its stake in the Zaventem airport operator BIAC from 63.56% to 30%. The other 36.44% of the shares are held by ten private shareholders, including Ackermans & Van Haaren, Dexia Bank, KBC, the insurance company P&V, and Axa Bank, and they have not yet decided whether they will dispose of their holding. The potential investors have been given until 27 September to submit their application. In the end four candidates have been retained: the airport of Copenhagen, the Australian group Macquarie Airports, the French construction group Vinci and the Spanish company from the same sector Ferrovial. The new shareholder can gain a maximum of 70% of the airport operator. The value of this shareholding is put at EUR 500 million (FF).

Johan Corthouts • De Morgen • 27 September

An immediate decision as to who gains control over Zaventem is only expected at the end of the year. ‘The shareholders will take one or two months to analyse the proposals,’ says Pierre Klee, chairman of the BIAC board of directors. Officially there is no connection whatsoever between the privatisation and the further settlement of the DHL affair. But the uncertainty surrounding the question of the charter firm has consequences for the price tag put on BIAC. The crucial question is whether Zaventem can realise its growth potential to the full. In the long run the airport wants to more than double the number of flight movements to 450,000 a year, which could create thousands of new jobs, according to BIAC. Last year 15.2 million passengers passed through the airport of Zaventem, which recorded 250,000 flight movements (departures and arrivals). The airport is Europe’s fifth most important in terms of cargo. ‘If DHL decided to leave Zaventem, it would certainly affect things. But the DHL question does not have really major consequences for the privatisation of BIAC,’ says chairman of the House and former transport minister Herman De Croo [VLD].

The departure of DHL, if this were to occur, would cost BIAC 5% of its turnover. In itself that loss is too small to destabilise the privatisation operation. If charter airlines were to leave the Brussels airport, this would also cost the airport operator 5% of its turnover. To find a solution for the DHL affair, the Brussels Government is pressing for the night flights operated by charter airlines to be shifted to Liège airport. But BIAC views the prospect of the charter airlines leaving as inconceivable. It would sooner see DHL go than the charter operators. If DHL were to leave, Zaventem airport would be closed for a large part of the night. The loss in income would then be offset by the savings made in keeping the airport closed at night. If only the charter airlines were to leave, the loss in income would not be offset, since the airport would have to remain open for DHL.

[www.biac.be](http://www.biac.be)

**TEXTILE**

170 jobs go at bath linen producer Santens

The Flemish towelling producer Santens [turnover in 2003: EUR 93 million] based in Oudenaarde (East Flanders) is closing its weaving mill in Veurne (West Flanders). One hundred and forty-two employees are being laid off. The looms will be transferred to the head office in Oudenaarde, where 626 people are currently still employed. In that main plant the spinning mill is to be closed and 39 jobs axed. The cotton yarn for towelling will be sourced elsewhere from now on. De Tijd observes that sponge-cloth weaver Santens is the fourth textile company in a short space of time, after Louis De Poortere, EuroTapis and Prado (three carpet weavers), to have downsized. But the ‘big bang’ in the Flemish industry is yet to come. Insiders warn that this will happen next year (FF).

René de Witte • De Tijd • 30 September

FThe market in bath linen is evolving towards more high-quality products, says Santens, which was offering bath linen made of bamboo fibres and towels made of microfibres at the Heimtextil international interior textiles trade fair this year. The bamboo and microfibres illustrate how the sector is seeking innovative products that are not easily copied and with which a decent added value can be achieved. But this broadening is now costing 30 jobs. ‘We process an enormous range of different types of yarns, but the quantities are always too small for us to continue to do the spinning ourselves. We will now be buying our yarns on the open market,’ says Jean-Baptiste Santens.

The decision to discontinue the spinning-mill business is also the result of the increasing range of cotton yarn from countries such as Turkey and China. They are now supplying yarn that is often considerably cheaper than the yarn we make ourselves,’ says Fa Quix, director of the Belgian textile federation Febeltex. It will get even worse, Quix says, when the world export quota in the textile sector is removed on 1 January 2005. ‘It will become even easier to procure supplies from anywhere in the world,’ says Quix. Sectors such as clothing textiles or knitwear, in which a quota is still in force, will then have a hard time of it. ‘The big bang is still to come’ says Quix. Santens also points to the need to reduce structural costs in order to improve profitability. The message is that in the field of wages and energy and environmental costs, in particular, the damage is getting greater all the time. ‘And here we’re not talking about countries like India. We’re not asking to be competitive with such countries. We have to compare the entire cost environment in Belgium with that of our neighbouring countries, such as France, Germany and Italy. It’s in comparison with those countries that the gap is getting bigger,’ says Santens.

[www.santens.be](http://www.santens.be)
Coup by Suez at Electrabel

The numbers one and two at Suez, namely Gerard Mestrallet and Jean-Pierre Hansen, will henceforth be taking the helm themselves

After having been replaced as managing director of the natural gas company DistriGas two weeks ago, Willy Bosmans is now also stepping down as managing director of the electricity producer Electrabel. His enforced departure is the result of open friction between the Electrabel senior management and the French main shareholder Suez, which holds 50.01% of the Electrabel shares and prefers to outline policy on its own from Paris. The numbers one and two at Suez, namely Gerard Mestrallet and Jean-Pierre Hansen, will henceforth be taking the helm themselves, Mestrallet as chairman of the board of directors and Hansen from next year as managing director. The change of power is fuelling speculation about an all-out takeover of the rich Electrabel by the debt-ridden Suez. It is also the last in a whole series of incidents confronting the parent company with its subsidiary. For example, a few months ago Hansen and Suez organised a night-time break-in by computer hackers at Electrabel’s head office, and the Electrabel senior management was opposed to the expensive purchase of the financially ailing Suez subsidiary Fabricom. The vote in the board of directors on the appointment of the top two executives passed off in fairly unorthodox fashion. Hansen made the two appointments into a single package that had to be voted on. Calling for separate votes would immediately have been tantamount to a motion of no-confidence against Mestrallet, the reference shareholder’s senior director, explains De Standaard (29 September) (FF).

Meanwhile the first reactions to the appointments are being made. The socialist trade union ABVV fears that the change is the harbinger of a takeover bid by Suez. ‘There is the danger of the French group walking off with Electrabel’s reserves that have been built up thanks to the overly high price that Belgian consumers have paid,’ said the union. Stock market analysts also reckon that a bid by Suez for Electrabel is possible. Suez’s European energy activities, which consist of the Belgian energy companies Electrabel, Fluxys and DistriGas, account for no less than 84% of Suez’s available cash flow, says Steven De Proost of Delta Lloyd Securities. He thinks that a bid in cash and shares is possible before the end of the year. In his view, Electrabel holds assets that are still undervalued, such as the shareholdings in the distribution network managers and the French electricity producer CNR. Electrabel is worth in excess of EUR 16 billion, at a price of EUR 293 per share on 28 September. Moreover, Electrabel has taken the decision in principle to re-invest in nuclear energy, more especially in nuclear power stations of the EPR type, which is already in use in France and Belgium.

WWW.ELECTRABEL.BE
WWW.SUEZ.COM

David Adriaen • De Tijd • 29 September

Hansen declared in an initial reaction that he would carry forward Electrabel’s profitable and advantageous growth. A corporate governance committee has been set up in the board of directors, with the task of analysing new developments in corporate governance. In addition to Hansen, the committee consists of directors Lutgart Vanden Berghe (university professor and specialist in corporate governance, ed.) and Tony Vandeputte (former chairman of the Federation of Belgian Businesses (VBO)).
Bachelor degree courses get under way

This week saw the new academic year (2004/2005) get under way at the universities in Flanders. The 1,200 first-year students in Ghent, Leuven, Brussels, Antwerp, Kortrijk and Diepenbeek were able to choose from a completely new range of three-year bachelor degree courses, which replace the old ‘candidature’ courses. If everything goes according to plan, they will have a bachelor’s degree in the bag in the summer of 2007. Then they can start an academic master’s course of one or more years, or look for a job, although that latter option is not so self-evident. According to chancellor Van Camp of the Free University of Brussels, quoted in De Standaard (28 September), a ‘vocational (more practically oriented) bachelor’s diploma’ still offers better chances on the job market.

In a second phase the ‘decree enabling flexibility’ will come into force. This introduces a credit system replacing the current curriculum split into years (first year bachelor’s, second year bachelor’s) by a curriculum the component parts of which have credits or points attached to them (FF).

Opinion

Isleen DE VOOGHT • De Tijd • 27 September

Flanders has shown itself to be among the best students in the class as regards implementation of this ambitious European pamphlet. The decree-based framework for the reform was established and the universities and polytechnics diligently started working out the new programmes. For everyone agreed that a thorough revamp was needed, and not just some superficial embellishment. Unfortunately the establishments of higher education did not make use of the large-scale operation to rationalise the courses they offered. On the contrary, in fact, whilst the Bologna decree was in the pipeline, they lobbied vigorously for wider-ranging educational powers. Students can now choose from no fewer than 342 bachelor’s courses, and in the last few months the polytechnics and universities have spared neither time nor money in ensuring there were takers for them. However, over the next few years, during the accreditation or recognition procedure, it will emerge whether all these courses are of an equally high quality, and can thus compete with the international competition. Behind the scenes it is already being whispered that some of these courses will not survive the recognition procedure. Unfortunately, by then there will be students who will have already graduated in these subjects.

The student should not be the victim of this curricular passion. It is therefore high time that the polytechnics and universities saw to it that the range of courses they offer complements each other’s and is trimmed down. There is no point in Flanders, small that it is, offering the same course six times over. The polytechnics and universities have been asking for increased education and research funding for years. With some judicious trimming, their financing requirement would be that much smaller to start with.

EXHIBITION

Panamarenko in the Flemish Parliament

The exhibition is aimed at providing an overview of his work

Eighteen works by the Antwerp artist Panamarenko will be on display in the Lokettenzaal of the Flemish Parliament from 1 October. They are aimed at providing an overview of his work from 1975 to the present day. The exhibited works have been lent by the SMAK in Ghent, the Technical University of Eindhoven, the Fondation Cartier in Paris and the Jamar Gallery in Antwerp.

Flor Bex, former director of the MUHKA in Antwerp, gave advice as to the development of the exhibition, which has been entitled ‘on land, at sea, and in the air’. It is the second time that the Lokettenzaal has been fitted out to house an exhibition, having hosted ‘Icons of Design in Flanders’ last year (FF).

The exhibition is a foretaste of the major retrospective that will be held at the end of 2005 in the Brussels Museums of Fine Arts. In addition to nine major works by Panamarenko, four smaller creations and five multiples are on show in the restored giro cheque counters. Of the exhibited works, ‘Flying Island’ is Panamarenko’s largest piece. His more recent works, including the aerodynamic racing car ‘Thermo Photovoltaic Energy Converter’, the motor vehicle ‘K2’ and the space ship ‘Bing II’, stand alongside the hang-glider ‘Piewan’, ‘Umbilly I’ and Flying Wing, three works from the 1970s. At the reception held at the official opening of the exhibition, which was well attended by members of the Flemish Parliament, the Speaker of the Parliament Norbert De Batselier (SP.A) called the exhibition ‘a tribute to a pioneering artist’. Panamarenko, more than anyone, has put Flanders’ creativity on the international map, said De Batselier. ‘Exhibiting all the pieces was no easy task’. For example, the work entitled ‘Panama Spitsbergen Nova Zemblaya’, a submarine weighing no less than two and a half tons, had to be lifted into the building with the help of two cranes.

Visitors are given an audio guide in which Panamarenko tells anecdotes about his creations, in an entertaining Antwerp accent. A reduced model of the ‘Flying Island’, in the form of a do-it-yourself kit, can also be bought for EUR 50. Quite a few of those present, including some politicians, felt that the arrangement of the works of art was less than successful. It was said...
that there was not enough space between the exhibited objects. ‘I had to play along with the hall, which could not be ignored,’ said Flor Bex, in a reaction. On 1 October, the day the exhibition is opened to the general public, Panamarenko will be in Antwerp to receive the Plantin Moretus Prize for ‘Tekenen en rekenen’ (Drawing and Calculating), which has won the award for the best designed art book of last year.

www.vlaamsparlement.be

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