De Gucht want Coveliers out of VLD

Karel De Gucht, former Party Chairman, wants to initiate proceedings on Monday 6 December to remove Senator Hugo Coveliers from the party. Coveliers, who was relieved of his chairmanship of the parliamentary party in the Chamber last year, now supports the candidacy of Jean-Marie Dedeccker against that of Bart Somers, who he deems as the candidate who is manipulated by the leading trio of Verhofs-tadt-Dewael-De Gucht. According to De Gucht, Coveliers has conducted his campaign in such an ill-natured manner that he has damaged the entire party. Coveliers accuses Verhofsstadt of dictatorial tendencies and says that he is ruining the party. Earlier he suggested that the party leadership would not shrink from manipulating the counting of the chairmanship elections (FF).

LIESBETH VAN IMPE/ RUUD GOOSSENS • DE MORGEN • 3 DECEMBER

If on 4 September the votes are counted and one candidate has the support of more than half the members, the VLD will have a new chairman. But while the Liberals dreamed more and more frequently of a ‘cleaner’ campaign after the example of the CD&V, the main task of the party executive on Monday will be to assess the damage. Yesterday Minister for Foreign Affairs Karel De Gucht unexpectedly put yet another point on the agenda: the definitive exclusion of Senator Hugo Coveliers from the party. No one should be surprised that Coveliers’ position within the VLD has gradually become untenable. The Senator, until last week still a candidate himself, exceeded the bounds of decency several times in his criticism of the party leadership. But yesterday De Gucht’s timing caused many VLD members to frown. They fear that asking the question now, in mid-campaign, will give the signal that Coveliers is finished. De Gucht, however, picked his moment quite deliberately. He wants to avoid Coveliers talking on Monday of ‘a Night of the Long Knives’. Coveliers still intends defending himself tooth and nail. ‘They just want to get at Jean-Marie Dedeccker through me.’ He believes De Gucht’s approach is mainly suggested by PS Chairman Elio Di Rupo, but Coveliers himself feels he cannot be blamed for anything. Jean-Marie Dedeccker can no longer laugh about it. He sees an ‘operation damage’ by the party leaders, who want to get across the message ‘Somers or chaos’.

INTRODUCTION

SOME PEOPLE AND PARTIES, SURELY THEY 미국, are against Belgium and want to ruin our country. I can promise you that they will have to deal with me first. And do not forget: if necessary, I can be a tough nut to crack.’ With these comments Prince Filip held the front pages of Flanders’ papers for two days and turned political Flanders upside down. It included one N-VA MP inspired one N-VA MP to mockingly call him ‘Filips De Taaie, in imitation of 15th century Dukes governing this region such as Filips de Schone Duken and Filips de Graef. The Crown Prince, intended as a call for Belgian unity, also appear to be having a misplaced effect. This was once again evident on 1 December in the Flemish Parliament. Flemish-national parties such as the Vlaams Belang and the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie pulled out all the stops against what they viewed as an attack by the Prince on the fight for greater Flemish autonomy. Minister-President Leterme (CD&V) maintained a steady calm and sided with the Prince on the fight for greater Flemish autonomy. Minister-President Leterme (CD&V) maintained a steady calm and sided with the Prince on the fight for greater Flemish autonomy. But yesterday De Gucht want Coveliers out of VLD, who twice urged the Prince to exercise more restraint in the future. The contrast with the reactions on the other side of the linguistic border was marked. Francophone politicians felt that the Prince had shown courage and condemned Flanders’ separatist trends. And the Premier, who according to one of them (Joelle Milquet,CDH) had even reacted like a Flemish, not a Belgian prime minister, according to De Standaard and Het Laatste Nieuws. Francophone politicians merely reinforced the impression in Flanders that the Prince primarily serves the interests. This is evidenced by the results of a survey that appeared the next day on the front page of Het Laatste Nieuws. 55% of Belgians and 49% of Flemings supported the Prince’s comments on the Vlaams Belang. The duty commentator felt this was not enough: the population is divided. An unelected head of state must represent a broader consensus. And in particular rise above the party hustle, De Morgen added (2 December). Most comment writers also agree that by making these comments, Filip above all gave that other Filip (Dewinter of the Vlaams Belang) an open scoring opportunity, since he could again proclaim undisturbed that the Prince despises 1 million Vlaamse Belang voters. In short, for the other Flemish parties the Prince has only made things worse with his tough talking. And yet it is striking, De Morgophone concludes, that the VB, a self-declared republican party, never goes very far in its criticism of the royal house. Not difficult, since according to the same survey, 56% of Belgians have shown that more than half of its electorate are royalists. Finally, the survey by Het Laatste Nieuws raises a sneaky question. Is the Royal Family entitled to freedom of speech? 76% of Flemings think so. Dewinter, recently manning the barricades for freedom of speech, especially when racist opinions are involved, believes that the Prince should hold his tongue, concludes De Morgen.

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief

CONTENTS

Politics
Stop dirty campaign, says Verhofsstadt 2
Prince Filip makes comments about foreign trade 2
Prince Filip attacks Vlaams Belang 3
Vlaams Belang is not a new party 4
ACW’s political strategy 4

Health Care and employment
The kiwi-model of Dr. Van Duppen and Steve Stevaert 5
Rise of 11.9% in unemployment 5

Economy and social policy
Agreement on deepening of Scheldt 6
Belgium popular among investment houses 6
Additional pension scheme and early retirement on the agenda 7

Culture
Director Doroshenko sacked in SMAK 7
Prince Filip makes comments about foreign trade

At the end of the Belgian Trade Mission to China, which he led, Prince Filip called for foreign trade to be made more ‘Belgian’. According to the Prince, we should stop our ‘navel-gazing’ and our country’s regions and communities should combine forces. Pro-Flemish parties reacted angrily to the Prince’s comments. N-VA Chairman Bart De Wever pointed out that foreign trade was constitutionally regionalised and that members of the Court should refrain from political comment. According to Premier Verhofstadt, De Wever is looking for an incident where there is none (FF).

N-VA Chairman Bart De Wever reacted irritably to the Prince’s comments. ‘The Royal Family is decorum. They are given tens of millions of taxpayers’ money each year to play this role. If the Prince wants to express his own opinion all the time, he’ll simply have to take part in the elections.’ When a member of the Royal Family makes ill-chosen comments, it is up to the government to blow the whistle on him or her, according to De Wever. For Spirit, forcing control of foreign trade back into a Belgian straitjacket is out of the question. Jacques Hermans, spokesman for Federal Minister for Economic Affairs Marc Verwilghen (VLD), qualified the Prince’s comments. ‘He said we should speak with one voice. There is no question of the regionalisation of foreign trade being put up for discussion. Flemish Minister for Economic Affairs Fientje Moerman [VLD] reacted similar fashion. ‘It seems logical to us that the regions should co-operate to bring foreign missions to a successful conclusion. In this respect, the Prince can clearly open doors,’ says spokeswoman Anne-mie Nijs. In a statement Premier Guy Verhofstadt [VLD] reacted purely to the criticism of De Wever, not that of Spirit. ‘It is perfectly obvious that the Prince, after a successful economic mission in which all Regions took one voice, is expressing the hope that the regions can work even more closely together,’ he said. According to Verhofstadt, the N-VA is looking for an incident where there is none. De Wever is trying to push his own agenda, the splitting up of the country, into the foreground.’

WWW.EXPORT.VLAANDEREN.BE

■

Verhofstadt wants dirty campaign for VLD chairmanship elections to stop

The soul-searching that did not take place after the election defeat of 13 June will now rise to the surface, De Decker believes

Unrest is growing within the VLD in the run-up to the chairmanship elections on 4 December. Current interim Party Chairman, Bart Somers, has the backing of the party leadership, much to the irritation of the six other candidates. According to leading rival Jean-Marie Dedecker (VLD), party members are being intimidated. He even claims that VLD MPs are scared to talk to him. The Antwerp senator Hugo Covieliers, who withdrew his candidacy in favour of De Decker, is continually insinuating that the party leadership is cheating. They are wiping the floor with the party leadership in public debates. Both De Decker and Covieliers also want to no longer discount a collaboration with the Vlaams Belang. Comment writers in De Morgen and Het Laatste Nieuws argue in no uncertain terms that the party lacks structure and organisation and that this is undermining the party’s credibility. Premier Verhofstadt is sick and tired of the ‘dirty campaign’ of De Decker and above all Covieliers and let the party executive appoint a mediator to ensure the campaign remains calm. The mediator is Dirk Sterckx, VLD Euro-MP and previously the ministering angel when the party leadership forced Party Chairman De Gucht to resign because of his stubborn opposition to immigrant voting rights (FF).

LIESBETH VAN IMPE • DE MORGEN • 30 NOVEMBER

Bart Somers, and by extension the leading trio of Verhofstadt-De Gucht-De wael, against the rest, that in a nutshell is what the VLD’s chairmanship elections appear to be boiling down to. On behalf of the rank and file, the five remaining candidates have made the nerve to contradict Verhofstadt the key quality of the new chairman. While Somers is twisting and turning to avoid coming across as the establishment candidate, the other candidates are ensuring with targeted swipes that as interim chairman Somers has to defend the party leadership again and again. The party, which has already put one election defeat on 13 June down to internal bickering, is gradually beginning to realise that once the votes have been counted, the damage to its image will also have to be gauged.

Hugo Covieliers, who withdrew his candidacy last Friday, so far beat them all. He openly cast doubt on whether the votes would be counted correctly and in so doing trampled on many a Liberal’s dark-blue heart. In the end the party executive decided to unleash Dirk Sterckx to urge the remaining candidates to be more loyal and adopt a constructive stance. Sterckx himself is prepared to say little about his mission, he will call the candidates one by one. It is the second time Sterckx has had to help pick up the pieces, after he had become chairman in the aftermath of the power struggle between De Gucht and Verhofstadt.

It should come as no surprise that Sterckx’s appeal is aimed primarily at De Decker. In the Jong-VLD debate last Thursday Somers again lashed out at the former judo coach because he cast doubt on tax cuts, the Liberals’ showpiece. According to De Decker, everything is peachy keen. The soul-searching that did not take place after the election defeat of 13 June will now rise to the surface, he believes, and elections require stronger profiling.

■
Prince Filip openly attacks Vlaams Belang during China mission

Although all party chairmen find the comments of the Prince unwise and have rejected them, there is nothing constitutionally wrong with them.

Some people and parties, such as the Vlaams Belang, are against Belgium and want to ruin our country. I can promise you that they will have to deal with me first. And do not forget: if necessary, I can be a tough nut to crack.' With these words, recorded by the TV magazine Story in connection with the Belgian trade mission to China, Crown Prince Filip created a commotion in Flemish political circles.

According to royal journalist Louis Van Raak, the Prince gave express permission for his comments to be published, even though it was not an official interview, but a ‘table conversation’. When he heard the comments, Premier Verhofstadt (VLD) immediately contacted the Prince and then reacted with a statement in which he attributed the comments to the Prince having an emotional moment. According to the Premier, it does not tie in with ‘the current and future’ constitutional role of the Prince in our country, and he continues: ‘The Prince must remain at a distance, especially where political parties are concerned, even if these parties do not mean well for the future of the country’. Filip Dewinter, Antwerp’s leader of the Vlaams Belang, believes the Prince has overstepped his bounds: ‘He must abide by the laws and constitution of this country and refrain from political comment. Now he is giving the impression he has chosen the side of the Walloons against the Flemings. That is unacceptable. If he wants to get involved in politics he must make himself politically electable.’ Dewinter wants to call Premier Verhofstadt to book for the comments of Prince Filip. ‘What Dewinter is saying is completely wrong,’ reacted Van Orshoven. ‘There can be no question of Premier Verhofstadt being called to account for this.’ ‘There may well be a political problem if the Crown Prince makes such comments, but as a lawyer I am not about to comment on that. It depends on the politicians themselves as to how they deal with comments such as those made by Prince Filip. Strictly speaking, the political world can ignore them. But if it does so, that is a political decision with no legal foundation.’

‘I want to be King. I’m ready for it.’ This appeared in every paper in the country this week. Crown Prince Filip believes his time has come. His statement stood for precisely two days. The Prince is not (yet) ready for it. He has failed to grasp the number one rule of a constitutional monarchy. And that is very simple: say nothing about politicians and political parties. (…) If the monarchy wants to survive in a democracy - and that would be for the best in the dual country Belgium - it must limit its political role to the ceremonial and promotion-al. There is no other way.

THE MAJORITY SUPPORTS PRINCE FILIP

DO YOU AGREE WITH THE COMMENTS OF PRINCE FILIP ON THE VLAAMS BELANG?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Belgium%</th>
<th>Flanders%</th>
<th>Brussels%</th>
<th>Wallonia%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IS THE ROYAL FAMILY ENTITLED TO FREEDOM OF SPEECH?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Belgium%</th>
<th>Flanders%</th>
<th>Brussels%</th>
<th>Wallonia%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IS PRINCE FILIP READY TO SUCCEED HIS FATHER?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Belgium%</th>
<th>Flanders%</th>
<th>Brussels%</th>
<th>Wallonia%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Vlaams Belang is not a new party, Dewinter says

As a consequence, the Vlaams Belang is to retain its allocation of 135,000 euros a month, which the party receives from the Flemish Parliament

The Vlaams Belang is to retain its allocation of 135,000 euros a month, which the party receives from the Flemish Parliament. In that Parliament’s Extended Bureau, consisting of the chairmen, vice-chairmen and parliamentary party leaders of the Flemish parties, a majority of the CD&V, VLD and N-VA decided that the Vlaams Belang could keep its allocation. However, to claim this allocation the Belang had to publicly adjust its communication. Since its Founding Congress it had proclaimed in all the media that it was a new party. But last week it was given this difficult choice by the Parliament’s Legal Department. As a new party that did not take part in the elections of 13 June 2004, the Belang had no legal right to an allocation. If, however, it remained the same party as the Vlaams Blok with simply a new name, then its fate lay in the hands of the Bureau, which was responsible for deciding whether this party, which had been convicted of racism, could still lay claim to an allocation. In an official reaction to Parliament Chairman De Batselier (SP.A), Belang big guns Frank Vanhecke and Philip Dewinter stated that the Vlaams Belang was the same party as the Vlaams Blok. The Christian Democrats, Liberals and Flemish Nationalists did not want to put the Belang back in its cherished position of victim by taking away its allocation. The S.PA and Groen! wanted to apply the regulation strictly and temporarily withdraw the allocation on the basis of the ruling of the Court of Appeal. But the Belang has not quite got away with it yet. Based on the election results of May 2003, it is entitled to 173,000 euros a month in the Federal Parliament. The Francophone parties are pressing for this federal allocation to be withdrawn on the basis of the Racism Act (FF).

MARK DEWEERDT • DE TIJD • 30 NOVEMBER

Norbert De Batselier said that the Vlaams Belang ‘has abandoned its earlier principled stance and opted for the money’. ‘The main thing is that the Vlaams Belang says it is the Vlaams Blok, so the media circus of recent weeks is over,’ said Kris Van Dijck, Parliamentary Party Leader of the N-VA. The Parliamentary Party Chairwoman of SPA-Spirit, Caroline Gennez, spoke of ‘political beating about the bush’. Like her Groen! colleague Jos Stassen, she regretted that ‘some parliamentary parties felt it was inopportune to withdraw the allocation’. Dewinter said he was satisfied that ‘common sense has prevailed’ and ‘our Flemish allocation has been made safe’. He said he would suggest amending the regulation so that it would no longer be political parties but an independent body such as the Council of State that would rule on whether to withdraw a party allocation.

Dewinter said he was under no illusions about the allocation his party receives from the Federal Parliament. ‘All the Francophone parties, headed by the PS, will do all they can to take away our allocation,’ he predicted. He also admitted to being concerned with the attitude of the Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight Against Racism (Centrum voor Gelijkheid van Kansen en Racisembestrijding), which has opened an investigation following his statement that a ‘residency limit’ for immigrants should be introduced in certain parts of Antwerp. ‘And yet that’s the policy that has been adopted in Rotterdam,’ said Dewinter.

ACW’S political strategy shifts slightly towards greater openness

Over the weekend the Flemish press kept a careful eye on the conference of the Christian Workers’ Movement, the ACW. Above all the debate on political strategy and in particular the collaboration with the Christian Democratic CD&V was followed closely. In the end ‘preferably’ was added to several crucial conference text passages on the collaboration with the CD&V as a political partner, which boils down to defining the relationship with the CD&V as less rigid, claim De Tijd, De Standaard and De Morgen [29 November]. Chairman Jan Renders also emphasised the need to play a part in political decision-making with a left-progressive body of ideas, in contrast to the general trend to shift towards the right in society. Despite the presence of two ministers with an ACW stamp in the Flemish Government - Minister-President Leterme and Welfare Minister Vervotte - the ACW is fed up that it ‘always hears the same refrain’ from this government, namely ‘that for the time being there is no money’. Marc Justaert, leader of the Christian health insurance funds, discussed the political plan of action afterwards and announced that the new relationship with the CD&V created the possibility of stepping back from the party if it were to decide to form a coalition with far-right parties. If that happens in the local elections in 2006, it will in his opinion lead to ACW representatives withdrawing from this local coalition, claims Justaert in De Tijd [29 November].

WWW.ACW.BE
The kiwi-model of Dr. Van Duppen and Steve Stevaert

SPA politicians will table bills to auction medicines publicly, Stevaert announced

In ‘Het Nieuwsblad op Zondag’ last weekend SPA Chairman Steve Stevaert spoke out against expensive medicines. Not only are they too expensive for the patient, but also for healthcare insurance, whose budget is being derailed more and more quickly. The pharmaceutical industry makes massive profits, of which only 12% goes to scientific research for the development of new medicines, the majority being eaten up by marketing (24%), says Stevaert. SPA politicians will therefore table bills to auction medicines publicly, he announced. Stevaert supports the central purchase model common in New Zealand and wants to introduce it here. In New Zealand, for each ailment, healthcare insurance only refunds the cost of the medicine that appears the cheapest after a public call for tenders or auction. On the VRT programme ‘De Zevende Dag’ he received the backing of VLD Chairman Bart Somers and CD&V Chairman Jo Vandeurzen. Minister for Public Health Demotte (PS) did not reject the idea out of hand, but fears there could be legal and European objections. Leo Neels, Director of Pharma.be, the association of pharmaceutical companies, is clearly strongly opposed to calls for tenders. According to him, the system will cause a great many medicines to disappear, and even more seriously will slow down scientific research into new medicines. Stevaert got his idea from Dr Dirk Van Duppen, who strongly defends the New Zealand system. In his book ‘De cholesteroloorlog’ (The war on cholesterol), Van Duppen alleges that the application of the ‘Kiwi model’ in Belgium would lead to a saving of 1.9 billion euros a year for healthcare insurance and patients together (FF).

Stevaert supports Van Duppen’s proposal, which caused prices to fall by 40 to 90%. Van Duppen estimates that introducing the ‘Kiwi model’ would save 1.9 billion euros out of a medicines turnover of 4.5 billion euros. Healthcare insurance would have to spend 1.5 billion euros less, and patients would save 0.4 billion euros.

Opinion

GUY TEGENBOS • DE STANDAARD • 30 NOVEMBER

Van Duppen’s proposal caught onto the popular criticism of the large pharmaceutical multinationals and their billions of profits. No one felt inclined to do what they should: shoot the idea down ‘as a general solution’. And so the Kiwi model became the cure-all. Which it clearly is not. It is not just what the doctor ordered. It could perhaps be one of the mechanisms for forcing down prices, but only for a small group of medicines: those with an unambiguous application that are available in several identical forms.

The Kiwi model does not work if side-effects play a major role, if the market is fluctuating (new drugs, frequent price changes). Other methods are then more appropriate for forcing down prices. Our ministers have only recently discovered this: promoting generic medicines, refunds based on the cheapest drug, allowing doctors to prescribe by the common generic name of the medicene, allowing pharmacists to choose the cheapest brand and above all: convincing doctors to follow international guidelines. These methods are slightly more efficient, but highly complex and more difficult to explain.

WWW.PHARMA.BE

Rise of 11.9% in unemployment in Flanders

At the end of November Flanders had 24,869 unemployed job-seekers more than a year ago. That represents a sharp rise of 11.9%. However, Flemish Employment Minister Vandenbroucke (SP.A) puts this into perspective by pointing out that the statistics now also include older job-seekers and PWA employees, which distorts the picture. In particular, this group ensures growth among the semi- and unskilled unemployed. The employment prospects for highly skilled job-seekers have improved in recent months.

WWW.VDAB.BE

Rise of 11.9% in unemployment in Flanders

EVELYNE HENS • DE TIJD • 30 NOVEMBER

New Zealand uses the central purchase model for all medicines whose patent has expired. The situation is more complex for medicines that are still covered by a patent. ‘In that case New Zealand addresses each case individually,’ says Van Duppen. Sometimes a public tender is organised, but often private agreement is reached. The government then decides to refund an innovative new product provided the company lowers the prices of other useful medicines considerably.

The New Zealand system caused prices to fall by 40 to 90%. Van Duppen estimates that introducing the ‘Kiwi model’ would save 1.9 billion euros out of a medicines turnover of 4.5 billion euros. Healthcare insurance would have to spend 1.5 billion euros less, and patients would save 0.4 billion euros.

WWW.PHARMA.BE

Rise of 11.9% in unemployment in Flanders

EVELYNE HENS • DE TIJD • 30 NOVEMBER

New Zealand uses the central purchase model for all medicines whose patent has expired. The situation is more complex for medicines that are still covered by a patent. ‘In that case New Zealand addresses each case individually,’ says Van Duppen. Sometimes a public tender is organised, but often private agreement is reached. The government then decides to refund an innovative new product provided the company lowers the prices of other useful medicines considerably.

The New Zealand system caused prices to fall by 40 to 90%. Van Duppen estimates that introducing the ‘Kiwi model’ would save 1.9 billion euros out of a medicines turnover of 4.5 billion euros. Healthcare insurance would have to spend 1.5 billion euros less, and patients would save 0.4 billion euros.

WWW.PHARMA.BE

Rise of 11.9% in unemployment in Flanders

EVELYNE HENS • DE TIJD • 30 NOVEMBER

New Zealand uses the central purchase model for all medicines whose patent has expired. The situation is more complex for medicines that are still covered by a patent. ‘In that case New Zealand addresses each case individually,’ says Van Duppen. Sometimes a public tender is organised, but often private agreement is reached. The government then decides to refund an innovative new product provided the company lowers the prices of other useful medicines considerably.

The New Zealand system caused prices to fall by 40 to 90%. Van Duppen estimates that introducing the ‘Kiwi model’ would save 1.9 billion euros out of a medicines turnover of 4.5 billion euros. Healthcare insurance would have to spend 1.5 billion euros less, and patients would save 0.4 billion euros.

WWW.PHARMA.BE

Rise of 11.9% in unemployment in Flanders

EVELYNE HENS • DE TIJD • 30 NOVEMBER

New Zealand uses the central purchase model for all medicines whose patent has expired. The situation is more complex for medicines that are still covered by a patent. ‘In that case New Zealand addresses each case individually,’ says Van Duppen. Sometimes a public tender is organised, but often private agreement is reached. The government then decides to refund an innovative new product provided the company lowers the prices of other useful medicines considerably.

The New Zealand system caused prices to fall by 40 to 90%. Van Duppen estimates that introducing the ‘Kiwi model’ would save 1.9 billion euros out of a medicines turnover of 4.5 billion euros. Healthcare insurance would have to spend 1.5 billion euros less, and patients would save 0.4 billion euros.

WWW.PHARMA.BE
Agreement on deepening of the Wester Scheldt
A Flemish-Dutch working party has been set up to address the splitting of costs

Flemish Minister for the Environment and Public Works, Kris Peeters (CD&V), has reached a political agreement with his Dutch colleagues in Waterways and Nature on the deepening of the Western Scheldt. The agreement will be submitted to the Flemish and Dutch Parliaments before the end of the year. Ocean-going ships use the Western Scheldt to access the port of Antwerp. The channel needs to be deepened from 11.6 to 13.1 m to make the Western Scheldt navigable for larger container ships. The Netherlands has long delayed in approving the project, fearing as it did for the competitive position of its own ports of Vlissingen and Rotterdam. The farmers of the province of Zeeland also feared flooding and environmental associations saw a threat to the rich flora and fauna of the Scheldt basin. To protect the threatened nature, a number of nature-based objectives have therefore been included in a second section of the agreement. Finally, dykes and flood areas will be created to counter the risk of flooding. A Flemish-Dutch working party has been set up to address the splitting of costs. According to Minister Peeters, that aspect remains a hard nut to crack. (FF).

KATRIEN VERSTRAETE • DE TIJD • 1 DECEMBER

Flemish Minister for the Environment and Nature, Kris Peeters, yesterday received his Dutch colleagues Karla Peijs [Transport and Waterways] and Cees Veerman [Agriculture and Nature] in Brussels. The competent ministers reached a political agreement on the content and timing of the 2010 Development Proposal.

The deepening of the Western Scheldt is intended to promote access to the estuary for larger container ships to reach the port of Antwerp. The ground is expected to be broken in 2007. The cost of the deepening is estimated at 213 million euros, plus 12.1 million euros a year for maintenance dredging work. Strengthening nature in the Scheldt estuary is the second pillar of the agreement. Places of natural importance [salt marshes, mud flats, etc.] in the river area are receding year by year, partly due to land reclamation, deepening work and the natural rise in sea levels. The aim is to re-establish ‘a robust nature’ that can survive the coming decades. By 1 July 2005 it must be clear what measures will be taken to achieve these nature-based objectives. The third pillar - safety - will mainly be translated into measures to counteract flooding. For this, Flanders is adapting its ‘Sigma plan’, which is designed to protect the valley of the Sea Scheldt. According to Flemish and Dutch ministers, there is unlikely to be a flood barrier at Antwerp before 2050. Nevertheless, work will be undertaken to increase the height of dykes and create controlled flood areas.

The political agreement will be put before the Flemish and Dutch Parliaments by 17 December. At the end of January a ‘Memorandum of Consensus’ will be concluded with practical arrangements on the procedures to be followed. These arrangements will also be anchored in law.

WWW.PORTOFANTWERP.BE

Belgian Firms popular with European investment houses

Belgian firms are in vogue with private equity bankers. This is evident from a poll conducted by consultants PricewaterhouseCoopers among 55 such investment houses concerning their plans in nine European countries. The sale of Belgian firms such as nappy manufacturer Ontex, airport operator BiaC, the aluminium profile producer Aliplast and the carpets group Balta to Anglo-Saxon investment companies has produced a snowball effect. Family businesses, which are well run but have insufficient financial resources to fund growth themselves, are a particularly desirable takeover target. As a result, Belgium is the number one investment country among Europe’s private equity houses, ahead of the Netherlands and France (FF).

Kris Barrezeele • De Tijd • 2 December

Among the 55 private equity houses that took part in the survey are six Belgian players, including the GIMV, Alpinvest and ING Private Equity. Belgium has the large number of family firms available for takeover and the favourable fiscal climate for this type of transaction to thank for its high position on the ‘shortlist’ of private investment companies, says Jan Muyldermans, managing partner in the mergers and take-over division of PwC.

Many profitable, well-run Belgian family firms with a steady cash flow have chosen to pursue their own growth. The stock market crash in 2001 largely cut off access to public funding via the stock exchange. After two calm years, private investment companies have heaps of liquid assets from institutional investors and are looking for profitable investments.

Familiar cases in our country to date include Ontex, Aliplast, BiaC, Six Flags, Balta, Scana-Noliko, Bureau Van Dijk Publishing and parts of Carestel. Even more are waiting in the wings, promises Muyldermans. European private equity houses invest mainly in Europe. Half of the firms questioned also invested in Belgian and Dutch companies. The two countries are together in third place, behind the UK and Germany. Six out of ten private equity houses have planned investments in the UK, compared with 52% in Belgium and the Netherlands. Although 68% put Belgium on the ‘shortlist’, only 52% have concrete plans for our country.

At a European level, 74% feel that the tax system is of decisive importance to the profitability of a take-over, but only 54% find the fiscal climate favourable. In Belgium satisfaction rises to 66% because here no capital gains tax is levied on shares and the deduction of interest is unlimited.
Additional pension scheme and early retirement on agenda of negotiations

Over the next few months the government and social partners will negotiate a new professional agreement. Pensions Minister Bruno Tobbback (SP.A) hopes that the Collective Labour Agreement negotiations will provide a supplementary pension scheme for a number of sectors. At present around 1.3 million employees contribute to such a pension. Tobbback hopes that after the negotiations around 700,000 additional employees will also be able to benefit from one. Then half of all employees will be in a supplementary pension scheme.

In addition, measures must quickly be introduced to keep older employees in work, say the Flemish employers of VOKA. After all, Belgium scores extremely poorly in terms of employment levels in this age group. Among the over-55s, only one in four employees remains in work. In the light of the ageing population that is untenable. One of the reasons is the appeal of early retirement, which accounts for around 118,000 people in this country. VOKA wants to see this abolished, and to lend strength to its demand the employers’ organisation examined the costs of this expensive status. It reached the conclusion that it costs the Belgian State and business community together 3.645 billion euros a year. Of this, the government pays 1.185 billion euros. At the same time, however, it loses an even greater amount in (para)fiscal revenue, namely 1.858 billion euros. Businesses, for their part, pay 602 million euros in monthly benefits and bonuses (FF).

EVELYNE HENS • DE TIJD • 2 DECEMBER

Early retirement costs the government 1.185 billion euros in unemployment benefits each year, or an average of 10,979 euros per person in early retirement. And that is not the whole story. The business world also chips in. Each month, employers have to pay those who have retired early an additional benefit. This is half the capped net pay and the unemployment benefit. Often a further bonus is also agreed. VOKA also looked into the indirect social cost of the system. The State is missing out on fiscal revenue and social security contributions because those in early retirement are no longer working. The revenue lost as a result of the 108,000 people on early retirement amounts to 1.858 billion euros. Early retirement therefore costs employers and the government 3.645 billion euros each year. ‘The macro-economic price is gigantic,’ says Philippe Muyters, Managing Director of VOKA. He continues to maintain that early retirement must be abolished over a five-year period, to make room for incentives to remain professionally active.

He finds the concept of a ‘fiscal rucksack’ interesting. That assumes that employees who are eligible for early retirement get a bonus if they choose to remain in work.

WWW.VOKA.BE

MUSEUM

SMAK Director Doroshenko sacked

On 25 November the Board of Directors of Ghent’s Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art (Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst - SMAK) decided to sack Peter Doroshenko, an American of Ukrainian descent, following a one-year trial contract. His artistic choices, but also his communicative skills, did not live up to expectations.

The art world reacted with shock, and the press, it was felt in Ghent, one talk about Ghent. Doroshenko applied an overly secretive internal communication policy during his one-year trial period for that to be the case. Communication was also said to have been difficult externally, with cultural players, the museum-going public and the press, it was felt in administrative circles. This last aspect was not as bad as expected, we felt.

Things got off to a bad start when Doroshenko sacked two curators, pressed for the commercial director to be dismissed (in vain) and perhaps stirred up too little enthusiasm for his ideas. It was no secret that he was taking the SMAK in a different direction from his predecessor, Jan Hoet: in particular, scrapping extramural activities and falling back on the museum’s core tasks meant a significant loss of image and profile. Doroshenko’s professional ability made an impression, but people in Ghent expect a SMAK director to make contemporary art a public matter: interwoven with city life, providing food for discussion, making everyone talk about Ghent.

Only in the latter stages of Hoet’s directorship did the city invest fully in a museum of international standing. Once the city invested fully in a museum of international standing. Once the SMAK in a different direction from his predecessor, Jan Hoet: in particular, scrapping extramural activities and falling back on the museum’s core tasks meant a significant loss of image and profile. Doroshenko’s professional ability made an impression, but people in Ghent expect a SMAK director to make contemporary art a public matter: interwoven with city life, providing food for discussion, making everyone talk about Ghent.

When Ghent’s Alderman for Culture Sas van Rouveroij (VLD) informed museum staff of the dismissal of Director Peter Doroshenko (42) on 26 November, he was immediately met with hostile reactions. The 65-strong staff were unhappy about not being consulted at all on the matter, and are now telling the whole world. No concrete plans of action have yet emerged. The bungling does not necessarily mean that the majority are firmly behind the sacked Doroshenko. The American of Ukrainian descent applied an overly secretive internal communication policy during his one-year trial period for that to be the case. Communication was also said to have been difficult externally, with cultural players, the museum-going public and the press, it was felt in administrative circles. This last aspect was not as bad as expected, we felt.

When Ghent’s Alderman for Culture Sas van Rouveroij (VLD) informed museum staff of the dismissal of Director Peter Doroshenko (42) on 26 November, he was immediately met with hostile reactions. The 65-strong staff were unhappy about not being consulted at all on the matter, and are now telling the whole world. No concrete plans of action have yet emerged. The bungling does not necessarily mean that the majority are firmly behind the sacked Doroshenko. The American of Ukrainian descent applied an overly secretive internal communication policy during his one-year trial period for that to be the case. Communication was also said to have been difficult externally, with cultural players, the museum-going public and the press, it was felt in administrative circles. This last aspect was not as bad as expected, we felt.

Things got off to a bad start when Doroshenko sacked two curators, pressed for the commercial director to be dismissed (in vain) and perhaps stirred up too little enthusiasm for his ideas. It was no secret that he was taking the SMAK in a different direction from his predecessor, Jan Hoet: in particular, scrapping extramural activities and falling back on the museum’s core tasks meant a significant loss of image and profile. Doroshenko’s professional ability made an impression, but people in Ghent expect a SMAK director to make contemporary art a public matter: interwoven with city life, providing food for discussion, making everyone talk about Ghent.

Only in the latter stages of Hoet’s directorship did the city invest fully in a museum of international standing. Once the city invested fully in a museum of international standing. Once the SMAK in a different direction from his predecessor, Jan Hoet: in particular, scrapping extramural activities and falling back on the museum’s core tasks meant a significant loss of image and profile. Doroshenko’s professional ability made an impression, but people in Ghent expect a SMAK director to make contemporary art a public matter: interwoven with city life, providing food for discussion, making everyone talk about Ghent.

WWW.SMMAK.BE
Diary

MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE
• Until 16 January: Turkish Festival, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
• 1 to 9 December: Vooruit Geluid Festival ‘Etoiles Polaires’ with Shaman, King Island Drummers, Olga Chonka (Siberia), Jaguar (Iceland), Think of One Meets Nunavik Inuit throat Singers, Karnavana, Kira Kira, Mugson, Helvitis Microphonia, Trabant, Apparat Organ Quartet and others; Vooruit, Ghent; info: www.vooruit.be;
• 6 and 7 December: Mustafa Kaplan or Filiz Sizanli, Taldance company Dolap or Sek; Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
• 6 December: Choir and Orchestra Collegium Vocale Ghent conducted by Philippe Herreweghe, Weihnachtsoratorium by JS Bach; De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• 7 December: Les Banques Nomades, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
• 8 December: Thierry Robin or Gulabi Sapatra (France/India); Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
• 8 December: Sofaa (Burkina Faso), Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
• 8 December: Joe McPhee Quartet (jazz); De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• 9 to 12 December: Cindy Van Acker – Compagnie Greffe (CH), Balk 00-49 (Dance); Kaaitheater, Brussels; info: www.kaaitheater.be
• 7 to 31 December: A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Opera by Benjamin Britten, director David McVicar, De Munt, Brussels; info: 0270/233.939 www.demunt.be
• 8 December: Ed Harcourt (+ Stoen), Royal Circus, Brussels; info: 02/218.37.32 www.botanique.be
• 9, 10, 11 and 12 December: Symphonic Orchestra of Flanders conducted by David Angus with Eroica by Prokoviev, Dvorak and Beethoven, Conservatory Brussels, Concertgebouw Bruges, De Bijloke Ghent and De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.symfonieorchestra.be
• 10 December: John Cale; Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
• 10 and 11 December: Volksbühne am Rosaluxemburg-Platz with ZT Hollandia, De Speler by Dostojewski (German and Dutch spoken); De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• 11 December: Luka Bloom, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
• 11 December: David or Alfredo Lagos, Flamencos from Jerez de la Frontera, Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: 03/248.01.00 www.zuiderpershuis.be
• 11 December: Tango Passion, Concertgebouw, Bruges; info: 070/22.33.02 www.concertgebouw.be
• 12 December: Akikazu Nakamura (Japanese Shakuhachi Music), Zuideropershuis, Antwerp; info: 03/248.01.00 www.zuiderpershuis.be
• 12 December: National Orchestra conducted by Mikko Franck with Severin Von Eckardstein, van Beethoven and Brahms; Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
• 12 December: Academy of Ancient Music conducted by Paul Goodman with Monteverdi and others; Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
• 15 December: Akram Khan Company with Ma, contemporary dance, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• 17 December: Nikolai Luganski (piano) with van Beethoven, Chopin, Prokoviev and Rachmaninoff, De Singel, Antwerp, info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• 18 December: Orchestre Symphonique de Liège, Chaoum Symphonique de Namur, Louis Langlé, Sophie Karthäuser, Werner Gura, Reinhard Hagen with Die Schöpfung by J. Haydn, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
• 19 December: Collegium Vocale, Philippe Herreweghe, Weihnachtsoratorium by JS Bach; Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
• 21 December: Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin/Rias Kammerchor conducted by Daniel Reuss, Messiah by GF Händel; De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• 22 December: Capella Sint-Petersburg, Concertgebouw, Bruges; info: 070/22.33.02 www.concertgebouw.be

EXPO
• Until 27 February: Tatu-Tattoo, exhibition, Royal Museum for Art and History, Cinquantenaire, Brussels; info: 02/741.72.11 or www.kmkg.be
• Until 16 January: Exhibition: Mothers, goddesses and sultanes from prehistory until the end of the Ottoman empire, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
• Until 10 November: Body and Cosmos, Pre-Columbian sculptures from Mexico, ING Cultural Center, Brussels; info: 02/547.22.92
• Until 12 December: Elliot Erwitt, photographer, exhibition, Botanique, Brussels; info: 02/218.37.32 www.botanique.be
• Until 28 February: Maarten Van Severen, exhibition, Design Museum, Ghent; info: http://design.museum.gent.be
• Until 13 March: The Heart, exhibition, Museum Dr Guislain, Ghent; info: www.museumdrguislain.be
• Until 19 December: Alphaville, exhibition by Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• Until 9 January: John Mc Cracken, exhibition, SMAK, Ghent; info: www.smak.be
• Until 28 February: Maarten Van Severen, exhibition, Design Museum, Ghent; info: http://design.museum.gent.be
• Until 31 December: De man versierd?, diamond jewels for men, Diamond Museum, Antwerp; info: www.diamantmuseum.be
• Until 30 January: Malign Muses, when Fashion turns back, Fashion Museum [MOMU], Antwerp; info: www.momu.be
• Until 15 March: The Heart, exhibition, Museum Dr Guislain, Ghent; info: www.museumdrguislain.be
• Until 9 January: Goya–Los desastres de la Guerra in the Jacob Smits Museum, Mol; info: 014/31.74.35 www.jakobsmits.be
• Until 29 January: Panamarenko with Hinky Pinky Prova, Antwerp Luchtschipbouw, Antwerp, info: 03/271.06.67
• Until 20 February: Dedicated to a proposition, Extra City, Antwerp; info 0484/42.10.70
• Until 9 January: Inigongo, From dung to design, Caermersklooster, Ghent; info: 09/216.29.10
• Until 28 February: Fake/not Fake, Jef Vander Veken, restorer of the Flemish Primitives, Groeninghemuseum, Bruges; info: www.brugge.be/musea
• Until 30 January: Rodin back in Brussels, Royal Library, Brussels, 50 Bronze sculptures by Rodin, Claudel and Degas; info: 02/519.53.61
• Until 23 January: Body and Cosmos, Pre-Columbian sculptures from Mexico, ING Cultural Center, Brussels; info: 02/547.22.92
• Until 12 December: Elliot Erwitt, photographer, exhibition, Botanique, Brussels; info: 02/218.37.32 www.botanique.be

Focus on Flanders provides a weekly overview of articles from the Flemish press and appears in English, French and German. This newsletter is published by Uitgeverij Lannoo nv, Kasteelstraat 97, 8700 Tielt and can also be obtained by e-mail.

Editor in chief: Frank Van de Caveye
• Advisory panel: Luc Demeester (Lannoo), Rik Van Caewaelaert (director Knack), Wim Coensens (Managing director, De Morgen), Frans Croes (Director, Trends), Francis Decoster (Information Officer), Flemish Community (Belgium), Mark Deweerdit (journalist, Financiell-Economische Tijd), Michael Stabenow (Correspondent, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung), Luc Standaert (journalist, Belang van Limburg), Jan Van Doren (Deputy Director, Vlaams Economisch Verbond), Bernard Bulcke (De Standaard)
• Translations: Eurologos
• Printing: Druckerij Lannoo nv, Tielt
• Responsible editor: Luc Demeester, Marke
• Subscription rate by post and e-mail: 220 euro
• Telephone: 0511.44.62.99
• Fax: 051/44.41.52

E-mail: frank.vandecaveye@lannoo.be

FOCUS ON FLANDERS • 27 November - 3 December • Number 42