Code and bill for corporate governance

Twelve months ago the Lippens Commission was asked to prepare a code for corporate governance in companies by the Bank Commission (CBFA), Euronext and VBO, the national employers’ association. Since the Picanol scandal a few months ago, suitable regulations in this sector have become a matter of urgency. Jan Coene, the top man at Picanol, appears to have negotiated a huge remuneration on the basis of various semi-secret agreements. When this was leaked to the press, it immediately led to a legislative initiative from VLD senators, Vankrunkelsven and Willems, in which the publication of directors/managers’ salaries and share options has been made a legal obligation. The ‘Picanol’ Act was approved by the Senate on 9 December. Chairman Lippens submitted his final code on the same day. The code imposes the publication of salaries, but only for directors and designate directors and does not have a legal quality. It also defines that directors cannot accept more than five mandates in companies quoted on the stock exchange, that the Board should include at least three independent directors and that the majority of the audit committee should consist of independent directors as well (FF).

On Thursday Maurice Lippens submitted the final code to premier Guy Verhofstadt [VLD]. A draft code had already been proposed on 18 June to open up a wider consultation base. The final text is based on these consultations and recent European transcripts on corporate governance. The Lippens Commission maintained a flexible approach based on the ‘apply or explain’ method. This implies that those who do not implement a specific section of the code have to explain why. The code does not comprise the bill on the publication of salaries submitted by Vankrunkelsven and Willems [VLD]. ‘The code goes further than the bill,’ states Mr Lippens. ‘We hope to enter into a dialogue with parliament and the government to attain optimum coherence between the code and the law.’ The Senate approved the bill yesterday, but Senator Patrik Vankrunkelsven said that consultation with the Lippens Commission is a definite possibility.

Www.corporategovernancecommittee.be

INTRODUCTION

The Flemish Government team, which took over after the elections of 13 June, has been active for almost six months now. Knack (8 December) decided that this was an ideal opportunity to ask premier Leterme (CD&V) to take stock. In his public statements Mr Leterme likes to emphasise the difference this government has made compared to the previous Purple/Green government. The new premier has adopted a frugal and sensible approach. Where-as his predecessor, Dhaene, used to focus on communicating the message, Mr Leterme has simply scrapped weekly press briefings. He himself cannot be accused of inappropriate statements. After all his party always pointed the finger at the Purple/Green government for making, in its promises. The new style is based on ‘parler vrai’. He has adopted a very careful, and particularly economical, approach with a sense for figures similar to that of an accountant. When preparing his budget all ministers were expected to make cutbacks in their department. Expensive, large-scale reforms, such as those in the Flemish civil service, will only be considered if they do not incur any costs. Mr Leterme is irritated by the accounts he has to settle, which were incurred as a result of promises and agreements made by the previous government. The premier is targeting green ministers in particular, as they made agreements without the necessary financial backing. He now has to deal with this legacy together with his CD&V colleagues, Inge Vervote (Welfare) and Kris Peeters (Environment). According to the minister-president, departments such as Environment and Agriculture are too important to be left to green ministers.

He himself steps into the breach for the farming community. His colleague, Mr Peeters, is doing the same for the business community and has Leterme’s full backing. According to the minister-president the former top man of the organisation of small businesses, Unizo, Mr Peeters – who introduced his environmental policy document this week – knows what it means for companies to implement the green environmental policies in the field. In his document Mr Peeters invites companies to put their nose forward with respect to the achievement of their environmental targets. He has abandoned the green principles and feels that Flanders needs to take into account the socio-economic realities of a densely populated, heavily industrialised region. The soil purification budget has been decimated by cutbacks. His predecessor, Vera Dau, the current chairperson of Groen! reacted with vehemence. This is not an environmental policy, states Dau, but a policy that merely creates economic pre-conditions and ignores ecological problems. Flemish companies must be at the top in Europe and the Flemish environment is a mere detail. She feels that, with air and water qualities amongst the worst in the world, this is a very poor policy. Leterme is of the opinion that Dau ought to ‘calm down’. We invited Groen! to participate in the government and they refused, states Mr Leterme, and we are still paying for their policies.

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief

CONTENTS

Education
Flemish mathematics education best in the world 2

Economy, Mobility and Environment
Fewer environment regulations for companies 3
Light rail: the public transport of the future 3
American fund wants Electrabel to go its own way 4
Sale of minority share in De Post 4
Employers incensed about national union action 5
Banksys must pay for disruption 5

Politics
New VLD chairman Somers faces a difficult task 6
De Croo most popular within VLD 6
Coveliers demands rehabilitation 7

Culture: Anciaux saves Flagey 7
Vercauteren replaces Doroshenko at SMAK in Ghent 7
Flemish secondary education is world leader in mathematics, just ahead of Hong Kong and Finland. This is the most obvious conclusion of the 2003 PISA research. The Flemish education system is also in the top five for reading skills (third place), scientific insight (fifth place) and problem solving (fourth place). Using the global Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), the OESO tests the mathematical and scientific insight and reading skills of secondary education pupils every three years. The 2000 investigation focussed on reading skills, the 2003 investigation on mathematical skills. A representative group of 5,000 fifteen year olds from 162 schools took part in the research in Flanders. The sound mathematical performance is mainly due to a relatively large top group with strong scores. 34% of the 5000 pupils gained a score within the two highest of six levels. But there is also a downside – the group in the lowest levels is also very large. In other leading countries the situation is different. Finland for example gets its high score with a strong middle group and less pupils in the top and lowest categories. The second conclusion, therefore, is that the difference between weak and strong pupils is most pronounced in Flanders, not just with mathematics but also with reading skills and in other test areas (FF).

Kris Hendrickx • De Morgen • 7 December

Flanders still needs to make some improvements when it comes to equal opportunities. Similar to the French speaking community, the influence of socio-economic background on learning performance in children is still very high. Again it is obvious that top scoring countries such as Finland, Canada and Japan manage to combine an excellent average score with the pupils’ background having little influence on their learning performance. ‘We are world leaders in mathematics. It would be nice if we also became world champions in equal opportuni-

Vandenbroucke was yesterday’s response of the Flemish Education Minister, Frank Vandenbroucke (SP.A).

Vandenbroucke is of the opinion that the cause for this large discrepancy is also due to the level difference between schools. Pisa 2003 has demonstrated that this difference has a major effect on the test results in Flanders. The division into ASO (General Secondary Education), TSO (Technical Secondary Education) and BSO (Technical and Vocational Training) in particular appears to define the differences in learning results. Vandenbroucke mentions an underlining effect. On the one hand many children in Flanders originate from an environment that does not promote learning performance, i.e. immigrant families, which can soon create a gap should these pupils also end up in a school with low learning levels.

The examples of Korea, Canada, Japan and obviously Finland also prove that things can be different. Experts point to the fact that in Finland the difference between schools hardly affects pupil performance, as the distances between schools are considerable. In other words, parents cannot choose between different schools, so that none of the schools can profile themselves as elite or problem schools.

As of yesterday, it was not yet clear how Pisa 2003 could influence the Flemish education environment. Vandenbroucke would like to look in detail at how other countries manage to provide equal education opportunities to the underprivileged. The introduction of an equal education opportunity decree will no doubt be a first step. Vandenbroucke would like to review the current ASO/TSO/BSO system in the near future.
Fewer regulations for companies in new environmental policy document

According to the environmental umbrella organisation BBL the policy seems to be limited to the creation of economic preconditions.

‘More common sense and fewer unnecessary rules’ is the theme of the latest policy document of the Environment Minister, Kris Peeters (CD&V). The Minister, and former Unizo director, wants to get rid of the innumerable environmental regulations that have been irritating the business community for some time. Mr Peeters wants to eliminate patronising rules and allow companies to take the initiative in order to achieve their environmental targets. This does not mean that the policies of his predecessor, Vera Duva (Groen!), will be scrapped entirely. The Minister wants to achieve a better balance between ecology and economy, within the guidelines of the EU of course, but no more than that. The Flemish coalition agreement had already made it clear that Mr Peeters did not want to reinforce the minimum European regulations. The umbrella environmental organisation BBL reacted with concern. Peeters’ policy document does not provide any answers to environmental problems. According to the BBL it seems to be limited to the creation of economic preconditions (FF).

SYBILLE DECOO • DE MORGEN • 8 DECEMBER

‘Legal certainty’, ‘appropriate management’ and ‘transparency’ are the order of the day. ‘There are too many regulations. The aim is not to alter objectives but, compared to the previous government, I want to make a difference in the realisation of the policy’, stated the Minister. As a matter of fact the Minister does not have much room for manoeuvre, as most objectives and standards are imposed by the EU.

In reality companies will have more leeway to put their environmental targets into practice when, for example, purifying and discharging wastewater. Farmers should see improvements with yet another new, but this time simpler, fertiliser decree. For consumers the use of blue bags (for disposable packaging) should also become less complicated. Mr Peeters also hopes to be able to change the limits with respect to the structure that will be created to combat floods and the ‘overly detailed’ water quality standards in the integral water policy decree.

The minister also wants to become more pragmatic with respect to other issues. When it comes to soil purification he does not want to clean up more than necessary in order to protect the population and the environment, e.g. by encapsulating the actual pollution. ‘When a new company is established in a specific location, there is no need to make the soil safe enough for children to play.’ As announced recently by the opposition party, Groen!, Mr Peeters has reduced the soil purification budget by 90%.

It had also become clear that he is imposing considerable cutbacks on the budget for the acquisition of woodland. Again the objective of 10,000 hectares of additional woodland is maintained, but the Minister wants to shift the emphasis with less government intervention. He would like to use the example of woodland groups by creating local cooperation agreements, attracting private means and encouraging woodland owners (and hunters) to impose their own woodland and nature management techniques.

The Minister wants better supervision of the observance of environmental regulations but ‘without exaggeration’. ‘New sanction measures’ and a single environmental code, which should clarify the sanctions, are to be introduced. Companies will be able to count on increased involvement and Mr Peeters will have to take account of the economic cost of the environmental policies even more.

Light rail: the public transport of the future

If it was left to the Flemish Transport Minister, Kathleen Vanden Brempt, (SP.A). Light rail would become the transport solution of the future and provide a comfortable alternative to the car. Light rails are ultramodern, environmentally friendly fast trams that will reach speeds up to 120 km/hr outside urban areas. They will also adapt to urban environments with suitable speeds and new changeover points, where fast buses interface with fast trams. The rail timetables would also be adjusted accordingly. De Morgen (9 December) is of the opinion that the expected timesavings with such a new network are quite impressive. Limburg, party chairman Stevaert’s province, will be first to introduce the new system. The first fast tram network is expected to be ready there in 2014. The cost of the project in this province alone amounts to 150 million euros. The overall plan, referred to as Spartacus, is still in the design stage, but is expected to be finalised next year. Other provinces are then expected to follow. It is not yet clear where the money to finance the entire plan will be found. In Limburg support is being sought from the Limburg Conversion Company (LRM).

WWW.DELIJN.BE
American fund wants Electrabel to go its own way

THE INVESTOR IS ORGANISING A CAMPAIGN AMONGST OTHER SUEZ AND ELECTRABEL SHAREHOLDERS

In 2000 the French Suez group ditched its plans to split up into an environmental and an energy company. Had these plans been implemented, we would now be looking at a merger between the Belgian energy companies Electrabel and Tractebel. Suez, however, feared that its interests would be diluted to a limited minority interest in this type of merger. The company therefore opted for complete control in Tractebel and just over half in Electrabel. Nonetheless, it is expected that the Belgian electricity producer will also fall into the hands of the French holding company in due course.

Suez shares have not been performing well in recent years. They are at their 1991 level. The American Investment company and shareholder in Suez, Knight Vinke Asset Management, has written to the Boards of Electrabel and Suez to urge a change of course at Suez. This investor is organising a campaign amongst other shareholders. According to Knight Vinke investors would fare much better with the opposite situation whereby Suez is divided into two, i.e., the water and waste activities at Suez and the combined energy interests of Tractebel and Electrabel, under the umbrella of Electrabel. Knight Vinke Asset Management is not just any asset management company. In 2004 it brought a similar action to a successful conclusion at Royal Dutch/Shell. Furthermore, it is owned by Calpers, the pension fund of the state of California, the second largest institutional investor in the world (FF).

Knight Vinke and Calpers have jointly invested almost 200 million dollars (148 million euros) in Electrabel and Suez. That is but a fraction of the stock market value of Suez (18.59 billion euros) and Electrabel (17.5 billion euros). Electrabel shares reacted immediately yesterday following Knight Vinke’s announcement and rose by 1.5% – a remarkable feat. Shares rose steadily in recent months as investors speculated on a complete take over of Electrabel by Suez. Knight Vinke has now introduced serious question marks with respect to such a take over. According to the American investor a take over attempt by Suez would be associated with a number of political and financial obstacles.

The American investment company feels that the current combination of environment and energy within Suez does not generate any financial advantages. On the contrary, states Knight Vinke. The current organisation at Suez generates additional costs because the French utility group has two main offices and two stock market quotations, and has created an umbrella group holding in the process. Knight Vinke’s ideas are not new. Suez shareholders were already pushing for a division twelve months ago. Gérard Mestrallet, the French top man, managed to avoid a split at the beginning of March. Since then Mestrallet has managed to reinforce his position at the head of the Suez conglomerate even more. Following two years of losses the company is making a profit again. From the 1st January, following the departure of director designate Willy Bosmans, Mestrallet, as the new chairman, will gain even more control at Electrabel.

WWW.SUEZ.COM
WWW.ELECTRABEL.BE

Knight Vinke and Calpers have jointly invested almost 200 million dollars (148 million euros) in Electrabel and Suez. That is but a fraction of the stock market value of Suez (18.59 billion euros) and Electrabel (17.5 billion euros). Electrabel shares reacted immediately yesterday following Knight Vinke’s announcement and rose by 1.5% – a remarkable feat. Shares rose steadily in recent months as investors speculated on a complete take over of Electrabel by Suez. Knight Vinke has now introduced serious question marks with respect to such a take over. According to the American investor a take over attempt by Suez would be associated with a number of political and financial obstacles.

The American investment company feels that the current combination of environment and energy within Suez does not generate any financial advantages. On the contrary, states Knight Vinke. The current organisation at Suez generates additional costs because the French utility group has two main offices and two stock market quotations, and has created an umbrella group holding in the process. Knight Vinke’s ideas are not new. Suez shareholders were already pushing for a division twelve months ago. Gérard Mestrallet, the French top man, managed to avoid a split at the beginning of March. Since then Mestrallet has managed to reinforce his position at the head of the Suez conglomerate even more. Following two years of losses the company is making a profit again. From the 1st January, following the departure of director designate Willy Bosmans, Mestrallet, as the new chairman, will gain even more control at Electrabel.

WWW.SUEZ.COM
WWW.ELECTRABEL.BE

The day before yesterday TPG in the Netherlands reiterated that it was interested in a participation in De Post. Only last year the top man at TPG, Peter Bakker, declared that he was only interested in a majority shareholding, but that strategy has obviously been abandoned. Both Deutsche Post and TPG, which is active in Belgium via the Belgian Distribution Service (BDI) and TNT, recently submitted bids for a 25% share in the Danish mail system. The decision on this matter will be made around the year-end.

The Deutsche Post, which is active in Belgium via DHL, yesterday repeated that it would like to acquire a share in De Post. Back in April the German mail system already announced that it was involved in talks with the Belgian mail system on ‘possible cooperation’. Other than TPG and the Deutsche Post, which both have powerful logistics operations, the British Royal Mail, French La Poste and Swiss Post are also mentioned as candidate partners.

The Belgian Post is going through the final stages of its reorganisation. The reorganisation of its delivery routes, referred to as Georoute, should be complete at the beginning of next year. The modernisation of its counter activities is almost complete. Negotiations with the unions on the current CLA are progressing with difficulty. Top man, Johnny Thijs, has always maintained that he wants to finalise the search for a new partner within nine months. De Post is aiming to achieve a profit figure of 40 to 60 million euros this year.
Employers incensed about national union action

The employers feel that the announcement of the national union protest arrives at a very inopportune moment

On 21 December the two largest unions, the socialist ABVV and Christian ACW, are planning to hold a national protest rally. According to union leaders there is a lot of unrest amongst core militants and shop floor employees about the future of the early retirement scheme. In the first place the rally aims to send a clear signal that early retirement arrangements should not be tampered with. The employers’ refusal to discuss wage increases is also creating a lot of ill feeling. If the negotiations on a private sector wage agreement between the unions and the employers fail, the unions will see this as another reason to take action. These negotiations have been underway for a month and have produced few actual results. The unions and employers organisations have organised a three-day meeting next week, whereby negotiations are expected to continue to the end. The employers feel that the announcement of the national union protest arrives at a very inopportune moment. They are stating publicly that they are wondering whether the unions are intent on destroying the negotiations (FF).

EVELYNE HENS • DE TIJD • 8 DECEMBER

The employers were incensed. ‘This is most unwelcome. These actions do not create jobs, they are destroying employment opportunities,’ states Pieter Timmermans, Director General of the VBO. He feels that it is unseemly that, on the one hand the unions appear to want to negotiate, but on the other hand they are threatening with tough action. ‘We want to negotiate constructively on a wage agreement. It appears that the unions are opting for short term gain rather than a long term vision.’ Unizo is also disgruntled. ‘This is ridiculous,’ states Karel Van Eetvelt, the director designate. He wonders whether there is any point in continuing with the negotiations on private sector wages and employment conditions. The VBO and Unizo are still prepared to sit down and negotiate with the unions on Monday, when inter-professional conciliation will recommence. ‘We will see whether the unions are still interested in an agreement that does not undermine employment opportunities and economic growth,’ states Timmermans. If the wage negotiations fail, the ball will be in the government’s court.

Opinion

STEFAN HUYSENTRUYT • DE TIJD • 8 DECEMBER

Whereas neighbouring countries, which are also our main competitors, are busy economising, reforming the employment market and preparing their social security systems for an ageing population, our federal government and social partners continue to whine on endlessly. The crucial year 2004, announced by the socialist ministers Vandenbergroucke and Vande Lanotte at the beginning of this year, is nearing its end, but there have not been many signs of structural measures as yet. To some extent the federal cabinet has only itself to blame for this. Premier Verhofstadt continues to emphasise at every available opportunity that our budget and economic performance is markedly better than that of our neighbours. However, this increase in growth has also resulted in a continued delay in tackling our structural problems. When the economy grows steadily, the rank and file of the unions wants to cash in rather than moderate and reorganise – even if our strong growth rate has nothing to do with a strong competitive position, but is based on high national consumption levels.

WWW.ABVV.BE
WWW.ACW.BE
WWW.VBO.BE
WWW.UNIZO.BE

Banksys must pay compensation for lengthy disruption in electronic payments

The finger is pointed at Banksys, which manages the electronic payment system. It appears that there was a problem with the central computers at Banksys’ headquarters, but the exact nature of the fault has not been disclosed yet. In November 2003 Banksys agreed to pay compensation to traders if the network failed as a result of obvious negligence. First of all it has to be decided whether this was indeed a case of negligence, states De TiJD (6 December). Banksys has already agreed a lost turnover calculation method with Fedis. The Minister of Consumer Affairs, Freya Vanden Bossche (SP.A), has already consulted Banksys, Unizo and ‘Test-Achats’ (Belgian equivalent of ‘Which Magazine’). The Minister feels that consumers are entitled to a reliable electronic payment system. She would, therefore, like to arrange an investigation into how automatic payments could be maintained during a possible future fault, if necessary via an emergency network.

WWW.FEDIS.BE
WWW.BANKSYS.BE
WWW.UNIZO.BE
New VLD chairman Somers faces a difficult task

**CHALLENGER Dedecker has seen his position and credence within the party reinforced since 4 December**

With 50.46%, or to be exact 120 votes more than an overall majority, the current interim chairman, Bart Somers, was elected as the new chairman of the Flemish Liberal Democrats (VLD). This means that there will be no second round. His main challenger, Jean-Marie Dedecker, who wanted to steer the party more to the right, managed to gain 38.32% of member votes. The other votes were distributed amongst the four remaining candidates. 27,110 of the 72,000 VLD members participated in the election. The main surprise was, not so much Somers’ victory, but the excellent showing of Dedecker resulting in a moral victory during the election. During his initial address as new chairman Somers appealed for unity after a very bitter campaign. He promised to take more note of the party base, to be more critical of the government, in which the VLD triumvirate, Verhofstadt-Dewael-De Gucht, hold key positions. He also undertook to sharpen the profile and soften the image of the party (give it a ‘warmer image’). Dedecker has seen his position and credence within the party reinforced since 4 December. The former national judo coach is convinced that the VLD will now have to move to the right and continues to demand that the VLD should hold a referendum for Dedecker proves beyond doubt that many VLD members do not object to cooperation with the ‘Vlaams Belang’. The *Standaard* anticipates five challenges for the new chairman, Bart Somers (FF).

**BART BRINCKMAN - DE STANDAARD - 6 DECEMBER**

1. **Restore unity.** No other political party is involved in so many public skirmishes as the VLD. Bart Somers must find a way to keep these conflicts out of the media. To give the party a ‘warmer image’ is easier said than done. A reputation borne of historic conflicts, shouting and cursing does not disappear overnight.

2. **Build up confidence at grassroots level.** Notwithstanding specific support from the party establishment, almost 50% of VLD members are not keen on a ‘Somers chairmanship’. Even though the Mayor of Mechelen visited quite a few VLD departments in order to explain his plans, he obviously made little impression. The former premier will have to make major investments in a policy aimed at reversing these misgivings at grassroots level.

3. **Let go of the Verhofstadt generation.** Somers must put an end to the, sometimes, caricatural images that he is a mere puppet of Guy Verhofstadt. The premier created Bart Somers and could just as easily destroy him. The succession of the Verhofstadt/Dewael/De Gucht generation will definitely be the most difficult task. This does not imply, however, that the role of the ‘three musketeers’ has already come to an end. Nevertheless, new people – such as Vincent Van Quickenborne and Fientje Moerman for example – will have to be included in the top decision making process.

4. **Dialogue with Vlaams Belang.** Is there a ‘third’ option between the rating of Vlaams Belang members and a coalition with this extreme right party? Dewael and De Gucht manage to avoid their own failings in their fight against Dewinter & Co by holding the media responsible for the fact the Vlaams Belang, and not the VLD, is the largest party in Flanders. One way or another Somers will have to enter into a dialogue with the voters and elected candidates of the Vlaams Belang. The unexpected amount of support for Dedecker proves beyond doubt that many VLD members do not object to cooperation with the Vlaams Belang. A referendum on this issue will alleviate the internal conflict.

5. **Back to basics.** Responsibilities of government and growth through various defectors has diluted the VLD profile. Credibility with respect to core business - lower taxes, more room for independent initiative - is virtually down to zero. Somers must align himself again with the right wing core values. In doing so he will have to abandon the ideal of his predecessor, De Gucht, to develop the VLD into a people’s party. The party should resolutely apply itself to the multicultural society issue, rather than euthanasia or homosexual marriages.

De Croo most popular within VLD ranks

**FF EDITORIAL OFFICE**

In addition to a new chairman, VLD members also elected 15 representatives for a new party executive. This election has always been an internal popularity poll and defines the pecking order within the party (*De Standaard* 7 December). The party executive meets on a weekly basis and decides which line the party will adopt on a specific dossier. However, the current eight VLD ministers have to be replaced in the office and only have an advisory role. The results of these elections are remarkable in that it is not premier Verhofstadt, but old-campaigner and chairman of the House, Herman De Croo, who is leading the list. Verhofstadt has lost face since 2001. Ex-chairs, Karel De Gucht and Dirk Sterckx, both acquired a particularly strong score. Also remarkable is the fact that the new generation of young ministers and ministers of state are claiming places in the top 15: Vincent Van Quickenborne, Dirk Van Meechelen, Fientje Moerman, Patricia Ceyssens and Marino Keulens. Jean-Marie Dedecker is in seventh place, more or less a status quo, and Hugo Coveliers has a poor score. This election is definitely not a punishment for the party hierarchy, concludes De Standaard [7 December]. Liberalisers such as Patrick Vankrunkelsven [ex-VU], Karel Pinxten [ex-CVP], Fons Borgignon [ex-VU] and Johan Van Hecke [ex-CVP], attracted under the chairmanship of Karel De Gucht, are not faring well either. Other than Van Quickenborne [ex-ID21] none of them managed to break through. [table p. 3]
VLD: Covieliers continues to demand rehabilitation

Dedecker does not agree with Covieliers on this

During the chairmanship campaign Hugo Covieliers managed to outdo all others in berating, and hitting out at, the Verhofstadt-Dewael-De Gucht triumvirate. Covieliers -himself not particularly popular within the party – did withdraw his candidacy in favour of Dedecker, but continued to attack Verhofstadt, whom he compared to Stalin. He even briefly suggested that the party hierarchy would not be above manipulating the votes. That was too much for Foreign Secretary De Gucht. He demanded that Covieliers be evicted from the party and announced that he would submit such a proposal to the party’s statutory commission. However, the day after the elections that complaint seemed to have disappeared into thin air. Dedecker, who appointed himself shadow chairman after his Hugo’s departure, but I would not follow him, obviously not. I have the backing of 40% of VLD members.’

Somers agrees with his challenger on this and welcomes Covieliers. But the latter continues to demand rehabilitation from the party, for example by offering him the chairmanship in the Senate. Dedecker does not agree with Covieliers on this. The Laatste Nieuws wonders whether Covieliers wants to remain within the party, as he is threatening to establish a right wing/liberal splinter group list in Antwerp. The latter would then enter into a coalition with the Vlaams Belang during the council elections in 2006, although he admits to De Standaard that this is not yet certain. (FF).

‘Both Karel and Hugo would be advised to shut up now,’ placates Jean-Marie Dedecker. ‘I take my hat off to the way

Anciaux saves Flagey arts centre from decline

The splendidly renovated Art Deco building in Ixelles will also accommodate the Flemish Radio Orchestra and the Flemish Radio Choir

The Minister for Culture and Brussels Affairs, Bert Anciaux (Spirit), has awarded 1.5 million euros next year, and 2 million euros in 2006, to the Flagey Arts Centre. The destitute non-profit organisation, which runs the centre, had sounded the alarm bell and threatened to cease operations. After an unsuccessful appeal to the French Community, the Board did manage to get a response from the Flemish Community. Anciaux is taking the necessary funds from the Flemish Brussels Fund, so that the Flagey non-profit organisation will become a Flemish institution. The splendidly renovated Art Deco building in Ixelles, which used to house the BRT television studios, will also accommodate the Flemish Radio Orchestra and the Flemish Radio Choir (FF).

Everyone is happy, not least because Anciaux did not even have to break into the own cultural budget. After all, the subsidy is taken from the Flemish Brussels Fund, which has acted as a ‘piggy bank’ on previous occasions. The then premier, Bart Somers [VLD], had already used the fund last year to grant a 0.5 million-euro bridging loan to the non-profit organisation. There is no doubt that the integral subsidisation by the Flemish government represents a ‘reinforcement of the Flemish network in Brussels’, as stated by Anciaux. From 2005 the Flagey non-profit organisation will become an institution subsidised by the Flemish government. Two thirds of the mandates in the Board of Directors and AGM will be in Flemish hands. Equally important is the fact that the Flemish Radio Orchestra and Flemish Radio Choir, which have both been ‘peripatetic’ for several years, will get a fixed abode in the same building. It means that both companies will return to their ‘roots’ and, they are happy to say, ‘there is proof of real involvement in the implementation of a management vision in Flemish Community institutions’.

Anciaux was adamant that his gesture should not be seen as an expression of a Flemish drive to conquer a very Gallicised borough of Brussels ‘(Elsene). ‘On the contrary this decision is an olive branch,’ states the Minister, ‘an olive branch to all communities, and the French speaking community in particular. As far as I am concerned, this project could be the precursor of a cultural agreement with the French Community.’ Anciaux is making a case for this agreement being introduced during this legislative term. ‘Flanders has agreements with communities throughout the world. It would be madness if we could not achieve the same with our nearest neighbours.’

WWW.FLAGEY.BE

focus on flanders • 4 December - 10 December • Number 43
SMAK: Philippe Van Cauteren replaces Doroshenko

Philippe Van Cauteren, the former right hand man of Jan Hoet, will be the artistic coordinator of the Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst [SMAK - Municipal Museum for Contemporary Art] in Gent until 15th June 2005. This was announced on 6th December by the chairman of the Arts Committee, Sas Van Rouverooij [VLD]. Mr. Van Cauteren has been working as an independent curator for two years in Hamburg. His appointment is temporary. A permanent replacement for the recently dismissed Doroshenko is to be selected from the same shortlist from which the American was selected, or a new selection procedure will be set up. For the first time Mr. Van Rouverooij, who is also chairman of the Museum's Board of Directors, provided more details on the dismissal of Peter Doroshenko. Although the latter appears to have utilised his international network contacts, he did neglect the local network. Under his management the number of public events dropped from 14 to 3. Doroshenko wanted to impose a traditional hierarchical structure, but this affected internal communications and never really clicked with the Board. www.smak.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.

Diary

MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE
• Until 16 January: Turkish Festival, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
• 7 to 31 December: A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Opera by Benjamin Britten, director David Mc Vicar, De Munt, Brussels; info: 02/700.233.99 www.desingel.be
• 15 December: Akram Khan Company with Ma, contemporary dance; De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• 17 December: Nikolaj Luganski (piano) with van Beethoven, Chopin, Prokoviev and Rachmaninov, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
• 18 December: Orchestre Symphonique de Liege, Chevre Symphonique de Namur, Louis Langre, Sophie Karthauser, Werner Gura, Reinhard Hagen with Die Schöpfung by J. Haydn, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
• 18 to 23 December: Distler, Weihnachts-geschichte by Flemish Radio Choir conducted by Johan Duyck, Elzenvelde, Antwerp/Abdij Vlierbeek, Leuven/Virga Jesse
• 20 December: Capella Sint-Petersburg, Concertgebouw, Bruges; info: 070/22.33.02 www.concertgebouw.be
• 23 and 27 December: Nutcracker by Tchaikovsky with solo performers by Kiev ballet, ballet St Petersburg and Symphony Orchestra; Concertgebouw, Bruges; info: 070/22.33.02 www.concertgebouw.be
• Until 23 December: Carmen by Bizet, director: Calixto Beito, Flemish Opera House, Antwerp, info: www.vlaamseopera.be Christmas concerts:
• 23 December: Defilharmonie conducted by Christof Spering with Jean-Guihen Queyras (cello), Bijloke, Ghent; info: www.bijloke.be

EXPO
• Until 27 February: Tatoo-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
• 13 October to 16 January: Karel Appel, exhibition, Rudi Fuchs on a journey through the art of the low countries, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
• Until 16 January: Pacale Marthine Tayou. African art, Smak, Ghent; info: 09/221.17.03 www.smak.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
• December: Retrospective of Experimental Dutch Film; Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
• 18 to 23 December: Distler, Weihnachts-geschichte by Flemish Radio Choir conducted by Johan Duyck, Elzenvelde, Antwerp/Abdij Vlierbeek, Leuven/Virga Jesse
• Until 16 January: Carmen, exhibition, SMAK, Ghent; info: www.smak.be
• 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: Metamorphoses 1 (December) and IV (Marguiterie. L`an e le diable) by Ingrid von Wantoch Rekowski, exhibition, Beurschouwburg, Brussels; info: www.beurschouwburg.be

Editor in chief: Frank Vandecaeye
• Advice panel: Luc Van Cauwelaert [director Knock], Wim Coeckens [Managing director, De Morgen], Frans Croils [Director, Trends], Francois Decoster [Information Officer], Flemish Community], Mark Deweerdt [Journalist, Belang van Limburg], Jan Van Doren [Deputy Director, Vlaams Economisch Verbond], Bernard Bulcke [De Standaard]
• With thanks to: Concentra nv, De Vlijt nv, De Vlaamse Uitgevermaatschappij nv, De Persgroep nv, Uitgeversbedrijf Tijd nv en Roularta Media Group nv and their editorial teams for supplying the articles.

MUSEUM

• Until 4 May: Rudolf Lange, war witness, In Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres, info: www.inflandersfields.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 13 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, Antwerps 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: Invigoango, 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 19 December: Metamorphoses 1 (December) and IV (Marguiterie. L’an e le diable) by Ingrid von Wantoch Rekowski, exhibition, Beurschouwburg, Brussels; info: www.beurschouwburg.be

• Translation: Eurologs
• Printing: Drukkerij Lannoo nv, Tielt
• Responsible editor: Luc Demester, Marke
• Subscription rate by post and e-mail: 220 euro
• Either transfer the sum to account no. 8700 97 8700 Tielt
• Fax: 051/42.42.99
• Telephone: 051/42.42.99
• E-mail: frank.vandeveayee@gmail.com