Belgians repatriated EUR 8 billion in 2004

The ING bank has calculated that Belgians repatriated EUR 8 billion from foreign bank accounts in 2004, which is equivalent to 2.8% of GNP. The European savings directive, which comes into force next year and under which, for example, a higher withholding tax on income from movable assets has to be paid in Luxembourg than in Belgium, has clearly had its effect. Unfortunately for the federal government, only 10% of this 8 billion has been repatriated using the one-off exemption declaration (‘EBA’), better known as the tax amnesty. The aim was for the EBA to yield EUR 850 million, but it will probably bring no more than EUR 200 million into the treasury's coffers, conceded Finance Minister Reyners (MR). However, this capital flowing back into the country has had a salutary effect on the Belgian economy. Consumption has risen by 2.2%, double the figure for the euro zone. According to ING economist Vanden Houte, a lot of undeclared and semi-declared money has been spent on consumer goods and real estate (FF).

SERGE MAMPAEY/PATRICK LUYSTERMAN
DE TIJD • 17 DECEMBER

Despite the imperfections in the European savings directive, the ‘tax refugees’ have realised that the mesh in the net is getting finer all the time. Even Luxembourg appears not to be such a safe haven as many thought it would be, and the Cayman Islands are too far away and not well known for most people. Financial experts realised all too clearly that most Belgians would bring their money back illegitimately. True to tradition Belgians are suspicious of the authorities, with many also wondering about the legal certainty of the tax amnesty. The government is now faced with an awkward problem. The bulk of the money that has flowed back is illegal, but it is having a beneficial effect on the Belgian economy. Belgians are systematically spending the repatriated money, since going to the bank with declared money is thereby being ‘laundered’. True to tradition Belgians are suspicious of the authorities, with many also wondering about the legal certainty of the tax amnesty. 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Dedecker gradually makes his mark among new VLD party executive

He defends co-operation with the VB, but that certainly does not mean that he agrees with all the VB’s positions

The VLD is divided over whether it should enter into local coalition talks with the Vlaams Belang for the next municipal elections. Jean-Marie De Decker, promoted to spokesperson for the party’s right wing after his 38% in the elections for chairman of the party, thinks it should. Federal ministers Karel De Gucht, Guy Verhofstadt and Patrick Dewael think it shouldn’t. The Speaker of the Parliament and former chairman Herman Decroo feels that it would be in contravention of his Liberal principles. Nonetheless Dedecker is gradually making his mark among the VLD’s new party executive. He wanted an internal party referendum on whether the cordon sanitaire should be broken. This will not happen, but there will be an internal debate within the party on co-operation with the VB. The party standpoint in the meantime remains unchanged i.e. that co-operation with the VB is ruled out. After the debate the local party officials will be given an answer in good time to their questions concerning the municipal elections.

Dedecker defends co-operation with the VB, but that certainly does not mean that he agrees with all the VB’s positions. He feels they should abandon their twaddle about sending women who wear a headscarf back to their country of origin, the closure of mosques in cities, and so on. Dedecker is happy to profile himself as the champion of common sense. The cordon only makes the VB bigger and gives it a monopoly on the protest vote, he feels. And the left wing is using the cordon as a life insurance policy on power, since they are indispensable in every coalition formation (FF).

GILBERT ROOX • DE STANDAARD 11 DECEMBER

Most VLD members are gradually beginning to agree that the cordon sanitaire against the Vlaams Belang is not working and is even counterproductive. The reasoning is that the only way to curb the Belang’s march is to get into the bathtub with it. Then its popularity, as occurred in Austria, would soon begin to wane. Up to there all opponents are in agreement. But being the first party to breach the cordon sanitaire - now that’s a very different matter. ‘It’s as though you’re making a pact with the devil and selling your soul’, says Dedecker. ‘Of course it’s nonsense, but this is not about a love affair, it’s just strategy. And why be afraid? Our democracy is strong enough to withstand that confrontation, too. And anyway, what’s the alternative? Carry on with the cordon, so that the Vlaams Belang gets even stronger? We have already tarried for far too long. It has to happen in 2006, otherwise it’s too late.’

Dedecker goes even further. The cordon sanitaire not only makes the Vlaams Belang stronger, it is also bad for our democracy. [...] Look at the Flemish Government today. VLD, CD&V and SP.A are grouped together in a coalition along Antwerp lines: everyone together against the Belang. Fear reigns. To ward off mutual mistrust, the three parliamentary groups in the Flemish Parliament have now signed an agreement of silence. Alternative coalitions with the opposition can no longer be permitted unless all the majority parties agree. Where is the debate? As a member of the Flemish Parliament you’re merely a voting machine now. The agreement of silence is a violation of democracy.

Why didn’t the political establishment foresee this disastrous cordon long ago? Because it’s long since been about more than just countering the Vlaams Belang, says Dedecker. ‘The left wing is using the cordon as a life insurance policy on power, since it is now indispensable in the formation of coalitions. The protective shield is also eroding Flemish political power in Parliament. Therefore the Francophone parties immediately scream blue murder the moment anyone raises questions about the cordon.’

WWW.VLD.BE

Vlaams Belang opposed to Islam and Turkey’s membership of the EU

At the first leaders’ conference of the Vlaams Belang since the ‘burial’ of the Vlaams Blok, chairman Frank Vanhecke was re-elected, as expected, for a term of four years. Vanhecke was the only candidate and was re-elected, unlike in elections in other parties, not by the members but by some 450 executive members with a Stalinist majority of 94%. At this conference in Antwerp’s municipal theatre, Islam, the red and green parties and EU membership candidate Turkey were the sitting targets (FF).

PETER DEBACKER • HET NIEUWSBLAD 13 DECEMBER

Vanhecke emphasised that after the conviction for racism, the Belang was prepared to recognise mistakes made in the past, but was certainly not about to cowtow to anyone. ‘Because we’re not responsible for the immigrant invasion and the advance of Islam.’ All speakers expressed opposition to the possibility of Turkey joining the European Union, Filip Dewinter saying that Turkey would act as ‘the Trojan Horse of Islam in Europe’ if this happened. Dewinter is now extending a hand to politicians on the right wing of the CD&V and VLD, who he hopes will break through the cordon sanitaire. For he thinks that they are now being sabotaged by Steve Stevaert. Dewinter also called on the Flemish Minister-President Yves Leterme to cast political correctness to the wind and join forces with the Vlaams Belang. Yet Dewinter is pinning his hopes primarily on the municipal elections of 2006 and is already calling on his militants to convince N-VA, CD&V and VLD officials to ‘dispatch the Green/left-wing elements to the opposition benches once and for all’.
**POLITICS**

## Alternative majority for plebiscite on EU constitution

The holding of a plebiscite on the European Constitution splits the government majority in the Federal Parliament's parliamentary home affairs committee. The Liberals on both sides of the linguistic divide (VLD and MR) voted in favour, while, with the support of the extreme right-wing Vlaams Belang and Spirit, the alliance partner of the Flemish Socialists (SPA), obtained a narrow majority (nine against eight). SPA and its French-speaking sister party PS voted against a plebiscite, as did the Christian Democrats (CD&V, CdH), although these parties each gave their own reasons for their voting behaviour. SPA supports the basic idea of a plebiscite, but backs the Council of State in the view that a constitutional amendment first has to be made. According to *De Tijd* (15 December), the PS and Christian Democrats fear above all that the VB will make inappropriate use of the plebiscite to wage a xenophobic campaign against Turkey joining the EU. For that matter the VB is making no secret of the fact that it indeed plans to do just that. The plebiscite is scheduled to take place in May 2005 at the latest.

**WIM WINCKELMANS • HET NIEUWSBLAD 15 DECEMBER**

According to SPA parliamentary party leader Dirk Vander Maelen, a plebiscite is against the constitution. The Council of State is of the same opinion. Supporters of a plebiscite cite other jurists who assert the contrary. A plebiscite, unlike a referendum, is not binding on a government. The PS, in particular, is very much opposed to the idea. Chairman Di Rupo fears that it presents the VB with a perfect opportunity to rant against Turkey’s possible membership of the European Union, and that is not the subject of the plebiscite. VLD chairman Bart Somers reacted with delight: ‘In recent decades we have never been so close to a plebiscite in which all citizens in the country have the opportunity to express their opinion directly about an important social issue’.

The division in the majority formation calls to mind the vote on immigrants’ voting rights. On that occasion the Socialists and Francophones got their way, against the will of the Flemish Liberals. Now the Liberals are getting a chance for revenge. This time, if they continue their present stance, it will be the Socialists who will be isolated.

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## Never work with the VB, says Stevaert

*If nobody is prepared to co-operate, they need 51% to enter office*

On the occasion of an SPA debating day in Bruges, the party’s chairman Steve Stevaert ruled out the possibility of any co-operation with the Vlaams Belang, saying that their ideas were wholly contrary to everything his party stood for. He called on the other democratic parties to do the same and not to enter into any agreements with this party [in other words: to maintain the cordon sanitaire] at the next municipal elections in 2006, now that discussions about this are well and truly under way in the Liberal VLD and the Christian-Democratic CD&V. A Christian cannot work with the VB, just as a humanist Liberal can’t, either, he feels. If nobody is prepared to co-operate with the VB, they need 51% of the vote to be able to enter office and they will never manage that, he believes. Stevaert also suggested simply referring to the party by the initials VB (FF).

**FILIP ROGIERS DE MORGEN • 13 DECEMBER**

Nevertheless Stevaert believes that the best policy vis-à-vis the party is silence. He himself also wanted to keep quiet until the SPA’s New Year’s reception, when he had resolved that he would say ‘once again and for the last time’ what the position was. But the elections to the post of chairman in the VLD, where the cordon became an issue thanks to the candidacy of Jean-Marie Dedecker together with the public appearance of the Belang itself with its ‘new’ immigrants programme, made him change his mind. For the SPA, the VB remains no more and no less than a ‘hereditary enemy’. There are also Liberals in the VLD for whom the issue is not even worth debating. There are some principles that you do not disavow, even when you fall behind on your own. Karel De Gucht, that other Liberal who entertains zero tolerance of blue-brown (liberal co-operation with VB, ed.), is happy to back Stevaert. ‘At last’, he says in De Morgen. ‘In the past I have often felt as though I was the only one, when push came to shove. In the VLD Patrick Dewael, Guy Verhofstadt and others have regularly said where they stood, but in other parties there has often been a deafening silence.’ Stevaert did not want to sully any words on whether or not the VB had ‘merely shed its skin’ or on its programme. Only this: ‘They want to rid the cities of mosques. So what will be next? Synagogues? Courts? Teachers? Homosexuals? Courts? Journalists?’ De Gucht also sees nothing new in the VB’s immigrants programme. ‘On the contrary’, he says, ‘Some points, such as a ‘council’ using a neighbour check’ to determine whether an immigrant has or has not integrated, smack of Nazi practices.’ He sees no reason whatsoever why the VB should be treated differently now.

Www.sp.be
Wage bargaining blocked, but restarts on 22 December

The trade Unions are expecting the employers to come up with fresh proposals (FF).

On 13 December the talks on an inter-professional agreement for 2005-2006 between trade unions and employers' organisations ran aground on overtime and wage increases. The trade unions wanted a real wage increase over and above the index adjustments, but are not getting it. The employers want unrestricted use of overtime without trade union control, but they are not getting that, either. The next day unions and employers consulted their rank and file to see whether there was any point in negotiating further. There was no talk as yet of a definitive break, but pessimism dominated. On Wednesday 15 December employers and trade unions decided during a short meeting to resume the social dialogue on 22 December. The trade Unions are expecting the employers to come up with fresh proposals (FF).

EVELYNE HENS • DE TIJD • 14 DECEMBER

'We are at a complete deadlock on two points: wages and flexibility', conceded ACV chairman Luc Cortebeeck. The trade unions criticise the employers for not being prepared to grant more than the index, 3.3% over two years. There is reportedly no margin for wage increases in real terms, and there is uncertainty over wage-scale increases. The unions are moreover insisting that the employers want to use overtime without the prior approval of the trade union delegation. 'The employers want to secure 175 hours of overtime on an annual basis, 130 hours of which is not negotiated. That boils down to a re-packaged 40-hour working week', says Xavier Verboven, general secretary of the ABVV. The employers lamented the fact that the talks had been stopped. 'We want an agreement aimed at ensuring that companies can survive in a competitively difficult environment. That implies us being able to make unrestricted use of overtime, and the introduction of strict wage restraint without purchasing power being adversely affected', said Luc Vansteenkiste, chairman of the Federation of Belgian Businesses (VBO). He refused to say whether the employers were leaving any margin for wage-scale increases or real wage increases. 'The wage formation depends on the position adopted by the unions as regards flexibility. That is the most important aspect for us'.

EVELYNE HENS • DE TIJD • 15 DECEMBER

The three trade unions want to continue the talks only on the basis of a new proposal from the employers. 'What is on the table at the moment is unacceptable. We want an agreement with real wage increases, with flexibility arranged in concert, and with an increase in early-retirement arrangements', said Xavier Verboven, ABVV General Secretary. The trade unions emphasised the fact that the ball was in the employers' court. 'They should think carefully. They have to decide whether they want to opt for the Belgian bargaining model or a conflict situation', said ACLVB chairman Guy Haaze. Earlier in the day the employers had also consulted their rank and file. They showed themselves willing to continue the negotiations in order to arrive at a wage agreement. The employers' federations confirmed that they were indeed prepared to 'concede something on wages', as long as there was a fundamental breakthrough on flexibility. 'We want more overtime and cheaper overtime, via a flexible procedure', was the message. It looks very much as though talks on the national trade union demonstration on 21 December are being abandoned. There is considerable enthusiasm for this action among the rank and file.

Leterme refuses support to Wallonia for European subsidy

There is currently a discussion under way within the European Union between the Member States as to how much the EU can spend in the period 2007-2013. The Commission wants to spend 1.26% of the GDP of the Member States, but the large rich states regard 1% as enough. Belgium is arguing in favour of 1.15%, and Flanders and Wallonia range themselves behind that standpoint.

However, as Minister-President Leterme (CD&V) pointed out on 15 December in the Flemish Parliament, Flanders does not agree with the establishing of the support to neglected and poor regions at a high amount. In Wallonia a part of the economically stricken region of Hainaut is eligible for this support. Flanders, on the other hand, basically receives support for economic growth and jobs. If Wallonia succeeds in getting its support concretised, Flanders risks losing support if Europe reduces the support it gives to Belgium.

According to De Tijd [16 December], in this way Flanders wants to put pressure on Wallonia to make concessions in matters such as the splitting of the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde constituency at the Institutional Reforms Forum.

TRENDS TOP 30.000: THE PROFIT MAKERS (IN THOUSANDS OF EUROS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPANY</th>
<th>NET PROFIT 2003</th>
<th>NET PROFIT 2002</th>
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<td>4. NV COMUNEX</td>
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<td>10. GSK BIO</td>
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The Flemish Government is planning measures to grant socio-economic support to the region around the airport of Zaventem. The Strategic Action Plan for Redevelopment and Employment (abbreviated to ‘START’ in Dutch) is intended to be an answer to DHL’s decision to move its sorting centre to Leipzig. The economic growth of the region (the most important economic intersection in Flanders after the port of Antwerp) should be given greater opportunities by having certain bottlenecks ironed out. The plan aims to free up industrial estates for new activities and make the airport more accessible by road and rail, and will therefore boost employment.

The importance that the Flemish Government attaches to the project was reflected by the fact that virtually the entire government team was in attendance at the airport to present the plan. Senior figures from the Flemish Administration, and from the NMBS and airport operator BIAC were also present.

For Minister-President Yves Leterme (CD&V), the airport policy is in any case a test case to see whether a Flemish Government is able to bring about a lasting boost to the economy (FF).

BART HAECK • DE TIJD • 11 DECEMBER

The Flemish Government is freeing up five industrial estates in Meise, Vilvoorde, Machelen and Zaventem. A thorough soil clean-up is needed for 300 hectares of sites in Vilvoorde and Machelen. Companies will be able to apply for ‘Dutch on the workfloor’ instructors. Thirty-eight percent of job seekers in the region are non-Flemish speakers, says the Flemish Employment Minister Frank Vandenbroucke (SP.A), and in the case of low-skilled workers, that proportion rises to six in ten. When workers are threatened with redundancy, the Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Office (VDAB) is given the task of deploying a social intervention team or setting up an employment unit. At the beginning of 2005 Franck Vandenbroucke also worked out a co-operation agreement between the Brussels Region and the Flemish Periphery. The aim is to help unemployed people in Brussels (20%) to find jobs in the bottleneck professions in Flanders.

Transport is another area receiving attention. Only 15% of air passengers use public transport in Zaventem to travel to and from the airport, and only 4.5% of airport employees use public transport. The railway company NMBS wants to increase those percentages to 30% and 15%, respectively.

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Major infrastructure works should help here. If everything goes according to plan, Leuven and the airport will be connected by a rail link by the end of next year, offering travelling time of just 16 minutes [at the moment that journey takes an hour]. On the roads, there will be two new exits on the E19 Antwerp-Brussels motorway, as well as a special exit for the cargo airport Brucargo. Leterme wants to involve private investors in this latter investment. Next week he will be having talks on this with the Australian company Macquarie, the new owner of airport operator BIAC.

The Flemish Government thought briefly about buying a stake in BIAC, but has not done so, because its impact on BIAC’s policy would be limited. Next week, the Flemish Environment Minister Kris Peeters (CD&V) will make a definitive decision about the environmental permit for BIAC. The number of night flights is set at a maximum of 25,000 per year in the current permit. Leterme has guaranteed the new owners of BIAC that they will be able to implement their expansion plans.

WWW.BIAC.BE

TRENDS TOP 30.000: THE BIGGEST EMPLOYERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPANY</th>
<th>NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES 2003</th>
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The Council of State has deleted the Royal Decree governing implementation of the one-off exemption declaration (‘EBA’), better known as the tax amnesty. In March CD&V MP Hendrik Bogaert asked, as a member of the federal opposition, for the Decree to be annulled. He claimed that the tax amnesty had to be regulated in a law that was voted on. The Council of State took account of part of his comments and suspended Article 3 of the implementing order. But on 15 December the Council announced that the whole decree had been deleted. According to the federal government, the Council had made a typographical mistake, and ‘article 3’ was removed from the text, so that it appeared as though the entire decree had been wiped out. Finance Minister Reynders (MR) stressed that there was nothing intrinsically problematic and that the mistake would be rectified. The opposition party CD&V, however, seized the opportunity presented by the misunderstanding to again point to the ‘government’s sloppy work’ in respect of the tax amnesty, which in itself is not a major success anyway. There is again the risk of legal uncertainty for those who have used the regulation, whilst for those planning to use it before 31 December the rectification risks coming too late, warned Bogaert.

Het Laatste Nieuws [16 December] felt that the CD&V was unjustifiably blowing the mistake up into a huge incident and thereby undermining faith in the constitutional state. Minister Reynders had some cutting words for MP Bogaert the next day in parliament, accusing him of ‘undemocratic practices’ and ‘manipulation’.

FISCAL AMNESTY

FF EDITOR

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TRENDS TOP 30.000: THE BIGGEST EMPLOYERS

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Peeters’ environment policy now also opposed by SP.A

His federal SP.A colleague Tobback, Federal Environment Minister, regards Peeters’ environmental vision as far too defensive

FF EDITOR

CD&V Economic Affairs and Environment Minister Kris Peeters has been criticised left, right and centre over the last few days after the presentation of his environment policy memorandum. After opposition party Groen! and the Association for a Better Environment Company (VMM) which issued an annual report on the state of the Flemish environment, Tobback, Federal Environment Minister, regards Peeters’ environmental vision as far too defensive. The federal minister reckons that it reflects a shopkeeper’s mentality. In his memo, Flemish Environment Minister Peeters tries to gloss over the fact that he is not placing the bar very high as regards environment policy with the comment that Flanders is a densely populated region with heavily developed industry and a dense roads network. That is a huge handicap to environment policy, says Peeters, and he argues for more common sense in this field. According to Tobback the population density and high industrialisation are precisely the reasons why a much more careful approach needs to be adopted to the environment and more needs to be invested in environment policy here than elsewhere. Environmental pollution affects many more people here than in sparsely populated regions, and therefore investments must be made in the innovative environmental technology of the future, he feels.

Peeters goes a step further in his no-nonsense approach. In Trends (9 December) he also questions the federal choices that have been made in recent years in the field of energy and environment policy. In that interview he calls wind energy ‘hype’, even though federal minister Vande Lanotte (SP.A) is currently making every effort to develop a huge windmill park on the Thornton Bank in the North Sea. He regards as hypocritical the closure of nuclear power stations in 2015 in order then to import electricity generated by nuclear energy in France. Therefore he wants to reopen the debate on the abandonment of nuclear energy, even though there is an agreement between the government parties at federal level. There is also an agreement on the sharing of the Kyoto efforts [reduction of CO2 emissions] between the regions, but Peeters does not accept the federal government’s unilateral postponement of the exemption from energy levies for companies in Flanders. He also fears that Flanders will miss out on investments if it is so strict with energy levies. Moreover he feels that the federal government has negotiated the reduction of CO2 emissions poorly. Belgium has to take responsibility for 11% of the European effort, and he regards that as being far too much.

De Standaard comes to the conclusion that with his no-nonsense approach, Peeters is treading on the SP.A’s toes a little too much. If all ministers adopt an attitude like Peeters’, the Leterme I government will be a shambles, the paper concludes.

Environmental pollution costs Flemings five months of their life

Damage to the health caused by suspended matter, ozone, carcinogenic matter, lead and noise pollution are cutting five months of the life expectancy of the average Fleming. The calculation appears in the tenth Mira-T report produced by the Flemish Environment Company (VMM) which issues an annual report on the state of the Flemish environment. There is also some good news in the report. Emissions of dioxins, heavy metals and suspended matter dropped appreciably last year. But because Flemings consume more every year, use more energy and use the car more and more, the burden on the environment continues to grow (FF).

Suspended matter, ozone, carcinogenic matter lead and noise pollution are the source of cardiovascular diseases, respiratory disorders, cancers, and lack of sleep. ‘Last year that led to an overall loss of 36,000 healthy hours of life in Flanders, i.e. five months per Fleming’, writes the VMM. The real loss is actually higher since the exercise did not take account of damage to the health caused by carcinogenic PCBs, pesticides and BMRs (Brominated Flame Retardants) in air and food and the effects of climatic changes such as heat waves.

The biggest villain of the peace remains suspended or fine matter, which is 71% responsible for the loss of healthy years. These are minute particles of diverse composition (including heavy metals) which permeate deep into the lungs and increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases, respiratory disorders and lung cancer. The amount of fine matter in the air has not been falling since 2000. Industry, traffic and household energy consumption are the most important sources. Noise pollution is responsible for 18% of the healthy years lost, and cancer for 6%. Environmental pollution also has a detrimental effect on the purse. The VMM calculated that suspended matter cost Flemings EUR 1.1 billion last year in health expenditure. Traffic costs us as much as EUR 97 per 100 kilometres driven, in the form of health expenditure, economic loss, accidents, environmental damage and road surface damage.
Open tender should bring down the price of the Pill

At the council of ministers meeting on 23 December, Social Affairs Minister Rudy Demotte will table a draft Public Health Act which will drastically alter the policy on reimbursement of medicines. He wants to use it to enable medicines to be put out to contract by public tender, and has already been advised by the European authorities that there are no objections on a legal and technical level. Medicines that drop their prices will be granted a more favourable reimbursement, whilst others will continue to be subject to reimbursement, but at a lower rate. The larger price differential thus created should prompt doctors to prescribe the cheaper variety. The ultimate aim is to slash the prices of medicines. Demotte also wants to see to it that the pharmaceutical companies are no longer able unilaterally to pull out of the reimbursement system, as the producers of contraceptives are doing (FF).

ANN PEUTEMAN • KNACK • 15 DECEMBER

As of 1 January three of the five contraceptive pills (those of the brands Schering, Wyeth and Organon) will no longer be eligible for reimbursement. These brands reckoned they would rather forget about the reimbursement system because the price of contraceptives is only reimbursed to the tune of 20% and the tax on being in the system is fairly high. According to chemist and MP Maya Detiège (SPA), the companies are dissatisfied with a system in which the reimbursement is based on the price of the generic medicine (the patent for which has lapsed and which is therefore cheaper, ed.). ‘Because the generic pills cost people a lot less, the other companies lower their prices’, she says. ‘Whereupon the generic producers also implement a price reduction. This increasingly fierce competition ends up forcing the pharmaceutical companies out of the system’. As a result the ‘brand’ pills do not become cheaper, quite the reverse. It also now does not look as though the doctors will be prescribing generic pills en masse. For Detiège it is all a matter of convincing the doctors to do just that: ‘Today it’s already a major step for teenagers to ask their GP for a prescription. What’s more, they generally pay for the Pill out of their pocket money. To be able to get a prescription, they first have to pay for a consultation, and if the Pill then becomes more expensive, there is a risk of some giving up on the idea. As a rule they are not mature enough to ask for a generic pill - that is, if they know that these exist. I can only hope that the prices will fall further to the public contract. But that won’t happen overnight’.

Free museum visits on one Sunday every month

According to the SPA, the admission price is the reason why people do not go - or only rarely go - to the museum

On 15 December a delegation of the SPA, led by MP Magda De Meyer, called for an increase in the number of museums, the improvement of educational services and involvement of the public, and a sound variety of exhibitions (FF).

WILFRIED EETEZONNE • DE MORGEN 16 DECEMBER

The free-admission initiatives that already exist (municipal museums which are often free for residents of the city, Wednesday afternoons in federal museums, Heritage Days and the Museums Night on the Flemish Feast Day) are regarded by De Meyer as good but isolated. ‘You notice that an awful lot of people come along on those days. But you have to structure such initiatives. We want it to be a tradition that on the first Sunday of every month you can visit a museum with your family free of charge. We know about this from other countries. In Paris and London the museums are free and there there’s been a huge growth in visitor numbers, sometimes of the order of 60 or 70%. You see that the public is getting younger and that more families are going to museums. Sweden has also just started. My view is that we cannot be left behind’. De Meyer does not worry about the financial conse-
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: 02/703.33.99 www.demunt.be
- **18 to 23 December:** Distler: Weihnachts-geschichte by Flemish Radio Choir conducted by Johan Duyck, Elzenveld, Antwerp/Abdij Vlierbeek, Leuven/Virga Jesse Basiliek, Hasselt/OLV-Ter-Potterie, Brugge/Bigoloe, Ghent; info: 016/29.41.91
- **20 December:** Fazil Say(piano) and Serifat Eren (singer) with Haydn, Stravinsky and Camille Saint-Saëns, De Bijloke, Ghent; info: www.bigoloe.be
- **6 to 16 January:** Carmen by Bizet, Ghent Opera House
- **8 January:** Symphonic Orchestra of Flanders conducted by Etienne Siebens with César Franck, André Laporte, Maurice Ravel and Camille Saint-Saëns, De Bijloke, Ghent; info: www.bigoloe.be
- **10 January:** Recital Olga Borodina [mezzo] with Dimitri Yefimov (piano), Rachmaninov, Tchaikovsky and Moussorgski, De Munt, Brussels; info: www.demunt.be
- **12 to 14 January:** Frans Poelaert(Holland), his dramaturg and Bach (dance), Kaaitheater-studios, Brussels; info: www.kaaitheater.be
- **13 January:** Orchestra De Munt conducted by Stéphane Denève with Piotr Anderszewski [piano] with compositions by Dukas, Mozart, Roussel and Ravel, De Munt, Brussels; info: www.demunt.be
- **12 January:** Strauss Festival Orchestra, New Year’s Concert, Concertgebouw, Bruges; info: www.concertgebouw.be
- **12 to 15 January:** Guerre written and directed by Lars Noren, (French spoken), De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be
- **12 January:** Bird [singer-songwriter], Handelsbeurs, Ghent, info: www.handelsbeurs.be
- **13 January:** Ferhan Onder and Fezian Onder [piano] with Rachmaninov, Borodin, Kamran Ince, Rimsky-Korsakov and Mily Balakirev; Royal Conservatory, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be

**EXPO**

- **Until 27 February:** Tatoo-Tattoo, exhibition, Royal Museum for Art and History, Cinquantenaire, Brussels; info: 02/741.72.11 or www.mkmg.be
- **Until 16 January:** Exhibition: Mothers, goddesses and sultanes from prehistory until the end of the Ottoman empire, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be

**CULTURE**

Collection free, people will be prepared to come back and pay to see a temporary exhibition’. The SPA wants to start a campaign on the subject. The French Community has already picked up the idea.