focus on FLANDERS
THE DUTCH SPEAKING PART OF BELGIUM
PRESS REVIEW
weekly, does not appear in July • number 2 • 8 JANUARY - 14 JANUARY 2005

If removed from federal government, VLD will also leave Flemish government

It is not only the press that is expressing the fear that Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde could well be the stumbling block for the Verhofstadt II Federal Government. In recent days, all party headquarters have been pondering the political consequences of a clash between Flemish and Francophone parties. The Flemish Liberals have their tactics ready, in case they risk becoming the loser. At least that is how it appears from what Parliamentary Chairman Herman Decroo announced at his New Year’s lunch. If it is thrown out of the Federal Government, the VLD will also leave the Flemish Government, he said (FF).

WIM VANDE Velden • DE TIJD • 14 JANUARY

The Liberal warning could count. If the VLD withdraws from the Flemish Government, there is the risk that a political stalemate will emerge, as the Flemish coalition partners the CD&V/N-VA, SP.A-Spirit and the VLD condemned to each other. The alternative is that Groen! joins the fray, or the Vlaams Belang. But almost no one - certainly not in the VLD - believes in the chances of success of a change in coalition.

Furthermore, early elections for the Flemish Parliament are not possible. This makes the VLD necessary, and it is therefore considering exploiting or capitalising on this position. If the VLD is removed from the Federal Government, there will be chaos in Flanders and Flemish institutions will be blocked. Some in Liberal circles, however, are saying that all this is tactically unwise. Threatening to block the Flemish Government is going on the defensive and risks coming back to haunt them like a boomerang. In addition the analysis is gaining strength - not only in Liberal circles - that a crisis will initially hit the Flemish Government and the CD&V/N-VA. They are the ones who are calling for the splitting of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde. It is from this corner that the political need is the greatest to force a community breakthrough. 'It’s not the VLD, but the CD&V/N-VA who should be worried. But we’re turning it round,’ says a Liberal minister. ‘The problem of a change in coalition is not the issue. It is completely hypothetical and yet we are leading the debate on the matter. Are we shooting ourselves in the foot again?’ runs the rhetorical question. ■

INTRODUCTION
After the mass attention given to the Asian tsunami disaster, national politics has gradually returned to the foreground in Flemish newspapers and journals. Initially that did not offer an invigorating spectacle. In two weighty dossiers the negotiators appeared not to make a single millimetre’s progress, inspiring newspaper and journal commentators to map out doom scenarios with the collapse of the Federal Government as the end result. The first dossier is a community one, and has hardly been out of the news since the spring. The splitting of the constituency of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde requires ministers of both linguistic communities to be willing to make certain concessions at the inter-ministerial conference of the Federal Government. The VLD believes a vote in the Federal Parliament will irrevocably lead to the ratification of the Flemish bill, which is totally unacceptable to the Francophones. Equally predictably, the Francophones will then pull the emergency brake by invoking the alarm bell procedure. The collapse of the government is then just a matter of days.

Trade Unions and employers also withdrew into a hedgehog position for weeks in the social dialogue on a wage agreement for the private sector over the next two years. Employers demanded greater flexibility to make use of overtime, even without trade union approval. The trade unions called for a real wage increase, whereas employers believed there is only room for an index adjustment. In 2004 discussions misfired due to the inflexibility of both camps, while a national trade union demonstration on 21 December added yet more fuel to the fire. Meanwhile, Premier Verhofstadt (VLD) and Employment Minister Freya Vanden Bossche (SP.A) tried to get the negotiations back on track with proposals aimed at placating the social partners. When on 13 January they came up with 252 million euros - most of which is intended for employers - to lend strength to their proposals, hope returned slightly. According to De Tijd (14 January), agreement on the amount and its use led to lively debate between Liberal and Socialist ministers within the government. In the end they agreed on 120 and 80 million respectively for fiscal goodwill schemes for shift work and overtime. A further 40 million will go towards reducing employers contributions for the disabled, young people and unskilled workers, 5 million towards a work bonus for the lowest paid workers and 7 million towards a fund for employees of bankrupt businesses. These concessions are designed to soften up employers in the wage discussion. In turn, the unions have agreed to the fact that an agreement will be reached. Without such an agreement, the next social negotiations on end-of-career arrangements and the financing of social security will be an impossible task, all commentators agree.

Frank Vandecaveye • editor in chief

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Long queues at schools on first day of registration

On the first school day of 2005, several popular Dutch-speaking primary schools in Brussels saw long queues of waiting parents wanting to put their children’s names down for the 2005-2006 academic year. Some had been there for several days. The same phenomenon could be seen at several Freinet schools in Ghent. The phenomenon first saw the light of day last year and is a consequence of the Equal Opportunities Decree for Flemish Education (GOK), which took effect the previous school year (2003-2004). This stipulates that school heads may not create any more waiting lists and can no longer designate themselves those pupils who are eligible for registration. Henceforth they must register pupils in the order in which their parents present themselves. Two groups of parents felt they had been snubbed by the Decree: those who already had one or more children in a school and also wanted their brother or sister to go there and the Dutch-speaking residents of Brussels, who demanded priority in Brussels’ Dutch-language schools. Their wishes have been met by two amendments to the Decree. A prior registration period has been introduced for children with brothers or sisters at a school and for Flemish children in Brussels’ Dutch-language schools. For Flemish residents of Brussels, however, the priority lapses as soon as the school has 27% Dutch-speaking pupils (FF).

MARK DEWEERDT • DE TIJD • 11 JANUARY

Dutch-language schools have agreed to use the same registration periods. In an initial phase, in October and November, brothers and sisters could be registered. Yesterday, on the first day after the Christmas holidays, the ‘priority period’ began for children of Flemish parents. From 1 February children from mixed-language, homogeneous Francophone and foreign families can also be registered. Despite the amendment to the Decree, Flemish parents had to queue for hours at several Dutch-language schools yesterday morning in order to register their children. According to the Equal Opportunities Decree of his predecessor Marleen Vanderpoorten [VLD], which regulates registration policy and financial support for schools, as a first step in the direction of greater equal opportunities. He himself wants to tackle the structure and culture of Education. His document has four spearheads. The first is putting education more in tune with the labour market. Thus, the Education Minister wants social partners (employers and workers) to fix the final attainment levels of vocational training. A second point is the equal financing of education, which will now take place on the basis of school and pupil characteristics. This means schools with a large number of underprivileged pupils will receive more funds. Vandebroucke is suggesting introducing free primary education in the sixth school year from 2007. Thirdly, Vandebroucke wants to give schools greater autonomy and responsibility. The first measure is better pay and support for school heads. A second is a greater role for school communities, thereby reducing the fragmentation of the supply and any associated costs. Finally, the Minister is planning a less flat career for teachers with a reform of teacher training, which will be extended by a year’s practical experience with a mentor on 70% pay.

At the end of 2004 Education Minister Frank Vandebroucke [SPA] presented his policy document for Education. ‘Today champion in mathematics, tomorrow equal opportunities’ reads the title, referring to the excellent maths results achieved by Flemish pupils in the international Pisa study, in which forty-three OECD countries took part. At the same time that study also revealed that the gulf between the strongest and weakest pupils in Flanders is considerable. Hence the document’s title. Vandebroucke sees the Equal Opportunities Decree of his predecessor as a consequence with a mentor on 70% pay. Vandenbroucke builds on equal opportunities

FF EDITORIAL TEAM

Policy document for Flemish education builds on equal opportunities

www.frankvandenbroucke.be

USE OF 12-12 FUNDRAISING (SEE P.3)
Tsunami 12-12 biggest fundraising campaign ever

The absolute high point of the collection campaign is the benefit television show Tsunami-12-12 on TV1 and VTM.

FF EDITOR

The Tsunami disaster which affected the coastal regions of Sumatra, Thailand, Sri Lanka and India has also set the charitable wheels in motion in Belgium. In barely two weeks, almost 300,000 Belgians have sent a donation to victims of the disaster via the 12-12 account, so far totalling 19.8 million euros. The account number groups together a consortium of 5 charitable organisations: Oxfam, Handicap International, the Red Cross, Caritas and Unicef. They are distributing the money according to a fixed allocation formula and are promising maximum transparency with regard to how the funds are used. Donations of 30 euros and greater get Belgian citizens a tax certificate enabling them to partly deduct the amount from their income tax.

Organisations such as 11.11.11 and Médecins Sans Frontières are organising their own collections. At the beginning of January Médecins Sans Frontières International announced that the 40 million euros collected internationally was already enough to finance its emergency aid programme for the region. The organisation points out that the wholesale campaigns for Asia risk harming the generosity for humanitarian campaigns in other parts of the world. In Belgium the organisation collected 1.1 million euros. They do not want to stop the Tsunami collection, but made it clear that the donated money can also be used for forgotten crises such as Somalia, Darfur, Burundi or the Ivory Coast.

In addition to the collection campaigns of the major organisations, there are also the innumerable local initiatives in schools, businesses, hospitals, etc. The Flemish infoline has already counted around 5,200. But the absolute high point of the collection campaign will be the benefit show Tsunami-12-12, which the public broadcaster TV1 and commercial competitor VTM are organising on Friday 14 January. Obviously the aim is to collect as much money as possible. According to presenter Bart Peeters, the aim must be to match or even overtake the Dutch in terms of generosity. A similar TV show by our northern neighbours produced 7.6 euros per inhabitant.

www.1212.be

Agreement in Senate on drying out of racist parties

The Flemish Christian Democrats (CD&V) and the Vlaams Belang voted against the draft

The majority parties have reached a political agreement at federal level on the so-called ‘Extinguishing Act’, which allows them to reduce the endowment of parties that fail to respect the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) or promote racism. Last year the Chamber approved a proposal by Francophones Claude Eerdekens (PS) and Muriel Gerkens (Ecolo). However, the proposal still has to be approved by the Senate, and was yesterday on the agenda of the Senate Internal Affairs Committee. The proposal is primarily directed at the Vlaams Belang, the successor to the Vlaams Blok, which was convicted of racism in November 2004. Until recently, Francophones were calling for the Act to also have retroactive effect, so that a party could also be convicted of racism in the past. But the bill was toned down under pressure from the Flemish parties, and no longer applies to racist comments made in the past. Nevertheless, the Council of State, which rules on the withdrawal of party allocations, can take facts from the past into account in its rulings. If the Vlaams Belang is guilty of racism in the future, it could cost the party 2 million euros a year. On the evening of Tuesday 11 January the draft was approved by the Senate Committee by thirteen votes (majority parties + Francophone Christian Democrats CdH) to three. The Flemish Christian Democrats (CD&V), who are in opposition on a federal level, and the Vlaams Belang voted against the draft. This last party spent the whole day in delaying manoeuvres, having its eight senators speak for hours to postpone the vote for as long as possible. Earlier, however, a committee of the Flemish Parliament decided that the party could keep its Flemish party allocation. After all, most Flemish parties believe that the Blok seizes any opportunity to wallow in the role of victim and in so doing also scores points with the electorate (FF).

In the Senate the Almost-Act has been nicknamed the ‘Liberticide Act’. The Freedom-Killing Act. The name outlines the views of supporters and opponents. The supporters feel they are protecting democracy by preventing parties that are guilty of violating the ECHR from being financed by government money. The opponents, headed by the Vlaams Belang, believe exactly the opposite: that the Act is undemocratic because they want to attack political competitors.

On the Flemish side the Parliamentary Party Leaders of the SP.A and VLD, Myriam Vanlerberghe and Paul Wille respectively, said that the Vlaams Belang has nothing to fear if it sticks to the rules of democracy. ‘We don’t understand why it doesn’t approve this Act,’ they said. Wille also pointed out that it was not his fellow politicians that would judge the facts, but the Council of State. Joris Van Hauthem, Parliamentary Party Leader of the Vlaams Belang, spoke of ‘yet another attempt to silence a political competitor’. CD&V Senator Marc Van Peel claims that ‘deep down the Vlaams Belang is laughing up its sleeve’ because it can wallow in its cherished ‘role of victim’.

WWW.SENATE.BE
Flanders and municipalities keep federal budget out of the red

**FF EDITOR**

On 7 January Finance Minister Reyniers [MR] presented the definitive budget figures together with his Budget colleague Johan Vande Lanotte (SPA). A surplus of 15 million euros is not much, but compared with the other countries of the European Union, Belgium is performing exceptionally in budgetary terms. Only Finland is doing better, while the budgetary deficits of neighbours Germany, France and the Netherlands are 3.9%, 3.6% and 2.9% respectively.

In addition, government finances were balanced for the fifth year in succession and for the first time account for less than 100% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). At the end of 2004 the government debt amounted to 95.5%, and because debts are being reduced structurally, this will easily fall to 70% by 2010, claims Vande Lanotte. Only by 2015 will that be 60%, allowing the government to dip into the built-up Silver Fund, which is intended to cover the costs of an ageing population. Vande Lanotte believes that it is therefore better to increase efforts to raise employment levels instead of all concentrating on reducing debt. According to him, that is the best guarantee for continuing to be able to pay pensions. According to De Tijd [7 January], in so doing he has again dusted off the plan for an active welfare state of his fellow party member Frank Vandenbroucke. De Tijd and De Standaard [7 January] qualify the Federal Budget Minister’s triumph. Above all it is Flanders (+440 million euros) and the municipalities and provinces (+500 million euros) that have kept the budget out of the red thanks to a surplus of 0.4%. The Federal Government recorded a deficit of 0.3%, social security a deficit of 0.1%. The health insurance deficit [-9.8%] is particularly worrying.

**[TABLE P. 5]**

Facilities for Francophones in Flemish municipalities restricted

**FF EDITOR**

In December 1997 the then Minister for Flemish Affairs Leo Peeters (SPA) sent a circular to Flemish local authorities in which he instructed them to use only Dutch in administrative correspondence with the public. French could only be used at the express request of the individual concerned. This letter also applied to the six Flemish municipalities around Brussels, where the Francophones have facilities. With this circular the Flemish Government wanted to put an end to the custom of local authorities of, for example, automatically sending French-language tax-related post to those who had requested them on a previous occasion. This practice was not in line with the aim of the facilities, namely the promotion of the integration of Francophones in Flanders, the Flemish Government felt.

The Francophone parties, which were not happy with the circular, repeatedly asked the Council of State to suspend and annul it. In 1998 the Council of State rejected the requests for suspension and recently, on 23 December 2004, the Council also rejected the calls for annulment of citizens and politicians of Linkebeek, Kraainem and Sint-Genesius-Rode.

In so doing the Council has sided with the restrictive interpretation of the facilities for Francophones as a transitional measure. Dutch will retain its privileged position in a monolingual Flanders. The Francophones' broad interpretation of the facilities will lead to a system of bilingualism and is incompatible with the law governing use of language in administration, claims the ruling [De Tijd, 29 December].

Frivolous action of N-VA reminds francophones of transfers

**FF EDITOR**

On Thursday, 6 January the Flemish-national N-VA once again turned the spotlight onto financial transfers from Flanders to Wallonia. It symbolically loaded the transfers onto twelve small trucks, required to transport 11.4 billion euros in 50-euro notes, and deposited them at the ship lift of Strépy-Thieu, which the party claims is a ‘monument to wasted money’. The lift is seen as a textbook example of the old waffle-iron policy, according to which for each investment in Flanders one also has to be made in Wallonia, even if it proves to be little useful.

With its figures the N-VA far exceeds the transfer of 6.6 billion euros that was calculated by the Flemish Government. The party also includes in its calculations the proportionally smaller contribution to reducing Belgium’s debt, the contributions to the EU, whereby Wallonia receives and Francophones give and the distortions of state enterprises such as NMBS and the Federal States will negotiate on further steps in state reform. ‘We don’t harbour any historical hard feelings and are not driving at organised group egoism,’ says Chairman Bart De Wever in De Tijd [7 January], ‘but the Francophones have to realise that a ‘non’ to every Flemish request for state reform undermines the foundations of solidarity.’

Francophone leaders reacted particularly sharply to the ‘frivolous action’.

WWW.N-VA.BE
Crisis looms over Brussel-Halle-Vilvoorde

The fear is growing that the dossier could mean the end of the Verhofstadt II Federal Government

Shortly before the regional elections in June 2004 the splitting of the constituency of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde suddenly became a hot item. Flemish mayors from the constituency threatened a boycott if the Francophones were allowed to continue standing with their own parties in the monolingual Flemish district. The Flemish parties, all outspoken supporters of a split, placated the mayors. The split, so stated the coalition agreement of the new Flemish Government, would take place ‘immediately’ after the elections. We are now a full six months on, twelve bills are ready in Parliament, but at the end of 2004 Home Affairs Minister Patrick Dewael (VLD) was forced to ask for their discussion to be postponed until the end of January. Because if Francophones and Flemings fail to agree, there will be a vote in which the Flemish majority approves the split against the entire Francophone representation. The latter can then invoke the alarm bell procedure, which will pretty much signal the end for the government. Premier Verhofstadt has already announced that Flanders had better give up hope of not having to pay anything for Francophone concessions. But little headway has been made in the discreet preparatory negotiations with the Francophones. This is because the Francophones are much less willing to make concessions now they are losing the legal argument in the Flemish facilities municipalities. In particular the MR, which has a great many voters in the green belt around Brussels, is adopting a hard line. The splitting of the constituency is on the agenda of an interministerial conference for Institutional Reform, which will meet formally for the first time. Its purpose is to find a solution to a series of community dossiers. In practice this means that it will attempt to seek a compromise to the splitting of the constituency of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde, linked to ‘small change’ for the Francophones.

And that is where the problems start for the Federal Government, because the Francophones continue to maintain that they do not want a split, nor any small change.

The Court of Arbitration has, however, ruled that the current division of the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde constituency is unconstitutional and must be changed for the next elections, but according to the Francophones that does not necessarily imply a split. After all, merging Flemish and Walloon Brabant into one constituency would also be a solution, albeit unmentionable for Flemings. Another Francophone demand, the expansion of Brussels territory to include several Flemish municipalities, is not an option for Flanders. Nor is there much raw material from which to fashion a compromise. The Council of State recently confirmed the legal validity of the Peeters circular on the use of language in the facilities municipalities. This makes it very difficult for this circular to be reversed. The Flemish coalition agreement also explicitly states that there can be no question of signing the Minority Treaty of the Council of Europe, which could give Francophones in Flanders new linguistic rights.

Which leaves: Brussels. The Brussels Metropolitan Region is in need of financing, and extra funds for Brussels have also proved to be an excellent lubricant in previous state reforms.

A twofold problem here is that the Francophone parties in Brussels are not officially asking for refinancing and that the federal coffers do not have a wide budgetary margin. A second line being pursued is that of a relaxation of linguistic laws in government services in the Metropolitan Region. Replacing the compulsory bilingualism of civil servants by a guaranteed bilingualism of the service satisfies an old Francophone complaint.

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Ajit Shetty (Janssen Pharmaceutica) manager of the year

Shetty criticises the intention of the Belgian government to auction off medicines in the future.

Ajit Shetty, the boss of Janssen Pharmaceutica, is the first Fleming of foreign origin to be voted Manager of the Year by the readers of the business journal Trends. Shetty is a nephew of the late Dr. Paul Janssen, who made Janssen Pharmaceutica great. Shetty can be credited with having fished the company perfectly into the strategy of the American parent company Johnson & Johnson (J&J), and in so doing secured the Flemish anchoring of Janssen Pharmaceutica. In an interview in Trends Shetty also criticises the intention of the Belgian government to auction off medicines in the future (FF).

FRANS CROLS • TRENDS • 13 JANUARY

The CEO of Janssen Pharmaceutica is a triad man: Asia is his region of birth, Europe his residence and workplace and America his partner. Shetty has Indian roots, is a deeply religious Hindu and has lived in Belgium for years. Under Shetty’s leadership Janssen Pharmaceutica last year opened a new research centre, a project of 68 million euros that provides space for 300 researchers. In this way the fundamental medical research of the American group Johnson & Johnson was firmly anchored in Belgium. When Ajit Shetty became boss in 1994, Janssen Pharmaceutica had 3,000 employees in Belgium. Today it has 4,386. The pipeline has been filled with drugs to combat cancer, tuberculosis, internal diseases and schizophrenia. According to a study by the temping group Randstad, Janssen Pharmaceutica is also in the top three most attractive employers in Belgium for the fourth year in succession. The firm invests almost one quarter of its R&D in Flanders. Ajit Shetty is far from happy with the federal healthcare policy. He is particularly annoyed by the intention of Minister Demotte (PS) to organise public auctions for pharmaceutical products. Shetty: ‘It is far from certain that we will get involved, as it would have consequences on other markets. In Europe there is free movement of goods and services, but prices are set in consultation with the national government. The result of this is that in the cheapest countries of the EU wholesalers are buying up products en masse, repackaging them and selling them for a higher price in a more expensive country. This has already put 3.5 billion euros into the wallets of these parallel traders. These sums are not benefiting research or social security. We are therefore calling for prices to be set at European level for prescribed drugs and negotiations in each country on refunds. This will do away with the parallel trade. We will have the money for our research and each government can offer certain products more cheaply for its healthcare policy.’

WWW.JANSSENS

2004: Strong economic growth and consumption, but also rising unemployment

FF EDITORIAL TEAM

The newspapers traditionally close the year with economic final balance sheets and reviews of the past year. This year was no different. These show that broadly speaking the economy picked up, recording growth of 2.7%, that consumption grew, but that economic growth translated poorly into more jobs. For the Treasury this means that revenue from VAT rose appreciably by 7.2%, but that the RVA (Rijksdienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling - National Employment Office) spent more on unemployment benefits.

The number of unemployed in Belgium is approaching the landmark of 600,000. At the end of December there were 595,454 unemployed jobseekers. This is 40,600 more than at the end of last year. The biggest rise was recorded in Flanders, namely 24,000 compared with 9,500 in Wallonia and 7,000 in Brussels. However, unemployment in Flanders is still significantly lower than in the other regions: 8.6% compared with 18.4% in Wallonia and 21% in Brussels. Unemployment among young people did, however, show a positive trend. At the end of 2004 the number of young people below the age of 25 entitled to benefits was lower [-2,400] than at the end of 2003.

Belgian growth figure down to returning money?

FF EDITOR

Minister Reynders is looking for a possible explanation for the sharp rise in consumption in the indirect consequences of the fiscal amnesty. According to him, a great deal of white money has also come back into Belgium in addition to black money. The Nationale Bank also suddenly saw a large quantity of 500-euro notes emerge from “a small country in the south-east”, the Minister reported. According to De Standaard (23 December), it is most likely that the impressive Belgian growth figure for 2004 - 2.7%, 0.6% above the European average - is mainly due to the return of foreign black and grey money. In itself the fiscal amnesty measure has not been an overwhelming success. Little of the expected revenue of 850 million euros has actually materialised. During the first eleven months of 2004 the measure provided barely 100 million euros. According to Reynders, a further 200 million was raised during December. For dossiers submitted during this month, the deadline of fifteen days in which the fine must be paid has been extended to forty days.

WWW.EBA.BE
Good year for entrepreneurship, Belgian shares and savings

FF EDITOR

2004 was a good year for entrepreneurs. The number of new businesses rose by 10% in Belgium, the biggest increase since 1998, the employers' organisation Unizo was able to report. In total, 52,395 new businesses were established. One-man businesses in particular flourished (+13.7%), although according to De Tijd (6 January) one third of these are self-employed on the side. According to De Standaard (6 January), the increase is down to government initiatives such as the start of the Entrepreneur Offices (ondernemingsloketten) during 2003 or the starters’ cheque, but there are also other explanatory factors such as rising unemployment and the trend towards outsourcing more and more corporate activities.

On the other hand 2004 also saw a record number of bankruptcies. Some 8,000 businesses went to the wall, 4.5% more than in 2003. 2004 was also an excellent year for the Belgian share market. In 2004 the Bel-20 index was the second best-performing western European index, with an increase of 30.7%. On 7 January the index closed at 3,002.65 points. Not since December 2001 had the index exceeded 3,000 points. Investors who entered the market at the low point of March 2003 achieved returns of 111% not including dividends, De Tijd calculated. Unfortunately in 2004 120 million euros of capital also disappeared from the twelve recognised pension funds, which was clearly a bad decision, claims De Tijd (8 January). In 2004 Belgian savings accounts rose to a record level of 150 billion euros, an increase of 12%. In particular the banks Rabo, ING and Dexia, which temporarily increased the growth premium, profited from this increase. The success of the savings book is down to the low long-term interest rate, which has made bonds unattractive.

First newspaper for the Internet generation

‘Compact News. Sharp opinions’ reads the baseline of the new paper

From Monday 24 January, Flemings will have a new newspaper. The date marks the first appearance of De Standaard Espresso, a compact paper of 24 pages in tabloid format with short articles for half the price of a normal paper (50 cents) for a single copy. Subscriptions will not be allowed. It will be tailored to the working Internet generation that has too little time during the week to read De Standaard or other papers. There will be no weekend edition, therefore. The paper will be produced by a specially expanded Standaard editorial team. The Flemish Publishing Company (Vlaamse Uitgeversmaatschappij, VUM), publisher of De Standaard, Het Nieuwsblad, Het Volk and a highly successful De Standaard Online, took its inspiration from the USA and Germany (FF).

PETER VANDERMEERSCH • DE STANDAARD • 12 JANUARY

‘Compact News. Sharp opinions’ Thus reads the baseline of the new paper that is aimed at an active, mobile and cosmopolitan public that wants to be informed quickly and yet thoroughly. ‘We realise that on Saturday De Standaard reaches an extra audience that is very happy with the paper but has little time during the week,’ claims Commercial Manager Gert Ysebaert. ‘For this target group, call it the Internet generation, we have decided to introduce this comprehensive Espresso from Monday to Friday’. De Standaard Espresso is the second ‘daughter’ of De Standaard. In addition to the printed paper, for the past five years the editorial team has produced a successful online version of the paper. With more than 50,000 single visitors a day, the expanded site www.standaard.be is one of the most visited websites in the country. De Standaard took its inspiration for Espresso from, among others, two foreign examples. In the United States The Chicago Tribune has published RedEye since 2003, a compact version of this city paper. Last year in Germany Die Welt launched a successful Die Welt Kompakt. After a trial period in Berlin the project was extended to seven German cities. ‘The launch of Espresso represents a new step in the further development of our newspaper publishing,’ says Jo Van Croonenborch, Managing Director of
Diary

MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE

• 18 January: Twelve flies went out at noon by David Zambrano, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: www.vooruit.be 09/267.28.28
• 19 January: Raphael Wallfish and John York (Cello) with Gabriel Fauré; De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
• 19 January: Raphal Wallfish and John York (Cello) with Gabriel Fauré; De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
• 20 January: Vogler Quartett with Mendelssohn, Mozart and own composition, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
• 20 and 21 January: Graham Johnson and young singers with Hugo Wolf, De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
• 20 January: Brussels Jazz Orchestra featuring Chris Joris, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: www.vooruit.be
• 20 January: Nelson Freire, piano adventures, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
• 21 and 22 January: Isabella’s room, Need Company, De Vooruit, Ghent, info: www.vooruit.be
• 21 January: Slodovan Trkula & Balkanopolis, concert, Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
• 22 January: Africa matters happening, De Vooruit, Ghent, info: www.vooruit.be 09/267.28.28
• 22 January: American Music Club piano adventures, Handelsbeurs, Ghent, info: www.handelsbeurs.be
• 22 January: El Gunco o La Chabuguita, dance, Spain; Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
• 22 January: Flemish Radio Orchestra with Swingle Singers, compositions by Mahler and Berio, Concertgebouw, Bruges; info: www.concertgebouw.be
• 23 January: Budapest Festival Orchestra conducted by Ivan Fischer with Mahler and Bartok; Concertgebouw, Bruges; info: www.concertgebouw.be
• 24 to 30 January: Blush, Ultima Vez (dance) with music by Eugene Edwards, Hallen van Schaarbeek, Brussels; info: www.kvs.be
• 25 January: Storoni Trio Amsterdam with piano work by Haydn, Schumann and Brahms; De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
• 26 January: Oidipus Sürgünde, director: Sahika Tekand (Turkey) with Studio Oyunculuari, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be

EXPO

• Until 27 February: Tutu-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
• Until 4 May: Rudolf Lange, arbe witness, In Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres; info: www.inlandersfields.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 versiert!, 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: Injupongo, From dung to design, Caemersklooster, Ghent, info: 09/216.29.10
• Until 28 February: Fake/not Fake, Jef Vander Veken, restorer of the Flemish Primitives, Groeninghmuseum, 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 10 April: Retrospective Floris Jespers, exhibition, PMMK, Ostend; info: 059/50.81.18 www.pmmk.be
• 21 to 30 January: Art and Antiques fair, St Peters abbey, Ghent

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.

CULTURE

Nieuwsblad op Zondag was launched that same year. Last year we successfully changed the format of De Standaard from a broadsheet to a tabloid.

With Espresso we are now going one step further.'

WWW.STANDAARD.BE