Antwerp gets Lange Wapper bridge

On Thursday 3 March the Committee for Public Works of the Flemish Parliament was finally able to view the model of the Lange Wapper, an imposing cable bridge 1,500 metres long with five 110-metre pillars that will span the harbour docks in North Antwerp. The bridge is part of the planned Oosterweel link, which will complete Antwerp’s ring road. In addition to the bridge the project also includes a new tunnel beneath the Scheldt. From 2010 the link will divert some of the traffic that currently uses the Kennedy Tunnel. Every day 130,000 vehicles currently pass through this tunnel. The aim is to direct all goods traffic through the Oosterweel Tunnel. The cost of tunnel and bridge currently stands at 1.25 billion euros. The company BAM (Beheermaatschappij Antwerpen Mobiel) is building and financing both bridge and tunnel and will also charge a toll to recoup its investment. Apart from the Vlaams Belang, all the parties have reacted positively (FF).

KURT TUERLINCKX • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 4 MARCH

The proposal of the City of Antwerp to build a second tunnel instead of a bridge appears to have been shelved. Few members of the Committee for Public Works of the Flemish Parliament still take that option seriously. The risk of subsidence is too great and HGVs carrying chemical substances would not be allowed through, says BAM Manager Yvan Verbakel. The financing for the Oosterweel link is put at 1.25 billion euros. Of this, 250 million is coming from the company that is carrying out the construction work. The contractors can recoup that amount over the next thirty years. BAM boss Bruno Accou expects to send the specifications to the four candidate constructors at the beginning of April and award the contract in the second quarter of 2006. Taking into account a construction time of four years, the Oosterweel link would be ready in 2010. But first the Flemish Government still has to finally approve the route. Minister for Public Works Kris Peeters (CD&V) will submit the dossier to the government as soon as possible.

The Lange Wapper Bridge will be a civic icon that will put Antwerp among the other large cities with prestigious bridges, such as the Erasmus Bridge in Rotterdam, the Central Artery Bridge in Boston or Brooklyn Bridge in New York,’ says spokesman Nick Orbaen.

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INTRODUCTION

Do the government partners VLD and SPA-Spirit still agree on anything, ask the Gazet van Antwerpen and De Standaard (3 March). For VLD Chairman Bart Somers the week was dedicated to criticism of the policy of SPA-Spirit ministers. On Monday Federal Transport Minister Renaat Landuyt (SPA) got it in the neck because in his proposal he had dared to increase the levels of the three fines for traffic violations. On Wednesday Somers launched a general attack on the subsidy policy of Culture Minister Bert Anciaux (Spirit) from the platform of the Flemish Parliament. He feels that foreign associations that are only open to their own ethnic group should no longer be entitled to subsidies. What Anciaux is doing with his subsidies for Moroccan youth clubs is giving young Moroccans the signal that they do not need to integrate, alleges Somers, who as Mayor of Mechelen claims he can speak from experience. Anyone who subsidises a youth club for Moroccans will shortly have a whole street of youth clubs, one for each ethnic group or nationality. What is more, you may then unintentionally be subsidising associations that have little to do with emancipation and, for example, continue to organise separate swimming lessons for women. In short, Anciaux’s subsidy policy is in contravention of the Flemish coalition agreement, since this opts to support associations that are aimed at more than one cultural group, claims Somers. Anciaux, however, is sticking up for himself, referring to a passage in the coalition agreement in which support for foreign target groups is approved. Two different visions of integration lie behind the difference of opinion between Anciaux and Somers. Anciaux maintains that any involvement of foreigners in clubs and associations is good because it brings them out of anonymity. It is a first necessary step on the way to integration. Time will then gradually play its part, through mutual contacts between associations. For Anciaux, however, Flemish social life also has to express its goodwill. In De Morgen (4 March) he announces an action plan that asks Flemish youth associations, sports circles and culture houses to target figures for the involvement of foreigners. The VLD on the other hand is calling for more pressure on the foreign citizens themselves and asks that they give up their old associations and integrate individually.

The Gazet van Antwerpen sees much profiling in the debates by both SPA-Spirit and the VLD, which have lost their leading role in Flemish politics since the last elections. In the case of Somers that is patently obvious. To score better in the media he is acting like an opposition leader, claims the VV. De Morgen in turn claims that Somers’s media appearances are mainly intended to placate his party’s right wing, which has turned the attack on high traffic fines and the hammering on about the duties of foreigners into its favourite subjects. When elected to party chairman, Somers promised to articulate their complaints. He is only keeping his word, says the paper.

Frank Vandercaeyve | editor in chief

focus on FLANDERS • 26 February - 4 March 2005 • Number 9
Doctors call for privatisation of health insurance

Marc Moens, Chairman of the Belgian Association of Doctors' Unions (Belgische Vereniging van Artens syndicaten), says that partial privatisation is the only way to keep health insurance out of the red. The State must allow an individual to take out additional insurance to pay for the health insurance budget. De Morgen (28 February). The government must recognise that it can no longer refund everything and therefore create a basic package that it guarantees to all. Moens says that the government is heading for having only the cheapest drugs and treatments on the market. Steve STEvaert, Chairman of the SPF, and the Socialist and Christian Health Insurance Funds reacted negatively to Moens's proposal. In defence of our health insurance, Stevaert is quick to point to the privatised American system, which makes effective treatment much less accessible to everyone and is also more expensive. According to Stevaert, privatisation opens the door to better treatment for more well-off patients. He wants to keep health insurance affordable with a concerted fight against abuses. He received the backing of Walter Cornelis of the Christian union LBC of striking nursing staff. Cornelis points out that a joint health insurance is in the interest of the entire population. Moens does, however, realise that there is no political support for privatisation in Flanders. Even the Liberal VLD is in favour of cost-cutting to avoid derailing the health insurance budget. De Standaard (1 March) wonders about the 'sense of reality' of this debate. According to this paper, privatisation has been introduced by stealth for years. The government is becoming increasingly strict with regard to the reimbursement of medical services, which means more and more costs are passed on to the patient. According to the paper, the amount that Belgians themselves have to pay is twice that of neighbouring countries (FF).

Opinion

GUY TEGENBOS • DE STANDAARD • 1 MARCH

Belgian patients pay around 20% of their health costs themselves. That is twice as much as in neighbouring countries. 10% of Belgians postpone treatment because they cannot afford it. Belgian law allows patients in single rooms and sometimes in double rooms to be charged extra fees by doctors and room supplements by hospitals. Officially everyone insists that these supplements do not mean better treatment. Even without supplements a patient still pays extras following a stay in hospital: many new devices, implants and treatments are not reimbursed. Many drugs are not reimbursed, or if so only partly. The man in the street is not stupid. He knows that his health insurance has not covered everything for a long time. Therefore around half of them, not only the wealthiest, have additional health or hospitalisation insurance: either individually or via their health insurance fund (which just like the politicians is also against privatisation!), or through their work. By emphasising that they are against privatisation, they want to make us believe that they can still control everything and that health insurance still reimburses ‘everything for everyone’. But that has not been the case for a long time. Thanks to developments in the population, science, technology and commerce it is actually becoming less possible.

7th threatening letter forces Naïma to give in

On 3 March Naïma Amzil, an employee of the foods firm R. Remmery in West Flanders, handed in her resignation after receiving a seventh threatening letter, this time containing two bullets. In the letter the anonymous author threatened to poison Remmery’s products with mercury. Earlier in a series of threatening letters sent to her employer he had demanded that she work without a headdress, otherwise, he threatened, he would murder manager Rik Van Nieuwenhuyze. When Naïma left her headdress at home, the letter-writer demanded her dismissal. The letters are signed with the initials NVV and JR, which stand for Nieuw Vrij Vlaanderen and Jack Ruby (the murderer of Lee Harvey Oswald, who in turn had murdered President Kennedy). The fifth letter also contained a bullet. The sixth was sent to the newspapers Het Laatste Nieuws and Het Nieuwsblad. In the seventh letter, a copy of which was also sent to De Standaard, the author warned other businesses that employ Moslems. Until recently Naïma Amzil and Rik Van Nieuwenhuyze were praised for refusing to give in to threats. King Albert even received them at the Palace. In an initial reaction Ronny Lanno, spokesman for Unizo, the Union of Independent Employers, called the resignation a bad sign. In February Unizo declared the foods firm Remmery SME team of the year 2004. Integration Minister Keulen (VLD) believes the resignation is a defeat for democracy (FF).

PETER DE BACKER • HET NIEUWSBLAD • 3 MARCH

‘Very, very sad’, Integration Minister Marino Keulen (VLD) called the resignation. ‘These threatening letters are the lowest of the low. I can only hope that the forces of law and order catch this swine. It is a defeat for democracy if someone has to give in to threats, even if everyone around them stands firm. The fact that Naïma’s boss and colleagues supported her so strongly shows that there are also people with a heart.’ Keulen hopes to meet her as soon as possible.

FF EDITOR

Under pressure from the many reactions, Remmerie NV has not accepted Naïma’s resignation. She will, however, stay at home on temporary leave. In the meantime every effort will be made to catch the perpetrator. Justice Minister Onkelinx (PS) said in the Parliament that six investigators were six investigators were six investigators were investigating two bullets. In the letter the anonymous author threatened to poison Remmery’s products with mercury. Earlier in a series of threatening letters sent to her employer he had demanded that she work without a headdress, otherwise, he threatened, he would murder manager Rik Van Nieuwenhuyze. When Naïma left her headdress at home, the letter-writer demanded her dismissal. The letters are signed with the initials NVV and JR, which stand for Nieuw Vrij Vlaanderen and Jack Ruby (the murderer of Lee Harvey Oswald, who in turn had murdered President Kennedy). The fifth letter also contained a bullet. The sixth was sent to the newspapers Het Laatste Nieuws and Het Nieuwsblad. In the seventh letter, a copy of which was also sent to De Standaard, the author warned other businesses that employ Moslems. Until recently Naïma Amzil and Rik Van Nieuwenhuyze were praised for refusing to give in to threats. King Albert even received them at the Palace. In an initial reaction Ronny Lanno, spokesman for Unizo, the Union of Independent Employers, called the resignation a bad sign. In February Unizo declared the foods firm Remmery SME team of the year 2004. Integration Minister Keulen (VLD) believes the resignation is a defeat for democracy (FF).

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Top sport: Anciaux has found his Superman

Ivo Van Aken, Technical Director of the Flemish Tennis Association, seems best to fit the required profile

Flemish top sport must do better. Everyone has been convinced of this since the thin pickings at the latest Olympic Games. Even Flemish Minister for Sport Bert Anciaux (Spirit). Following the systematic increase in the top sport budget - 2.8 million euros extra in 2005, an amount that will gradually be increased to 8 million more - Anciaux also had to find a manager who could outline the main strategy of the new top sport policy. In the end it did not take him long. Of the fourteen selected candidates Ivo Van Aken, Technical Director of the Flemish Tennis Association, seems best to fit the required profile. Van Aken has to create a climate in which top Flemish sportsmen and women can again achieve results. By September he must have a plan ready in which he explains how he wants to achieve his ambitious objectives. His policy must ultimately lead to better results at the 2016 Olympic Games. Any earlier will be difficult. Producing top sportsmen and women is a long-term investment of at least ten years, claims Van Aken. But he feels ten medals in 2016 must be possible (FF).

BART FIEREMANS • DE MORGEN • 2 MARCH

‘Top sportsmen and women are born, but can also be created.’ Ivo Van Aken can now try to live up to the credo that he successfully applied to the Flemish Tennis Association across the entire Flemish sport landscape. Since yesterday he is officially the first Flemish top sport manager. The long-term goal: more top athletes, more international titles and Olympic medals.

As Coach and Technical Director of the Flemish Tennis Association (VTV), Van Aken provided sufficient evidence that a top sport model with early detection and fostering of talent works. The Study and Tennis project in Wilrijk ensured systematic success. Having now been appointed, Van Aken first wants to produce an analysis and assessment of the current Flemish top sport landscape before then creating an optimum structure for each federation.

‘I want to approach the federations from an entirely neutral perspective,’ stresses Van Aken. ‘They mustn’t be afraid that I will change everything because I feel the policy has been geared towards top sport for too long. But results don’t always follow. Where I find an unwieldy structure I will try and make it less so. You also need the right people in the right place.’ In a second phase Van Aken will also have his say in the appointment of sufficient top trainers. Van Aken will also look abroad. ‘The Dutch sport model, the Sporthochschule in Cologne, the Australian Institute of Sports... It will prove very useful if we can exchange knowledge and expertise.’ Van Aken is getting the necessary financial guarantees from Anciaux. But in turn he will have to produce results. ‘In 2008 I will have succeeded if more federations are structurally more efficient than now, allowing more young talent to develop in the right environment. The athletes of 2012 have already completed part of their training. Then we must firstly look at the results at the Junior European and World Championships.’ We will only see how effective the reforms have been at the 2016 Games. ‘Then the pros have to perform better at European Championships, World Championships and Olympic Games. Then we must be able to win ten medals. If that doesn’t happen, I will have failed.’ With all these tasks, Ivo Van Aken has his hands more than full. But Anciaux is in every way firmly convinced that he has found the right man. ‘I think Flemish has found the superman we need.’

Di Rupo causes misunderstanding about Belgian referendum

Elio Di Rupo, Chairman of the French speaking Socialists, has caused a commotion in Flanders with a proposal that was actually intended as an example. At the PS’s party conference he spoke out against a referendum on the EU constitution because he fears that it will be misused by the far-right who will try and turn it into a referendum on the accession of Turkey. And yet he is not against referendums in principle, and is even prepared to have it incorporated in the Belgian constitution. Crucial to such a referendum is that the people can express their views on clear questions, he said. ‘Such as: do you want to retain Belgium’s unity?’

In Flanders that was quickly interpreted as a genuine proposal for such a referendum. Strangely enough the most Flemish-minded parties were most in favour of it. The Vlaams Belang immediately suggested tabling a bill together with the PS. ‘Then Flanders can finally have its say on the added value Belgium has for Flemings which is not there and which is very real for Wallonia,’ replied VB Chairman Frank Vanhecke. According to N-VA Chairman Bart De Wever, Di Rupo is taking his wishes to be reality when he assumes in advance an overwhelming Flemish ‘yes’ for retaining Belgium. De Wever claims that Di Rupo is taking his inspiration from the poll carried out by VRT/De Standaard, which shows that 70% of Flemings believe that a question that divides the two halves of the country such as Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde is not worth of a government crisis. According to De Wever, such a poll merely shows that the Flemings want the split without it bringing down the government.

‘The misunderstanding’ follows a charm offensive initiated by the PS leader in Flanders with an interview in Het Laatste Nieuws (26 February) and interviews in Dutch on Flemish radio and television.

politics

belgium and regional powers

ffa
Poll: advance of Vlaams Belang comes to standstill

In the latest opinion poll by VRT/De Standaard, carried out in the first two weeks of February, the CD&V/N-VA cartel of Christian Democrats and Flemish Nationalists (27.4%) clearly emerges as the largest political group. The advance of the far-right Vlaams Belang, which until recently appeared on the way to becoming the largest political force in Flanders, seems to have been checked. The party fell 2.2%, finishing on 22.1%. The Federal Government parties jointly made slight gains. However, this is entirely due to the Socialists (SP.A) and Left-Liberals (Spirit). They rose by 1.4%, ending up on 21.3%. The Liberal government (Spirit) rose slightly by 0.4% to reach 7.7%. Although the difference is not significant, the decline of the Vlaams Belang is the most striking trend in this poll. De Standaard attempts to explain it (FF).

ANJA OTTE • DE STANDAARD • 26 FEBRUARY

Why is the Vlaams Belang spiralling downwards? In the Flemish elections the party achieved a record score because in addition to its hard core it was also able to convince a large number of undecided voters. In calmer moments the hard core remains and some of the less-convinced fly the nest. In recent months a conflict over Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde has been bubbling under the surface in the Rue de la Loi, but the political climate is much less heated than during the elections - the moment of polarisation par excellence - or when the last poll was carried out and the mood of crisis over DHL dominated the news.

The party is also beginning to behave more and more like all the other parties in the statistics. Since 13 June a total of 17% of voters have changed their minds. That figure is almost the same for the Vlaams Belang, which was able to retain 82% of its voters - a figure comparable to that of SP.A/Spirit and the VLD. What is striking is that the Vlaams Belang is losing voters primarily to SP.A/Spirit. The relative calm is working out wonderfully for the CD&V/N-VA, but at the same time poses a problem for the cartel: should it charge over Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde if it can consolidate its success in particular through (apparent) calm? In any event, with 88% the CD&V/N-VA has been most successful in holding onto its voters from 13 June. It is also the political group with the greatest potential: half of voters could imagine voting for it. The cartel is reaching its traditional grass roots (seniors, West Flemings, housewives) and has prospects among workers and Limburg.

WWW.VRT.BE
WWW.STANDAARD.BE

Minister-president Leterme is most popular politician

Leterme’s government had a confidence rating of 66%

FF EDITOR

In the popularity poll of politicians the Flemish Minister-President Yves Leterme (CD&V) has made a giant leap forward. He knocked his fellow party colleague and veteran Jean-Luc Dehaene off the throne and with 45% has passed its nadir. It again rose from 40.1% to 45% in the statistics. Since 13 June a total of 17% of voters have changed their minds. That figure is almost the same for the Vlaams Belang, which was able to retain 82% of its voters - a figure comparable to that of SPA/Spirit and the VLD. What is striking is that the Vlaams Belang is losing voters primarily to SPA/Spirit. The relative calm is working out wonderfully for the CD&V/N-VA, but at the same time poses a problem for the cartel: should it charge over Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde if it can consolidate its success in particular through (apparent) calm? In any event, with 88% the CD&V/N-VA has been most successful in holding onto its voters from 13 June. It is also the political group with the greatest potential: half of voters could imagine voting for it. The cartel is reaching its traditional grass roots (seniors, West Flemings, housewives) and has prospects among workers and Limburg.

WWW.VRT.BE
WWW.STANDAARD.BE

Opinion

BART STURTEWAGEN • DE STANDAARD • 26 FEBRUARY

There is no better indicator of what the voter currently expects of politics than the rise of the Leterme phenomenon. Anyone who predicted two years ago that a politician with his characteristics could become the most popular of all would have received nothing but disbelief. And yet today that is the case. The fear that politics had irretrievably fallen victim to crude populism and Familiar Fleming (TV entertainment celebrities, ed.) rubbish fortunately appears to have been premature. The forced marriage between the three traditional political families in Flanders is not going well. If there was a viable alternative, accidents would already have happened. But for the time being the voter has no regrets about the straitjacket into which he pushed his leaders. Uncomfortable is fine. And for the time being even a little better than feared.

WWW.STANDAARD.BE
WWW.VRT.BE
New proposal for traffic fines creates division in federal government

Bart Somers (VLD) believes that increasing fines is not negotiable

Federal Transport Minister Renaat Landuyt (SPA) attracted considerable criticism with his proposal for a new classification of traffic fines. Landuyt wants to make the size of fines dependent on the risk of accident a violation involves. This would make some violations less serious, others more so. Non-handsfree use of mobile phones while driving or failure to wear seatbelts would cost 100 instead of 50 euros. Parking incorrectly or not shutting the car would drop from 150 to 50 euros. The Minister had reached a consensus with around thirty automobile organisations and the cyclists’ union in the Federal Road Safety Commission on the principles of the new act. The new fine tariffs are his own idea.

By 1 April the Minister wants to get the Federal Government on his side to amend the current Traffic Act, which has been in force for barely a year, in this sense. But that will not be plain sailing. Bart Somers, Chairman of the Liberal VLD coalition party, believes that increasing fines is not negotiable. He is supported in this by the Francophone sister party, the MR. According to Somers, the vast majority of Flemings are against an increase in fines. He favours a system in which fines for speeding increase gradually. Landuyt is sticking up for himself. Fines will always be too high for those that have to pay them, he warns. According to him, it is severe fines that have dramatically altered driving behaviour. People drive slower, there are fewer accidents and fewer fatalities, claims the Transport Minister. In Het Laatste Nieuws (2 March) he claims he is feeling “cornered” by Somers, who has merely focused on the three fines that would increase in his media appearances, but ignored the majority of fines that would decrease. Landuyt says he knows why the VLD is airing its dissatisfaction publicly. The Premier’s party is angry because Landuyt announced the proposal for the new fine tariffs without an agreement having been reached in the government. But that threatened to leak out, claims the Minister (FF).

On Monday the new system of fines of Minister Renaat Landuyt (SPA) lasted for a total of one hour. Bart Somers called each increase in fines ‘not negotiable’. The Transport Minister must now look for a new system of tariffs Landuyt launched his proposals on Monday morning to stop partial leaks in time. But the political debate was not yet over. Admittedly a week earlier the inner cabinet followed the logic of the new Traffic Act. This classifies traffic violations according to the danger they represent. But senior ministers had not yet agreed on the fixing of tariffs for the various categories. Officially Landuyt does not want to ‘engage in polemics’ with Somers. The Transport Minister stresses that the assessment of the old Traffic Act must be completed by 1 April at the latest. Somers condemned Landuyt’s ‘macho behaviour’. The VLD Chairman places the new Traffic Act on the principles of the new act. The new fine tariffs are his own idea.

Indian group takes over transformer manufacturer Pauwels Trafo

Pauwels Trafo, the Mechelen transformer manufacturer, was taken over last week by the Indian Crompton Greaves. Crompton Greaves specialises in switchgear, and with the Pauwels transformers the new company hopes to be able to offer customers more integral solutions. The Indians paid 32.1 million for Pauwels, and took on the 69 million euros of debt. Pauwels is one of the world’s ten largest producers of three-phase transformers and employs close on 2,000 people worldwide. In 2004 the consolidated annual turnover was 257 million euros. In 2004 Crompton Greaves achieved a turnover of 346 million euros. The company has its headquarters in India and employs 2,700 people (FF).

CG is buying all the shares in Pauwels Contracting, the parent company of the Pauwels Group. The transaction will be completed by the end of April at the latest. The Indian group is paying 32.1 million euros. CG is also immediately investing 7.5 million euros in liquid funds. ‘We actively went looking for a partner,’ says Van Zele. ‘In Europe there was not a single potential partner with whom one plus one made three. That is the case with CG, which has access to the rapidly growing Indian market. There is still massive investment in the electricity network there,’ he argues. Van Zele stresses that the take-over has nothing to do with restructuring plans. ‘Operationally, both companies will remain the same,’ he says. The sale will also provide several strategic benefits. Thanks to the merger, Pauwels is able to offer its customers integral solutions. Van Zele: ‘In contrast to our main competitors Alstom, ABB and Siemens, our offer was largely restricted to transformers. Both groups also complement each other geographically. ‘We are strong in Western Europe and North America, while CG is active on the Indian sub-continent,’ explains Van Zele.Pauwels Group, which is based in Mechelen, has a network of agents and customers in more than 135 countries.

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Base gains market share on Belgian mobile phone market

In 2004 the Belgian mobile phone market underwent a number of slight shifts. The one to profit most is the third mobile phone operator, Base, a subsidiary of the Dutch group KPN. Its marketing and market niche-oriented promotional campaigns did not do the operator any harm. In 2004 Base acquired 394,000 new customers, equivalent to 64% of all new customers in the market (De Tijd, 2 March). This was mainly at the expense of market leader Proximus, which lost 1% of its customers. The second player, Mobistar, grew by 37%. Base’s strong growth brought its market share as of the end of 2004 to 17.07%. As a result, the targeted 20% market share seems likely to be achieved by the end of this year. As a consequence of this increase in the number of customers there was for the first time a positive cash-flow of 51 million euros. Turnover was 432 million euros, EBITDA 119 million euros. The market share of Proximus fell to just below 50%. Mobistar made slight gains to reach 33.5%. Last year Base also implemented a restructuring operation that cost 200 people their jobs. At the end of 2004 Base still employed 630 people.

Belgacom pays out 1 billion euros to shareholders

The first annual figures published by telecoms operator Belgacom after being floated on the stock market are better than expected. Turnover rose by 1.6% to 5.54 billion euros, despite a 0.5% drop in private-line services. But these were largely compensated for by the revenue from mobile telephony (+2.6%) of subsidiary Proximus and from international carrier services (+3%), the telecoms services for other operators. Because staff numbers fell by 600 and total costs by 2%, EBITDA grew by 6.4% (De Tijd, 26 February). Belgacom is setting aside some 500 million for an ordinary dividend (54% of group profit) and a further 200 million for a special dividend. The Belgian State, the majority shareholder in Belgacom, will reap 349 million euros from the dividend.

Inbev sees profit rise by 42%

In 2004 the Leuven-based brewery InBev achieved a turnover of 8,568 million euros, an increase of 22%. The increase in net profits is even more impressive. These rose by 42% to 719 million euros, although this also includes a number of one-off sources of income. Company cash-flow (EBITDA) rose to 2.11 billion euros. The main reason for the increase in revenue was the take-over of the Brazilian Ambev in August of last year. This made InBev the biggest brewer in the world in terms of volume. Last year Inbev brewed 153.7 hectolitres of beer, representing internal growth of 3.2%. In terms of sales the American Anheuser-Busch remains the biggest brewer.

The annual figures of Belgacom are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turnover</th>
<th>Ebitda</th>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
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<td>(difference in %)</td>
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<td>DIFFERENCE WITH 2003 (in %)</td>
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<td>DIFFERENCE WITH 2003 (in %)</td>
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* Before internal billing between divisions - Tijd Graphics - Source: Belgacom

Belgacom's market shares for 2003 and 2004 are as follows:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Number of customers</th>
<th>End 2003</th>
<th>Market share</th>
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<tr>
<td>PROXIMUS</td>
<td>4,201,503</td>
<td>53.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOBISTAR</td>
<td>2,600,181</td>
<td>33.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BASE</td>
<td>1,014,930</td>
<td>12.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>7,816,614</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of customers</th>
<th>End 2004</th>
<th>Market share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PROXIMUS</td>
<td>4,197,826</td>
<td>49.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOBISTAR</td>
<td>2,945,762</td>
<td>33.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BASE</td>
<td>1,449,360</td>
<td>17.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>8,592,948</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Belgacom's annual figures for 2004:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turnover</th>
<th>Ebitda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(in million euro)</td>
<td>(difference in %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPERATING PROFIT</td>
<td>1,398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NET PROFIT</td>
<td>1,109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASH FLOW [EBITDA]</td>
<td>8,568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVENUE</td>
<td>5,617</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2000, InBev made a profit of 839 million euros, in 2001 of 939 million euros, and in 2002 of 1,109 million euros. The increase in net profit was 211 million euros. INBEV CONSOLIDATED RESULTS (in million euro)
KBC absorbs Almanij, which disappears from stock market

On 2 March the extraordinary general meetings of Almanij and KBC ratified the absorption of the holding by its subsidiary, the bank insurer KBC. Almanij’s shareholders will receive 1.35 KBC shares per Almanij share. Almanij will therefore disappear from the stock market. On 2 March Almanij ended its 73-year existence with a price of 88.9 euros, which means the price has doubled over the last year. Over the same period the price of the KBC share rose by half to 66 euros. With the absorption of Almanij, KBC now has a stock market capitalisation of 24 billion euros. That is more than the 20.5 billion of Dexia and not far off the 27 billion of Fortis, concludes De Standaard (3 March) (FF).

JOHAN VAN GEYTE • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN 3 MARCH

In recent times Almanij managed packages of shares mainly of KBC produced by the merger of KB, Cera and ABB in 1998, KB Lux and the investment company Gevaert. In past years the cascade structure was regularly criticised by investors. This led to efforts to bring about a large-scale simplification. Almanij first made a bid for all the shares of KB Lux it did not yet hold and is now itself being taken over by KBC. The KBC group now holds a position in the top ten of the banking landscape in euroland. Most of the shares are in the possession of the earlier family shareholders of Almanij [11.4%], Cera/Almancora [27.1%] and the Farmers Union [Boerenbond] [11.6%]. They have agreed not to change things for at least ten years. The rest of the shares are traded freely on the stock market. Gevaert’s portfolio also contains a 25% interest in the image-processing company Agfa-Gevaert. According to Management Chairman Willy Duron, that is no longer a core activity.

www.kbc.be

A tool for active cultural participation

The ultimate aim of this database is a portal site, cultuurweb.be, which goes live this summer. In time the site must develop into a digital office to which the public can go for any basic information on the cultural offer (FF).

BRUNO DEPOVER • DE MORGEN • 2 MARCH

As Flemish Minister for Culture, Bert Anciaux (Spirit) is particularly concerned about the cultural participation of the Flemings. One key tool in his participation policy is the cultural database, an initiative of CultuurNet Vlaanderen, the organisation that was set up by Anciaux in 2002 and given the task of lowering the threshold for cultural participation. The cultural database makes the entire cultural offer of Flanders and Brussels more readily accessible. The cultural organisers, both local and on a larger scale, enter the offer in the database themselves. The target group includes anyone who works with cultural information: cultural civil servants, programmers, organisers and journalists. The ultimate aim of this database is a portal site, cultuurweb.be, which goes live this summer. In time the site must develop into a digital office to which the public can go for any basic information on the cultural offer (FF).

At the end of 2002 CultuurNet Vlaanderen began developing a working instrument for all those actively involved in cultural life in Flanders. So far the project has cost 4.5 million euros, one third of which went into the construction of the actual database, explains Toon Berckmoes, Director of CultuurNet Vlaanderen. ‘In addition to 160 Flemish municipalities and all the central towns, the provinces of Flemish Brabant and West Flanders will also take part. For Brussels the Flemish Community Committee is our partner, and we can also count on various cultural centres.’ ‘As a reaction to the idea that our society merely consists of economic activities, I wanted to create the ultimate website that overseeing the entire Flemish cultural landscape with the active participation of the sector itself,’ says Anciaux. An underlying database seems essential if a global cultural site such as this is ever to get off the ground. ‘This database also has to appeal to the various cultural players,’ adds Anciaux. In so doing he is targeting not only the cultural players and various groups of culture workers but also journalists who can use the database as a source of information. ‘Not only is our cultural database unique in Europe, because it is modular it can easily be extended to the departments of Tourism, Foreign Affairs and our own Sports Department.’ The database will also function as a so-called ‘crossroads’ within a network of other cultural databases, such as Tinck, the West Flanders culture site. Every Flemish cultural association or artist can enter their details in the
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.

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D’Haene and Murial (Fr), De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
• 14 March: Christophe Prégardien with Lieder by Schubert, Michael Gees, piano, De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
• 14 March: Brave old world ø Smyrna Trio (Greece), Handelsbeurs, Ghent, info: www.handelsbeurs.be
• 10 March: Good Charlotte, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels, info: www.abconcerts.be 02/548.24.24
• 15 and 16 March: Need Company, directed by Ian Lauwers, No Comment, theatre, De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
• 16 March: Olga Neuwirth, Ce qui arrive performed by Modern Ensemble, Bozar, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be
• 17 and 18 March: Meg Stuart, Forgeries, Love and other Matters, dance, De Minard, Ghent, info: www.vooruit.be 09/267.28.28
• 17 March: Otomo Yushihide new Jazz Quintet, De Vooruit, Ghent, info: www.vooruit.be 09/267.28.28
• 18 March: Frank London and the Klezmer Brass All Stars, Concertgebouw, Bruges, info: www.concertgebouw.be 070/22 55 02
• 19 March: Zap Mama, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels, info: www.abconcerts.be 02/548.24.24

EXPO
• Until 13 March: The Heart, exhibition, Museum Dr Guislain, Ghent, info: www.museumdrguislain.be
• Until 3 April: Anton Corbijn, exhibition, Fotomuseum, Antwerp, info: 03/242.93.00 www.fotomuseum.be

• Until 10 April: Retrospective Floris Jespers, exhibition, PMMK, Ostend, info: 059/90.81.18 www.pmmk.be
• Until 10 April: hulk + brandlhuber/co + a42org, architects, Köln and Masters of Architecture, Nürnberg, Collecting the Future, exhibition, De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
• Until 17 April: jazz in Little Belgium, MIM-museum [musical instruments], Brussels, info: www.mim.fgov.be
• Until 4 May: Rudolf Lange, war witness, In Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres, info: www.inflandersfields.be
• From 5 February onwards: ‘The memory of Congo, the colonial period, exhibition, Museum for Central Africa (Tervuren), info: www.175-25.be
• Until 17 April: SMAK-exhibitions: Orla Barry, Michael Borremans and Bernd Lohaus + opening Art Now-exhibition with Ivo Provost & Simonetta Dimicolai, SMAK, Ghent, info: www.smak.be
• Until 10 April: 25 years of press photography, Fotomuseum, Antwerp, info: 03/242.93.00
• Until 15 May: Particular visions, exhibition with work from studios of disabled people, Bozar, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be
• Until 15 May: Belgium 175-25, a celebration programme with music, dance, theatre, Bozar, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be
• Until 15 May: René Magritte and Photography, exhibition, Bozar, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be
• Until spring 2005: Loam Mosques in Djenné (Mali), Photo exhibition, Bozar, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be

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