Antwerp diamond trade faces competition from the East

According to the diamond unions Antwerp will only be able to maintain its position as the centre of the diamond industry with a minimum of 2,000 highly qualified diamond cutters. Frank Fensie, chairman of BVGD (Association of Polished Diamond Traders) thinks the opposite: ‘The diamond industry is now purely a service industry for the trade. If we want to keep the diamond industry we will have to ensure that the trade in rough and cut diamonds stays here.’

For the time being Antwerp still is the main trade location for rough diamonds: something like 80% of all rough diamonds pass through the four Antwerp diamond exchanges. But in a few years that may well be history due to the emergence of the trade centers in Dubai, Hong Kong and India for example. In 2004 the export of diamonds to Hong Kong increased by no less than 27%, whereas exports to the US dropped by 4%. The export to India also increased by 20%. ‘This is a very significant development,’ states Peter Meeus, managing director of the Hoge Raad voor Diamant (Diamond Council). ‘It underlines the position of India as both a diamond market and an industrial centre. India is developing into one of the largest jewel and diamond markets in the world.’ Almost 90% of Belgian exports to, and 65% of imports from India are related to diamonds, states the Foreign Trade Agency. Until the Indians discover that they might just as well buy their rough diamonds in Dubai, and forget about Antwerp.

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief
FLEMISH BUDGET POLICY

Savings and cutbacks in the Flemish budget

ONLY THE MOST URGENT NEEDS JUSTIFIED A SLIGHTLY HIGHER BUDGET

The Flemish Government completed its inspection of the 2005 budget on 25 March. There is hardly any room for new initiatives and adjustments were inevitable. After all the Flemish government needs to realise a surplus of 191.8 million euros this year within the framework of the debt reduction programme. Only the most urgent needs would justify a slightly higher budget. When, after the Easter break, the government starts to prepare the long term budget for 2006-2009, savings will once again be the maxim, warned the Minister for Employment and Education, Frank Vandenbroucke (SP.A). During this budget round decisions will be made on how to finance plans in the long term. According to Frank Vandenbroucke the Flemish Government will have to put the break on its expenditure policies, and in some cases make savings, during the next few years. As indicated by the minister’s calculations, the Flemish government will be faced with a bill of 200 million euros by 2009, if it meets the demands of care personnel employed in the Flemish health sector. Whether or not the intended tax reduction of 500 million euros can still be realised in that case remains to be seen. The financial scope has been limited by a few setbacks. Care insurance for instance is taking up 11.6 million euros, which is more than expected (FF).

PETER DE BACKER • HET NIEUWSBLAD • 26 MARCH

Minister for Welfare, Inge Vervotte, (CD&V) will receive an extra 7.5 million euros, enough for 900 additional care places from September, in order to remove waiting lists in the disabled sector. As a result Vervotte has access to 22.5 million euros annually to deal with this problem. She aims to ensure that those who have been on waiting lists the longest will be dealt with first. Local communities will receive an additional 10 million euros for sewerage projects. The Minister for the Environment, Kris Peeters, (CD&V) will receive 5 million to deal with the delay in subsidising container parks. Environmental organisations will receive an extra 2.5 million euros and soil purification an extra 5.5 million euros. Recycling centres have been allocated 1 million euros extra for their operations.

Together with Mobility Minister, Kathleen Van Brempt, (SP.A) Kris Peeters also has access to 13.2 million euros to ensure that all school environments are transformed into ‘30 zones’ by 1 September 2005. The Flemish Government has opted for more variable signals, with speed restrictions lighting up at school opening and closing times. Extra effort will be made to promote the flow of public transport, with more free tram and bus lanes.

Minister Frank Vandenbroucke will receive an extra 2 million because students are increasingly resorting to the Equal Education Opportunities Decree. Furthermore, school communities are now entitled to a full-time member of personnel to provide assistance. Children who are ill for a very long time will henceforth also be entitled to receive education at home.

PARTIES

Professor Blanpain defends Bolkestein guideline

ACCORDING TO BLANPAINE THE FEAR OF ‘SOCIAL DUMPING’ IS UNJUSTIFIED

Two weeks ago, following an initiative from the European unions, about 60,000 people attended a protest march in Brussels against the service guideline put forward by the former EU commissioner, Mr Bolkestein. Jacques Chirac even wanted to totally abolish the guideline that proposes to completely liberalise services. But the European heads of government decided that only adjustments would be introduced. Roger Blanpain, professor in employment legislation, is fed up with the catchphrases being circulated, mainly by the unions, about the service guideline and country of origin principle. According to the professor, who organised a press conference on the subject, the idea that East European workers are taking away the jobs of much more expensive Belgian employ-

JEROEN LISSENS • DE TIJD • 31 MARCH

According to Professor Blanpain the fear of ‘social dumping’ is unjustified, as the draft guideline defines that the country of origin principle does not apply to the employment conditions and circumstances of employees who are working in another member state. These are regulated by another guideline dating back to 1996, which defines that the employment conditions, applicable in the country in which the work is being performed, apply. That particular European guideline was the basis for Belgian legislation introduced in March 2002, which makes Belgium ‘a model for other member states,’ ac-

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Professor Blanpain also maintains that the country in which the work is carried out also carries out the control of the implementation of employment conditions. The EU Council of Ministers has already revised the original version of the Bolkestein guideline accordingly in January.

The Louvain professor admits that there are still problems associated with the text, but states that they can be adjusted. For instance there is a lack of information on employment legislation in other Member States. Professor Blanpain therefore argues for the creation of a central European databank. Yesterday he defended the decision not to drop the guideline, as he is convinced of the need for a free service market. ‘70 % of our economy is service based. Once the formalities have been removed and the service market liberalised, it will create more jobs.’

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JEROEN LISSENS • DE TIJD • 31 MARCH

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On 24 March the Board of the publishing company 'De Tijd' decided to agree to enter into exclusive takeover discussions with the 'De Persgroep/Rossel' partnership during the coming weeks. De Persgroep, which produces publications such as De Morgen and Het Laatste Nieuws, and Rossel, publisher of Le Soir and the regional papers of Sud Presse, are already partners in Editeco, publisher of the French financial paper, L'Echo. De Tijd will be incorporated in a new holding for financial/economic media, within which De Tijd and L'Echo will remain individual entities. De Persgroep and Rossel won the argument with the most financially attractive proposal and a business plan with sufficient guarantees for the independence of the business paper. The three other large media groups, VUM (De Standaard/Het Nieuwsblad/Het Volk), Roularta (Knack/Trends) in combination with the Dutch financial paper, Het Financieele Dagblad, and Concentra (Gazet van Antwerpen/Belang van Limburg) in partnership with the Swedish financial publisher Bonnier, had also managed to reach the final round with a binding offer, but were ultimately beaten by De Persgroep/Rossel. De Tijd, which has been faced with a drop in both sales and reader numbers in the past few years, recently received the final blow when the government decided to abolish the obligation to publish a number of company notifications. As a result the paper suffered a loss in advertising revenue to the tune of 3 million euros. De Tijd was the last paper to be taken over by one of the four major Flemish press groups [VUM, De Persgroep, Concentra/RUG, Roularta] (FF).

**MICHAËL SEPNIHA • DE TIJD • 26 MARCH**

Five years after his failed bid for De Tijd, Christian Van Thillo [De Persgroep] is about to acquire the business publication. In 2000 the takeover of De Financieel-Economische Tijd by De Persgroep and Roularta was cancelled at the last minute. At that time the duo was prepared to pay 64 million euros for the paper, but the main shareholder of the Vlaams Economisch Verbond [VEV - Flemish Employers Association] cancelled the transaction at the eleventh hour. This time the process seems to have been successful. De Tijd is currently printed at Concentra [Gazet van Antwerpen, Het Belang van Limburg, Metro]. This printing contract expires in 2008. Whether or not it will be extended remains to be seen. De Persgroep runs its own printing centre in Kobbegem and is planning to build a new printing centre in Lokeren (East-Flanders). L’Echo is also printed at Concentra, but will possibly be moved to the Rossel printing centre in Nijvel in the medium term. According to our information the bid submitted by De Persgroep and Rossel amounts to almost 40 million euros. This includes approximately 5 million euros in debts. ‘Three out of the four bids were relatively close,’ states one of the parties involved.

Based on a take over price of 40 million euros - which could still fluctuate - the VEV (35.33% of De Tijd) and its social secretariat SD Worx (10.49%) could jointly end up with maximum 18.32 million euros after the take over. With this scenario the investment company Gevaert (10%) will be able to collect up to 4 million euros and Mercator (8%) up to 3.2 million euros. The KBC pension fund (7.02%) and Brussel Securities holding of the Walloon financier, Albert Frère, (6.5%) will receive 2.8 and 2.6 million euros respectively. Regio [Cobepa-Ibel - 4.39%] would collect a maximum of 1.76 million euros and RMBB (Boerenbond - 3.6%) 1.44 million euros. Personnelvereniging Tijd [PVT], which represents personnel and holds 5.18% of the shares, will be able to count on about 2.07 million euros. The other shareholders have minor participations.

The competitors of the De Persgroep/Rossel partnership each had their own agenda for De Tijd. The Vlaamse Uitgeversmaatschappij [VUM] wanted to incorporate the paper in a separate financial/economic entity, in the holding VUMMedia. The financial/economic section would be incorporated alongside the other divisions. In the project proposed by Concentra and the Swedish publisher Bonnier, Uitgeversbedrijf Tijd would initially become a subsidiary of Concentra. In the long term Bonnier had the option to acquire up to 49% of the company. Concentra and Bonnier wanted to increase the focus on purely financial and economic news. Roularta, which submitted a bid together with HAL Investments [Het Financieele Dagblad], envisaged a mainly supportive role, for instance with respect to marketing and subscription management. Het Financieele Dagblad would cover the editorial cooperation with De Tijd.

www.tijd.be
www.persgroep.be

**DE PERSGROEP**

**ROSSEL**

**UITGEVERSBEDRIJF TIJD**

| STAFF (‘04) | 1770 (‘04) | 1552 | 318 |
| SHAREHOLDERS | VAN THILLO FAMILY | FAMILY HUBRAIN - 60% | VEV + FINANCIAL GROUPS |
| TITLES | HET LAATSTE NIEUWS DE MORGEN | LE SOIR | DE TIJD |
| | L’ECO - 50% | SUD PRESSE (REGIONAL NEWSPAPERS) | DE BELEGER [INVENTM.] |
| | HET PAROOL - 45.08% | L’ECO - 50% | TIJD BEURS MEDIA |
| | VMMA [VTM] - 50% | GRENZ-ECO - 50% | REUKERSMEDIA NEWS |
| MAGAZINES: | ATV [REG. TV] - 50% | AUDOPRESS [RTL-TVI] - 29% | VACATURE - 33% |
| | DAG ALLEMAAL,... | VLN [FREE PAPER] | [JOB RECRUITMENT] |
| | VACATURE - 33.33% | INADIS [BEL-RTL] - 46% | [JOB RECRUITMENT] |

**MARKET SHARE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEWSPAPER MARKET 2004</th>
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<tr>
<td>35.22%</td>
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<tr>
<td>49.66%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.01%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**RESULTS (MILL. EURO)**

| turnover 2003 | 334.3 |
| operating result 2003 | 47.4 |
| net profit 2003 | 23.8 |

**SOURCE: DE TIJD**
VMMa acquires rights to Champions League

This is the second disappointment in the sporting arena for the VRT

The Vlaamse Mediamaatsschappij (VMMa - Flemish Media Company - the company behind the commercial broadcasters VTM and Kanaaltwee and not the public broadcaster VRT, has managed to obtain the broadcasting rights for Flanders for the 2006-2009 Champions League. Until (and including) the next football season (2005-2006) the rights are still in the hands of VRT. This is the second disappointment in the sporting arena for the public broadcaster in a short time. Last year, a special partnership between the commercial broadcasters VTM and VT4 managed to acquire the television rights for the football world cup in 2006 (FF).

JAN DEBACKERE • DE STANDAARD • 30 MARCH

Together with the VRT, the Vlaamse Media Maatschappij (VMMa) was still the only candidate for the Flemish rights to the Champions League, a football competition between the top teams in Europe. During the first round VT4 was also a candidate, but UEFA, the European football association, organised a second round because the bids were too low. VRT and VMMa then increased their bids and UEFA announced yesterday that the VMMa bid was the highest. The VMMa will broadcast the Champions League matches on Kanaaltwee (Channel Two). RTL-TVI continues to hold the rights in Wallonia. The VMMa was pleased to have acquired the rights. Having also obtained the WK football rights in Germany next year, this is an important second coup. The Champions League commonly attracts half a million viewers. For a smaller broadcaster such as Kanaaltwee these guaranteed viewing figures are particularly important. It is not known how much the VMMa paid for the Champions League rights. Its spokesman, Mark Vanlombeek, would only disclose that they went to the limit of their capacity. In the event of a third round they would have had to pull out. VRT television director, Aimé Van Hecke, is not prepared to quote figures either. We offered significantly more than what we paid last time, but apparently that was still not enough. But we were not prepared to go above certain limits.' He is of the opinion that the VMMa is paying twice what the VRT paid last time. According to Van Hecke this puts an end to the idea that the VRT might be over-financed. The VMMa submitted a complaint to the European Commission on this issue. ‘This proves the idea is a fallacy. We do not have a reserve of 25 million euros to resort to in order to buy sporting rights, as claimed by the VMMa.’ UEFA has not yet made a decision on the rights for pay television. The bids were too low so that UEFA decided not to grant them as yet. Negotiations with interested parties will continue though. The allocation of the rights for the Champions League may also have consequences for the Belgian football contract. Profliga is developing a procedure to sell the rights for the Belgian football competition and is having exclusive discussions, until the end of this month, with the current holders of the rights (VTM, Canal+, RTBF and BeTv). Discussions with other interested parties will follow. The fact that VTM had to dig deep for the Champions League rights could have an effect on the sale of the Belgian rights.

Vanlombeek denies this. ‘The Champions League is for Kanaaltwee, the Belgian competition is for VTM in the first place. The dossiers are dealt with separately and the budgets do not affect each other.’

WWW.VMM.A.BE
WWW.VTM.BE
WWW.VRT.BE

Belgacom fails to acquire Cesky Telecom

FF EDITOR

The Belgian telecom operator, Belgacom submitted a binding offer for its Czech rival, Cesky Telecom. The Spanish operator, Telefonica, French operator, France Telecom and Swiss operator, Swisscom, were also involved in the bidding process. The Czech government’s 51.5% share in Cesky Telecom is for sale. Apparently Belgacom offered 2.25 billion euros during the first round. According to De Tijd Cesky Telecom would be valued at 4.45 billion euros on the basis of the market price on 25 March. The financially strong Cesky would immediately make a positive contribution to Belgacom’s profits, De Tijd [30 March] found out. The Belgian operator, who from an accounting point of view does ‘not have enough debts’, would benefit from the debt it would incur in order to complete the transaction. However, it was the Spanish Telecom operator Telefonica that made the highest bid (2.75 billion euro) for the stake of 51.1% held by the Czech government in Cesky Telecom (De Tijd 31 March). That is considerably more than Belgacom, which only offered 2.25 billion euros. Swiss Telecom offered 2.64 billion euros. The bids submitted by France Telecom and a few venture capitalists were considered invalid. The Czech government agency, which supervised the sale, will recommend Telefonica to the government as the most suitable candidate to take over Cesky Telecom. However, the Czech government crisis threatens to delay the work of the government. The fate of the Prime Minister, Stanislav Gross, and his centre-left government is dependent upon a vote of confidence from parliament. In order to survive the vote Mr Gross needs support from the communists. According to De Tijd it is by no means certain that they will agree with the sale of the government interest. The privatisation of Cesky Telecom could well be postponed in the long term as a result of these events.

WWW.BELGACOM.BE
WWW.TELECOM.CZ
Huge investment puts Zeebrugge on the maritime map of the world

In 2004 Zeebrugge port finally found the new client it had been looking for: AP Möller Maersk

Last year the port of Zeebrugge achieved a record shipment rate of 1.7 million vehicles, an increase of 10%, and has thus become the largest vehicle transfer (RoRo) port in Europe. According to De Tijd (29 March), however, the port had been struggling until recently with a ‘container complex’. For many years the government had been investing millions in a major container terminal that did not make a profit. The Antwerp harbour group, Katoen Natie, (KTN) has been running the FCT container terminal for a long time. In 1999 KTN wanted to introduce car shipments, but was refused permission to do so by MBZ (Zeebrugge Harbour Authorities), notwithstanding the existence of a contract with the shipping company Cobelfret. After many years of legal wrangling the MBZ, spurred on by the new Managing Director, Joachim Coens, took on the terminal concession again in 2003. In 2004 Coens finally found the new client he had been looking for. APM, a subsidiary of the Danish family concern, A.P. Möller Maersk, is one of the largest container terminal operators in the world. It operates 35 container terminals with an annual shipment rate of 22 million TEU (20 ft containers) and employs 12,000 people. It is one of the main port transfer shipper groups in the world. APM is investing between 100 and 150 million euros in the modernisation of the FCT terminal. This huge investment has made it easier for Zeebrugge to appeal to the government for subsidies. Until now the port management was frequently told it had to run the FCT terminal to capacity before starting with new harbour projects (FF).

MARC DEROO • DE TIJD • 29 MARCH

In May of next year APM will take over 900 of the 1,300 metres of quays and 57 of the 84 ha of the terrain. The company has promised to realise a shipment rate in excess of 1 million TEU in a relatively short time. This equates to approximately 12 million tons of goods, a third of what the port of Zeebrugge is currently handling. Furthermore, the Danish group has promised to create 500 extra jobs so that Zeebrugge will undoubtedly become one of the main European operating bases of the global shipping company Maersk and its subsidiaries Sealand and Safmarine. Zeebrugge will be able to accommodate the largest container ships in the world in its terminal and will thus become a prominent feature on the maritime map of the world. Last year Zeebrugge realised a shipment rate of 31.8 million tons (+4.3%), 14 million of which were container goods (+14.5%). 1.2 million TEU, or 20 ft containers, were handled (+18.5%).

Joachim Coens explains why APM opted for Zeebrugge: ‘Global container transport continues to grow considerably. There is a need to increase, or at least maintain, existing capacity. All container terminal operators are looking at the Rhine/Schelde delta to see what options are available. FCT enables us to operate with a high quality terminal. We are close to Antwerp and Rotterdam and easily accessible for large ships. It only takes them half an hour to proceed from the maritime route to the terminal.’ There is still growth potential in car transfer (RoRo) shipments as well. Coens states: ‘We still have capacity to extend the car transfer facilities at the Bastenaken quay. We are able to expand to approximately 100 ha. We would have to extend the quay wall, which is currently only 600 m. The car shipment company - 90% owned by HNN - has already taken on 27 ha and is investing 10 million euros in a new terminal with a storage capacity of 15,000 vehicles. The remainder is still being investigated.’ Distribution and car shipment facilities are mainly based in the rear harbour. Various players in the care sector are involved. They include Wallenius, Toyota, CTO, Sea-Ro and Stukwerkers who operate their own terminals. Cobelfret has a terminal in Vlissingen, but is and remains - same as Wallenius and UECC - one of the main car shipping companies for our port. Last year Cobelfret Ferries realised a shipment rate of 340,000 containers and 400,000 vehicles. The ships of United European Car Carriers (UECC) visited the port 600 times last year, a record. The Wallenius car carriers docked in Zeebrugge 265 times. The Japanese shipping companies, Mitsui OSK, NYK and K Line, also run regular services to Zeebrugge.

www.maersk.com
www.zeebruggeport.be

GROSS DIVIDEND RETURN OF LISTED BELGIAN COMPANIES IN 2004* GREW BY ONE THIRD TO 6.55 BILLION EURO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>%</th>
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<th>GROSS DIVIDEND RETURN OF LISTED BELGIAN COMPANIES IN 2004* GREW BY ONE THIRD TO 6.55 BILLION EURO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Euronav          | 12.5 | 4.6
| CMB              | 12.2 | 4.5
| Mellels          | 10.5 | 4.4
| Belgacom         | 6.9  | 4.3
| GIMV             | 6.0  | 4.2
| Mourey construct | 5.6  | 4.1
| EYS              | 5.1  | 4.0
| Rosier           | 3.0  | 3.9
| Atener           | 4.9  | 3.8
| Fortis           | 4.7  | 3.7

* COMPANIES WITH BOOKING YEAR ENDING ON 31/12/2004, REAL ESTATE GROUPS EXCLUDED

SOURCE: DE TIJ
Kiwi model has become mini model

The principle of public tender for comparable medication, whereby only the cheapest medication is refunded, does not apply to patented medication.

For the time being we will have to wait for the new public health act, which should give the Minister for Social Affairs, Rudy Demotte, (PS) the unlimited power to tackle the problems in the health care system until the end of this year. Demotte thus wants to prevent the health care budget getting out of hand. But the opposition parties, CD&V and Vlaams Belang, feel that the law has not been properly formulated and do not want to pass it until after the Easter break. In the end the Kiwi model of SPA chairman, Steve Stevaert, and Rudy Demotte (PS) was only partly incorporated in the new public health act. The principle of public tender for comparable medication, whereby only the cheapest medication is refunded, does not apply to patented medication. Generics, perfect copies of brand medicines that are no longer patented, should in future be 30% cheaper. A triumph for the pharmaceutical industry, according to Knack (FF).

Patrick Martens • Knack • 30 March

The pharmaceutical companies are so delighted with the ruling that they are adding another 63 million euro on top of the planned levy of 127 million euros, via an additional tax and a price reduction for older medicines. However, this contribution will be compensated many times over with new and expensive medicines that are not covered by the Kiwi inspection, but will pass various unmanned administrative channels relatively easily in the course of being refunded. Following a string of agitated rebukes in the media, Demotte, Stevaert and their supporters of health insurance funds and unions, suddenly want to avoid ‘all out war’ with the pharmaceutical sector and have proposed an age old recipe. In addition to an instruction booklet on cheap medication for patients, it involves a small fee for doctors who prescribe lots of expensive medication. But this sanction has been in the pipeline for years, whether it can be put into practice is another matter. This does not bode well for Demotte’s public health act, which the liberals and socialists already agreed on in 2004, but which will not be passed by parliament until after the Easter break. Paars II will soon have been working on this for two years and the initial structural management of health care expenditure still has to be achieved.

Dispute between Moroccans and Turks on representativeness of Muslim Council

The Moroccan Community, by far the largest group, is unhappy about the elections for the Muslim Council.

There is discord in the Belgian immigrant community. The Moroccan Community, by far the largest group amongst the estimated 400,000 to 500,000 Belgian Muslims, is unhappy about the elections for the Muslim Council. The Brussels Member of Parliament, Fouad Ahidar (Spirit) even maintains that the results should be annulled. Barely 43,775 Muslims submitted a legitimate vote out of 69,464 registered voters. In Brussels, where more than half of the Belgian Muslim population resides, only 2800 Moroccans decided to vote. However, this is also where Belgian politicians of Moroccan origin, such as Fouad Ahidir, had called for a boycott of the elections. They were of the opinion that the classification into categories (Turks, Moroccans, Belgian converts and others) was irresponsible. As a result the Turkish community, which is only half the size of the Moroccan community, gained twice as many seats (40 as opposed to 20 for the Moroccans). Belgian politicians of Turkish and Moroccan descent, often from the same political cartel (SPA-Spirit), are now directly opposed to each other. The ‘Turks’ feel that the Muslim Executive, which is elected by the Council, should get going. The ‘Moroccans’ feel that new elections should take place (FF).

Fabian Lefevere • De Morgen • 30 March

Fatma Pehlivian, SPA member of Turkish origin, is not best pleased with her cartel partner Ahidar. ‘Elections results should be respected. Ahidar motivated his criticism with the fact that the classification of voters and candidates in categories - Turkish, Moroccan, convert or other - gave the impression that there is such a thing as a Turkish or a Moroccan Islam. ‘Whereas we want a Belgian Islam,’ maintains Pehlivian. ‘In that case he should accept the results. All the Council members are Belgian. But Fouad has allowed himself to be tempted to defend the Moroccan point of view.’ Pehlivian does recognise that the relationships within the new executive are, and remain, precarious. The previous executive, which was dominated by Moroccans, also faced major ideological problems. The Turks follow a more moderate course. [...] All we can do is to support the group that has been elected this time. It needs to complete dossiers such as the recognition of mosques as soon as possible. In fact in this case we can apply objective criteria, that have nothing to do with Turks or Moroccans.’
Flanders and the French speaking community have reached an agreement on the Flagey cultural centre in Ixelles. A dispute between the two communities on the destitute centre, known for its art deco ‘packet boat’ architecture, had been rumbling along for a few months. Bert Anciaux (Spirit), the Flemish Culture Minister had pledged 1.5 million euros for the operation of the centre in 2005. He also promised another 2 million in 2006. In return he demanded two thirds of the mandates on the Board for the Flemish speaking community. Fidala Laanan (PS), Culture Minister for the French speaking community, described Anciaux’s actions as a declaration of war. A week later the Board of vzw Flagey, in which the Flemish occupied two of the seven seats, deferred Anciaux’s decision. Laanan and Anciaux discreetly tried to find a solution, which duly followed on Good Friday. From now on the Flemish and French Communities will each provide Flagey with subsidies of 500,000 euros per annum. Brussels will do the same. The Flemish government will also subsidise the Flemish Radio Orchestra and Choir, which will move in this summer, to the tune of 500,000 euros. The new Board will have eleven instead of seven members, seven of which will be Flemish speaking (FF).

The agreement maintains a delicate balance between the communities. Anciaux did manage to claim a victory though. In his own words, he had to provide less with better results. Furthermore, he managed to introduce a Flemish majority on the new Board. Seven of the eleven members are Flemish speaking, three appointed by the Flemish Community, three for ‘residential users’ such as the VRO, and one representative from the Brussels Community. The set-up includes a blocking majority to prevent one of the communities from gaining the upper hand.

Ministers Anciaux, Laanan and the Brussels Premier, Mr Picqué, (PS) called Flagey an inter-cultural project, heralding a yet to be accomplished cultural agreement between Flanders and Wallonia.

The Belgian pavilion compares favourably with those of its neighbouring countries. It consists of three major sections, a high-tech gallery of paintings by famous Belgian artists [ranging from the Van Eyck brothers to Luc Tuymans], a panoramic presentation of the three regions, Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels; and (obviously) a Belgian café with a wide selection of beers. The shop next door sells Belgian chocolate and other products. To put it in a nutshell, the pavilion is quite something, but does not hold many surprises. Clichés associated with beer and chocolates are rife. Chips and mayonnaise have just about been avoided. Bourgeois completed a four-day visit to Japan at Easter to promote Flanders itself and closer ties between the two countries. ‘Culture and economy go hand in hand,’ he states. Indeed Flanders gets cultural recognition in Japan, in many ways due to the efforts made by the Flanders Centre in Osaka. The FC is a foundation according to Japanese law. The organisation, with prominent companies on its Board (Daikin, Kaneka), has been a forum for everything Flanders has to offer for 30 years. Today the FC represents Flanders throughout Japan and receives financial backing from the Flemish government. Japanese companies that are active in Flanders are also involved in this process. One could say it is a public/private co-operation structure in the Japanese mode. During his visit Bourgeois attended several successful events supported by the FC.

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MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE

• 5 April: The Spirit Music jamia, Meshell Ndegcecello with Ron Blake, Michael Cain, Chris Dave, Dahu Mumaigi, Meshell Ndegcecello en Dj Jahi Sundance;

• 5, 8, 10, 13 and 16 April: Giovanna D’arco by Giuseppe Verdi, Concert Version, Drama Licrio wit a prologue and 3 acts, libretto by Temistocile Solera, based on the Longdress of Orleans by Friedrich von Schiller, Conductor: Silvio Varviso, Bijloke, Ghent and Flanders Opera Antwerp, info: www.vlaamseopera.be

• 7 April: Nature and Creation, Il Gardellino with Couperin, Fasch and Rebel, info: www.handelsbeurs.be

• 6 April: Feist + Hood + Chacda, Brussels, 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be

• 8 and 9 April: Ensemble Organum with the Vespers of Santiago de Compostela, Flagey, Brussels, info: www.flagey.be

• 8 April: Salome by Richard Strauss, co-production with Hamburgische Staatsoper and Nationale Reisopera, director: Willy Decker, Flanders Opera, Ghent, info: www.vlaamseopera.be

• 5 April: Jonathan Richman, AB, Brussels, info: www.abconcerts.be

• 6 April: Ba Cissoko (Guinée), Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp, info: www.zuiderpershuis.be

• 8 April: Singhajit Singh, Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp, info: www.zuiderpershuis.be

• 10 April: Ludwig van Beethoven, violin sonatas by Midori Seiler, violin and Jos van Immerseel, piano, Concertgebouw, Bruges, info: www.concertgebouw.be

• 1 to 9 April: Salome by Richard Strauss, co-production with Hamburgische Staatsoper and Nationale Reisopera, director: Willy Decker, Flanders Opera, Ghent, info: www.vlaamseopera.be

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• 14 April: Nathalie Loriers and Yadh Elyes, Jazz, Flagey, Brussels, info: www.flagey.be

EXPO

• Until 10 April: Retrospective Floris lepers, exhibition, PMMK, Ostend, info: 059/50.81.18 www.pmmk.be

• Until 10 April: bok + 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, Ypers, 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

• 17 April: SMAK-exhibitions: Andé-Philip Lenké, Orla Barry, Michael Borremans and Bernd Lohaus + opening Art Now-exhibition with Ivo Provoost & Simona Denicolai, SMAK, Ghent, info: www.smak.be

• Until 15 May: The Moroccan Jews, Jewish Museum of Belgium, Brussels, info: 02/512.19.63

• 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 Djennai (Mali), Photo exhibition, Bozar, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be


• From 19 March: Emotion Pictures, exhibition, MuHKA, Antwerp, info: www.muhka.be

• From 19 March: The Final Floor Show, exhibition, Objectif Exhibitions, Bergerhout [Antwerp]

• From 19 March: Are we changing the world? Exhibition, Extra City, Antwerp

• Until 15 May: Visionary Belgium, an exhibition by the late Harald Szeemann (by means of an exhibition with several approaches, but always taking a poetic route, I try to give shape to the spirituality of a region or a country and its inhabitants), Bozar, Brussels, info: 02/507.82.00 www.bozar.be

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CULTURE