Broad consultation over Flemish climate policy

On 30 and 31 May there will be a Flemish Climate Conference, announced the Flemish Minister for the Environment and Energy, Kris Peeters (CD&V). That will signal the start of a broad round of consultations. Over the next few months employers, trade unions and environmental organisations must reach as broad a consensus as possible on Flemish climate policy. The aim is both to outline a long-term vision and propose concrete environmental measures for the current Flemish government (up to 2009). According to De Tijd, this modus operandi is unique in the political history of Flanders. The Flemish Government generally seeks a political agreement first and only then asks for advice. Thanks to the consultations, this order has been reversed (FF).

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De Batselier wants to involve Flemish Parliament in Europe

He also wants to put in place structures enabling the Flemish Parliament to closely follow and even modify European decision-making.

**Norbert De Batselier (SPA), Chairman of the Flemish Parliament, wants his Assembly not to be forgotten in Europe, even though the European Constitution only mentions national parliaments. He wants the seven community and regional parliaments to be able to take the lead in their areas of competence and not be tutored by the Federal Parliament. He also wants to put in place structures enabling the Flemish Parliament to closely follow and even modify European decision-making (FF).**

BART DOBELAERE • DE STANDAARD • 7 APRIL

Because the European Constitution only acknowledges national parliaments, all Belgian parliaments have to enter into co-operation agreements. In these agreements, says De Batselier, it is essential that the seven regional and community parliaments have the same power as the Federal Parliament whenever the European Constitution speaks of the ‘national’ parliaments of the Member States.

Our country has produced a declaration on this subject - Declaration 49 - but according to the Council of State this is not enforceable where European institutions are concerned. And so, says De Batselier, the Belgian parliaments must reach mutual agreements that guarantee that each one has the same rights within its constitutional powers as the Federal Parliament.

In any case, De Batselier has already made it clear to his federal colleague Herman De Croo (VLD) in a letter of 10 March that the Flemish Parliament will not tolerate any form of patronising by the Federal Parliaments. De Croo apparently answered that he understood that and shared De Batselier’s point of view.

To avoid rows over powers, De Batselier is thinking of a procedure to indicate which parliament should take the lead in which dossier.

De Batselier wants a mechanism whereby not only the Chamber and the Senate but all Belgian parliaments are informed directly and without filtering by European institutions about European legislation negotiations. He wants the regions to be given the chance to follow European decision-making as closely as possible and if necessary to modify it. For this, an ‘early intelligence system’ is needed so that European rules become known at an early stage. In any event, De Batselier wants to set up a Europe department in his own parliament specifically to keep the Flemish Parliament involved at European policy level.

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**Drop in municipal taxes just make-believe**

Over the past five years, living in the Flemish municipalities has become significantly more expensive from the point of view of taxation. As usual, the municipalities lower their taxes when the local elections are approaching. They are doing the same this year, because there are elections next year in October. The rates of their two main taxes, the supplementary personal income tax and the mill rate on property, are being cut slightly. But overall residents are still paying considerably more taxes than in 2000, the year of the last local elections (FF).

**GUY FRANSEN • DE STANDAARD • 6 APRIL**

Eighty per cent of the income the Flemish municipalities receive from taxes comes from supplementary personal income tax and the mill rate. Local councils are free to set the rates themselves, although the government does provide for penalties for municipalities that charge excessively low taxes.

This year, Flemish local authorities are cutting their supplementary personal income tax on average to 7.16%, whereas the average last year was 7.19%. That is no cause for celebration, however, because in 2000 the rate was 6.59%, before rising each year thereafter. According to the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten, VVSG), in 60% of municipalities the rate is higher than five years ago.

The story is exactly the same for surcharges on property. Here too the Flemish municipalities are cutting the figure by a single unit from 1,305 to 1,304 in 2005, but in 2000 the average rate was only 1,074 units. The VVSG says that in as many as 79% of Flemish municipalities more taxes are being paid on property than in 2000.

[www.vvsg.be](http://www.vvsg.be)

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**Celibacy called into question by head of Brothers of Love**

Now that Pope John Paul II has died, several prominent clergymen in Flanders have also commented on what direction they think the church should take. Brother René Stockman, for example, Head of the Brothers of Love worldwide, has brought celibacy up for discussion. It is time that priests can marry or that married men can become priests, he says. According to Stockman, it is still too soon for women priests. However, De Standaard [6 April] wonders whether married priests can solve the problem of the lack of priestly callings - a problem primarily afflicting the West. And whether in any case married priests make the church more modern and therefore more attractive.

Church specialists are not convinced that married priests solve much, the paper concludes. Perhaps a few more men will take the step, but a major influx is not anticipated. The crisis of faith in the West is too great for that, the paper claims.
No individual job offers for Walloon unemployed

Thus, their unemployed are never punished, while Flemish ones are

Last year the Federal Government (BGDA) and the Walloon (Forem), Brussels (VDAB) and Flemish (VDAB) employment services agreed that after a certain period of unemployment, each individual unemployed person would receive individual assistance and if necessary would be offered training or a job. An unemployed person who repeatedly refuses an offer of training or work would be reported to the Federal Employment Office (the RVA), which could punish the work-shy person concerned, if necessary. But now it appears that Wallonia and Brussels almost never report such work-refusing people. Thus, their unemployed are never punished, while Flemish ones are. In the past few days it has become clear why, reports De Standaard [4 April] (FF).

Contrary to what was agreed, the Walloon service does not make individual job offers to its unemployed. Job offers are placed on noticeboards, posted on a website, but an individual unemployed person never receives an individual job offer. This means they can never refuse an offer, and therefore cannot be punished.

According to Freya Van den Bossche, that is contrary to what was agreed and another agreement must urgently be reached this week. Flemish Minister-President Yves Leterme (CD&V) and Flemish Employment Minister Frank Vandenbroucke (SP.A) are insisting on it.
‘We have noticeboards and websites in Flanders too; we even send out e-mails and text messages with job offers. But we also call all unemployed people to an interview, as per the agreed plan. They then receive an individual offer of training or a job. If they refuse, we report them to the RVA,’ says the VDAB. Over the past few days there were insufficient staff at the office of the Walloon Minister for Economic Affairs and Employment, Jean-Claude Marcourt (PS), to answer this. It was, however, stated that the RVA can call people itself; they then have to prove that they have made sufficient applications and put in sufficient effort. Then penalties may still be applied, albeit months later. But what was agreed was different. And my main concern is not penalties, but the rights of the unemployed in Wallonia. They are entitled to receive individual, tailored job offers.’

www.vdab.be
www.forem.be
www.rva.be
www.bgda.be

ACV calls for introduction of international union card

This is intended to make it possible for a union member to call on another trade union abroad

On 22 and 23 April the Flemish wing of the Christian trade union the ACV is holding its conference, the main theme of which will be globalisation. There, 600 militants will have to lay down the policy lines for the next four years and examine how they can intensify the pressure on the Flemish Government to deal with the negative consequences of globalisation. One of the most striking proposals the union is calling for is the introduction of an international trade union membership card. This is intended to make it possible for a union member to call on another trade union abroad and vice versa give foreigners the chance to ask Belgian unions for help. Another central theme of the discussion will be the proportional representation of foreigners in companies (FF).

According to National Secretary Ilse Dielen, the system can be compared to the recognition of foreign diplomas in our country. There are already agreements between our country and neighbouring countries concerning cross-border workers, she says. An international trade union membership card takes things one step further.

The ACV will also ask the Flemish Government to carry out an interim evaluation of the Vilvoorde Pact in the autumn of 2005, which was accepted in 2001. One of the aims of the Vilvoorde Pact was to obtain the proportional participation of countrymen of foreign origin in the labour market by 2010. For this, 2,500 to 5,000 foreign workers should be taken on every year. But because of the intervening economic recession, that goal can no longer be achieved with the current system,’ says the union. If sufficient progress is not made, therefore, the Flemish ACV wants to work with diversity plans at company level. Fixed quotas are not yet possible. ‘The foreigners are not there to make that possible,’ says the ACV. The union is more inclined to argue in favour of so-called smart quotas (which take account of a number of aspects of the foreign community) with results commitments or undertakings. The standpoints that will be further expressed at the conference concern Flanders’ socio-economic place within globalisation. ‘We will be emphasising the way in which a Flemish policy can counter the consequences of globalisation and how that policy can influence it,’ says Ilse Dielen. Topics such as industrial policy, career policy, the deregulation of services and sustainable development will also be addressed.

www.acw.be

focus on FLANDERS • 2 April - 8 April 2005 • Number 14
Government cuts duty to compensate for high diesel price

**THE VERHOFSSTADT GOVERNMENT THEREFORE FELT THE TIME WAS RIPE TO INTRODUCE A CORRECTION MECHANISM**

This week the price of oil went through the roof. Over the past few days oil in New York reached a historic high of more than 58 dollars. That effect has now died down somewhat, but prices at the pump remain high. The Verhofstadt government therefore felt the time was ripe to introduce a correction mechanism. This consists of cutting the duty on fuel as soon as the price of diesel exceeds a certain level, known as the so-called ‘reverse cliquet’. At the first Council of Ministers after the Easter holidays the government approved a royal decree to this effect (FF).

**FABIAN LEFEVERE • DE MORGEN • 7 APRIL**

If the price of diesel rises above a certain level - 1.1 euros is being mentioned - the government will cut duty to compensate. The government is in a break-even situation: what they lose in duty, they win back in higher VAT revenue.

This year alone, for example, the Federal government received a further 15 million euros from the higher VAT on fuel and by the end of 2005 that could even rise to 100 million euros. The effects are massive. Het Laatste Nieuws yesterday reported that the high price could cost an average family an extra 120 euros in light, heating and fuel in 2005. And last year several airlines introduced a surcharge to compensate for the high cost of fuel.

‘Costs are rising sharply in the transport sector,’ says Isabelle De Maeght, spokeswoman for the transport federation Febeatra. ‘After the wage burden, fuel is our main burden. If companies cannot pass this rise on to the customer - and that is not always easy without a clause in the contract - the situation will eventually become untenable for a number of hauliers.’ At Febeatra they are still expecting something from the so-called reverse cliquet. That system is the mirror image of what the government introduced in 2003 to protect itself against all too sharp price cuts, which at the time was named regular cliquet. If the price of oil falls below a certain level, the consumer will benefit only half. The rest of the price cut will be compensated for by extra duty for the government.

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**REGIONAL INVESTMENT COMPANY GIMV FACING IMMINENT PRIVATISATION**

**THE OPTION OF SELLING THE PACKAGE TO A LARGER COMPETITOR SUCH AS ACKERMANS VAN HAAREN OR FORTIS PRIVATE EQUITY HAS NOW BEEN ABANDONED**

Via the Flemish Participation Company (Vlaamse Participatiemaatschappij, VPM), the Flemish Government now holds 70% of the shares in the Flanders Regional Investment Company (Gewestelijke Investeringsmaatschappij, GIMV). It wants to dispose of 30 to 35% of these. But it wants to continue to sit on the Board of Directors and retain a blocking minority. A privatisation committee, assisted by Bank De Groof, was asked to steer this partial privatisation in the right direction. This has now entered its second phase. Until recently the possibility was still being considered of selling the package to a larger competitor such as Ackermans Van Haaren or Fortis Private Equity. But this option has now been abandoned. A business banker must place the shares on the stock exchange and supervise the sale. (FF).

**PASCAL DEN DOOVEN • DE STANDAARD • 7 APRIL**

By Friday next week at the latest the business bankers must answer a series of questions on the intended share sale. Based on these answers, the government’s advisers will give the job to those bankers they feel are best able to place the shares on the market at the best price.

Meanwhile, the continuing high price of the GIMV is beginning to make brokers nervous. ‘Normally the price drops when such a large package is hanging over the market, but the GIMV continues to remain around the 40 euros level, the highest in a long time. It’s inexplicable,’ said a financial specialist.

All the Belgian banks have applied to place the government’s shares. It will be one of the biggest operations of the first half of the year involving Belgian listed shares. London and American business banks are also competing for the order. It is expected that the actual placement is now fast approaching. The banks are already busy preparing their marketing strategies.

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**DISTRIBUTION OF INTRINSIC VALUE OF GIMV (24/02/05)**

(in million euros)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cash</td>
<td>28% (323.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barco</td>
<td>6% (70.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2% (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telenet</td>
<td>18% (200.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private equity</td>
<td>46% (523.2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ING
Towards a reorganisation of energy distribution in Flanders

The VREG no longer accepts that electricity supplier Electrabel has still not disconnected its computer system from that of the intermunicipal companies. The electricity producer Electrabel and the Flemish municipalities are currently negotiating a sweeping reform of energy distribution in Flanders. The subject of the discussions is who will gain control of the future Flemish distribution company. The VREG, the government body whose job is to ensure that all players observe the rules of the free energy market, believes that as an electricity supplier, Electrabel gains too great an advantage from the common computer system it shares with the mixed intermunicipal distribution companies. These distribution companies - Indexis, Gedis and Electrabel Netmanagement Vlaanderen - manage and maintain 80% of Flanders' electricity and gas networks. Indexis is responsible for reading electricity, gas and water meters and for passing this data on to the energy suppliers. Gedis takes care of the intermunicipal companies' bookkeeping, organises campaigns on the rational use of energy and prepares investments in the low-voltage network. But it is Electrabel Netmanagement Vlaanderen in particular that still plays the key role in energy distribution. It is responsible for maintaining and operating the electricity and gas networks. The VREG no longer accepts that electricity supplier Electrabel has still not disconnected its computer system from that of the intermunicipal companies, thereby putting other suppliers such as Luminus, Nuon or Essent at a disadvantage. The municipalities now want to merge Indexis, Gedis and Netmanagement Vlaanderen (FF).

DAVID ADRIAEN • DE TIJD • 2 APRIL

The cable network that connects the high-voltage cabins to the electricity meter of a household or an SME is managed by the intermunicipal distribution network operators. The vast majority of these, the mixed intermunicipal companies, collaborate with their historical partner Electrabel. Since the Flemish energy market was deregulated in 2003, the operational activities of all the mixed intermunicipal companies have been provided by three companies. Netmanagement Vlaanderen, a subsidiary of Electrabel, Indexis and Gedis. Gedis is owned by the municipalities, while the intermunicipal companies hold shares in Indexis.

This structure suffered a great many teething troubles when deregulation began, but even now is not yet running smoothly. Indexis in particular is having to deal with a large number of problems. The exchange of customer information between Gedis and Indexis is also still defective. In addition, these companies' computer systems are still linked to that of Electrabel. The competing electricity suppliers are complaining that as a result Electrabel is the only player to have access to confidential customer information. The political will exists to combine these activities. The municipalities are holding negotiations on this with Electrabel, wrote De Standaard yesterday. Another possibility is the merger of the intermunicipal companies. The talks between Electrabel and the municipalities have been confirmed by various sources. Electrabel is refusing to comment on the matter. Daniel Termont, Vice-Chairman of Gedis, does not want to comment to avoid hampering the negotiations. One tricky problem is the control and shareholder structure of the new undertaking. The municipalities are hoping that the talks will bear fruit this year.

The management of the distribution network is a natural monopoly and is regulated by the government. The network must not be managed by a company that is also active as an electricity supplier, says one observer. The discussions are being held at the same time as negotiations on the sharehold-
ership of the gas companies Distrigas (gas sales) and Fluxys (operator of the network of natural gas pipelines). The French utilities group Suez, Electrabel's parent company, controls both companies. The municipalities, united in the holding company Publigas, believe that the regulated activities of Fluxys should be in the hands of the public sector. They are prepared to exchange their interest in Distrigas for a larger interest in Fluxys.

WWW.VREG.BE
WWW.ELECTRABEL.BE
WWW.INDEXIS.BE
WWW.GEDIS.BE

Increase of unemployment in Flanders

At the end of March there were 227,184 job-seekers in Flanders. That is an increase of 8.5% over the same period last year, announced Employment Minister Frank Vandenbroucke (SP.A). Last month the increase came to 7.9% on an annual basis. Of these job-seekers, 172,659 are receiving benefit. The increase is partly down to the inclusion in the figures of older job-seekers and employees of local employment agencies (plaatselijke werkgelegenheidsagentschappen, PWAs). Unemployment in Flanders currently lies at 8.48%.

WWW.VDAB.BE
Shops specialised in recycled goods triple turnover

Second-hand centres are now an integral part of the Flemish social economy. They offer work to unskilled workers and the long-term unemployed who get few if any chances on the ordinary job market. Theses shops collect all manner of second-hand goods and sell them at low prices, if necessary after giving them a facelift. In 1998 the second-hand sector was investigated for the first time by the Public Waste Agency of Flanders (Openbare Vlaamse Afvalstoffenmaatschappy, OVAM).

Since then the sector’s turnover has tripled from 5.8 million euros to 15.2 million euros, according to a recently published report. (FF).

KATRIEN VERSTRAETE • DE TIJD • 7 APRIL

Between 1998 and 2003, the number of shops rose from 58 to 97. Further growth to 106 shops was expected for 2004. Presumably they are now mainly working on providing better service, improved collection and better sales, says the OVAM. ‘Every Fleming produces 6 to 8 kilograms of reusable waste a year. Some of that could also end up in these shops.’

In 1998, second-hand shops collected 11,020 tonnes of reusable goods. In 2003 that had risen to 30,066 tonnes. The percentage of second-hand furniture collected has fallen in recent years, but remains the main group, with 11,286 tonnes and a share of 38%.

In second place are white goods (fridges, freezers), followed by clothing with 11,286 tonnes and a share of 38%.

Of the items collected, 18,582 tonnes (6 to 8 kilograms of reusable waste a year. Some of that could also end up in these shops.’

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In second place are white goods (fridges, freezers), followed by clothing with 11,286 tonnes and a share of 38%.

Of the items collected, 18,582 tonnes were sold in second-hand shops in 2003. In 1998 that figure was just 7,847 tonnes.

Second-hand shops are becoming more and more popular. In 1998 they welcomed 831,000 paying customers, and in 2003 2.1 million. Finally, more and more people are finding jobs in the second-hand sector. In 1999 there were 1,313, in 2003 2,244, including 346 volunteers. According to the report, more people urgently need recruiting to cope with the success of the second-hand shops.

WWW.KRINGLOOPWINKEL.BE
WWW.OVAM.BE

Flanders is no stranger in Japan

That Flanders is almost unknown abroad and that foreign trade is therefore better conducted under the Belgian flag is a frequently heard argument in some commercial and diplomatic circles. In Japan at any rate this argument does not hold water, claims the Gazet van Antwerpen. There ‘Flanders’ is rather more familiar than “Belgium”.

Flemish representatives have put Flanders on the Japanese map. Flemish economic representatives in Japan presented the Flemish Minister for Foreign Policy and Tourism, Geert Bourgeois (N-VA), who was in Japan last week, with one or two fine figures. But without doubt it is the aura of artistic Flemish cities such as Ghent, Antwerp and Bruges in particular that rings bells with the Japanese (FF).

ROGER VAN HOUTTE • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 5 APRIL

There are various reasons for Flanders’ reputation in Japan. The cultural aura of Flanders and the fame of its artistic cities are facts. In the ‘Flanders Center’, Director Bernard Catrysse succeeds in introducing Flemish artists to a broad Japanese public.

On an economic level, no fewer than 150 Japanese firms have a presence in Flanders. They employ 14,000 people. Obviously that strengthens ties. Most of these Japanese firms are based in Flemish Brabant, on the Antwerp-Limburg axis. In turn, around 70 Flemish companies export to Japan. They are mainly active in the foodstuffs sector (beer and chocolate are gaining further in importance), but also in diamonds (Antwerp in particular), chemicals, machines and the pharmaceutical sector. The Flemish region accounts for 90% of Belgian exports to Japan, or 2 billion euros on an annual basis.

The Flanders Foreign Investment Office currently monitors around thirty firms. ‘Flanders’ assets are its multilingualism, its favourable location and good infrastructure in the centre of Western Europe, the reputation of Flemish education (which heads the list in Europe), and consequently the good training of workers and high quality of employees,’ says Director Jan De Bock of the FFIO. These qualities outweigh the negative points, such as complicated environmental legislation and high taxation.

The good economic relations between Japan and Flanders have not come about by themselves. Since 1994 the emphasis has been placed on Flanders by our representatives from the FFIO and Export Vlaanderen (EV). A dynamic team of seven people is headed by Jan De Bock and Dirk De Ruyver. They are responsible not only for trade relations with Japan, but also with Australia, New Zealand and Korea (the ‘Pacific’ region). The FFIO and EV are already working as a single team. However, the two offices, in Tokyo and Osaka, will remain.

Tourism is also an economic sector. Japanese tourism to Belgium is again on the up following several difficult years. 11 September 2001, the economic recession in Japan, but also the bankruptcy of Sabena and the SARS epidemic in the Far East had halted the growth of tourism between 2001 and 2003.

That now appears past. In the first five months of 2004 the total number of Japanese stopping off in Belgium rose by 21% compared with 2003. The increase is bigger in Flanders, says Wim Vanseveren, Director-General of Tourism Vlaanderen. Flanders’ artistic cities provide healthy figures: Antwerp +16%, Bruges +50%, Ghent +17%, Leuven +57%, Mechelen +7% and Brussels +15%. In 2003, for which complete figures are available, 114,452 Japanese tourists visited Belgium, good for 220,566 overnight stays or 1.4% of all foreign bookings. 53% of them stopped off in Brussels, 42% in the Flemish Region and 5% in the Walloon Region. Tourism from Japan still has enormous possibilities for growth. Tourism Vlaanderen therefore hopes to attract 250,000 Japanese tourists a year by 2007, good for 500,000 overnight stays.

WWW.FFIO.JP / WWW.BELGIUM-TRAVEL.JP / WWW.FLANDERS.JP /
VRRT wants to start digital channels

According to Tony Mary, Managing Director, his company bid 6.6 million euros for the broadcasting rights to the Champions League

FF EDITOR

According to Tony Mary, Managing Director of the public broadcaster VRT, his company bid 6.6 million euros for the broadcasting rights to the Champions League. Since it was not VRT but its competitor, the Flemish Media Company (Vlaamse Mediamaatjeschappij, VMMa) that won the rights, he is assuming that the commercial television company made a higher bid. According to Mary, Kanaaltwee, the VMMa’s second channel, can never earn the money back through advertising revenue. Mary made these comments in the weekend edition of De Standaard (2 April). Mary also admits that the loss of the Champions League and earlier the football World Championships in Germany is a heavy blow for VRT. He also believes the public broadcaster has little chance of winning the broadcasting rights to Belgian football. Because the VMMa owns open channels (VTM and Kanaaltwee) and the only Flemish subscription channel (Canal+), it is at an advantage in negotiations over sports rights, claims the VRT boss. Nevertheless, Mary hopes that the public broadcaster will play a major role in the breakthrough of digital television. In the meantime, he is assuming that he will get the go-ahead from the government to start a digital arts and culture channel. The project is a joint-venture between VRT and the Dutch NOS. Both public channels would pay out 20 million euros to create a Great-Dutch channel. Next year VRT is also planning to launch an educational channel, focusing on technology, history and architecture. Mary believes such a channel to be part of the role a public channel should play.

www.vrt.be

Large scale examination and renovation of Rubens’ paintings in Flemish museums

The project will culminate in a major exhibition in the autumn of 2007

The Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium are restoring five of their Rubens paintings, including the monumental “Crowning of Mary”. The operation is being made possible by the patronage of the Interbrew-Baillet Latour Fund. At the same time the Royal Museums are for the first time having their large Rubens collection, containing 52 paintings, systematically examined with modern techniques such as infrared photography, radiography and pigment analysis. The project will culminate in a major exhibition in the autumn of 2007 (FF).

JAN VAN HOVE - DE STANDAARD - 6 APRIL

The Interbrew-Bailet Latour Fund is known for its support of scientific research, primarily in the field of medicine. But it also funds restoration projects. ‘Without outside help the Royal Museums could not carry out a demanding restoration such as that of the ‘Crowning of Mary’,” says Joost Van der Auwera, curator of seventeenth century Flemish art in the Royal Museums. The restoration of the gigantic work of art means two years’ work for three restorers. The painting is so big and fragile that it cannot be moved. The facelift is taking place in the Rubens Room itself, where the public can follow the work step by step. ‘In earlier restorations the work was painted over in various places,’ says Van der Auwera. ‘This is now being removed, so that we can again see the original layer of paint of the ‘Crowning’. This will bring the work closer to the appearance Rubens intended.’ The ‘Portrait of Helena Fourment’ is also being treated. Some specialists doubt whether this is actually by Rubens. The initial results of the cleaning, which will reveal the original layer of paint, is promising for the Royal Museums. The quality of the painting is so high that it is likely to be by Rubens. The three other panels that are being restored are ‘Christ and the adulterous woman’, ‘The triumph of faith’ and ‘Mary and the periwinkle’.

The work is being carried out by a team of restorers under the supervision of the curators of the Royal Museums. They are part of an ambitious Rubens project in which the 52 paintings and oil paint sketches from the Royal Museums’ collection will be thoroughly examined in the laboratory for the first time. ‘By examining the paintings with radiography and infrared photography, by gauging the age of the wood and by analysing the pigments of some works, the laboratory examination will provide a wealth of new information,’ says Joost Van de Auwera. ‘On some paintings the signature will become visible. This will give us a better insight into the authenticity of the pieces, which in some cases has been disputed for years in specialist literature. We hope this examination will throw new light on how Rubens organised his studio.’

www.fine-arts-museum.be
**CULTURE**

**Diary**

**MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE**

- **13 and 16 April:** Giovanna D’Arco by Giuseppe Verdi, Concert Version, Drama, Lirico Wit prologue and 3 acts, libretto by Temistocle Solera, based on Die Jungfrau von Orleans by Friedrich von Schiller, Conductor: Silvio Varviso, Bijloke, Ghent and Florimant Opera Antwerp, info: www.vlaamseopera.be
- **12 April:** Nathalie Loriers and Yadd Elyes, Jazz, Flagey, Brussels; info: www.flagey.be
- **14 April:** Nederlanders Blazers Ensemble and Aynur (Turkey), Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp, info: www.zuiderpershuis.be 03/248 01 00
- **14 April:** Akademie für alte Musik Berlin – Rias Kammerchor conducted by Daniel Gehmacher (Baroque); Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp, info: www.zuiderpershuis.be 03/248 28 28
- **15 and 17 April:** National Orchestra of Belgium conducted by Mikko Wulff with Hilary Hahn, Violin, compositions by Henr’i van Buzouw and Jouhanni Rautavaara, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- **15 April:** deFilharmonie conducted by Daniele Carbonara with Manfred Symphony by Tchaikovsky, De Filharmonie, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- **16 April:** Raphaël Abou Khalil, Handschulbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handschulbeurs.be 09/265 91 65
- **15 April:** Tito Paris (Cabu Verde), Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp, info: www.zuiderpershuis.be 03/248 01 00
- **16 April:** Saez, AB, Brussels; info: www.abconcerts.be
- **14 and 15 April:** Incubator by Philipp Gehrmaier [Austria], dance, Kaaitheater, Brussels; info: www.kaaitheater.be
- **18 April:** KREMERata Baltic – Amsterdam Sinfonieta conducted by Gustavo Dudamel with Gidon Kremer [Violin]; compositions by Shostakovich, Bella Bartok, Gustav Mahler and Leonard Bernstein; Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- **13 to 16 April:** Romeo Castelluci with Societas Raffaello Sanzio, B #03 Berlin; De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03/248 28 28
- **14 April:** Flemish Radio Orchestra conducted by Martin Brabbin with compositions by Elliot Carter; De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03/248 28 28
- **15 April:** Souad Massi, Stadsschouwburg, Brugge; info: www.springsessions.be 050/44 30 60
- **15 to 24 April:** Grand Hotel Europe, Literary meetings; more than 20 national and international writers are invited to the Bozar (with Philippe Besson [France], Javier Cercas [Spain]), Alan Cherchesov [Russia], Alan Hollinghurst [UK – Booker Prize 2004], Edward P. Jones [US – Pulitzer Prize 2004], Erwin Mortier [Belgium], Glenn Patterson [Ireland], Said [Iran/Ger], Daniele Sánchez [France] and Chika Unigwe [Nigeria/Belg.], Brussels; info: www.bozar.be www.grandhotelbeurdeurope.be
- **16 April:** Baghi o’ Zhyran Ensemble, Karakal, Pakistan; Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp, info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
- **15 April:** Music Fund is a partnership between New Music Society, Luthiers sans Frontieres and Oxfam-Solidariteit in order to collect musical instruments and then organize their donation to countries in the South; First collection for Palestine, Flagey, Brussels; info: www.flagey.be
- **18 April:** Collegium Vocale conducted by Philip Hurley (Ronan) with composers by Heinrich Schütz; De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03/248 28 28
- **19 April:** Champs d’Action o’ Mar Vanrunx (Kunst/Werk) Stockhausen, Feldman, Globalok, Handschulbeurs, Ghent; info: www.kaaitheater.be
- **19 April:** Spiritual Unity, Jazz, Vooruit Ghent with Albert Ayler, Marc Ribot, Charles Grimes and Chad Taylor, info: www.vooruit.be 09/267 28 28
- **20 April:** Ane Brnz / Mary Lorson / Sergeant Petter, Handschulbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handschulbeurs.be
- **21 April:** Rebekke Bakken [Nor], Rotterdam, info: www.denoma.be 03/235 04 90
- **21 April:** Tres Chicas / Waterson Carly / Kate & Anna Maggarrigle Handschulbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handschulbeurs.be
- **21 April:** Théâtre de Poche/Allah n’est pas obligé [Bel/Air], Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp, info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
- **21 to 23 April:** Christelle Filloz and Yukiko Shinozaki, Inner Horizon, choreography and design by Cézanne, Concertgebouw, Bruges, info: www.concertgebouw.be
- **22 April:** Aldo Ciccolini, Pianoreital with Claude Debussy, Préludes and Debussy’s Images, Concertgebouw, Brussels; info: www.kaaitheater.be
- **22 April:** Big Low / Black Lipstick / Hugh Cornwell’s Three Piece Suite Handschulbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handschulbeurs.be
- **23 April:** Marinke Jager / Matha Wainwright / A Girl Called Eddy / Mia Dai Todd / Kathleen Edwards; Handschulbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handschulbeurs.be

**EXPO**

- **Until 17 April:** Jazz in Little Belgium, MIM-museum [musical instruments], Brussels; info: www.mim.be/ Jazz
- **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:** SAKM-exhibitions: André-Philip Lemke, Orra Barry, Michael Barrois and Bernd Lohaus – opening Art Now-exhibition with Ivo Proost & Simona Denicolai, SMAK, Ghent; info: www.smak.be
- **Until 15 May:** The Maroccan 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 Djenné [Mali], Photo exhibition, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- **18 to 22 March:** Eurafrica Brussels 2005, Fine Art o’ Antiques fair, theme: light and Art Nouveau, Expo, Brussels; info: www.eurafrica.be
- **From 19 March:** Emotion Pictures, exhibition, MuHKA, Antwerp; info: www.muhka.be
- **From 19 March:** The Final Floor Show, exhibition, Objectified Exhibitions, Borgerhout [Antwerp]
- **From 19 March:** Are we changing the world? Exhibition, Extra City, Antwerp
- **Until 15 May:** Visionary Belgium, an exhibition by the late Harald Szemann Bozar, Brussels; info: 02/507 82.00 www.bozar.be
- **Until 16 May:** Më-tissages, exhibition about art and textile, Miat [Museum for Industrial Archeology and Textile, Ghent; info: www.miat.gent.be
- **Until 5 June:** El fruto de la fe, Flemish gothic art from La Palma, Sint-Pietersabdij, Ghent; info: www.gent.be/ spa 09/243.97.30
- **15 to 18 April:** Art Brussels, 23rd Contemporary Art Fair, Brussels Expo; info: www.artbrussels.com

**Focus on Flanders**

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