Flemish road sticker draws nearer

Speaking at the presentation of a comparative European traffic study, the Flemish Mobility Minister Kathleen Van Brempt (SP.A) said that she wanted to introduce the new “road sticker” before 2009, the end of the Flemish legislature. Introduction of the road sticker is included in the Flemish coalition agreement. The sticker replaces road tax and should ensure that from now on foreigners also pay for using Flemish roads. The study showed Van Brempt that no existing system could be transferred to the Flemish context just like that. A toll system such as the one in France, with tollgates, is out of the question here, whilst the German satellite-operated truck toll (Lkw-Maut) is causing problems with short cuts. The minister said that Flanders would probably get a combination of various systems, which would differ for trucks and for cars (FF).

GUIDO CLOOSTERMANS • HET BELANG VAN LIMBURG • 29 APRIL

‘The revenue from the road sticker will be invested in safe roads and in sustainable transport with better public transport, and without that leading to any tax increases for the Flemish people,’ said Van Brempt. ‘Before a sticker system can be put into practice, however, a wide-ranging social debate is needed on its objectives,’ she feels. Van Brempt does not want to pin herself down to a date, and is also not revealing anything of what the system should look like in Flanders. When Flanders knows what it wants, Van Brempt will also start the dialogue with the other regions, so that Belgium does not end up with three different systems.

Van Brempt says that the sticker should not merely be a replacement road tax. It should thus offer an added advantage. And this will come not only from the extra contribution paid by foreigners, who will also have to pay for using our roads. According to Van Brempt, the road sticker should also increase traffic fluidity, in other words, avert congestion on the roads. ‘That means that the tariffs will vary according to the place, the time of day and the type of car, so that environmentally friendly vehicles will also benefit from a favourable rate’. The introduction of the road sticker should also have a positive effect on quality of life and safety. For Van Brempt there is no possibility of trafficswarming onto the secondary roads because the toll is only levied on motorways.

INTRODUCTION

Two out of every three immigrants in Belgium are out of work. In Europe that average is 3.5%. Employment rates among immigrants do none too well when it comes to immigrant employment. Nonetheless it generally assumed that a job is the most obvious route towards integration. Anyone reducing unemployment among immigrants is solving, as it were, a part of the integration problem. There are a number of ideas doing the rounds and can therefore be ranked under plan B. The more obvious route towards integration is to set a quota on employers for the number of immigrant workers they have to recruit. But there are problems with this approach. As a matter of fact, employers who systematically put applications aside solely because the person’s name is Mohammed or Youssouf. The Flemish Integration Minister Marino Keulen (VLD) recognises that kind of discrimination but remains opposed to a quota. All too often immigrants are linguistically disadvantaged and have too little knowledge and training. They therefore also emerge from the selection process as the least competent, according to the minister, who bases himself on the results of Jobkanaal, an initiative of the Flemish Chamber of Commerce aimed at giving immigrants, disabled persons and the over-45s more opportunities on the job market. If the government wants to do something about discrimination, it should invest in training courses and see to it, for example, that fewer young immigrants end up in vocational training or private education, if they do not belong there, says Keulen. According to the minister quotas actually contribute to discrimination. He argues that if someone is taken on because he is called Mohammed, his colleagues on the work floor will know that, too (De Standaard, 25 April). In short, quotas take no account of the company’s economic reality. The Flemish wing of the Christian trade union ACV also spoke out against quotas at the weekend. However, the ACV does want to see companies work out a diversity plan with noncommittal target figures for immigrant employment. Keulen advises people of Moroccan and Turkish origin to use their network of friends and acquaintances when they are looking for jobs, adding that it is often through unofficial channels that small SMEs and self-employed persons recruit staff.

On 28 April De Standaard’s front page included the story of an employer who had developed a very new kind of argument to justify discrimination. The company in question, trading in swing-up doors, refused to take on twenty Moroccans as fitters, arguing that the customers did not want to have their swing-up doors fitted by Moroccans. However, the manager does employ people of Moroccan origin in the company’s internal department. He can therefore hardly be accused of racism. In the light of the organisation of self-employed entrepreneurs, shows understanding for this reasoning and lays the blame on society. The minister regards the excuse as implausible and the whole argument as twaddle. His colleague at Employers’ Organisation Vandenbroucke, reacted angrily and reminded Unizo and the employers that they receive a large sum of money every year from the government for the fight against Racism, a new taboo among employers seems to have perished.

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief
The Council of State has suspended the circulars implementing the Brussels Language Agreement. That agreement stipulates that local administrations (municipalities and public social welfare centres) may hire contract staff who only speak one language when there are no bilingual candidates available and if the continuity of the service is at risk. Staff with a permanent appointment, on the other hand, would have to continue to abide by the language legislation. According to the Council of State, the latter legislation should also apply to contract staff. The Council’s opinion comes in the wake of a complaint from four pro-Flemish organisations. However, VLD minister Guy Vanhengel wants to make sure that services in hospitals and old people’s homes are not jeopardised as a result (FF).

ANJA OTTE • DE STANDAARD • 27 APRIL

The Language courtesy agreement (the predecessor of the Brussels Language Agreement, ed.) allowed local administrations (municipalities and public social welfare centres) to recruit non-permanent civil servants who only spoke one language if they obtained the required language certificate within two years. At the same time the federal selection agency Selor undertook to make the language exam more flexible. That agreement also died a death in Vilvoorde. Grouwels misses such ‘horse-trading’.

Vilvoorde constituency. Grouwels dismisses the Brussels government’s authority to annul unlawful contracts, ruling that the Brussels government is not free to do this, it is obliged to do so. It is unclear where things should go from here. CD&V state secretary Brigitte Grouwels feels that the Brussels government must reconcile itself with the suspension.

‘We must stop saying that all the ups and downs on the linguistic front in Brussels are solved if the language law is simply enforced strictly’, says VLD minister Guy Vanhengel. The Flemish Liberal has repeatedly pressed for the adaptation or ‘modernisation’ of the language law. However, that has to be regulated at federal level. Up until recently, it was on the table as compensation to the Francophones for a possible split of the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde constituency. Grouwels dismisses such ‘horse-trading’.

FF EDITOR

In the night of 26/27 April negotiations between the Federal Government parties on the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde issue continued until 1 a.m., at an unknown location. ‘There’ll be more talks in the coming days because further talks will be worth the effort,’ was the only thing that Deputy Prime Minister and Federal Institutional Reforms Minister Johan Vande Lanotte (SP.A) was prepared to disclose after the secret talks. The same concise message was conveyed by his colleague Didier Reynders (MR). The chairmen of the Francophone parties also met to discuss the matter the next morning. After their meeting, they also adopted a very tactful approach in their reactions.

Anyone who had hoped for a breakthrough in these ‘ultimate negotiations’ could not fail to be disappointed. It looked as if the federal parties had merely gained time. This was also apparent from the report given by the two ministers in the afternoon of 27 April in the parliamentary internal affairs committee. CD&V parliamentary party leader De Crem wanted a solution by next Wednesday, but that proposal was voted down by the purple majority, so there will be no vote on BHV in the same committee next week either. According to Johan Vande Lanotte the purple senior ministers do not yet have the beginnings of an agreement, but the negotiations are developing favourably. PS chairman Elio Di Rupo said that the night-time meeting had gone off well and that various possibilities were still open. The ‘ultimate negotiations’ may only be continued after 1 May. The conclusion of Het Laatste Nieuws (28 April) the next day was relentless: ‘Nothing, niente, that’s the state of affairs’.

The negotiations continued the next evening, but on 29 April there was still no sign of any agreement.
**BHV: N-VA, Spirit and CD&V protest against plan B**

**Spirit threatens to leave the federal government if BHV is not split**

In the run-up to the final negotiations on Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde, the most pro-Flemish parties on the Flemish side are cranking up the pressure. The proposal that was put forward in the press as a possible compromise at the end of last week appeared after the weekend to stand less of a chance again. The plan consisted in bringing into a de-facto Flemish Brabant constituency and amending Article 63 of the constitution to that end. This would mean Flemings being able to vote for the same candidates in Leuven and Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde, if the same lists were submitted in the two constituencies. For the two-thirds majority required for this amendment to the constitution, the "purple" majority would have to count on the support of one Francophone opposition party. In exchange for the non-splitting, Flanders would receive extra competencies in the fields of traffic, development cooperation, energy and possibly labour in the fields of traffic, development cooperation; the Franophone opposition party. In so-called plan B, as described above and with a substantial loss of face for the Flemish parties, was given the best probability rating at 50%.

Flemish Minister-President Yves Leterme (CD&V) reacted sharply to this so-called plan B and reminded all Flemish government parties (CD&V/N-VA, SPA/Spirit and VLD) that they had signed the Flemish coalition agreement, which had included the splitting of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde as a requirement. But he immediately added that his party (CD&V) would not be leaving the government if the split did not come about. Even his Flemish-National alliance partner N-VA is not planning to do so, as N-VA chairman Bart De Wever confirmed. In a solemn joint statement it was stated that 'the promise made to the Flemish people is not a commodity and neither the constitution nor the Flemish coalition agreement are mere scraps of paper. The major concern for the VLD thus appears to be continuing in office at federal level, where they still provide the prime minister in the form of Verhofstadt.' The prime minister stirred up some bad feelings in pro-Flemish circles by declaring that as far as he was concerned the most important question was not whether Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde would be split, but who would win the Liège-Bastogne-Liège cycle race. CD&V parliametary party leader Pieter De Crem and Spirit figurehead Bert Anciaux adopted tougher standpoints in weekend interviews in De Standaard. For Anciaux the split remained the only stake in the negotiations, even if it were to lead to a crisis. Only after a crisis could plan B possibly be brought to the surface, he felt. On Monday he hardened his view in Het Laatste Nieuws (25 April) and threatened that his party would quit the Federal Government if BHV was not split. On the same day N-VA chairman De Wever made some threatening comments directed at the VLD in an interview in De Standaard.

**BART DOBBELAERE • DE STANDAARD • 26 APRIL**

After CD&V on Friday, yesterday it was the turn of N-VA to launch a fierce attack on Plan B. In this paper N-VA chairman Bart De Wever threatened to set the entire Flemish coalition agreement on its head if the split, or even a part of that agreement, was not forthcoming. De Wever took particular aim at the VLD’s showpiece, a general easing of the tax and premium burden. In the meantime Spirit, the SPA’s alliance partner, has upped the stakes. The party repeated that the split remains objective number one, just as Bert Anciaux had said this weekend in De Standaard. But yesterday it went a step further: with no split and no transfer of major competencies (more traffic policy, energy and development co-operation), the party would consider quitting the Federal Government. It is immediately clear that Spirit will never supply the necessary votes to make an amendment to the constitution possible according to Plan B. Without Spirit votes the ‘purple’ coalition needs the support of both CDH and Ecolo - a complete Francophone front, in other words. Just try to explain that being VLD or SPA. In a nutshell, plan B would mean a bust-up in the Flemish Government and in the SPA-Spirit alliance. For theoretically it is of course possible for Spirit to leave the Federal Government and the SPA to stay in it. Politically this would be anything but simple. As for the SPA, officially it is not saying anything. But unofficially it is reported that the socialists are also regarding Plan B as dead and buried. ‘We’re still in favour of the split,’ says the party spokesman. So has plan B been shelved? ‘No plan has been shelved. That’s the way it goes in negotiations’.

So there is complete radio silence on the matter again. On other issues the bickering goes on. The N-VA and VLD are openly squabbling over the easing of the tax and premium burden. De Wever is putting the future of this at risk. The VLD thinks it is unlikely that Flemish taxpayers will get along without their reduction in taxes and charges because the Francophones are digging their heels in over B-H-V. Chairman Somers called that ‘utterly crazy’.
Problem-free budget control thanks to extra revenue from taxes

A handsome EUR 1 billion more in taxes was collected than had been budgeted for, and the favourable interest-rate trend yielded a bonus of EUR 155 million.

The federal budget is balanced after the budget control, for the sixth time in a row. That was Prime Minister Verhofsstadt’s (VLD) central message at the press conference after the council of ministers’ meeting on 22 April. Social security is to receive an extra injection of EUR 600 million in 2005. That is needed in order to absorb the higher unemployment benefit payments and the low revenue from social security charges on labour. The government does not have to take any major savings measures for this. A handsome EUR 1 billion more in taxes was collected than had been budgeted for, and the favourable interest-rate trend yielded a bonus of EUR 155 million. Prospects for economic growth were adjusted downwards from 2.5 to 2.2%, the figure used by the Federal Planning Office. This year the Belgian debt mountain is being further reduced to 94.6% of GDP. After the sizeable injection of funds, Social Affairs Minister Rudy Demotte (PS) calculated that it would be possible for the social security budget to be closed with a surplus of EUR 174 million this year. Finally the government adopted one or two other noteworthy political measures with budgetary consequences (FF).

Katrien Verstraete • De Tijd • 23 April

Soon it will not be possible for a packet of cigarettes to cost less than a minimum price. ‘With the threshold price we want to prevent a price war between the cigarette manufacturers’, said the Federal Finance Minister Didier Reyners (MR) yesterday. The measure should also help to flesh out the health care budget, since the higher the price of tobacco products, the higher the excise taxes on them that flow into the treasury. The government also decided yesterday to cut the levy on disposable drinks containers from 15 to 10 euro cents per litre. After years of procrastination the ‘purple’ government had introduced a levy of almost 10 euro cents per litre on 1 April last year. But this did not have any effect on purchasing behaviour, so when the budget was being prepared in October the packaging levy was increased by almost 5 euro cents per litre from January this year. The government hoped that this would bring in EUR 139 million. The drinks and distribution sector protested vehemently at the higher levy. Yesterday the government announced that it would be doing away with the EUR 0.05/litre increase again from 1 July. During the budget control it was also decided that cities with a safety and prevention contract would be able to recruit 347 additional civic guards to contribute towards the local feeling of security.

WWW.BEGROTING.BE

Zero economic growth in the first quarter

Economists at KBC, Dexia and Fortis put the zero growth mainly down to the high price of oil.

The growth of the Belgian economy has suddenly stagnated. On 27 April the Institute for National Accounts (National Bank) reported that Gross Domestic Product (GDP) had stagnated in the first quarter of 2005 (zero growth). In the last quarter of 2004 growth of 0.3% had been recorded. Year-on-year growth from the first quarter of 2004 thus fell to 1.8%. Economists at KBC, Dexia and Fortis put the zero growth mainly down to the high price of oil. This is also the main reason for the low level of consumer and business confidence, which the National Bank noted last week. The economists do not predict much improvement for the coming months, either. The first indicators for April suggest a further downward trend. Most banks are therefore considering a review of the growth estimate. For Budget Minister Johan Vande Lanotte (SP.A), that is bad news. In his budget control last week, he based himself on an assumption of 2.2% growth. De Tijd says that these quarterly figures mark an end to the exceptionally good results chalked up by the Belgian economy, which has performed above the European average for three years in succession (FF).

Opinion

Wouter Vervenne • De Tijd • 28 April

The marked downward turn in the economic cycle has major negative consequences for the labour market and public finances. The aim of creating 200,000 jobs by the end of the Federal Government’s term of office was difficult to attain anyway. Now it becomes really very ambitious. The number of jobs will also rise too slowly in the coming months to absorb the growth in the working population, and that means unemployment will continue to rise. The lower than expected growth result means that last week’s budget control is already out of date. The buffer of EUR 200 million created by the government will not be enough if economic growth slows to 2% or less this year. The Belgian Government does not have instruments at its disposal with which to boost economic growth in the short term. Monetary policy is the responsibility of the European Central Bank (ECB), but Frankfurt is not planning to lend a hand. Budgetary policy does not offer any margin, either. If the government wants to achieve a balanced budget in 2005, for the sixth year in a row, additional cutbacks would seem to be inevitable. For the time being Belgium can do little more than hope for an international economic recovery.

WWW.INR-ICN.F.GOV.BE

focus on FLANDERS • 22 April - 29 April 2005 • Number 17
RELIGION

Flemish scouts take distance from catholic roots

At the congress of the Flemish Scouts and Girl Guides Movement VVKSM, around 700 group leaders chose to remove all explicit references to Catholicism. Explicit mentions of God or Jesus in educational work were rejected by an overwhelming majority (more than 80%). A large majority (more than 70%) felt that celebrations of the Eucharist and group chaplains were superfluous. Around 80% opted for the organisation to be given a profile as an active pluralist movement. More than a third of the leaders also felt that it was no longer expedient to call themselves Flemish. They regard the Flanders theme to be politically too scorched (FF).

KRIS HENDRICKX • DE MORGEN • 25 APRIL

The results of the congress tally with a study by the University of Antwerp, which at the beginning of this year already revealed that the average Flemish scout leader was far more progressive than the average young Fleming. The decision of the VVKSM leaders clears the way for co-operation with the Federatie Open Scoutisme [FOS], VVKSM’s smaller pluralistic brother. Seventy percent of the group leaders felt such co-operation was a good idea. Like VVKSM, FOS is affiliated to the world scouts movement and currently has seven thousand members [VVKSM has some seventy thousand]. The FOS members had already made it clear previously that they would like to talk about a joint umbrella scouting organisation.

Representatives of FOS showed themselves yesterday to be very pleased with the results of the congress. ‘We do not view VVKSM as a rival’, said chairman Dieter de Court, who was impressed by the democratic quality of the congress. ‘It is amazing that this is possible in such a large organisation’. Some seven hundred leaders took part in the congress, enthusiastically filling a packed Leuven hall, where participants expressed the standpoint of eleven thousand leaders throughout Flanders.

During the panel discussion Mieke Van Hecke, head of the Catholic umbrella organisation VSko, reacted very sharply to the plan to remove the words God and Jesus. ‘If you no longer mention the source of your inspiration, some very dirty water will at some point come your way’, said Van Hecke. A female leader from the panel replied that the church and the Vatican have taken on a negative connotation in the eyes of many young people, and therein lay the reason for the leaders’ very unambiguous choice.

Finally the leaders’ congress also expressed its opinion, with a North Korean score of 100 percent, in favour of the environment being maintained as an essential part of the VVKSM vision. As regards specific obligations, the scouts show themselves to be rather more reluctant: only two thirds are in favour of the use of environmental products. www.vvksm.be

TEXTILE

Jan De Clerck steps down from management of Domo

Jan De Clerck, the sole shareholder in the textile and chemicals group Domo, is handing over his position as managing director and chairman of the management committee to Filiep Libeert. Also noteworthy is the fact that De Clerck is not calling for the post of chairman of the board of directors, either, which is currently held by Paul De Keersmaeker. According to De Tijd this points to the likelihood of De Clerck also wanting to dispose of his shares in the near future. Last week De Tijd announced that Domo had given a merchant bank the task of looking for possibilities for a strategic departure for Jan De Clerck. Jan De Clerck is the oldest son of Roger De Clerck, the founder of the textile group Beaulieu. He has managed Domo since 1978. Domo was a division of Beaulieu until 1991, the year in which the empire was shared out among Roger De Clerck’s six children. Domo is the largest branch of the now subdivided Beaulieu group (FF).

It is expected that under Filiep Libeert, who advised Balcaen on the sale of Balta, Domo will be prepared for sectoral challenges. The only thing is that at the moment there is nobody who wants to prejudge that. Domo Group records a turnover of EUR 859 million and has 2,350 employees, but it is the chemicals division that accounts for the profitability. In 2003 and 2002 the current loss amounted to EUR 34.5 million and EUR 36.5 million respectively. The result for 2004 is not known. Libeert [51] remains chairman of the European textile federation Eu ratex and has recently also taken up a post as independent director with the loom group Picanol. He is mainly known as the former chief executive of Libeltex [British Vita]. Libeert will continue to combine the various responsibilities. Baron Paul De Keersmaeker remains chairman of the board of directors of Domo. As a director, Jan De Clerck will concern himself more with strategy. With Libeert as his operations man, De Clerck will have greater freedom to think about where he wants Domo to go.

PASCAL DEN DOOVEN • DE STANDAARD • 26 APRIL

Overcapacity in the carpet sector, the keener competition and persistent losses in subsidiaries such as Domo Oudenaarde, have adjusted the ambitions for expansion and a possible flotation. Jan De Clerck has realised that Domo is faced with fundamental choices. He has already closed the woven carpet division in Northern France but the real question is whether Domo sees its own future as an integrated group. In the past Jan De Clerck already toyed with the idea of selling the successful German chemicals division. This makes caprolactam, the basic raw material for nylon carpet [polyamide]. Selling the soft floor covering does not have so much sense today for lack of profitability. However, since Filip Balcaen’s decision to sell Balta [a large carpet group from Waregem], selling has become the new magic word among Flemish industrialists.

www.domo.be
The pros and cons of abandoning nuclear energy

A new study on the phased abandonment of nuclear energy, conducted by McKinsey, put the subject under the spotlight again.

Since Federal Economic Affairs Minister Mark Verwilghen (VLD) last year again ventured to question the planned abandonment of nuclear energy, which had been approved under the previous ‘purple-green’ government, the taboo surrounding the issue seems to have broken. Since then various sources in CD&V and VLD circles have been quoted as saying that they would like to see the debate on nuclear energy reopened. Flemish Energy Minister Kris Peeters (CD&V) was one of them. SP.A and Groen! feel that the debate can be held, but say that it will mainly prejudice investments in alternative energy. A new study on the phased abandonment of nuclear energy, conducted by McKinsey, put the subject under the spotlight again in a hearing of the Flemish Parliament on 26 April. The study predicts a hefty rise in energy prices if nuclear energy is abandoned. Simultaneously Greenpeace has produced a study that illustrates the increasing danger represented by obsolete nuclear power stations such as those of Doel 1, Doel 2 and Tihange (FF).

‘The McKinsey study focuses on the effect that the abandonment of nuclear energy would have on energy prices and comes to the conclusion that the production of electricity would become a lot more expensive. The production of 1 megawatt hour currently costs EUR 30. Over a period of ten years that price would rise to EUR 50, with a phenomenal additional cost for the energy sector as a result.’

‘The problem is that the study is based on the wrong basic principles’, says Flemish MP Bart Martens (SP.A). ‘There is the assumption of a maximum capacity of ‘reproducible (alternative) energy’ of 6 terrawatt hours on an annual basis, whereas a recent study indicates that 20 terrawatt hours would be possible by 2015. Account is also not taken of energy saving through the use of total energy and there is the assumption of a business-as-usual scenario, although there are possibilities for making the demand for energy fall.’ The BBL also calls the study out of date. This is partly because the research consultancy has used figures on distribution costs dating from 2003 whilst distribution costs for 2004 are already known and differ substantially after privatisation of the electricity market in mid-2003. Almost at the same time, Greenpeace has come up with a study on the increasing danger of obsolete institutions. Institutions more than twenty years old (Doel 1, Doel 2 and Tihange are thirty years old) all become more dangerous every year. Existing safety problems can no longer be solved. According to Greenpeace, the liberalisation of the market also endangers the safety of the nuclear power stations.

‘We are certainly not against a well-founded debate, but the consequence of the discussion on nuclear energy is that the administration continues to limp on two legs’, says Jan Turf. ‘The act for the abandonment of nuclear energy makes provision for nuclear energy to be maintained if external factors should result in there being a risk of a shortfall. It clearly talks of external factors, but now people are slamming on the brakes when it comes to the development of alternative sources of energy in order to save nuclear energy. So we are busy wasting time. Ministers Kris Peeters (CD&V) and Marc Verwilghen (VLD) simply have to do their work.’

264 jobs axed at Bosch Tienen

Bosch will be axing 264 of the 1,640 jobs in its windscreen wiper plant in Tienen over the next four years. The management made the announcement at a meeting of the works council at which it unveiled its plans for the period 2005-2008. Further automation, the cost burden and international competition are forcing the company to relocate its production of windscreen wipers to a factory in Compa, Romania. This will lead to 122 redundancies in Tienen. A further 140 jobs are to go on account of the productivity improvement that the management wants to carry through in Tienen itself. The management says that the bulk of these redundancies can be absorbed by employees who leave not being replaced. According to personnel manager Van den Houte, it boils down to the workforce being cut by 125. The staff immediately reacted by going on strike. At Bosch Tienen this is the third reorganisation in eight years. The first occurred in 1997, and the second in 2003. Bosch Tienen is a subsidiary of the German group of the same name and recorded a turnover of EUR 264.7 million in 2004. The group itself posted a worldwide turnover last year of EUR 24.8 billion, and employs 195,000 people (FF).

After talks with the management on Thursday morning, the blue-collar trade unions at Bosch in Tienen decided to suspend the strike from 2.00 p.m. The white-collar workers at Bosch had already resumed work at 10 a.m. on Thursday morning. ‘The management has promised to review the restructuring plan with the group management in Germany and to convey our grievances to them. A new meeting is planned for 9 May, when the management will announce the results of that consultation. If it then transpires that the plan has not been changed, there will certainly be further strike action’, said union representative Ivo Vandersmissen (ACV). The unions are demanding that the management withdraw its plans to shift part of the production of windscreen wipers to Compa in Romania. They are also unhappy about Wednesday’s announcement that the staff would in total have to forfeit EUR 2.5 million per year. www.bosch.be
Aviation

GlobeGround disappears in Zaventem

FF EDITORIAL TEAM

27 April was a black day for the 150 employees of the baggage handling company GlobeGround. At a special works council meeting the management announced that the company would be filing for bankruptcy on 29 April. Since GlobeGround is not given access to baggage handling on the tarmac at the airport, there is no further future for the company. The trade unions have been given until 29 April to negotiate a plan with rivals BGS and Aviapartner to take on 50 to 60 members of staff as well as the contracts with Lufthansa and Austrian Airlines. Since some of the employees can keep working with rival companies, most reacted stoically to the news. GlobeGround is also reported to have promised to pay April’s salaries and the holiday allowances before it files for bankruptcy. In order not to jeopardise the last chance of a planned redundancy scheme, the unions have called on employees not to take any strike action, reports De Standaard [28 April]. On Friday morning the staff has been officially informed by the receiver that the company was bankrupt.

Chemical Industry in Belgium

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<td>- Paint/ varnish</td>
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Books and Literature

Literature enjoys a boom year in Flanders

The Colibro bookstores say that last year they sold on average 60% more books than in 2001 from literary publishers such as Atlas, Querido, De Arbeiderspers and De Bezighe Bij.

The book trade in Flanders has recovered from a long period in the doldrums thanks mainly to a spectacular rise in sales of literary novels. This was revealed by sales figures from the thirty-four bookstores affiliated to the joint venture Colibro. A comparable trend is noticeable at the rival Standard Boekhandel. Standaard Boekhandel and Colibro together account for around half of the book market. Both Colibro and Standaard Boekhandel put the success of literature down to the cooperation projects with the media. At Colibro the rising sales are attributed to the book campaigns organised by De Morgen. Readers have discovered the book campaigns by De Morgen, together with the professionalisation of the stores themselves, the most important reason. ‘We have had new people coming in who also fit perfectly into the profile of our stores. The campaigns have shown readers the way to our book shops, and once there they have been enticed by a broad and high-quality range.’

A spectacular rise in sales of fiction books was also noted among the 98 branches of Standaard Boekhandel. Commercial manager Daniel Dullers referred to a 90% rise in the space of four years. Fiction is the linchpin among ‘general books’ [all genres except scientific books and schoolbooks], a division that notched up growth of ‘only’ 60%.

Since the Standaard Boekhandel’s figures also include thrillers as well as literary novels, a comparison with the Colibro figures is not entirely applicable. But the fact that the literary novel is faring exceptionally well here, too, is revealed - among other things - by the share represented by the literary publishers De Arbeiderspers, De Bezighe Bij and Querido (WPG publishing group). 

www.colibro.be

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**CULTURE**

**MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE**
- 3 May: Christian Wolff (piano) with QOZ, contemporary compositions by Wolff himself, De Singel, Antwerp.
  - info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- 2 and 3 May: Mathilde Monnier - Centre Choreographique National de Montpellier, Languedoc-Roussillon with Publique, Singel, Antwerp.
  - info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- 3 May: Amon Tobin, The splinter cell show, De Vooruit, Ghent.
  - info: www.vooruit.be 09/267.28.28
- 4 May: Fred Hersch Ensemble, Leaves of grass [Walt Whitman/Fred Hersch], De Singel, Antwerp.
  - info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- 5 May: Batsheva Dance Company, Naharin’s Virus, Brussels; Belgique, Brussels.
  - info: www.abconcerts.be 02/548.28.28
  - info: www.concertgebouw.be
- 5 May: Naharin’s Virus, Brussels; Belgique, Brussels; (0)70 222 199,
  - info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
- 5 May: Luka Bloom, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels.
  - info: www.desingel.be 02/548.28.28
- 5 May: Octum, Magic Malik, Jazz, Concertgebouw, Bruges.
  - info: www.concertgebouw.be
- 5 May: Melanie, Handelsbeurs, Ghent.
  - info: www.handelsbeurs.be
- 6 May: Papi Sanchez, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels.
  - info: www.abconcerts.be 02/548.28.28
- 6 and 7 May: Moussem Festival ‘Ambazgh and Dansant’: Iitzì & Imetlùa & NL Mondo, Jedwane & El Manar & Abdeslam, Barcelona & Cheb Riahi (Morocco), Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp.
  - info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
- 7 May: London Synfonietta, Warp project 2, contemporary music, Concertgebouw, Bruges.
  - info: www.concertgebouw.be
- 5 to 28 May: Kunstenaarsfeesten, 36 projects, 23 evenings, Brussels-based and cosmopolitan contemporary music, Koninklijke Académie voor Schone Kunsten van België, Brussels.
  - info: www.kmsk.be
  - info: 0900/00311 www.springsessions.be
- 8 May: Janez Dedić, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels.
  - info: www.desingel.be 02/548.28.28
- 9 May: Jesse Dayton, Handelsbeurs, Ghent.
  - info: www.handelsbeurs.be (09/265 91 65)
- 10 and 11 May: Sasha Waltz, Schaubühne am Leinen Platz, Impromptus, De Singel, Antwerp.
  - info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- 11 May: South San Gabriel, Handelsbeurs, Ghent.
  - info: www.handelsbeurs.be (09/265 91 65)
- 11 May: Sarah Bettens, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels.
  - info: www.abconcerts.be 02/548.28.28
- 11 May: Mariza, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels.
  - info: www.abconcerts.be 02/548.28.28
- 11 May: Spectra Ensemble conducted by Philip Rathe, Process music with Ligeti, Reich, Rzewski and Goevaerts, De Singel, Antwerp.
  - info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- 12 May: Daby Touré, Fra/Maur, Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp.
  - info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
- 12 May: Quirine Vierens/Silke Avenhaus, Brussels; info: www.concertgebouw.be
- 12 and 13 May: The Musical Box, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels.
  - info: www.abconcerts.be 02/548.28.28
- 13 May: Omanys with Metamorphosen by Richard Strauss and Das Lied von der Erde by Gustav Mahler, info: www.biijloke.be
  - 16, 18, 19 and 20 May: Mario Joao e Mario Laginha Quartet, Flagey, Brussels/Handelsbeurs Ghent; CC Hasselt and De Warande Turnhout.
  - info: www.flagay.be (02/641 10 20), www.handelsbeurs.be (09/265 91 65), 011/22 99 33, 014/41 69 91

**EXPO**

- 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 voor Volkenkunde (Museum of Belgium, Brussels; info: www.momu.be)
  - until 26 June: Cast for eternity [bronze statues from India and the Himalaya in Belgian and Dutch collections], Etnographic museum, Antwerp; info: +32 (0)3 220 86 00
  - info: www.diamant.museum.be
- Until 19 June: Barry Flannagan, exhibition, SMAK, Ghent.
  - info: www.smak.be 09/221 17 03
- Until 4 September: Hidden worlds, art from artists with various backgrounds; Museum Dr. Guislain, Ghent.
  - info: www.museumdrguislain.be (09 216 35 95)
  - +32 (0)2 769 52 11 www.museumafrikanum.be
- Until 14 August: Beyond Desire/ Desire, attitude and styling in African and Western culture, MoMu, Antwerp
  - +32 (0)3 470 27 70 www.momu.be
- Until 31 December: Master pieces from the Dutch treasure room, KMSK, Antwerp; info: www.kmsk.be
- Until 15 May: Moroccan Jews – Two cultures in one, Jewish Museum, Brussels.

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**From 19 March: Emotion Pictures, exhibition, MuHKA, Antwerp; info: www.muhka.be**
**From 19 March: The Final Floor Show, exhibition, Objectif Exhibitions, Borgerhout (Antwerp)**
**Until 15 May: Visionary Belgium, an exhibition by the late Harold Szeeman Bozar, Brussels; info: 02/507 82.00 www.bozar.be**
**Until 16 May: Mé-tissages, exhibition about art and textile, Miat [Museum for Industrial Archaeology 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.musplanet.be/spa/09/243/97/30**
**Until 19 June: LCM / Laboratorio de la Ciudad de Mexico – architects, Mexico City, exhibition handelsbeurs, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28**
**Until 29 May: The Return of the Swallows: Five Years in the Making, exhibition by Els Dietvorst, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be**
**Until 28 May: Wrong time, wrong place, exhibition In Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres, info: 057 33 92 20 www.inflandersfields.be**
**Until 19 June: Airworld, design and architecture in aviation, Design museum, Ghent, info: www.design.museum.be +32 (0)9 267 99 99**
**Until 26 June: Cast for eternity [bronze statues from India and the Himalaya in Belgian and Dutch collections], Etnographic museum, Antwerp; info: +32 (0)3 220 86 00**
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