Foreign companies again create more jobs in Flanders

Foreign companies created 2,949 jobs in Flanders in 2004, almost 200 more than the year before. The number of investment dossiers of foreign companies (152) was also up by 20 in 2004. According to Flemish Foreign Trade Minister Fientje Moerman (VLD), this marks an end to the downward trend in foreign investments that had persisted since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The total amount invested by foreign companies is lower (EUR 1.13 billion) than in 2003, but that is because investments have chiefly been made in the expansion of already existing companies (FF).

BART MOERMAN • HET NIEUWSBLAD • 3 JUNE

In 2001 Flanders recorded an addi-
tional 4,941 jobs through foreign in-
vestments. 2003 was an absolute low point with 2,761. According to Minis-
ter Moerman the 10% more recorded in 2004 is a real turnaround, which is also being continued this year. Logis-
tics accounts for the bulk of jobs, fol-
lowed by the car industry (such as Volvo in Ghent). Most projects come from the Netherlands, whilst the Swedes account for most jobs. But the USA is also present. Most jobs are cre-
ated in existing companies. However,
Minister Moerman does not rule out the possibility of larger companies coming to Belgium again in the com-
ing years. Quite a number of Indian and Chinese mega-companies are plan-
ning investments in Europe, in the electronics sector for example.

The minister also stresses the impor-
tance of good air links. Since the bank-
ruptcy of Sabena, Zaventem no longer has any direct flights to the Far East. To her delight, that will be changing: from this summer the Indian airline Jet Airways will be flying from Bombay via Brussels to New York.

Moerman wants to further strengthen her search for foreign investors. There-
fore she has had the Flanders Foreign Investment Office [Dienst Investeren in Vlaanderen] merge with the Flanders Export Promotion Agency [Export Vlaanderen] to form a single agency: ‘Flanders Investment and Trade’. In this way the export network can be used to attract foreign investors. At the same time she is setting up a task force in the administrations, that can sub-
mit global proposals to companies, and in one fell swoop say: there you'll find a site, there you'll find personnel, these are the possible subsidies you can apply for. The minister hopes to have this completed by this summer.

WWW.FFIO.BE

INTRODUCTION

The start with the good news: to the list of countries that have approved the European Constitution (Austria, Spain), Belgium, Germany and Latvia may now also be added. But little attention has been given to that. Very considerable cover-
age, on the other hand, has been given to the thrashing that Europe was given in the French and Dutch referendum. Some, like former premier Mark Eyskens (De Standaard, 2 June), feel that Eyskens, but that was not the purpose of this refer-
endum. He reckons that this mainly serves to prove its social model. The EU is going through a crisis, whilst others do not share Eyskens’ view, or at least not entirely. They assume that the voter has indeed voted with a European view and attempt to ascertain the grounds for so much negativity towards the Euro-
pean project. Amongst others, the fear of nationalism and abhorrence of the bureaucratic super-state in the making, whilst others were giving voice to a ‘fear of social protection disappearing in a neo-liberal playground of big money. The EU’s expansion to 25 Member States, which has not gone down too well, is a major factor, accompanied by the fear of Polish plumbers or construction workers coming here to ruin the job market by working unpaid or in the black. If the kinds of objections actually constituted a mishmash, then so did the composition of the ‘No’ camp in both countries: right-wing nationalists alongside trade unionists and left-wingers.

Another factor that helped to contribute to the vot-

ing behaviour, in the view of almost all Flemish newspapers, is the fact that the national govern-
ments have helped in no small way to kill Europe’s reputation by constantly blaming Europe, on the domestic front, for the less popular measures they have had to take. And in the meantime, the EU hard-
ly realised how bad things had got with its image of arrogant bureaucracy, according to De Standaard (2 June).

The result and the consequences are just about what one would expect. As far as De Standaard and De Morgen are concerned, we need no longer await the full ratification process. The papers declare the Con-
stitution to be as dead as a doornail now. According to De Morgen (2 June), feel that the French Constitution quite simply confirms the image that citizens have of Europe. It lacks inspiration and vision, and is more a grey compromise text attempting to bring the national areas of competence into line with the complexity of the international decision-making procedures. This kind of text, says the paper, con-
tains issues that the political elite – but not the man in the street – loses sleep over. The argument of the ‘Yes’ camp, that this could not have been done in a European Union more democratic, therefore made little impression. According to De Tijd, the key question is still how Europe can remain economically competitive in the world without relinquishing the essential acquis of its social model. The EU is going through a crisis, of that even the ever-optimistic prime minister Verhof-
stadt is convinced. He reasons that the vote to believe that Europe should not be limited to a free-trade zone, but should also be able to stand as a political force at world level. But according to De Standaard (3 June) the voters have precisely given a signal that the EU is going far too fast and has become too detached and aloof from people’s everyday lives.

Frank Vandeaveye | editor in chief

focus on FLANDERS • 28 May - 3 Juni 2005 • Number 22
**VLD sinks further in poll**

The crisis surrounding Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde has left few traces in the latest option poll carried out by De Standaard/VRT. The poll took place in May in the midst of the political turmoil over the splitting of the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde constituency, which had Flemings and Francophones opposed. One half of the poll was carried out when it was not yet known that the negotiations would fail (on 11 May), the other half thereafter. Flemings felt that it was a good thing that the government did not fall on account of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde not being split. After all, 66% of Flemings reckoned that BHV was not worth a crisis. The poll also revealed that confidence in the Prime Minister and his government was barely troubled by the furore, with the PM’s personal confidence rating rising from 56% to 60%, and his government’s score rising from 52% to 53%. However, the Flemish Government and its Minister-President Leterme (CD&V) fares even better, with 66% and 65% respectively. Nonetheless, the Prime Minister’s party, the VLD, continues to fare poorly in this poll. It loses 1.5% in comparison with the last poll carried out in February and the [poor] election result of 2004, and attains 18.5%. Vlaams Belang, which in the last poll lost ground in comparison with the strong result it had posted in the 2004 elections, gains 1.3% and reaches 23.4%. The CD&V/N-VA alliance has an uncontested lead, on 27.7%, and gains a further 0.4%. SP.A/Spirit also gains ground. The alliance is already up 2.2% on its poor election showing in 2004, and now stands at 22%. Groen! continues to post remarkably stable ratings since last year, and remains on 7.5%.

In the politicians’ popularity poll Jean-Luc Dehaene (CD&V) (47%) is again on top, despite not holding any senior political post. He is followed by party colleague and Flemish Minister-President Yves Leterme (44%), former SPA party chairman Steve Stevaert (44%) and the pregnant federal Employment Minister Freya Vanden Bossche (SPA, 43%). Prime Minister Verhofstadt is in fifth place with 42% of the votes. Before the failure of the negotiations over BHV, he headed the ranking in the poll.

**FLEMISH ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY**

**Stevaert sworn in as governor of the province of Limburg**

Observers feel it is unlikely that there is any chance now of the governor’s administrative position being abolished

Steve Stevaert, former party chairman of the SPA, was sworn in as governor of the province of Limburg on 30 May at the Hotel Errera, the Brussels official residence of the Flemish Government. He was received there by Minister-President Leterme (CD&V) and Flemish Internal Administration Minister, Marino Keulen (VLD). Federal Interior Minister Patrick Dewael (VLD) was also in attendance. With Keulen and Dewael, Stevaert also has two Limburgers as ‘tutelage’ ministers, so that the Limburg feeling was dominant in the official residence. For the occasion Stevaert had brought along his father Jean Stevaert who won over the press with his witticisms. Stevaert received praise from Leterme, Dewael and Keulen. But it is also clear that the brand new governor wants to turn his position into more than merely the threading together of administrative obligations and duties of protocol. He prefers to view it as a ‘social experiment’, in which job creation is top of the list of priorities. Observers feel it is unlikely that there is any chance now of the governor’s position being abolished, as had been under discussion for some time, now that the post is filled by a political heavyweight such as Stevaert (FF).

FABIAN LEFEVERE • DE MORGEN • 31 MAY

Stevaert’s first mission is now called Limburg. Looking back at his national career, it may reasonably be assumed that the occasional stunt here or there is on the cards. Stevaert was the first to announce that. ‘My first stunt is on the way. It won’t even last very long.’ But how or what? To this his only response was a mysterious half smile. What is certain is that Stevaert is returning to Limburg with bags of ambition. ‘This is not an end-of-career job.’ He is resolutely planning to sound out the boundaries of his authority. ‘We will be doing a lot with the economy; attracting companies. My governorship will become a social experiment.’ According to Stevaert the governor’s areas of competence can be planned down somewhat. ‘In some areas it can be more again, in others a bit less. But I will not be saying anything about that now, of course. I have to be above the political parties.’ Above his own SPA, too, because according to Stevaert governors have often let themselves be influenced by their party. ‘If they [SPA] want to exert pressure now, I’d like to see whether they’ll succeed.’

www.limburg.be
The French ‘non’: a call for a greater sense of reality

It has long been clear that the massive enlargement of the EU from fifteen to twenty-five has not gone down very well.

Flemish politicians reacted with disappointment at the ‘Non’ in the French referendum on the European Constitution. Jean-Luc Dehaene, who contributed to the drafting of the European Constitution, hopes that the other Member States do not paralyse the ratification process and says that Europe should not acquiesce to the opinion of one Member State (De Standaard, 30 May). In his opinion, European integration should continue unhindered. For the reactions seem to indicate that more than anything the French voters have punished the French Government, he added. Former EU commissioner Karel Van Miert feels that with the French ‘No’, the child has been thrown out with the bath water. For not a single European country means anything on its own. Only united can Europe make a difference. Van Miert wonders how the institutions will now carry on functioning. The ‘No’ will in any case force the politicians to tackle European policy with a greater sense of reality. He continues to call the initiation of talks on Turkey’s joining the EU a political blunder.

According to the press commentators the political leaders have failed, the European Union’s has shown its democratic shortfall and they remind the uneasiness among the people. Het Laatste Nieuws (31 May) points to the underlying reasons for the counter-vote: 15 years of technocratic administration from glittering offices in Brussels, in a jargon of which nobody understands a word any more, and in an institution that has become far too large: ‘Europe occupies itself with everything in life, but you can’t say anything against it, you can’t even debate with it, since it has no face; it is intangible’. According to De Morgen and De Standaard, the politicians who had to explain the Constitution to their people have now had the door slammed in their face (FF).

Opinions

YVES DESMET • DE MORGEN • 31 MAY

It is telling that the politicians of the established order from the entire centre of the political spectrum have been unsuccessful, despite all their efforts, promises and threats, in convincing their electorate of the benefits of ‘yes’ and have thereby collectively lost legitimacy.

In a couple of years we will try again. That is not the point. The point is that all over Europe populations are hinting that everything is going too quickly and abruptly for them, that they are unsure and ill at ease. They therefore represent potential votes for populists of any kind who live off the magnification of those fears. Old and scared of losing everything – it’s not a mentality with which you distinguish yourself. Via France, Europe has shown that it has the ambition to remain a while longer the world’s affluent old people’s home, dreaming of times of yore.

MIA DOORNAERT • DE STANDAARD • 31 MAY

It has long been clear that the massive enlargement of the EU from fifteen to twenty-five Member States has not gone down very well, and that is the fault of all the political leaders of the ‘old’ EU States, since they did not handle the enlargement well and did not explain it well to their subjects. The French ‘no’ is therefore not just a hitch. It creates a sizeable political crisis, a crisis in the Franco-German partnership that has been the engine of integration for so long, and a crisis in the EU.

The Netherlands buries the European Constitution

Now that 62% of Dutch voters have also said ‘no’ in a referendum, the European Constitution is as good as dead, in the opinion of most Flemish newspapers. The ball is now in Tony Blair’s court, since the British PM now has doubts as to whether he will hold a referendum or not. The prime minister of current EU chairman Luxembourg, Jean-Claude Juncker, said that the ratification process must continue in order to give all countries the opportunity to organise a debate. He feels that the government leaders should give a signal at the European summit on 16 and 17 June that Europe wants to continue at the same pace. What is striking is that the arsenal of counter-arguments is very large: opposition to excessive centralisation from Brussels, too much market liberalisation, too little social protection, loss of identity, and so on. But even so, the support for this ‘no’ is substantial, says De Standaard (FF).

Opinion

BART STURTEWAGEN • DE STANDAARD • 2 JUNE

The fact that the enlarged Europe of 25 Member States will not have rules to make its decision-making process more efficient as a result of the rejection of the Constitution, is an extremely serious development. But more has been lost than a set of complicated procedures and agreements. What has been nullified in one fell swoop by the voters in two of the founder EU Member States is the belief in an ever future-oriented integration movement on our continent. If there was one political axiom that people have held to be true without debate in recent years, it has been that the future was in Europe’s hands and that the nation states would have to sacrifice scope for policy making to that power base. How far that transfer of power would have to go and how quickly we would have to move down that road, was the subject of heated debate. But the fact that that development was unavoidable is scarcely open to debate. We have lost that certainty forever. There is a very real chance that the unified political Europe that its most fervent champions saw on the horizon half a century ago, will never come into being.
Poll: Flemings would vote in favour of the European constitution

Flemings would have turned out in large numbers if there were a referendum on the European Constitution. Far more of them would vote ‘yes’ than ‘no’, but they do not feel so strongly about their knowledge of the European Constitution. Only 2% of Flemings said that they were very well informed about the European Constitution and 29% ‘fairly well informed’ – together making 31%. 32% of the interviewees said they were not really all that well informed and 37% not informed at all, making 69%. One percent does not know. The better the knowledge, the greater the support for the Constitution. Of those very well and fairly well informed, 68% would vote ‘yes’.

Social economy to create 10,000 jobs by the end of 2008

The Flemish, Brussels, Walloon, German-speaking and federal governments have concluded an agreement to create 10,000 new jobs by the end of 2008 in the social economy. These will be subsidised jobs such as domestic help, home help for the elderly, workers in ‘green’ services and carers in day nurseries. They are to be filled by semi- and unskilled workers, the long-term unemployed and immigrants who have less of a chance on the regular job market. The sector strives for social, ecological and ethical objectives as well as economic ones. At the moment Belgium already has 18,000 people employed in the social economy. To create the extra jobs the governments are setting aside EUR 30 million, half of which will be coming from the Federal Government (FF).

Governments make budget agreements

The budget objectives for the Communities and Regions have been set at the interministerial conference for Finance and the Budget. It has been agreed that they will have to make a small effort in the stability programme. The High Council of Finance has pressured them to achieve together a budget surplus of 0.2% of Gross National Product. That has now been reduced to a joint surplus of 0.1%. For this reason Flanders is cutting its budget objective this year by EUR 157 million, according to an announcement made by Flemish Budget Minister Dirk Van Brempt (SP.A). Another noteworthy breakthrough is that the Federal Government is abandoning its claim of 13% social contribution on the holiday pay of Flemish civil servants. This is yielding Flanders EUR 31 million this year, which according to the new pronouncement it admittedly cannot spend, but for example can deploy for debt reduction or use as a reserve for the development of care insurance. In this way the amount also counts as a budget surplus of all governments and ensures that ‘Belgium SA/NV’ complies with the European budget norms (De Standaard, 2 June).

### BUDGET SURPLUS OF COMMUNITIES and REGIONS (2005 - 2009) (in million euros)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Flemish Community</th>
<th>French Community</th>
<th>Wallon Region</th>
<th>Brussels Region</th>
<th>German Community</th>
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<td>Commu-</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>419.04</td>
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<td>-21.78</td>
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<td>-7.45</td>
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<td>17.67</td>
<td>15.62</td>
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<td>2009</td>
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<td>15.82</td>
<td>40.51</td>
<td>25.41</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>266.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Flanders there are currently 6,500 people working in the sector, said the Flemish Social Economy Minister Kathleen Van Brempt (SP.A). The Flemish budget has quadrupled in recent years, from EUR 12.8 million in 1999 to EUR 52 million this year. The social economy has not reached its peak, according to Van Brempt, and the financial resources will continue to grow in the coming years. In addition to the creation of jobs in so-called social-economy companies, Van Brempt is also paying attention to socially sound enterprise in ordinary companies. The minister quoted a study by Business & Society which reveals that two of every three company managers think that they are a step ahead of the competition by paying attention to the environment, training and jobs for minorities. This year the minister will therefore initiate an image campaign aimed at convincing employers of the benefits of the social economy. She is also encouraging contacts between ordinary and social-economy companies. In September the website www.mvovlaanderen.be will be up and running, containing information on socially sound enterprise.

WWW.DUURZAAAM.NETWERK-VLAN-DEREN.BE
**First consultation of a lawyer will soon be free**

**THE INITIATIVE IS AIMED AT LOWERING THE THRESHOLD FOR PEOPLE PLANNING TO CONSULT A LAWYER**

The first visit to a lawyer to seek an opinion will soon be free of charge, if it were up to the Association of Flemish Bar Councils, which is submitting the idea to the 8,500 Dutch-speaking lawyers in Flanders and Brussels. The initiative is aimed at lowering the threshold for people planning to consult a lawyer. EUR 25 used to be the subscription. The last paid is the subscription. The last

A study among 500 people commissioned by the Association of Flemish Bar Councils reveals that people still see a lawyer as the man or woman in a gown, defending them around the clock – so that all has to be done is to adjust somewhat the negative image of lawyers.

FILIP VERHOEST • DE STANDAARD • 1 JUNE

A study among 500 people commissioned by the Association of Flemish Bar Councils reveals that people still always see a lawyer as the man or woman in a gown, defending them before the judge. Often in these cases that judge is a judge sitting in the criminal court. A lawyer assists someone as counsel in a dispute – that is the prevailing image. The lawyer as a legally trained person giving specialist advice is less well known. The lawyer as mediator, less well known still. Lawyers are of course not the only source of advice that can be consulted by the citizenry. There are the houses of justice, the trade unions, the health insurance funds, bodies where the threshold is lower than with a lawyer. But the main reason why people do not go to a lawyer is lack of clarity about the price. Since the liberalisation of the European market, the Bar Council may no longer lay down directives on fixed rates. As a result, their clients do not know exactly what they will be paying. In that respect ‘Europe’ has brought greater uncertainty for those seeking justice.

Lawyers also have difficulty predicting how long a lawsuit will go on for. If you add to that an uncertain outcome – have I been proven right or wrong? – you get a cocktail of arguments for not calling on the services of a lawyer. ‘The game is not worth the candle’, goes the reasoning.

The Association of Flemish Bar Councils advises people to contact more than one lawyer, to find out what their fees are, and to come to clear agreements in this respect. ‘There is nothing disrespectful about that’, says Marc Cottyn. ‘After all, if there are various butcher’s and baker’s shops in your neighbourhood, you try them out first, too. And if you don’t like the bread in the first baker’s you go to, you try another’. There are approximately 15,000 lawyers in Belgium, of whom 8,500 are in Flanders. Around 2,000 new lawyers have started practising in the last ten years. ‘Whilst the cake has remained the same size’, says Jo Stevens, former president of the Antwerp Bar Council. However, according to him lawyers in Flanders are not getting any poorer, as they are in Wallonia.

**Calls on fixed-line network become dirt-cheap**

**YOU CAN’T GET CHEAPER THAN FREE, SO DIFFERENTIATION HAS TO COME IN OTHER AREAS**

Falling interest in fixed-line telephony has led the telecom companies in Belgium to come up with stunt-like promotional deals. At the end of last week Belgacom unveiled its Happy Time formula: free calls after 5.00 p.m. and at weekends. That was a counter-move against mobile phone operator Telco which had cut the price of mobile-to-fixed-line calls, and against Telenet which had earlier made it possible for customers to call free of charge in off-peak periods. After Belgacom, Swedish competitor Tele2 followed suite with the same free-call offer, but with slightly cheaper rates for peak-time calls to boot. The next move came on 1 June from Telenet, which made calls free around the clock – so that all has to be paid is the subscription. The last

RONALD MEEUS • DE MORGEN • 2 JUNE

It is striking that the major players all at once seem to be offering a better range of services than the small ones, which had hitherto attempted to compete mainly on price. The competitive advantage of the others is now in services falling outside the free area.

You can’t get cheaper than free, so differentiation has to come in other areas. In the aforementioned options the free rate does not apply to calls to mobile phones, special numbers or calls abroad. There has also already been reaction in the prices for peak-time calls: where Belgacom applies a fixed rate of 30 euro-cents per call in its formula, Tele2 has already cut that to 28 euro-cents. ‘This is an historic moment,’ says spokesman Ivo Mechels of consumer organisation Test-Achat. ‘We have been calling for years for a switchover to an American system: flat-rate local calls. And to some degree they are now making that even more varied, by offering free calls in off-peak hours. We had already expected a movement such as this in 1998, when the telephone market was liberalised, and it didn’t happen then. But in the longer term the competition has done its job. Now we just have to hope that they maintain it. Certainly the alternative operators still have to pay Belgacom interconnection rates, also for those free calls in off-peak hours.’

www.telco.be
www.belgacom.be
www.tele2.be
www.euphony.be
HOTEL AND CATERING

Ban on smoking in the hotel, restaurant and catering sector from 1 Jan. 2007

Federal Public Health Minister Demotte (PS) has an agreement with the hotel, restaurant and catering sector on the ban on smoking, which will come into force on 1 January 2007. The ban applies not just to restaurants and hotels, but also to all public houses, brasseries and eateries where more than a third of the consumption consists of food. The parallel, more private circuit of eating establishments used by associations and non-profit-making organisations also falls under the ban alongside the restaurants. Cafés and pubs where less than a third of what is offered consists of food can obtain an exemption from the ban. They must also make clear whether there are rooms for smokers inside. The sectoral association Ho.Re.Ca Vlaanderen expresses its satisfaction at the agreement. To offset the negative economic consequences of the ban on smoking, there will be a VAT cut and a wage-cost reduction in the sector, and restaurant costs will become 100% tax deductible (FF).

GUY VAN DEN BROECK • DE TIJD • 31 MAY

The sector wanted to avoid smokers defecting to the alternative, more private eatery circuit of non-profit-making organisations and associations that organise restaurant days, where smoking would be permitted. The Royal Decree will therefore also apply to all enclosed places where meals and drinks are served, so that the competition is kept fair.

In order to protect the economically weakest of the hotels, restaurants and catering companies, i.e. the ordinary cafes and pubs, minister Demotte accepted the principle that all companies where less than a third of the purchases consist of food can secure a departure from the smoking ban. However, they must provide for an extractor-fan or ventilation system. Cafes and pubs with a floor surface area of more than 50 square metres must reserve half of the seating for non-smokers. Places to eat may also have ‘smoking rooms’, obviously equipped with the necessary ventilation, where only drinks may be served. Patrons may also always smoke at café terraces, courtyards and in hotel rooms.

The ministry and the sector agreed to have the Royal Decree on the smoking ban in the hotel, restaurant and catering sector only enter into force on 1 January 2007, so that the restaurant operators have plenty of time to adapt to the new legal situation, says Jan De Haes of Ho.Re.Ca Vlaanderen. Under these extra conditions, the hotel, restaurant and catering sector is prepared to cooperate with the ban on smoking.

WWW.RUDYDEMOTTE.BE
WWW.HORECAYLAANDEREN.BE
WWW.UNIZO.BE

TELEVISION

Belgacom offers 100 channels on ADSL Network

Belgacom TV offers practically all the channels currently already broadcast via cable, a number of additional channels and so-called premium channels

In a month’s time Belgacom will be offering a large and diverse range of television programmes and services which it will be distributing over its ADSL network. The telecom group will be starting with approximately 100 channels. On top of that come pay-per-view films and programmes as well as services such as e-mail and SMS via the television screen, according to a report in De Tijd. 11 TV, Belgacom’s football channel, is given a place among the channels and in the pay-per-view range. Belgacom TV offers practically all the channels currently already broadcast via cable, a number of additional channels and so-called premium channels, for which the subscriber has to pay extra on top of the basic subscription price. This is the case, for example, for The Discovery Channel, Extreme Sports or theme channels for certain sports or hobbies (FF).

BERT BROENS • DE TIJD • 28 MAY

It is not immediately clear whether Belgacom has been able to secure all Belgian channels in its range. At the commercial stations VMMA (VTM) and RTL-Tvi, in particular, there was an opposition on account of the good relations with the rival cable companies. As regards the programmes that can be ordered on request, Belgacom does not limit itself to films for which the company has concluded contracts with major studios such as Warner and Universal. There will also be TV series, documentaries and concerts. Channels such as the VRT will also be putting programmes in the pay-per-view range.

For that matter, that range will be partly included in the basic subscription. As regards services, finally, there is a whole range of possibilities, such as SMS messaging, e-mail, surfing the Net, the downloading of ring tones for mobile phones, the Lottery and the online ordering of travel services. The prices that Belgacom will be applying remain a well-kept secret. However, it looks very much as though Belgacom TV’s basic range contains more channels than that of the cable companies, and for a lower price. With a Belgian cable company the basic package costs on average EUR 12 per month for 35 channels. With Belgacom, as with the digital range offered by the cable companies, the customer will have to have a decoder installed. From Belgacom that costs around EUR 100, but it can also be hired.

WWW.BELGACOM.BE

focus on FLANDERS • 28 May - 3 Juni 2005 • Number 22
The VRT has submitted a request to the Flemish Media Minister Geert Bourgeois (N-VA) to be able to start up three digital theme channels this year: a culture channel, a children's channel and a news channel. The application was announced by managing director Tony Mary during the presentation of the VRT’s annual figures for 2004. Mary is aiming for a management agreement with the government, which provides the public broadcasting corporation with the funds to take part in the digital television revolution. VRT’s whole digital project is reported to cost EUR 200 million per year by 2010; eight theme channels each costing EUR 15 million, EUR 40 million for the opening up of the VRT archive and EUR 40 million to make the programmes of the regular channels Canvas and TV1 interactive. The annual report reveals that the VRT has for the umpteenth consecutive year met all the performance criteria laid down by the government. The most important are the daily reach (1.5 million viewers), the weekly reach of 70% of children between the ages of 4 and 12, and high valuation scores among viewers. The VRT closed its financial year with a loss of EUR 4.2 million and peppers its annual report with more figures than ever. The broadcasting company is thereby going along with the demand for greater transparency expressed in the Flemish Parliament and by Minister Bourgeois (FF).

Tony Mary wants in particular to stress the special role of the public broadcasting corporation, and that has to do with the forthcoming negotiations on the new management agreement for 2007-2011. Tony Mary reiterates that the future of the public broadcasting corporation will be digital or nothing. He thereby refers to the large-scale plans of Belgacom and Te- lenet, which will be offering hundreds of channels. The VRT’s CEO even fears that the traditional TV channels will have lost half their viewers by 2010. The VRT has submitted an application to start with three theme channels: a culture channel, a children’s channel and a news channel. According to Mary, there will be no stopping the fragmentation. ‘Ketnet is only on air for four hours. If we want to avoid kids switching to channels such as Nick- elodeon, we must be able to offer them their own children’s channel.’

Mary claims that the news channel will not aim to be a Flemish CNN. ‘We don’t have the money for that’, he says. But it should nonetheless become a fully-fledged channel broadcasting news bulletins throughout the day. For example, it will offer longer interviews and reports, which are currently limited to a minute and a half in the news bulletins, and if necessary also breaking news. But that can only be achieved if the VRT’s news service operations become entirely digital. That must be a reality by June 2006. Tony Mary was not prepared to talk yesterday about how all this should be financed. ‘That debate is one for the political authorities’, he says. However, the VRT’s chief executive is all too well aware that the Flemish Authorities are unable to meet the broadcasting company’s financial requirements solely by means of a subsidy. This is stated in a memorandum for reflection drafted by Tony Mary, which is being discussed with the board of directors. In it Mary argues more forcefully than ever in favour of mixed financing. ‘Commercial revenue,’ according to Mary, means more than radio advertising and TV sponsoring. The money that the public broadcasting corporation would collect from the market could consist, among other things, of the running of the archive, the merchandising of spin-off products from channels and programmes, a musical publisher, the publication of books, Internet activities (chat rooms, gaming), income from calls, subscriptions and/or memberships for theme channels and Internet sites, or – if necessary – television commercials.

WWW.VRT.BE
WWW.MINISTERGEERTBOURJEOISE.BE

### Television

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canvas</td>
<td>133.7</td>
<td>126.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ketnet</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sporeza</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VRT</td>
<td>176.5</td>
<td>218.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>227.5</td>
<td>218.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Radio

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radio 1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio 2</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio Donna</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studio Brussel</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klara</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RVI</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital channels</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>86.1</td>
<td>81.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How much do the channels cost (million euros)?

DIRK COOSEMANS • HET LAATSTE NIEUWS • 30 MAY

Ivanov, who played with a borrowed Stadivarius, collected EUR 17,500 with the second prize. Much more important, however, is the prospect of dozens of concerts at home and abroad. Yossif is the son of Bulgarian immigrant Dmitri Ivanov, who has been leader of the Antwerp Philharmonic Orchestra for many years. ‘I remember to this day how he took me to the Vogeljesmarkt on my fifth birthday to buy my first violin. My musical life had begun. Dad was my first teacher’. When he was six he performed for television, and when he was twelve he won his first international prize. Since then he has perfected his talent with renowned teachers in Belgium and abroad. Yossif did his studies in Dutch and feels more Belgian than Bulgarian.
**MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE**

- **7 June:** Prefuse 73 live band, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: www.abconcerts.be 02/548.24.24
- **8 June:** Billy Corgan, concert, De Vooruit, Gent; info: www.vooruit.be 09/267.28.28
- **10 June:** Henry Rollins, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: www.abconcerts.be 02/548.24.24

- **1, 2, 3, 8, 9 and 10 June:** Queen Elisabeth Competition for Violin, De Munt, Brussels; info: www.demunt.be 02/548.24.24
- **9 June:** Styx, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: www.abconcerts.be 02/548.24.24
- **10 June:** Philippe Catherine/Brussels Jazz Orchestra, Concertgebouw, Bruges; info: www.concertgebouw.be
- **21 June:** Open air concert with Deborah Voigt and José Van Dam, Fragments from operas by Wagner and Strauss, Grande Place, Brussels; info: www.demunt.be

**EXPO**

- From 5 February onwards: The memory of Congo, the colonial period, exhibition, Museum for Central Africa (Tervuren); info: www.momu.be
- Until 2005: Focus on the Dutch treasure room, KMSK, Antwerp; info: www.kmsk.be

**CULTURE**

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