Is politics tightening its grip on the VRT?

Media and Government Affairs Minister Geert Bourgeois (N-VA) has submitted a preliminary draft decree that aims to transform the public service broadcaster VRT into a privatised external agency. The draft essentially rewrites the relationship between the politically structured board of directors of the VRT and the VRT management team. It increases the number of board members to 16, 12 of whom will continue to be appointed by the Flemish Government, alongside one managing director and three additional, independent media experts. It confers greater responsibility onto the board for strategic decisions and clearly sets out the tasks of the managing director and management committee. The missing tasks in the summary are essentially supposed to be part of the authority of the board of directors. And, according to De Standaard, that is quite a lot. The supervisory powers of the community representative of the Flemish Government within the VRT are also extended. The draft entrusts the latter with monitoring ‘all of the activities of the VRT’. Reyerslaan fears that the broadcaster will come under greater political control, sending it back to the old system of pre-1995 (FF).

LEO BONTE • DE STANDAARD • 2 SEPTEMBER

The question is essentially whether the management will still be able in the future to chisel out its own programming policy, modernise channels and develop merchandising activities without first requesting the approval of the board. The management shall remain responsible for the day-to-day running of the broadcaster, taking on such tasks as scheduling. But the draft does not make the managing directly jointly responsible for programming. This means that if the board of directors is given a finger in this same pie, our politicians will have an indirect say in the programmes being shown on the VRT.

Geert Bourgeois vehemently denies that this constitutes a return to the time before 1995. ‘The VRT has to fit into our overall policy of better governance,’ explained his spokesman Ben Weyts. He provided assurance that, ‘we do not intend to impinge upon the independence of the management team. All decisions regarding personnel, scheduling and operational management shall remain the remit of the managing director’. The VRT is due to become a privatised external agency on 1 January.

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INTRODUCTION

Last week, the business journal Trends published an overview of the 100 richest Belgian families, on the basis of the consolidated annual accounts of any relevant business entities. Real estate and other private assets were not taken into account. Trends believes that a return to earnings accounts, especially in the area of non-financial business activities, makes the tax system more accurate and appropriate. The disclaimer by the board of KBC sold to Fortis is not only a blow to our national economy, but also an indication that the capital market only views the company as a financial institution. That is why the Flemish Government is paying so much attention to the VRT’s future: it is a prime example of the government’s role in the economy. If trends proves correct, we could well have a more accurate method of calculating the value of wealth in Belgium.

The reasons for the increasing number of Flemish business families are straightforward. Many Flemings have been financially successful because of their entrepreneurial spirit. In particular, the Flemish industrial and financial networks, which centre on the Boel, Solvay and Jansen families, are prime examples of this. Forts chairman Maurice Lippens explains that Belgium is currently home to hundreds of billionnaire families (euros) and some 200 or so that have built up assets in excess of 25 million euros. Numerous Flemings fall into this latter category, as do some French families who moved to Belgium to avoid their national capital gains taxation.

The overview in Trends shows that an increasing number of Flemish business families are staking their claim at the top. Some families, such as the Leyssens whose assets simply cannot be traced, or who have cashed in and whose fortune is now overwhelmingly in the private sphere, have dropped out of the leading peloton. The Van Malderen family falls into this last category, for example, having sold Ontex to British investment fund Candover for 600 million euros. According to Paul Buyssse, chairman of the international Bekaert group, very few of the Flemish families on the current list have been around for any length of time, unlike the French-speaking families Bol, Solvay and Jansen, whose fortunes have been firmly anchored in influential networks for many decades. Flanders is home to families such as Eernt, Bekaert and Saveyrs (CMB), but they never built up the major networks of influence that exist today in the south. Flemish owners of big businesses tend much more to sell their successful companies on to foreign bidders. Then, these companies, like the major Belgian firms, have used their influence in the country to gain an overall tax advantage, and in a way, Belgium has become a country in which all major areas of influence exist outside the country.

The way in which such networks exist in Belgium and the way in which they are managed can be compared to the networks in Great Britain. In the Netherlands, however, many such networks exist, and many are particularly well entrenched. The most accurate method of calculation is that of the VRT. This explains why 95% of the top 200 or so families are listed in the Trends overview. The Flemish industrial and financial networks, which centre on the Boel, Solvay and Jansen families, are prime examples of this. Forts chairman Maurice Lippens explains that Belgium is currently home to hundreds of billionnaire families (euros) and some 200 or so that have built up assets in excess of 25 million euros. Numerous Flemings fall into this latter category, as do some French families who moved to Belgium to avoid their national capital gains taxation.

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Vandenbroucke supports language testing between school levels

Education Minister Frank Vandenbroucke (SP.A) wants to introduce language testing in Flemish schools when pupils move up from one school level to the next. This idea came to him after observing that children in Flanders who speak a language other than Dutch in the home are lagging far behind in terms of both reading proficiency and mathematics skills. In international tests run as part of the PISA study being carried out by the OECD, Dutch-speaking children ranked amongst the top scorers. Those with a different mother tongue fell short of the OECD average. Vandenbroucke has also pointed to the tremendous shortfall between the results obtained in schools attended by children from more well-to-do families and in schools whose pupils fall within the lower socio-economic categories. He is keen to tag the provision of resources for socio-economic categories. He is keen to tag the provision of resources for socio-economic categories. He is keen to tag the provision of resources for socio-economic categories. He is keen to tag the provision of resources for socio-economic categories. He is keen to tag the provision of resources for socio-economic categories. He is keen to tag the provision of resources for socio-economic categories.

There are currently numerous vacancies for butchers, confectioners, lorry drivers and carers for the elderly. But the training courses for these careers are by no means cheap. This is another Vandenbroucke is aiming to change. This and next year, the relevant schools and the VDAB alike will receive 250 euros per trainee joining a course for one of the aforementioned trades. This money must be used to purchase equipment and materials and to cover the costs incurred by the trainee. This measure will cost 1 million euros this year and next. Furthermore, a one-off investment in the equipment available in vocational training centres is on the cards. Schools offering technical and professional courses in construction, woodwork, mechanics and electrics, automotive engineering, cooling and heating technologies and the graphical arts will receive an additional 200 euros for each student joining one of these courses this year. The total budget for this move is 10 million euros. Another measure that is in the offing are the work experience days to be offered to teaching staff. ‘This plan targets teachers of technical and practical subjects as well as staff responsible for vocational training,’ the minister has explained. ‘In order to ensure they remain up to date in their specialist field, we are going to offer them work experience in companies, hospitals and welfare centres. They will be replaced while they are out of school.’

Wealthiest Belgian business families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nr</th>
<th>Family and business</th>
<th>sector</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>de Spoelberch, de Meyius, Vandamme (inrev)</td>
<td>brewery</td>
<td>7,337,377,790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>family Solvay (Solvay)</td>
<td>chemicals and pharmaceutics</td>
<td>3,076,276,510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>family Frère (suez, total, bertelsmann)</td>
<td>financial holding</td>
<td>2,018,313,018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>family Colruyt</td>
<td>food distribution</td>
<td>1,902,345,865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>family Eternit</td>
<td>construction materials</td>
<td>1,736,313,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>family Lhoist</td>
<td>mining and raw mat</td>
<td>1,611,353,688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>family Emsens (sibelco)</td>
<td>mining and raw mat</td>
<td>1,555,272,551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>family De Clerck (beaulieu)</td>
<td>carpet manufacturing</td>
<td>1,437,712,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>family Savreys (CMR)</td>
<td>shipping</td>
<td>1,355,167,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>family Janssen (ICR)</td>
<td>chemicals and pharmaceuticals</td>
<td>1,279,100,941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>family Delhaize (delhaize de leeuw)</td>
<td>food distribution</td>
<td>943,983,988</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>family Boël (sofina-henex)</td>
<td>financial holding</td>
<td>816,046,749</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>family De Nul (group Jan de Nul)</td>
<td>dredging</td>
<td>545,777,235</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>family Bekarly</td>
<td>steel wire</td>
<td>547,146,732</td>
</tr>
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<td>15</td>
<td>family D’Ettene</td>
<td>car selling</td>
<td>535,292,425</td>
</tr>
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<td>16</td>
<td>family Cugranc (cobelex)</td>
<td>transportation</td>
<td>475,505,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>family Lippens (finac)</td>
<td>insurance/sugar</td>
<td>416,888,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>family Vandenmoerele</td>
<td>food</td>
<td>424,344,508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>families De Nolf en Claeyys (boulaert)</td>
<td>media</td>
<td>405,333,446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>families Duchâtelet en De Winter</td>
<td>Melexis (electronic se</td>
<td>403,100,993</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: Trends
6000 fewer school pupils on 1 september

FF EDITOR

On 1 September 1,041,079 children and young people will be starting the new school year. They will attend one of 2,505 primary schools and 1,030 secondary schools. Some 125,000 teachers will have the task of imparting upon them the knowledge and skills they need. In total, there are approximately 6,000 fewer school pupils this school year in Flanders, according to estimates released by the Flemish Secretariat for Catholic Education (VSKO) (De Tijd, 27 August). This drop can be seen above all in primary schools and pre-school education. Some 2,181 fewer toddlers will be joining pre-school groups this year [a total of 181,966 children], while primary schools are down 6,078 pupils [a total of 382,948 children]. The contrasting rise in numbers within secondary education amounts to just 2,367 students [a total of 476,165]. But from next year onwards, the downward trend will spread to this latter echelon, too.

The Catholic education system is by far the largest in Flanders: Catholic pre-school groups boast some 127,446 children; Catholic primary schools attract some 256,661 pupils, and Catholic high schools account for 340,232 of all students.

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IJzer pilgrimage calls upon Flemish parties to split BHV

chairman Walter Baeten called upon the Flemish parties not to join the next Federal Government if the voting constituency of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde is not split

On Sunday 28 August some 4,000 Flemings gathered at the feet of the IJzer tower of Diksmuide for the annual ‘Ijzer pilgrimage’. Traditionally, the IJzer pilgrimage was the highpoint of the Flemish movement, but for some years now this has no longer been the case. For the last few years the right wing of the movement, which is dominated by the Vlaams Belang, has been hosting its own gathering, the ‘Izerwake’, one week earlier. In right-wing, nationalistic Flemish circles, the IJzer pilgrimage is felt to have served its time. Ever since previous chairman of the Ijzer pilgrimage committee Lionel Vanden Berghe switched ranks to the more progressive party Spirit, headed up by Bert Anciaux, it has been touted as a celebration hosted by and for Spirit. Bart De Wever, chair of N-VA, the other Flemish nationalist party, previously the Volksunie, was conspicuous by his absence. According to De Wever the IJzer pilgrimage has become ‘a Spirit party’. His party colleague Minister Bourgeois was present, albeit in a discreet fashion. The presence of a large delegation of Christian Democrats, led by Minister President Leterme, and the higher visitor figures than last year would, however, seem to contradict De Wever’s assertions. In his address, pilgrimage chairman Walter Baeten called upon the Flemish parties not to join the next Federal Government if the voting constituency of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde is not split (FF).

WOUTER VERSCHELDEN • DE STANDAARD • 29 AUGUST

Committee Chairman Walter Baeten stuck to his political comfort zone, making the usual demands: the Flemish parties must not enter the next Federal Government unless a joint agreement is reached concerning the division of Brussels, Halle and Vilvoorde (BHV), unless greater powers are granted and unless transparent transfers to Wallonia are established.

This year again he called for tolerance, a clear reference to the l’Izerwake held during the previous week. ‘New gener-
All school areas made 30 speed limit zones from 1 September

To date, the compulsory 30 kmph speed limit has been applied in half of all registered school areas, according to figures published by federal transport minister Renaat Landuyt (SPA). This means that the other half of all school zones have yet to bring themselves into line with the obligation to instil a 30 kmph speed limit by 1 September. The situation is somewhat better in Flanders where 63% of all school areas are ready for the new school year and have already erected the necessary traffic signs. Landuyt is satisfied that just over 4,000 school areas have been made 30 speed limit zones. The problem, he believes, is that the regions (i.e., Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia) fell short of the target due to excessive delays in putting the right traffic signals in place. However, his Flemish counterpart and party colleague Kathleen Vanden Brempt is confident that all of the regional roads concerned will be ready by 1 September. The only outstanding issue would then be those areas that fall within the sphere of responsibility of the municipalities (FF).

GORIK VAN HOLLEN • DE MORGEN • 30 AUGUST

Although the individual municipalities have been aware of the new regulation for a year and a half now, there is no denying that in many areas the relevant authorities have omitted to take the necessary steps in good time. Numerous municipalities are hiding behind the claim that traffic sign manufacturers are unable to keep up with demand, but according to the Pedestrian Movement this serves only to show that the majority waited until the very last minute before placing their orders.

‘Those municipalities that have not fulfilled their obligations will be held responsible if accidents occur,’ warned the organisation. Landuyt himself has repeatedly stated in the press and on the radio that those districts that have not taken the necessary measures may find that they are legally liable.

The Flemish environment agency Indaver, responsible for waste disposal, is once again available for sale, as of September this year. The Flemish Environment Holding (VMH) owns 54% of the shares in Indaver. The VMH already tried to sell off its shares package in 2003, but met with fierce opposition from a number of politicians and private shareholders. Upon entering into office, environment minister Kris Peeters (CD&V) placed his plans for the sale of the business on the back burner. But now that the shareholders have agreed that it is time to change the shareholder structure, he is dusting them off. And so the bell sounds for a second round. The management is keen to market Indaver Europe-wide as an environment business that specialises in processing industrial waste, but insists that the decision-making centre must remain in Flanders. Indaver’s turnover figure for 2004 was 211.7 million euros and its profits amounted to 4.33 million euros (FF).

GUY VANDEN BROEK • DE TIJD • 30 AUGUST

Director De Bruycker believes that, ‘in any event Indaver must ensure that the Flemish waste plan is correctly implemented’. The plan provides for a tailored processing plant for high-calorie waste centred on a fluidised bed oven with sufficient capacity to process 460,000 tonnes of waste per year and which will be the only one of its kind in Europe. After commissioning the unit, in mid-2006, Indaver will have fulfilled its contract with Flanders and will be ready to set off on its European career.

Indaver has already made major progress towards obtaining the necessary permits for the construction of furnaces for industrial and household waste in Ireland. It will be the first foreign company to burn waste on Irish soil.

And this is a much more propitious time for the sale of the company shares, although De Bruycker himself believes that mid-2006 would be the optimum date: by that time the fluidising bed oven will likely be running to full capacity and the permits for Ireland will be in place. Nonetheless, Indaver has already made cost savings and its cash flow is much greater than when it was first put up for sale.

‘By preparing in-depth for both the withdrawal of the Flemish government and the simultaneous quest for a suitable partner in industry, the business is in fact creating maximum shareholder value,’ explains De Bruycker. European environment legislation, which is tending increasingly towards bans on dumping of waste, has created a tremendous market for burning of industrial and household waste.

As a result of the dumping ban introduced on 1 June of this year, Germany alone is currently facing a marked shortage of furnace capacity. Indaver is one of very few environment agencies that has at its fingertips the technology needed to process and, above all, burn industrial waste. The three parties still in the running for the last attempted sale, i.e., Sita, Shanks and Vivendi Environment, have once again put in their bids for this second round.

WWW.INDAVER.BE

Environment agency Indaver up for sale again

Telenet takes to the stock market

FF EDITOR

De Tijd (27 August) has learned from various sources that telecommunications company Telenet is expecting to enter the stock market some time in the autumn. The official announcement has not yet been made. One thing is sure: a capital increase of 320 million euros is on the agenda for the next general shareholder meeting. The shareholders have already been sounded out as to whether they would be willing to sell their shares. The joint intermunicipal utilities, including Electrabel and the municipal authorities, and who make up the largest shareholder, will be making known their decision concerning the bid put in by French group Suez for Electrabel. The corporate banking sector has estimated the stock market value of Telenet at 3 to 3.5 billion euros. Telenet is hoping to sell 1 billion existing and new shares.

De Tijd
On 30 August, the headquarters of the Walloon Government, presented its new recovery plan for Wallonia. Its aim, by ‘pooling our strengths’, as the document itself is entitled, is to set the Walloon economy back on track. The Walloon Socialist Party, the PS, has finally accepted that the Walloon Region has been treading water for far too long and that this situation cannot be allowed to continue. The figures speak for themselves: per capita GDP in Wallonia is almost 25% below the level of the 15 ‘old’ EU Member States and unemployment is almost twice that of Flanders. Not so long ago, the perilous economic situation of Wallonia was attributed by Flemish commentators to a series of ‘Wallonian ailments’, such as the dominance of the fossilised PS, nepotism and squandering of cash flowing in from Flanders and Europe as a whole. Just recently, a group of Walloon economists together with MR Senator Destexhe adopted the same critical mantra, pushing PS Chairman Elio Di Rupo to call for a ‘Marshall plan’ for the region. This plan is now on the table. The plan aims first and foremost to create wealth, before distributing it further. To this end, Wallonia needs new momentum for its economy. The solutions pinpointed are the creation of new sectors of activity, of new competitive advantages, a drop in fiscal pressure on business and investment in research, innovation and creation of jobs. Walloon Economy Minister Jean-Claude Marcourt (PS) has picked out five sectors in which Wallonia can become a market leader. These are: the biomedical sector, the foodstuffs industry, mechanical engineering, logistics and air transport. In each of these areas partnerships are to be set up between businesses, universities and training centres. According to Marcourt, the plan clearly demonstrates that the PS is keen to support enterprise. The funds for the plan, approximately 1 billion euros, shall be obtained through the sale of government assets, a strict budgetary policy and the additional resources that have been earmarked for the regions for the coming years. The Flemish press is hopeful that the plan may work. Commentators welcome this new - and long overdue - economic vision (FF).

Opinion

BART STURTEWAGEN • DE STANDAARD • 31 AUGUST

The basis for a brand new economic policy is taking shape. But these are still very early days. Due to the considerable time lost over the last decades, the road to recovery will be very long. Other, comparable European regions that have also had to contend with the dismantlement of traditional heavy industries, such as coal and steel, have succeeded in bouncing back, albeit with a great deal of blood, sweat and tears. But Wallonia would seem to have missed the boat. And it has only itself to blame.

While major sections of the text still support the view that the government must intervene in all areas of the economy, lending leadership and organisation, other paragraphs clearly indicate that the only way forward is an economic climate that encourages enterprise. Taxes must be cut, red tape reduced and innovative investment encouraged.

It is striking that the Van Cau (walloon, with minister-president Van Cauwenberghe, ed.) government is not using its new insight to take its conclusions one step further. In order to really determine its own fate, the region needs greater leverage for policy creation. In order to combat youth unemployment, for example, it has to set out its own political priorities. Flanders and Wallonia could enter into a partnership with a view to pushing through the necessary reforms.
The stakes are up between the PS and VLD for the energy voucher

The world of politics is gradually getting back to normal along the Rue de la Loi. PS chairman Elio Di Rupo set out his party’s priorities at his first public speech held in Seraing. Patrick Dewael, vice premier of the liberal VLD party, followed suit in an interview in the weekend edition of De Standaard. It comes as no great surprise that the overarching goals of the parties differ greatly when it comes to the major policy decisions to be taken this year on retirement and social security. The PS is for its part willing to accept a small budgetary deficit, whilst the VLD wants to see budgetary equilibrium. The PS is keen to further lower the burden of taxation on the lowest income groups, and to introduce a tax on income from capital as well as a social contribution to be applied across the board as additional sources of income for the social welfare system. The VLD is calling for a drop in the social contributions levied on shift work, has vehemently ruled out a general social security contribution and is contemplating an increase in VAT. Furthermore, it favours a minimum working life of 40 years, a point that has been widely criticised by the trade unions. The divide between the governing parties is gaping wide.

But the liberals and socialists did not truly clash until they began to debate how best to reduce consumer energy bills, essentially by dipping into the surplus earnings made by the government from the sale of oil products. The PS is suggesting that the VAT charged on fuel oil should be reduced from 21% to 12%, perhaps via the slow detour of a European initiative. The PS chairman on Friday to reduce VAT on fuel oil is currently 4.8 cents, some 0.4 cents more than in 2001. The taxes levied on a litre of fuel oil, meanwhile, have doubled to 12.6 cents over the same period.

Energieterminal has already pocketed an extra 1.5 billion euros since excise duties were first raised. And the voucher system will give just 225 million euros of that money back to the people, or in other words 1 euro for every 6 euros of additional excise taxes paid, according to chair Vandeurzen (FF).

‘It would appear that there has been a communication problem within the Prime Minister’s Office.’ With those words Di Rupo lashed out against the liberal proposal for a 75 euro energy voucher for every household, both in newspaper Le Soir and on the RTBF radio station. ‘I refuse to believe that a Prime Minister such as Mr Verhofstadt has taken the liberty of announcing that the government has already reached a decision regarding the energy voucher, when in fact the government is meeting at the end of this week for the first time in several months!’ exclaimed the PS chairman.

The reaction from number 16 Rue de la Loi to Di Rupo’s comments was one of surprise. ‘There has been no communication error. The Prime Minister simply wishes to bring a series of proposals to the table prior to the policy announcement,’ stressed his spokesperson.

According to Di Rupo, the amount of the energy voucher should be linked to the income of the household. In this respect, he is operating on the same wavelength as Vice-Premier Johan Vande Lanotte (SP.A). The proposals put forth by the VLD and MR have not only clearly signalled that Di Rupo does not have a monopoly on new ideas, they aim above all to implement practical measures that will benefit the middle classes. Lower-income households already have access to the fuel oil fund.

The suggestion put forward by PS chairman on Friday to reduce VAT on fuel oil from 21% to 12% was already rejected hands down two years ago at European level.

Both Vande Lanotte and Di Rupo are eager to tackle the oil companies and their ‘exorbitant profit margins’. The socialist trade union ABVV has also pointed the finger of blame at the oil producers. The Belgian Petroleum Federation reiterated in a press release published yesterday that the profits made by oil companies in Belgium are not linked to the prices applicable on the global markets. The margin earned by distributors on a litre of fuel oil is currently 4.8 cents, some 0.4 cents more than in 2001. The taxes levied on a litre of fuel oil, meanwhile, have doubled to 12.6 cents over the same period.

New anti-terrorism trial in autumn

The courts of Brussels are to initiate a new penal trial this autumn against a group of Islamic fundamentalists suspected of committing terrorist acts. The thirteen Belgian members of the Groupe Islamique Combattant Marocain (GICM), held responsible for the bloody bomb attacks on Casablanca, Madrid and Riad, are not themselves thought to be bombers, but are believed to have sheltered other GICM members suspected of terrorism over recent years and to have helped them in different ways to travel round the globe. It is thought that terrorists on the run from such countries as Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Spain and Afghanistan were housed in both Brussels and Maaseik. According to the defence, the suspects were merely offering shelter to members of their families and the prosecution has very little in the way of concrete evidence. They blame the new anti-terrorism law of 2004, which is so vague that innocent contact with a terrorist is considered sufficient to be considered an accomplice.
Non-commercial musicals in financial quandary

Flemish Culture Minister Bert Anciaux (Spirit) has unleashed a general outcry within the Flemish musicals sector with his recent decision to stem all structural subsidies paid out to musical organisations. Anciaux referred all musicals to his new policy for the ‘cultural industry’, which is anchored in a type of investment company he intends to create for cultural events that have commercial potential, encompassing also film, fashion and design. According to the minister, the aim of the policy is not to make profit, rather to cover risks. Musicalhuis and Musical Vlaanderen, two of the three organisations that had applied for funding and whose requests were rejected, are at a loss. According to Wouter Boits from Musicalhuis the minister is not taking the musicals industry seriously. 

What’s more, no one would appear to be going ahead as planned this season at the Antwerp city theatre. Dutch theatre giant Joop Van den Ende is bringing the Dutch-language version of this blockbuster production, which first took to the stage six years ago in London and was on the bill in the Netherlands just last season, to Flanders. This is clearly a show with significant commercial potential, and is sure to match the success of Pippi Longstocking last year in both the Netherlands and Flanders. Wouter Boits had a hand in both Pippi Longstocking and Camille, which was produced with the support of the StiHMul foundation for contemporary musicals. ‘We need both sorts of musical. Pippi Longstocking is of the more commercial variety, produced using private funds and intended to attract a good audience. Together with the StiHMul we aimed to come up with an overall musical concept, combining new ideas with smaller, experimental shows. But after a certain time it is always a good idea to show them again to new audiences of children who didn’t take part the first time round. And we can rest assured that these musicals will bring us a good return. We have built up a strong tradition and today families look forward to bringing their children to our Easter musical.’

Musical Vlaanderen - established to take over from the musicals department of the Flemish ballet company - has been forced to scrap its very first production, ‘A Perfect God’. Based on the theatre play ‘A Perfect Ganesh’ by American author Terrence McNally, ‘A Perfect God’ aimed crucially to give a fresh boost to the musicals genre. Musical Vlaanderen was expecting to cover 160,000 euros of the 460,000 euros needed from own resources and was counting on the government to provide the rest. That is no longer going to happen. 

The Abba musical ‘Mamma Mia!’ will be going ahead as planned this season in Antwerp from the start of November, has been funded via the Live Entertainment Foundation created by Geert Allaert and which takes donations from both businesses and individuals. In exchange, the latter receive VIP box bookings, tickets for premiers and more. ‘We have been saying for years now that this is the only feasible solution. And now the others are beginning to agree,’ explains Music Hall’s Peter Hoogeland. Above all else productions such as these rely on big names to draw in good crowds. Hans Bourlon, director of Studio 100, is only too aware of this. Studio 100, renowned for example for Samson & Gert and Plop the Gnome, is releasing the family musical Pinocchio once again this season. As Bourlon explains, ‘Over the last few years we have come up with seven new musicals based on fairy tales. But after a certain time it is always a good idea to show them again to new audiences of children who didn’t take part the first time round. And we can rest assured that these musicals will bring us a good return. We have built up a strong tradition and today families look forward to bringing their children to our Easter musical.’

Indeed Music Hall was one step ahead of the new policy for the cultural industry. The musical ‘Dracula’, show-
**Diary**

**MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE**

- **1 to 30 September:** *Images and life. The cinema of Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne.* A photography exhibition evokes their work. Bozar, Brussels; info www.bozar.be
- **Until 11 September:** *The summer of Poetry, Watou, Nous le passage, Watou* [near French border]; info: www.poezieomierswatou.be
- **1 to 9 September:** *Die Zauberpilote* by WA Mozart, director: William Kentridge, De Munt, Brussels; info: www.desingel.be
- **6 to 17 September:** *Fabbrica* (theatre) by Asciano Celestini with Angelo Bison, Bozar, Brussels; info www.bozar.be
- **6 to 15 September:** *Jazz Festival Marni* Flagey with Charles Gayle solo [piano, saxophone], François Decamps Quartet, Mimi Verderame Quartet, Pirly Zurstrassen *‘chromo sonor’* and Lilith Jazz, Flagey, Brussels; info: www.flagey.be.
- **7 September:** *Bob Mould Band*, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: www.abconcerts.be 02 548 24 24
- **7 September:** *Frothing Blues*, Brussels, info: www.abconcerts.be 02 548 24 24
- **8 September:** *Azucar Negra* (Cuba), concert, Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
- **8 to 10 September:** *Johan Simons, Paul Koeck, NT Cent, ZT Hollandia, Settenti* after Milch und Kohle by Ralf Rothman, Theatre, De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- **9 September:** *London Synfonietta* with compositions by Luciano Berio, Concertgebouw, Brugge, info: www.concertgebouw.be
- **9 and 11 September:** *Belgian National Orchestra* with Mikko Franck, conductor and Nikolaj Znaider, violin with Concerto by Felix Mendelssohn-tor and Nikolaj Znaider, violin with Antwerp; info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
- **10 September:** *Kozmozz, 10 years* [Techno], De Vooruit, Ghent; info: www.vooruit.be 09/267.28.28
- **10 and 11 September:** *Young Talents, part one and two*, Bijloke, Ghent; info: www.bijloke.be
- **10 September:** *Kozmozz, 10 years* [Techno], De Vooruit, Ghent; info: www.vooruit.be 09/267.28.28
- **9 and 10 September:** *Bang on a Can All-Stars* with compositions by Brian Eno, Brussels-Festival of Flanders, Airport Hall Zaiventem, info: www.festival.be
- **10 September:** *Proms in the Park* [Everything UK] with Flemish Radio Orchestra, Michael Nyman Band, Brussels Choral Society and Peter Stark, Paleizenplein, Brussels; info: www.festival.be
- **11 to 12 September:** *Ensemble living room Music O5* [Everything UK], Laken, info: www.festival.be
- **11 to 23 September:** *Klarafestival of Flanders and Bozar* [partners: VRT with Clara and Canvas, Ancienne Belgique, Bozar] with Choir of King’s College of Cambridge, De Filharmonie, Budapest Festival Orchestra, Everything UK, De Munt Symphony Orchestra etc. Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- **11 to 23 September:** *Everything UK*, lunch and afternoon concerts with *Sioned Williams, Nash Ensemble* and others, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- **11 September:** *The Talis Scholars with The ‘Misereere’ by Gregorio Allegri*, De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- **14 to 17 September:** *Rage for the rainy Season/Love Supreme* by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker & Rosas, De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- **14 September:** *The Budapest Festival Orchestra* conducted by Ivan Fischer with 2nd Symphony by G. Mahler, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- **15 September:** *De Munt Symphony Orchestra*, conducted by Kazushi Ono with 5th Symphony by Mahler, Philip Boesmans, Bozar, Brussels, info www.bozar.be
- **9 September:** *Minyeshu o/ Chewata*, Ethiopia, concert Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp, info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
- **10 September:** *Pastora Galvan*, dance and musical theatre, Spain, Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
- **10 September:** *The Walkabouts*, Brussels; info: www.abconcerts.be 02 548 24 24
- **10 and 11 September:** *Young Talents, part one and two*, Bijloke, Ghent; info: www.bijloke.be
- **10 September:** *Kozmozz, 10 years* [Techno], De Vooruit, Ghent; info: www.vooruit.be 09/267.28.28
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**EXPO**

- **From 5 February onwards:** *The memory of Congo*, the colonial period, exhibition, Museum for Central Africa (Tervuren); info: www.175-25.be
- **Until 9 October:** *Congo: Nature and Culture*, exhibition, KMMA, Tervuren, +32 (0)10 769 52 11 www.africanmuseum.be
- **Until 31 December:** *Master pieces from the Dutch treasure room*, KMSK, Antwerp; info: www.kmsk.be
- **Until 2008:** *Art at the Frontline 1914-1918*, Royal Army and Military History Museum, Brussels; info: 02 737 78 33 www.klm-mra.be
- **Until 31 December:** *Art nouveau and Design 1830-1938*, Royal Museum for Art and History, Cinquantenaire, Brussels; info: 02/741.72.11 www.kmkg.be
- **Until 11 September:** *Ensor to Bosch*, exhibition by Vlaamse kunstcollectie, an overview of the collections of the art museums of Bruges, Ghent and Antwerp, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- **Until 11 September:** *Christian Dior**, Musée de l’Élysée, Lausanne, info: 02/515.64.22
- **Until 2 October:** *The most beautiful paintings by Spilliaert*, KMSKA, Antwerp; info: 03/204.78.09
- **Until 23 December:** *The art nouveau front as a complete work of art*, Museum for Architecture, Brussels; info: 02/642.24.75
- **Until 18 September:** *Lois & Franziska Weinberger*, SMAK, Ghent, info: www.smak.be
- **25 August to 5 October:** Exhibition: 35 square metre young architecture, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- **Until 18 September:** *Barrio–Beuys*, exhibition, SMAK, Ghent, info: 09/221.17.03 www.smak.be
- **Until 18 September:** *Belgian photographers 1840–2005*, Photomuseum, Antwerp; info: 03/242.93.00
- **Until 25 September:** *Idyl*, Open air museum Middelheim, Antwerp; info: 03/827.15.34
- **Until 18 September:** *Roy Liechtenstein, Samuel Vanhoegaerd Gallery*, Knokke; info: 050/62.28.33
- **Until 9 October:** *Tazro Niscino*, exhibition, SMAK, Ghent, info: www.smak.be