Reporting office for asylum-seekers with suspicious travel behaviour

The Antwerp OCMW (Public Social Welfare Centre) has a reporting office where social assistants can track suspicious asylum dossiers. The specially appointed civil servant then passes these on to the Alien Affairs Department and the courts. The reporting office was introduced following a complaint by OCMW Councillor Marco Laenens (VLD), who six weeks ago concluded that poor people on benefit and refugees are travelling several times a year to countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan where terrorist training is organised. If the Assistance Committee, or social workers of the OCMW, come across such suspicious dossiers, the names can be passed on to a special civil servant. That reporting office is an intermediate to the Public Prosecutor’s Office and the Alien Affairs Department. Home Affairs Minister Patrick Dewael (VLD) is satisfied with the setting up of the reporting office. After the attacks in London it is not only European authorities, but also the police, the local hobby or the postman that must be able to help fight terrorism, he feels. SPA Senator Mimount Bousakla finds the tightening of controls a good thing, but warns against possible abuse of the reporting office. The Arab-European League (AEL) has labelled the initiative a witch hunt and pure discrimination (FF).

Kris Goossenaerts • Het Nieuwsblad • 9 September

The decision to set up a reporting office was taken after a meeting at Antwerp City Hall. There the courts, the Alien Affairs Department, the federal police and state security also promised to exchange information on these suspected asylum-seekers with each other, admitted following intervention by the Federal Government. Six weeks ago OCMW Councillor Laenens attracted a great deal of criticism when he revealed this suspicious travel behaviour. ‘Most people now say I’m right.’ I’m happy, therefore, that an investigation was eventually opened, after I’d been highlighting the problem internally for almost two years. It’s still difficult to defend people who come here and claim OCMW support because they’re being persecuted in their homeland returning there as soon as they have all the papers. How do they afford it? And these countries are not only known for their training camps for terrorists. Around 75% of the world’s opium is produced there.’

INTRODUCTION

Does Minister Bourgeois want to strengthen his grip on the public broadcaster with his preliminary draft decree? The debate continues to rage in the Flemish press. According to De Standaard, the fear at the VRT is that the Minister wants to turn the clock back fifteen years, when the politically appointed Board of Directors still had a say in programming. That is not the case at all, says the Minister in an interview in De Tijd (8 September). As he sees it in his proposal, the VRT management will continue to be responsible for programming, staff policy, finances and collaboration with production houses. But the management cannot simply ignore the wishes of Directors in strategic decisions. Nevertheless, that happened with the choice of a partnership with telecommunications operator Belgacom to broadcast the matches of the national football competition or the launch of a new sports channel (Sporza). This must not go on, Bourgeois believes. In 1995 the media decrees of then Minister Eric Van Rompuy (CD&V) were written to put a stop to the political appointments of the VRT. The managing director was guaranteed maximum independence in his decision-making. But ten years later the pendulum has swung too far in favour of this managing director, claims Bourgeois. Even the budget and annual accounts will have to be submitted to the Board of Directors if it is up to him. The Board will have to check these on behalf of the ‘six million Flemish shareholders’ in accordance with the rules of good administration that apply to every company. You cannot simply provide 250 million euros and say, just spend it, says the Media minister.

In the Flemish Parliament Bourgeois has already met with opposition from coalition partners the SPA and Spirit. They concluded that there was no agreement on his initiative within the majority and vociferously opposed Bourgeois’ plan to convert the VRT into an External Independent Agency like other Flemish public companies. They fear that the Minister - who alongside the media is also responsible for the civil service - wants to turn the VRT into an extension of the Flemish administration. Then the Minister will become partly responsible for the VRT and within a short time will be threatening to get involved in staff policy, they fear (De Standaard, 8 September). The next day the VLD and CD&V also announced that as far as they were concerned there was no need for the shackles of an EIA. In the Flemish Parliament Bourgeois has already met with opposition from coalition partners the SPA and Spirit. They concluded that there was no agreement on his initiative within the majority and vociferously opposed Bourgeois’ plan to convert the VRT into an External Independent Agency like other Flemish public companies. They fear that the Minister - who alongside the media is also responsible for the civil service - wants to turn the VRT into an extension of the Flemish administration. Then the Minister will become partly responsible for the VRT and within a short time will be threatening to get involved in staff policy, they fear (De Standaard, 8 September). The next day the VLD and CD&V also announced that as far as they were concerned there was no need for the shackles of an EIA. In the Flemish Parliament Bourgeois has already met with opposition from coalition partners the SPA and Spirit. They concluded that there was no agreement on his initiative within the majority and vociferously opposed Bourgeois’ plan to convert the VRT into an External Independent Agency like other Flemish public companies. They fear that the Minister - who alongside the media is also responsible for the civil service - wants to turn the VRT into an extension of the Flemish administration. Then the Minister will become partly responsible for the VRT and within a short time will be threatening to get involved in staff policy, they fear (De Standaard, 8 September). The next day the VLD and CD&V also announced that as far as they were concerned there was no need for the shackles of an EIA. In the Flemish Parliament Bourgeois has already met with opposition from coalition partners the SPA and Spirit. They concluded that there was no agreement on his initiative within the majority and vociferously opposed Bourgeois’ plan to convert the VRT into an External Independent Agency like other Flemish public companies. They fear that the Minister - who alongside the media is also responsible for the civil service - wants to turn the VRT into an extension of the Flemish administration. Then the Minister will become partly responsible for the VRT and within a short time will be threatening to get involved in staff policy, they fear (De Standaard, 8 September).

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief
The end-of-career debate will determine our social model of the future

Twenty years ago the Centre for Social Policy of the University of Antwerp (UIA) calculated that only 6% of the Belgian population was poor and that our country was therefore among the top countries in terms of social protection. Today Belgium is still just about one of the nine most prosperous European countries (the others being the three Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Luxembourg and France) that succeed in redistributing this wealth fairly. But by almost every indicator Belgium is at the bottom of this list. It has the lowest level of activity, the highest level of unemployment among foreigners and the elderly and therefore also the highest dependence on benefits. Social expenditure is average here, but has to be distributed among a higher number of recipients. This means these receive a small amount of benefit (unemployment, pension) and poverty among the elderly and benefit recipients is therefore high here too. Bea Cantillon, Director of the Centre, draws her conclusions without mercy in De Standaard (5 September): Belgium is no longer a leading social player. Too few Belgians are in employment (61%), and these not only have to pay for social costs, but also the high national debt. This leaves only one remedy: help benefit recipients is therefore high here too. Bea Cantillon, Director of the Centre, draws her conclusions without mercy in De Standaard (5 September): Belgium is no longer a leading social player. Too few Belgians are in employment (61%), and these not only have to pay for social costs, but also the high national debt. This leaves only one remedy: help more people find employment, as quickly as possible. Otherwise we will drop irreversibly out of the leading group of nine European countries that manage to redistribute their wealth. However, Cantillon has her doubts about the political feasibility of the required measures in this government (FF).

Opinion

PETER VANDERMEERSCH • DE STANDAARD • 5 SEPTEMBER

Whether Cantillon is right to have her doubts will become clear over the next few days. This week the Federal Government and social partners will quietly try to plot the course of an end-of-career reform. Preparations for this crucial debate did not go well. Two previous attempts to get the merry-go-round of talks on this subject going ended in failure. A memorandum from SPA Employment Minister Freya Van den Bossche that was not without its merits (encourage working longer, discourage stopping early) was dismissed by the trade unions and rejected by employers as ‘not bold enough’. The success of the debate will depend on the boldness and unanimity of the political majority parties even more than on the social partners. The signs are not good. For the SPA this is the first major dossier that has to be dealt with without Steve Stevaert at the helm. The VLD remains marked by Chairman Bart Somers, who lacks authority, and bewitched by the unpredictable Jean-Marie Dedekker. But above all the relationship between the PS and VLD will determine whether the debate succeeds. The PS, which simply continues to repeat that Verhofstadt II has made a complete mess of things in recent years, fired several serious warning shots during the summer. Socialist ideas about wealth tax, robot taxes and general social contributions do not particularly smack of the desperately needed modernity. All eyes are now on Guy Verhofstadt. Will the Premier manage to rise above himself and thus secure his own political legacy, but above all a large part of our wealth? It is more than a trial by fire for the Premier. It could be his final examinations.

WWW.CEPS.LU

Aircraft noise: Brussels makes gesture of goodwill

FF EDITOR

According to Federal Transport Minister Renaat Landuyt (SP.A), within the near future there will be a breakthrough in the dossier on aircraft noise over and around Brussels. On 6 September Brussels Minister-President Picqué (PS) announced on VRT radio that ‘the people of Brussels are reasonable and they do not need to impose noise limits that would prevent any economic activity whatsoever around Brussels.’ In June the Brussels Court of Appeal even made these noise limits enforceable. From 15 October penalties starting at 25,000 euros per complaint will be possible. Picqué, however, wanted to make it clear by his comments that the people of Brussels are not indifferent to the economic part of the dossier. They too do not want the airport to have to close because of the many breaches of the extremely strict noise limits. But he is attaching three conditions. The first is that the existing spreading plan for flight paths be reorganised. The second and third conditions are that the advisory committee and the inspection body for noise pollution, which Brussels and Flanders would set up jointly, function properly. He is now waiting for a proposal from Minister Landuyt.

WWW.MINISTERLANDUYT.BE

50- TO 65-YEARS-OLDS IN FLANDERS

Workers: 460,000 – 42%

not working: 640,000 – 58%

Unemployed: 180,000 – 16%

Early retirement: 75,000 – 7%

Anticipated retirement: 150,000 – 17%

Unable to work: 75,000 – 7%

Unemployed job seekers: 40,000 – 4%

Unable/Not seeking job: 75,000 – 7%

Source: DS INFOGRAFIEK

focus on Flanders • 3 September - 10 September 2005 • Number 33
Nuclear energy: for and against the withdrawal

The key question in the debate about withdrawing from nuclear energy is whether Belgium can cope without its nuclear power stations. These currently supply 55% of Belgium’s electricity, or 5,700 Megawatts (De Tijd, 3 September). The Greens and Socialists have opted for investments in renewable energies such as biomass and wind power. Together with the new gas power stations these have to be able to gradually replace nuclear energy. A chemicals company like BASF, which is already taking the withdrawal from nuclear energy into account, is building a gas power station of 400 MW. The steel firm Sidmar is even planning one of 800 MW. But there is another side to these gas power stations: they increase CO2 emissions. Replacing nuclear power stations with gas ones will produce an additional 12 million tonnes of CO2 a year, according to national electricity regulator CREG, 11% of all emissions in 1990. Opponents of the withdrawal from nuclear energy claim that we will therefore never achieve the Kyoto standard of reducing CO2 emissions by 7.5% by 2012.

However, Luc Barbé, Principal Private Secretary to the former Green Energy Minister, who pushed through the decision, points out that energy production is only responsible for 20% of CO2 emissions. Families and transport will have to make most effort, but a more economical energy policy is also absolutely indispensable, as we are Europe’s ‘biggest energy wasters’. If we could just manage to achieve the energy efficiency of our neighbours, that would be enough to achieve the Kyoto standards, claims Barbé.

Finally, opponents of nuclear energy have one more argument: no definitive solution has yet been found for hazardous nuclear waste.

WWW.CREG.BE

Nuclear energy: VLD chairman Somers blows hot and cold

The withdrawal from nuclear energy was decided on two years ago by the then Purple-Green government. It is pure nonsense, claims VLD Senator Jean-Marie Dedecker.

The first nuclear power stations are to close in our country in 2015. The last one will close its doors in 2025. This phased withdrawal from nuclear energy was decided on two years ago by the then Purple-Green government. This decision is also contained in the current government’s coalition agreement, but is pure nonsense, claims Senator Jean-Marie Dedecker (VLD), especially now that energy is so expensive. Oil will run out between 2036 and 2050, and there are insufficient alternatives. Wind power currently provides only 2% of all energy. He describes the decisions as a concession to the whims of the Greens and economically irresponsible. He is therefore tabling a bill to keep our country’s nuclear power stations open. This will earn him points with other parties in particular: the N-VA, CD&V and Vlaams Belang. Future SPA Chairman Johan Vande Lanotte, whose party is the VLD’s partner in the Federal Government, has fired a warning shot across the bows of Dedecker’s party: ‘If the VLD wants to break the coalition agreement it will have to be in opposition’. VLD Chairman Bart Somers is calling for calm. After the Liberal party executive meeting on 5 September it was decided that Dedecker can submit his bill to Parliament, but that the coalition agreement will be respected (FF).

WIM VANDEVELDEN • DE TIJD • 6 SEPTEMBER

In any event, no further decisions concerning nuclear energy will be taken during this legislature, VLD Chairman Bart Somers pointed out. After all, the closure scenario plunge does not have to be taken until 2007, perhaps after the elections. And we won’t be without light either, the VLD also added. Concerning nuclear energy, the coalition agreement states that nuclear power stations may only be closed if there are alternatives, if our energy stocks are secured. The Liberals want to use a study on the subject, commissioned by Federal Energy Minister Marc Verwilghen (VLD) for the end of 2006, to in their own words ‘debate on the core role of nuclear energy in our provision of energy’. This ‘fish nor flesh’ standpoint allows the VLD to remain on good terms with its Socialist coalition partner whilst sheltering ‘enfant terrible’ Dedecker. Party Chairman Somers did not therefore seize on this umpteenth little incident with ‘Shadow Chairman Jean-Marie’ to publicly blow the whistle on Dedecker. Somers wants to keep Dedecker on board. And where withdrawing from nuclear energy is concerned, Somers is well aware that the majority of Liberal voters think closing the nuclear power stations is nonsense. If it were feasible, it would push up the energy bills of businesses and families even higher than they are now. Dedecker knows that as well. And he cares little if anything about the agreements with the Socialists in a government to which he himself does not belong.
Who will pay for the increased oil bill?

The public is demanding "its money back" from the government, which also collected more taxes as a result of the price rises.

Family budgets are groaning under the increased energy prices. Compared with last year the price of fuel oil has doubled, that of natural gas has risen by 40% and that of electricity by 10 to 20%. It is families who heat their homes with fuel oil that will feel the price rises most keenly. And because many are afraid that prices will rise further, they all want to fill their tanks now. Fuel oil suppliers can barely keep pace with orders. But the companies are also at the Wailing Wall. The technological industry employers' association Agoria calculated that the additional cost of production and fleets of tankers is already 300 to 350 million euros for its 1,300 members alone. What's more, the companies will pay twice, because the rise in the price of fuel oil also pushes up wages more quickly thanks to automatic indexing. The organisation therefore came up with the proposal to remove fuel oil from the index. This proposal met with the approval of the other employers' organisations such as Unizo and the VBO, but encountered a resolute 'nyet' from the trade unions. Unizo and the VBO, but encountered a resolute 'nyet' from the trade unions. The proposal has been met with similar opposition in government circles. There are already various proposals on the government table for reducing families' energy bills: an energy cheque of 75 euros per family, spreading payments of fuel oil bills and increasing the tax relief for energy-saving investments. The CD&V, which is in opposition at federal level, called on the contrary for the duty on fuel to be cut (FF).

Opinion

GUY TEGENBOS • DE STANDAARD • 6 SEPTEMBER

The Agoria move is just one example of the commotion which the exploding oil prices have induced among pressure groups and political parties. They are all trying to pass the short-term consequences for their own supporters on to someone else.

The public is demanding 'its money back' from the government, which also collected more taxes as a result of the price rises. One wants to treat 'everyone equally', the other wants to give priority support to the poor. Businesses in turn are trying to pass the consequences for them on to the government, their staff and their customers. And the government wants to pass the consequences of these demands on to the oil companies.

That is honourable defence of interests. And the government should also make an effort to mitigate the most severe economic and social short-term consequences of the price increases. But that only applies to the short term. What about the long term? What is happening is that a load of money that up to now has been used for other things is now disappearing abroad to pay our gas and oil bills. We are getting nothing extra in return. That is therefore collective impoverishment. And this is on top of the impending impoverishment as a consequence of a lack of preparation for the ageing of the population, and the impoverishment hanging over us because we have no answer to the mass delocalisation of economic activities. Such a situation is more than a crisis. It demands a coherent approach.

### ADVERTISING IN THE MEDIA (IN MILLION EURO, JAN-JUN 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Type</th>
<th>Revenues 2005</th>
<th>Evolution 2004/2005</th>
<th>Market Share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>296 million</td>
<td>-5.3%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines</td>
<td>141 million</td>
<td>-2.5%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posters</td>
<td>107 million</td>
<td>+2.3%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td>480 million</td>
<td>-6.3%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>139 million</td>
<td>+14.3%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinema</td>
<td>13 million</td>
<td>+21.8%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.175 million</td>
<td>-2.1%</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### TV advertising (Market shares June 2005)

- **VMMA**: VTM, KANAL TWEE, JIM (66.5%)
- **SBS**: VT4, VJFTV (19.2%)
- **VRT**: ÉEN, CANVAS (8.7%)
- **Other**: VITAYA, CANAL+, REGIONAL BROADCASTERS (9.6%)

Source DE MORGEN
Situation with digital television: Telenet 20,000, Belgacom 4,000 customers

**TELENET CABLE SUBSCRIBERS SIMPLY HAVE TO BE CONVINCED TO SWITCH FROM ANALOGUE TO INTERACTIVE TELEVISION**

After the launch of its digital package (IDTV) on 3 September, on 7 September Telenet already has more than 20,000 customers, reports *De Standaard* (8 September). Major competitor Belgacom TV has only 4,000 subscribers. However, Telenet has an unparalleled competitive advantage. The cable company can attract customers from among its own customers who already have a cable TV subscription.

They simply have to be convinced to switch from analogue to interactive television, although there is a minor technical problem with major consequences. The TV does not offer enough bandwidth to send digital and analogue simultaneously. To create more bandwidth for the digital package, Telenet got rid of as many as 8 channels (CNN, BBC World, Arte, France 3, TVE, CNBC, TCM and Tel-Cell) from its cable. Anyone who wanted to get them back had to buy a cable tuner for 49 euros. This led to a wave of protest from customers. The office of Consumer Affairs Minister Freya Vanden Bossche (SP.A) received dozens of angry phone calls, and complaints rained down on the consumer organisation Test-Achat.

In the end Telenet promised that the 49 euros would be refunded if the tuner was returned (Het Laatste Nieuws, 7 September). Unfortunately, into the bargain the cable tuners appeared to run out after just a few days.

Nor is Belgacom, which offers its digital service on the ADSL network, simply throwing in the towel. This month the telecoms operator is increasing its efforts, via advertising campaigns, to convince its own customers who surf using the ADSL network to also take out a subscription to Belgacom TV (FF).

**DE STANDAARD • 8 SEPTEMBER**

‘We’re launching ourselves in a new market. Up to now there was no competition as far as distribution was concerned. We are now breaking the cable monopoly,’ says Belgacom spokesman Thierry Bouckaert. And according to the spokesman, it is normal for this to be growing more slowly than Telenet in terms of number of customers: after all, the two are fishing in different ponds.

‘We have a network and we want to offer as many services as possible on it. We’re not just about television. We’re putting the emphasis on triple play, a mixed range of services,’ says Bouckaert. In point of fact the investments Belgacom is making in its network have to produce. The launch of Belgacom TV is therefore an attempt to attract more broadband customers. For Belgacom, however, the fact that the commercial channel VTM is not yet in on the act is working to his disadvantage. But the telecoms operator is trusting that this will not last too much longer, since the channel does not want to lose viewers. To win as many customers as possible, this month new Belgacom TV users will receive the multifunctional modem and installation by an engineer free of charge from Belgacom. Also, for the first month they do not need to pay their TV subscription of 9.95 euros a month. Meanwhile Telenet is waiting to decide whether to launch advertising and marketing campaigns.

**WWW.IDTV.BE**
**WWW.BELGACOM.BE**
‘Gordel’ for BHV split

FF EDITOR

The summer weather ensured a record number of participants at the 25th Gordel (Belt). With 101,171, the landmark of 100,000 was exceeded for the third time. The original purpose of this bike ride and ramble was to further promote the Flemish character of the fringe municipalities around Brussels. But little by little this political message faded somewhat into the background. This year, however, it was once more to the fore, mainly because the route of the Gordel runs right through the much-discussed district of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde. The failed split has again increased community tensions in a number of these municipalities. This was evident, for example, in the increased number of thumb-tacks on the route, signs removed, etc. (FF).

THIERRY GOEMAN • GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN • 5 SEPTEMBER

The mayors of the Flemish Rand, clad in yellow T-shirts bearing the slogan ‘Split Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde now’, met with considerable sympathy en route. There were also many BVs present. This year no Premier Verhofstadt [VLD] or Home Affairs Minister Patrick Dewael [VLD], despite both being experienced cyclists and permanent fixtures at the Gordel. Verhofstadt has to take care of his heart, Dewael his leg after a serious operation during his winter holiday. ‘Anyway, it would be hypocritical if they had turned up after having put the BHV split on the back burner,’ said Flemish MP Eric Van Rompuy [CD&V], Flemish Minister-President Yves Leterme [CD&V] was there, however, together with Minister Kris Peeters [CD&V] and the runners from Burkina Faso who are sponsored by the Flemish Government. With its dozens of peripheral activities, the Gordel is much more than a bike ride and ramble. The 25th edition closed with an appearance by Flanders’ most popular group Clouseau in Sint-Genesius-Rode.

WWW.DEGORDEL.BE

Vande Lanotte promises progressive, more tightly led SP.A

Vande Lanotte himself, Patrick Janssens, Frank Vandenburgoucke are taking the lead together with three newcomers: Caroline Gennez, Pascal Smet and Freya Vanden Bossche

In La Fonderie, the centre for economic and social history of the Brussels Region, Johan Vande Lanotte and Caroline Gennez presented their declaration of intent as future chairman and vice-chairwoman respectively of the SP.A. Vande Lanotte wants to continue the modernisation initiated by his predecessors Patrick Janssens and Steve Stevaert. The cartel with Spirit is not up for discussion and the Greens are still welcome to strengthen the cartel. But the current Vice-Premier and Budget Minister, who will relinquish his duties on 15 October to become SP.A Chairman, wants to change the emphases. Equal opportunities for all remains the party’s motto, but he wants to develop the offensive and progressive character of the SP.A. Vande Lanotte, who is known to be pragmatic rather than ideological, also wants to widen the party and is reaching out to all those of a progressive bent. He also wants to take the party’s organisation to task. Former Chairman Stevaert became Provincial Governor of Liège and is no longer part of the leading quartet. Vande Lanotte himself, Mayor of Antwerp Patrick Janssens and Flemish Minister Frank Vandenburgoucke are now taking the lead together with three newcomers: Vice-Chairwoman Caroline Gennez, Brussels State Secretary Pascal Smet and Federal Employment Minister Freya Vanden Bossche. They are taking over the actual leadership of the party and will meet on a weekly basis (FF).

BART EECKHOUT • DE MORGEN • 7 SEPTEMBER

In 2003 the SP.A won the elections, then a year later a crack appeared. It showed that the success of the ‘modernised’ SP.A could be rather less structural than thought by the militants themselves and also that the Stevaert-effect is fairly limited in time. Stevaert knew that, and it gnawed at him in the months before he chose the governorship. Even the man with whom he had formed a tandem since 1999, Vande Lanotte, has in recent years concerned himself rather more with the self-satisfaction of his own ranks than with budget figures. Against conservatism, in his own ranks and beyond: that is pretty much the guiding principle with which Vande Lanotte wants to begin his new job. It translates as: ‘Only those who give the future form must not experience it’.

The SP.A has learned fundamental lessons from its near-death experience in 1999 (after the Augustia affair, ed.),’ he says in his declaration of principles. Over the past year concern has been growing among SP.A leaders over the specific gravity of their own, mainly young staff in the governments. The new chairman therefore intends tightening the reins somewhat. This is expressed in positive terms in the declaration of principles: ‘In the past rejuvenation has occurred without many problems, and that can also be the case now. However, it will require strong teambuilding, the passing on of experience and the SP.A to coordinate its actions in the three governments effectively. Leaving young people to their fate is no rejuvenation, but irresponsibility.’ Organisationally the void created by the disintegration of the original Tele-tubbies quartet has to be filled. Vande Lanotte has made no secret of the fact that he prefers a tightly led party in which everyone knows who holds the reins. Discipline is good for a party in government. He wants grass-roots SP.A members to be much more active with others in actions involving the environment, social policy or road safety. More movement in and around the party, therefore, and the invitation to Groen! and other progressives remains open.

WWW.SP.BE
SP.A calls for employment policy to be split

The main point from the new SP.A Chairman’s declaration of principles remembered by De Standaard and De Tijd is that the party is opting resolutely for a complete regionalisation of employment policy. A job-seeker in Roeselare in West Flanders (unemployment: 5%) and a job-seeker in La Louvière (unemployment above 20%) are currently governed by the same federal regulations. Both have much more to gain from a tailored approach, claims Vande Lanotte. Unemployment, early retirement, time-credit, temporary work and paid study leave must therefore be transferred to the regions. As evidence of solidarity with Wallonia, however, he wants to maintain the existing financial allocation formula for 25 years. In that his party is clearly at odds with the other Flemish parties, he says. Nevertheless, reactions from these parties have been positive (FF).

Opinion

BART STURTEWAGEN • DE STANDAARD • 7 SEPTEMBER

In his declaration of intent before party members Vande Lanotte put forward the idea that all policy levers relating to employment should lie with the regional governments. A completely different approach is now needed to find an employer for a long-term, young unemployed person in La Louvière from that required to provide a company in Roeselare looking for skilled workers with the right candidate.

He tackles the accusation that this approach will damage solidarity and will in the long run place the splitting up of social security as a whole on the agenda by freezing the current distribution ratio of funds available for employment policy for a generation - twenty to twenty-five years. During that period the regions will therefore get just as much money as they would have had under the current system. They will simply have to spend it in a way they feel is most efficient. That is their responsibility.

That does away with the argument that Flemings want to free themselves of their impoverished neighbours as quickly as possible and manage their own funds on a self-satisfying basis. The key question was not how much Flemish money went to Wallonia. The question was how this structural injection could achieve the best result. It was not, nor had it ever been, a question of ‘own money first’. A guarantee that there will be money for a sufficiently long period of time to combat Wallonia’s socio-economic deprivation makes a more purposeful approach possible. Wallonia must seize this opportunity.

Anciaux is strengthening his grip on cultural policy

Flemish Culture Minister Bert Anciaux (Spirit) is strengthening his grip on cultural policy. He had asked the arts sector (and in particular the performing arts) to encourage more collaboration and dam up the ‘evil fragmentation of the landscape. But the assessment committees whose job was to advise the minister on theatre and dance recognised to their hearts’ content new initiatives often based around a single artist, despite Anciaux having asked them not to do this any more. In a speech at a symposium of the Flemish Theatre Institute (Vlaams Theater Instituut, VTI) he made it clear to the sector that there are limits to the headstrong actions of assessment committees, support centres and other independently operating bodies. The measures announced by Anciaux represent a real break with trends, says Knack (FF).

KARL VANDEN BROECK • KNACK 7 SEPTEMBER

Since the early 1990s there has been a clear trend towards more autonomy in Flemish cultural policy. Especially under the CVP’s Luc Martens (Culture Minister from 1995 to 1999) structures were put in place within which the arts sectors could determine their own policy autonomously. The two most important examples of this are the Flemish Foundation for Literature and the Flemish Audiovisual Fund. They decide, without the intervention of the minister, which authors or film-makers receive subsidies. In the other sectors, political intervention vanished in the assessment committees. Finally, support centres were established whose job - independently of the culture administration - was to defend the interests of the various sectors. Of these, the VTI is the most well-known. On Friday Anciaux announced the setting up of an International Cultural Policy Unit... in the administration.

‘It’s not such a good idea to establish a separate support centre for this,’ said Anciaux, who pointed out that ‘the whole network of support centres must be assessed in terms of its efficiency and added value’.

What Anciaux did not say is that the culture administration had already examined all the support centres at the start of the year. The results were never published because they were too explosive. Thus, the profile of the support centres is apparently too vague, they work much more as lobby groups and provide far too little ‘support’ to the sectors for which they are supposed to be working. They also compete with the culture administration and take more and more assignments and tasks for themselves. Because the VTI disputed the methodology of the audit, the results were never made public.

For Anciaux it is clear. He found an extra 10 million euros for the arts and had hoped to be applauded for doing so. However, criticism of the minister has never been so great. He is no longer able to ignore this provocation. And to add insult to injury he is now confronting the ‘autonomous artists’ with the primacy of politics. ‘As the competent minister I want to lay a number of emphases myself. I shall ask the International Cultural Policy Unit to take a number of choices I wish to make into account in its policy.’ The emphasis is on the ‘T’.

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