Belgacom bids for Telindus

Belgacom is making a public bid of 483.3 million euros for Telindus, the network specialist from Haasrode near Leuven with subsidiaries in 14 countries. This is the second time Belgacom has tried to take over Telindus. In 2002 take-over talks collapsed. This time the bid has clearly been made without the knowledge of the Board of Directors of Telindus or of the main shareholder, the group based around the Cordier family, which holds a 23% interest. Allowance is therefore being made for Telindus rejecting the bid. The paper is also allowing for the possibility that other interested parties such as BT or France Télécom will make a counter-bid. Taking over Telindus would be a strategic masterstroke for Belgacom. On that most analysts agree. In its own country Telindus is the market-leader in network integration for telecoms and IT solutions as possible. For suppliers that can deliver and integrate network-based solutions to the professional market. Businesses are increasingly demanding integrated IT and telecoms solutions and are looking for suppliers that can deliver and integrate as many components of these solutions as possible.

Why is a supplier of telecoms services interested in an ICT company that provides network-based solutions to the commercial market and the public sector? Primarily because Belgacom is under pressure to expand. Not only because the shareholders of the listed telecoms group expect it, but mainly because Belgacom’s income from its classic activities is stagnating. There is another important reason. Belgacom has taken blows in various areas, but remains strong in the market of services to businesses. The group wants to protect this position. However, to be able to do so Belgacom must get involved in the trends in the professional market. Businesses are increasingly demanding integrated IT and telecoms solutions and are looking for suppliers that can deliver and integrate as many components of these solutions as possible.

Bert Broens • De Tijd • 30 September

INTRODUCTION

The various offices of the Socialist ABVV union are preparing the national 24-hour strike on Friday 7 October. Chairman Cortebeeck of the Christian ACV union believes this is the wrong strategy. He wants to negotiate first, and only strike if an agreement appears impossible, albeit on a different day (10 October) from the Socialist union. This discord among the unions may well saddle the Belgian economy with two 24-hour strikes. Employers’ organisations are furious, especially with the ABVV. At a time when the international indicator of the WFT suggests that Belgium is losing competitive strength year after year (De Tijd, 28 September), they find it irresponsible for so much damage to be caused to the Belgian economy once again. And striking and negotiating at the same time, as the ABVV is doing, they believe is entirely unacceptable, although they are not going so far as to suspend their involvement in the talks. Even the Flemish press has remarkably little time for the Socialist union’s attitude. The ABVV lacks proper leadership and gets a kick out of militantism, writes De Standaard (28 September). The union demand for low pensions and benefits to be increased is justified, but the ABVV is allowing people to believe that this is possible without remaining in work longer. Strikes lead to a polarisation of views in the talks and miss their target because they are aimed at the government, but affect the public and employers, the paper claims. A government, moreover, that has confirmed it will push its plans through even without an agreement. And yet there is a fear that the unions’ attempts to outbid one another will cause the wave of strikes to spread. The railway unions, for example, are striking on 1 October. The strike is, however, aimed at their management and not the government, but for train passengers that will make little difference. It is also highly likely that the trains will also not run on 7 (and 10) October due to ‘spontaneous actions’. Meanwhile, unions at De Post are taking this sort of spontaneous action into consideration. They have issued a strike notice for an entire month. After all, 80% of staff spoke out against the new Collective Labour Agreement, which they labelled a ‘wedding present to CVC/Post Danmark’, the combination that recently paid 260 million for a share of 50% less one share in De Post. The new Collective Labour Agreement introduces a job classification system, raises the early retirement age from 57 to 58 and increases the required number of career years from 30 to 35. The unions also fear that the high efficiency criteria of the Danish Post Office, which will probably serve as a model for the De Post, will be all-decisive. De Post is ten years behind modern postal services such as TNT Post, Deutsche Post and Post Danmark. CEO Johny Thys therefore accuses the unions of being too shortsighted. The reforms are just as inevitable as those of the end of career and social security. Commentators in the Flemish press have a word for the unions’ desperate defence against such unavoid- able reforms: rearguard actions.

Belgacom, which holds a 23% share of Telindus, has tried to take over Telindus. On that most analysts agree. In its own country Telindus is the market-leader in network integration for telecoms and IT solutions and are looking for suppliers that can deliver and integrate as many components of these solutions as possible.

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Unions reject government's end-of-career proposals

The three main stumbling-blocks are the raising of the early retirement age, compulsory participation in employment cells in the case of corporate restructures and the lack of clarity over the financing of social security. The government is being advised to modify them quickly and thoroughly. The socialist ABVV even threatens with a national 24-hour strike at the beginning of October. The three main stumbling-blocks are the raising of the early retirement age, compulsory participation in employment cells in the case of corporate restructures and the lack of clarity over the financing of social security. The Chairman of the Christian trade union ACV, Luc Cortebeeck, is allowing a little more room for negotiation, but is refusing to respect the timing proposed by Premier Verhofstadt. You cannot resolve such dossiers in two weeks, he claims. If the Premier still wants that, there will be no agreement, says the trade union leader. The Socialist ABVV is clear: the right to early retirement at 58 cannot be touched. Employees take early retirement at 58 because they can no longer cope with the pressure of work or have been sidelined within their company, claims the Francophone FGTB (ABVV) Leader Jean-Claude Vandermeeren. In contrast employers’ organisations are still open to further discussion. But they are also asking for more guarantees. The new procedure for restructuring must not lead to extra costs and tax cuts must not be used to finance pay rises (FF).

Opinion

GUY TEGENBOS • DE STANDAARD • 26 SEPTEMBER

What is the role of a trade union? To stand on the sidelines and yell out every time the established conditions of employees are threatened, and in the meantime make sure the competition does not do it better? If that is their role, they’ve played it very well. In the Belgium system they were given a wider role. They can take their place at the helm with others, but then they have to share responsibility for the whole thing, and help make choices for the future. In the dossier on ends of careers and the future of the welfare state, they have not played this role. For years they’ve been lulling their supporters about this. Rising wage costs! That’s not so bad! The ageing population! We’ve seen worse! The unaffordability of pensions? That was provocation by employers who had their eye on social breakdown. Early retirement was defended tooth and nail as if nothing were the matter. It was unrealistic to hope that they would simply change their tune following the government’s ‘work longer’ memorandum. In fairness it should be added that the political world has not set an example in this dossier. Tell the public the truth about the future of our welfare state! That hasn’t been its strong point in recent years. In recent times, within the SPA, Frank Vandenbroucke and Johan Vande Lanotte were occasionally allowed to say that there was a problem, but not too often. The party line was that you should not make people uneasy, on the contrary.

If the trade unions do not want to play their wide role and are not prepared to talk about working longer, the government and Parliament have to accept their responsibility, even if this leads to a lively autumn.

WWW.ABVV.BE
WWW.ACV.BE

Crack in trade union front

The trade union front is starting to crack. On 7 October the Socialist ABVV is to strike to retain early retirement. The Christian ACV and Liberal ACLVB are not joining in. Luc Cortebeeck, Chairman of the ACV, wants to talk first and only then strike. He believes talking and striking at the same time, as the ABVV is doing, is the wrong approach. The ACV is only prepared to strike if the talks come to nothing, and then not on 7 October, but three days later on 10 October. At first sight it goes against every political logic that the ACV appears more willing to talk with the Federal Government than the ABVV. After all, the Federal Government contains Socialists, but no Christian Democrats. Het Laatste Nieuws claims to know why (FF).

JAN SEGERS • HET LAATSTE NIEUWS • 29 SEPTEMBER

At the red trade union the FGTB, the Walloon wing of the ABVV, generally sets the tone: threatening, brusque, militant. Let the Walloon radical Jean-Claude Vandermeeren flex his muscles and the affable Xavier Verbom have no other choice but to do the same. Not that Verbom himself is a softie. He resents the fact that the SPA is focusing ever more emphatically on the Flemish middle classes and no longer curries favour with its classic, vulnerable public of workers, the unemployed and retired.

Luc Cortebeeck has a tighter grip on his ACV troops than Verbom, whose ABVV could well be called a Mexican army. He is also a more level-headed strategist. He realises like no one else that sooner or later a government has to take tough measures and that the ACV will have to swallow this willy-nilly. Cortebeeck is sufficiently cunning to then choose the shorter option. He would rather have his supporters swallow a set of measures from a Purple government in 2005 than make them swallow the same measures in 2007 from a government that will most probably be led by his friends in the CD&S.V. That would be the ultimate nightmare: to have to pitch into federal ministers from his own nest, such as Yves Letermé (by then Premier). No, better to hold the nose, bite and swallow.
410 civil servants at Belgacom are placed on availability

The management of telecoms operator Belgacom intends laying off around 460 workers currently in reconversion (without a job within the company). Of these, around 410 are civil servants, a status that dates from the time when the telecoms operator was still a state-owned enterprise. They would be placed on availability. This means that they are paid 100% of their salary for the first two years. From the third year the payment drops by 20% a year until a minimum payment amount is reached, which is determined by the number of years’ service. The fifty contractual workers would be laid off. The Christian Trade Union the ACV is refusing to accept the management’s proposals. It views the method of placing statutory civil servants on availability as a dangerous for all public-sector workers. The ACV has therefore left the negotiating table. Belgacom itself is not getting too worked up about it. Talks with the Socialist ACOD union and the Liberal civil servants’ union the VSOA are continuing. De Standaard (28 September) points out that under Belgian law a collective agreement between employers and workers is valid once one of the associations has signed it.

www.belgacom.be
www.acv.be

Federal government will decide on end of career, with or without social partners

The Socialist trade union the ABVV is standing by its threat to call a national strike in defence of early retirement

The Federal Government is refusing to yield to the unions’ threat of strike action. On 8 October it will take a decision on ends of careers, the financing of social security and pensions, with or without the support of the social partners. And yet from 29 September it will negotiate further with the social partners over the basic substance of its exploratory memorandum. The Prime minister also said that there was room for negotiation to amend the memorandum. But on 8 October the plunge will be taken, so that the decision can be taken into account when drawing up the 2006-2007 budget and included in the Premier’s policy statement before the Chamber on 11 October. That is the result of two hours of meetings between federal ministers and social partners in the Premier’s official residence. The Socialist trade union the ABVV is standing by its threat to call a national strike in defence of early retirement. The Christian ACV and the liberal VSOA do not intend to join the socialist union. They want to wait for the outcome of the negotiations. The employers of the VBO and Unizo are expressing their outrage at the threat of strikes and are ‘refusing to negotiate with a knife at their throats’. In other words, if the trade unions decide to strike, they will walk out of the talks. What is striking is that on both the Francophone and Flemish side the Socialist parties PS and SPA are openly against the unions’ position. Last week Justice Minister Laurette Onkelinx (PS) vehemently defended the government’s memorandum on RTBF. On the Flemish side too, a Socialist like MP Hans Bonte (SP.A) launches severe criticism against the trade unions, which he refers to as conservative organisations that no longer can (or dare) play their social role and have lost their sense of solidarity. Bonte is more familiar than anyone with the end-of-career problem, since he is Chairman of the parliamentary Committee for the Ageing Population (commissie Vergrijzing) (FF).

Opinion

YVES DESMET • DE MORGEN • 28 SEPTEMBER

Hans Bonte is perfectly right. Demography simply obliges any government to take measures. Early retirement is a particularly recent addition to our social legislation, so it is wrong to now present it as a sort of eternal right acquired for all time. And when the baby-boom generation shortly takes collective (early) retirement, that will not only be detrimental to the labour market, but also to the financing of social security, where exploding pension costs will have to be met with contributions from fewer and fewer working people.

That the level of employment among older people has to be increased is in fact no more than a justifiable call for social solidarity, something that was once the goal of the trade unions. Today they pose as the defenders of the purely I-oriented wishes of their most clamorous members.

The trade unions may demand something in return. That employers, for example, abandon the hypocrisy they are displaying: calling for more early retirement but shifting the social costs of any restructuring onto the community via that same early retirement. That such a new end of career be organised on a more humane and flexible basis. But the trade union cannot continue to avoid its social responsibility.

Figures BELGACOM and TELINDUS

<table>
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<th>RESULTS BALANCE SHEET 2004</th>
<th>BELGACOM</th>
<th>TELINDUS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turnover</td>
<td>5.54 billion euro</td>
<td>533 million euro</td>
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<tr>
<td>Operational Cash Flow</td>
<td>2.55 billion euro</td>
<td>22.7 million euro</td>
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<tr>
<td>Operating Result</td>
<td>1.61 billion euro</td>
<td>1.59 million euro</td>
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<tr>
<td>Net Benefit</td>
<td>0.92 billion euro</td>
<td>3.01 billion euro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Employees</td>
<td>16,913</td>
<td>2,233</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chairman of the board</td>
<td>Theo Dilissen</td>
<td>Jan Steyaert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>Didier Bellens</td>
<td>Ronald Everaert</td>
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SOURCE: TID GRAPHICS
From 26 September investors can sign up for shares in the television and internet company Telenet. Most of the 49.5 million shares available come from existing Telenet shareholders. On top of that a further 298 million euros of new shares are being issued. The shares are available at 21 to 25.50 euros per share. Overall this is designed to produce a maximum sum of 1.26 billion euros. 15% of this is reserved for Belgian private investors. The bid runs until 7 October, but can be closed early if it proves extremely successful.

Of the existing shareholders, only one is not selling: the American Liberty Global. The group from the business empire of John Malone has a priority right to buy 4.67 million shares, so that it can maintain its blocking minority of 21.3%. According to De Standaard (26 September), the mixed intermunicipal companies (Intermixt) are selling half their shares and pocketing some 344 million euros, the pure intermunicipal companies of Interkabel are also selling half, which will net them 99 million euros. Electrabel, the partner of the mixed intermunicipal companies, is selling all its shares (4.8%) for 107 million euros. The Regional Investment Company of Flanders (Gewestelijke Investeringsmaatschappij Vlaanderen, GIMV) will net 232 million euros after selling around 11%, the financial consortium (Sofinim, KBC private Equity, Finstrad, Ibel) about the same. Both are retaining 3.81%. Boss Duco Sickinge is selling all his shares (8.4 million euros) and JP Morgan (1.2 million) is also visiting the till.

In total, shareholders are offering around 55% or 40 million shares. However, they will have to set aside 25.4 million shares for Liberty, which has a buy-out right until 2009. Flemish shareholders are to retain a joint interest of 27.3% in Telenet, but many Flemish investors will further anchor the company, expects boss Duco Sickinge. De Standaard however reiterates that it is only a matter of time for Telenet before it falls ‘like a ripe fruit’ into the lap of the American Liberty group.

**Privatisation of GIMV leaves a bitter taste for Flemish government**

The Flemish Government opted for the worst possible scenario by selling its GIMV shares at 34 euros a share in May

The floatation of Telenet has a bitter after-taste for the Flemish Government, claims De Standaard. With the floatation of Telenet the full GIMV participation of 14.9% is worth 345 million euros. Unfortunately in May this year the Flemish Government privatised around 30% of the GIMV, and so missed out on 100 million euros (FF).

PASCAL DENDOOVEN • DE STANDAARD • 26 SEPTEMBER

It appears from a press report that the floatation of Telenet, of which the listed GIMV owns 14.9%, could mean an increase in value to 230.5 million euros for the investment company. The reality looks even better than the GIMV suggests in its communiqué. The Telenet shares held by the GIMV are worth up to 345 million euros. And this while the investment company has already recouped its entire historic investment - even before the floatation. In other words: everything that the sale now produces (and that could be as much as 345 million) is pure cash profit.

The Flemish taxpayer, however, is unlikely to see the funny side. Telenet is simply another indication that the criticism of the privatisation of the GIMV was justified. There was no sense in selling a 30% portion of the GIMV in May below the book value for 223.6 million euros, while the intrinsic value was 100 million higher.

If the Flemish Government wanted cash, it would have been better off paying part of the record amount of liquidities which the GIMV had at the time, around 300 million euros, as a dividend. But this option was never actively pursued during the months of work by the privatisation committee. Instead the privatisation experts of Budget Minister Van Mechelen (VLD) finally caused the share to plummet themselves by mopping up the market for months in every direction.

The Flemish Government opted for the worst possible scenario by selling its GIMV shares at 34 euros a share - less than the book value. The GIMV is now sitting on almost 500 million euros in cash and an invested portfolio of 600 to 700 million euros and the payment of liquidities is more than a consideration. The new shareholders, meanwhile, are ready and waiting.
The three-month poll carried out by VTM, Het Laatste Nieuws, RTL/TVI and La Libre Belgique reveals that the CD&V/N-VA (26.8%) would still be the biggest political formation in Flanders if elections were held tomorrow. However, the cartel is closely followed by the Vlaams Belang (26.1%), which is only 0.7% behind. Also striking is that the Liberal VLD appears to have turned the corner. While in June it had fallen to 17.1%, it has now gained 1.3%, for a total of 18.4%. SPA/Spirit, conversely, has lost 1.5%, dropping to 19.9%, barely 0.2% better than its poor result in the Flemish elections of June 2004. On the other hand, Groen! has risen by 1% to 6.9%. The poll has a margin of error of 2.25%, which means none of the shifts can be called significant. Nevertheless, some papers are drawing conclusions from it. De Tijd makes comparisons with the 2003 election results, when the Federal Government was formed, and concludes that the Flemish Liberals and Socialists have fallen by 5.8% and 3.6% respectively, while the opposition Vlaams Belang and Groen! have gained 8.2% and 3% respectively. The CD&V and N-VA have also gained a little ground.

SPA Chairwoman Caroline Gennez attributes her party’s downturn to the departure of popular chairman Steve Stevaert, who is now Governor of Limburg. In the popularity poll Minister-President Leterme (CD&V) remains the most popular Flemish politician (34%) ahead of Federal Premier Guy Verhofstadt (VLD, 32%) and Federal Vice-Premier and future SPA Chairman Johan Vande Lanotte (27%). Despite their good personal results both Leterme and Verhofstadt have reason to be concerned. Both the Flemish and Federal Governments are having to deal with growing public distrust. The poll was carried out among 2,000 Belgians in face-to-face interviews and has the reputation of being fairly reliable, although you never know with opinion polls.

www.vtm.be
www.lalibre.be

POLITICS

FF EDITOR

VMT/La Libre Poll: CD&V/N-VA still the biggest, swing for VLD

Flanders’ socio-economic strength must be improved. Over the next few years, therefore, the Flemish Government wants more jobs, more entrepreneurs and investors, more investment in innovative products and logistics, but also more investment in social housing, disabled care and wants to give foreigners and semi- and unskilled workers more opportunities on the labour market. That in a nutshell is the content of the 17-page September Declaration of Minister-President Yves Leterme (CD&V), for which he asked for a vote of confidence from the Flemish Parliament. At the same time he heralded in the new political year. The September Declaration has mainly become an hour-long recital in which no single minister and no single mandate is overlooked. In short, there was something in it for everyone. The main target of criticism was the way in which Leterme gave his address, in his notarial style (so said Caroline Gennez-SPA), monotonously rattling off measure after measure. According to Groen! Chairwoman Vera Dua, not only did his recital sound like a 3Suisses catalogue, but it also lacked an attractive project. For his party colleague Eric Van Rompuy, Leterme’s rather dull approach conceals substance. At least he does what he says, in contrast to the previous Purple-Green ‘government of announcements’, claims Van Rompuy (FF).

BART HAECK • DE TIJD • 27 SEPTEMBER

‘Globalisation and the ageing population are Flanders’ biggest problems,’ said the Flemish Minister-President, Yves Leterme (CD&V), yesterday at the start of his September Declaration. Social and ecological sustainability also remain inadequate. ‘To tackle these problems,’ he went on, ‘we need a solid economy. This will mainly depend on whether we have confidence in the future.’ Over the next twelve months, the Flemish Government therefore intends promoting entrepreneurship and investment, increasing the emphasis on innovation, making better use of Flanders’ logistically strategic situation, improving opportunities for foreigners and semi- and unskilled workers in education and making job-seekers aware of their responsibilities.

For example, the government is to sit down with the chemical industry to discuss its needs. It has already done this with the Flemish car sector. On 1 January the Flemish Entrepreneur Agency (Vlaams Agentschap Onderne-men) also opened its doors. For businesses this must develop into the sole point of contact with the Flemish Government.

Innovation is being given a major boost. Next year the Innovation Fund, which will take 150 million euros worth of participations in companies developing innovative technologies, will start up. The normal innovation budget is also to increase. In 2009 it will be 200 million euros higher than now. Finally, the Odysseus programme is intended to attract first-rate Flemish researchers back to Flemish universities.

Leterme called the consolidation of Flanders’ logistical trump cards ‘essential’. There will therefore be significant investment in sea ports, airports and inland ports and in roads and railways. This year a special airports commission is to be introduced within the Flemish Social and Economic Council (SERV).

In education the Flemish Government wants to address the issue of equal opportunities. ‘Unequal achievement levels are cause for concern,’ said Leterme. 80% of children of highly skilled parents find their way into higher education, but only 25% of children of semi- and unskilled parents. These figures show that too much talent is being wasted, Leterme feels. As regards the labour market, the Flemish Government will spend more money on helping older employees find a job. Young people and foreigners will also receive more support. Job-seekers will be given more opportunities, but will be made aware of their responsibilities.

Leterme emphasised that his government’s policy is not merely a list of intentions, but a justifiable programme with guaranteed financing. The long-range budget reveals that the Flemish Government is investing 3.1 billion euros over the next four years.

www.vlaamsparlement.be
www.vlaanderen.be
www.yveleterme.be
Public Health and Economy

Doctor demonstration against Demotte

Demotte took full advantage of his special powers to encourage the prescribing of cheap generic medicines and to freeze the index for GPs’ fees

In April Social Affairs Minister Rudy Demotte (PS) was given special powers by the government to balance the healthcare budget. Demotte took full advantage of this opportunity. As well as a number of interventions designed to encourage the prescribing of cheap generic medicines, he also froze the index for GPs’ fees. On 25 September the doctors’ unions the BVAS and SVH arranged a joint demonstration in Brussels to register their opposition to Demotte’s policy. The BVAS is the country’s biggest doctors’ union. Its 7,000 members include a number of GPs, but mainly specialists. However, the organisation has come in for a great deal of criticism because it often defends the interests of extremely well-paid specialists. The smaller, more left-wing Kartel did not take part in the demonstration. The BVAS has seven seats on the Doctors/National Health Service Committee, which negotiates over doctors’ fees, compared with five for the Kartel. But the Kartel appears to be fragmenting. One group of GPs recently split off from the Kartel and formed the Union of Flemish General Practitioners (Syndicaat voor Vlaamse Huisartsen), which primarily wants to defend the interests of the GP. The SVH wants the government to pump more money into front-line care and family medicine. Not only will that save money, it will also provide a better quality of medicine, the union believes. The government is currently spending far too much money on hospitals and specialists, claims the SVH. Despite their mutual differences of opinion, the BVAS and SVH were united in their opposition to the policy of Minister Demotte (FF).

Belgium loses competitive strength, says WEF

FF EDITOR

The Global Competitiveness Report 2005-2006 by the Swiss World Economic Forum (WEF) holds bad news for Belgium. Belgium has dropped from 25th to 31st place in terms of competitive strength. In the group of the old 15 EU countries it is in the starter group. It is behind Spain (29) and France (30). Only Greece (46) and Italy (47) do worse. In 2000 Belgium was still in 17th place. The WEF bases its report on macro-economic data, the perception of employers and the operation of the government. De Tijd has dug up several international studies from last year to flesh out the picture. In mid-September, for example, the World Bank reported that Belgium had fallen from 16th to 18th place in the list of countries with the most business-friendly climate. Even in areas where our country scores extremely highly, such as productivity and levels of human development, there has been a decline. According to the American think-tank Conference Board, Belgium has dropped from third to fourth place in 2005 in terms of productivity. And even in the UN Human Development report, based on education, income and life expectancy, Belgium has had to concede 3 places (from 6th to 9th place). And yet these figures do not appear to be having any major impact on foreign investors, reports De Tijd. According to Unctad, Belgium and Luxembourg are way out in front in terms of attracting foreign investment. And Belgium can also still put forward a number of excellent results. In terms of education it has one of the best scores in the world, in terms of poverty levels and budgetary balance one of the best in Europe and our country invests above the European average in research and development. In any case the employers’ federations VBO and Unizo are seizing on the published figures of declining competitive strength to condemn the planned strikes, which they feel will cause massive economic damage.

COMPETITIVE STRENGTH OF BELGIUM (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM)

Table 6 and 7

Frank Peeters • De Morgen • 26 September

‘Doctors are treated like dirt, we’re living under a diktat,’ says BVAS Chairman Marc Moens, who called for the demonstration. ‘Surveys show that 90% of the public trust their doctors, and only one quarter politicians, so who should be rebuking whom? Also, Demotte has failed to keep his promises on the index for GPs’ fees, which he’s simply frozen. Our index now or the Apocalypse tomorrow?’

Doctors are ranked not only by the index freezing, but also Demotte’s mandates, the possible sanctions for excessive prescribing behaviour, the ‘administrative lunacy’ and the national medical site Behealth. In April this year Parliament voted in mandates for Demotte which allow him to intervene if the healthcare budget threatens to be derailed. ‘Dialogue with the medical associations is no longer possible in an atmosphere of mandates,’ says Moens.

www.bvas.be
www.svh.be

Bron: Tijd Graphics

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Cultural infrastructure gets financial injection of 101 million euros

It’s now final. There will be no ‘Forum for Music, Dance and Visual Culture’ in Ghent. Bert Anciaux, the Flemish Culture Minister (Spizit), is burying the ambitious and costly project of Gerard Mortier, born in Ghent and currently Director of the Paris Opera. In its place there will be a ‘Forum Two’ (20 million euros), a super-library allowing for new media and visual arts and also a contemporary circus centre in the now empty Circus Mahy. Anciaux does not believe in the original plan of the people behind the Forum, because they did not agree on an allocation of responsibilities with the Concertgebouw in Bruges or the Singel in Antwerp. And above all, he no longer wants to invest further in performing arts. The city of Ghent reacted with disappointment. Gerard Mortier is accusing the Minister of lacking the nerve to adopt an innovative cultural policy. But apart from that, Anciaux had only good news to report at his press conference. Antwerp is to get its Museum aan de Stroom (MAS, 21 million euros), which will house the collections of three Antwerp museums. There will also be considerable investment in the expansion of deSingel with a tower, the renovation of the Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten (Royal Museum of Fine Arts, KMSKA) and the Flemish Opera. In recent years it has been Brussels’ turn with the KVS and Beursschouwburg, and now it is only getting the new development adjoining the Vlaams-Nederlands Huis. In Leuven there will be a museum site (5 million euros) and 4 million euros has been spent on Limburg, although as yet there is no project. A general budget of 5.5 million euros will be used for loose projects. This will allow maintenance work to be carried out.

In total Anciaux is investing 101 million euros in cultural buildings. He is managing this by spreading his investment costs over time and via public-private collaboration was able to circumnavigate European objections by letting private partners provide the loans instead of the Flemish Government. As a result, almost all the pending cultural infrastructure plans, and even one or two unexpected ones, can be started (FF).

GEERT SELS • DE STANDAARD • 24 SEPTEMBER

Building projects for which financing was until recently extremely uncertain have unexpectedly been given the go-ahead. Over the next few years building work will be carried out on the Museum aan de Stroom, the Singel will get its extra tower, a museum site will be created in Leuven and Ghent will actually be given another chance for the already buried Forum.

In recent years the Flemish Community had pledged itself to works for which the friendly sum of 85 million euros was requested. The piggy bank for cultural infrastructure was 50 million euros short. The money has not suddenly started to miraculously multiply. Nor has Anciaux weeded out the projects. On the contrary. The rabbit Anciaux is now pulling out surprisingly a new technique which the Flemish Community will now use to make its long-term purchases. For schools, rest- and care-homes or hospitals the government will no longer pay cash by putting the whole amount in an annual budget. It will pay off its purchases over a number of years. There will be two speeds. The cost of the new cultural infrastructure will be spread over ten and eighteen years. Around 12 million euros will be available each year. Of this, 1.5 million will be reserved for cultural infrastructure of super-local interest, and 3.5 million for maintaining the thirty buildings of the Flemish Community. This will leave 7.5 million to spend on new initiatives.

These long distribution periods will mean making sure not to remove the breathing space from subsequent terms. Any effect of the building work must be over and done with by 2020.

www.berntanciaux.be

EXHIBITION

Retrospective exhibition about Panamarenko in Brussels

FF EDITOR

Antwerp artist Panamarenko turns 65 this year. A chance to devote a large special exhibition to the most famous living Belgian artist, felt the Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten (Royal Museum of Fine Arts) in Brussels. International public and private collections loaned works for the occasion. Panamarenko, who all his life has been fascinated by science and technology, deals in a very personal way with the laws of nature in his designs. Panamarenko, who all his life has been fascinated by science and technology, deals in a very personal way with the laws of nature in his designs. His home is a new technique which the Flemish Community will now use to
**Diary**

**MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE**

- 8 to 15 October: Flanders Opera Antwerp. Aria come aus Naxos by Richard Strauss, libretto by Hugo van Hofmannsthal, conductor Ivan Törsz, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- 6 October: Nieuw Ensemble, Ed Spangard (Amsterdam) with chinese composers, De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- 7 October: Philharmonic Orchestra of the Ural conducted by Dimitri Liss and Olga Smirnova, Royal Army and Military History Museum, Brussels, info: 02/741.72.11 info: www.kkmk.be
- 11 October: La Petite Bande conducted by Sigiswald Kuijken, Le Quattro Stagione by Vivaldi with mise-en-geste by Béatrice Cramoix, De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- 12 October: Dream Theatre, Vorst Nationala, Brussels, info: www.goformusic.be 0900/26060
- 12 October: Hubet Chime Bells Ensemble [China], the oldest orchestra in the world, De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- 12 October: Onguesta tipica la Imperali [Arg], concert, Zuidereinde, Antwerp, info: www.zuideinde.be 03/248.01 00
- 12 October: Needlepadd, Need Company, theatre, Kaaitheater, Brussels, info: www.kaaitheater.be
- 13 October: Sooraz Malamas [Greece], concert, Zuidereinde, Antwerp, info: www.zuideinde.be 03/248.01 00
- 13 October: 50 Cent, Vorst Nationala, Brussels, info: www.goformusic.be 0900/26060
- 13 October: Royal Ballet of Flanders with Perfect Gems, Concertgebouw Bruges, info: www.concertgebouw.be
- 14 October: La Granatina o’ Flamenco Vivo, De Handebeurs, Ghent, info: www.handelsbeurs.be
- 14 October: Oxyals with Sophie Kartäsper [Soprano] with Mahler and Richard Strauss De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28

**EXPO**

- From 5 February onwards: The memory of Congo, the colonial period, exhibition, Museum for Central Africa (Tervuren), info: +32 (0)2 769 52 11 www.africamuseum.be
- Until 4 December: The big umbrella by Aleksandria Mir, SMAK, Ghent, info: www.smak.be
- Until 13 November: Retrospective Bettina Rheims (photography), Museum of the Botanique, 02/218 37 32 www.botanique.be
- Until 31 December: Between Photo and Film, exhibition, KMMK, Cinquantenaire, Brussels, info: www.kmmk.be Until 4 December: The big umbrella by Aleksandria Mir, SMAK, Ghent, info: www.smak.be
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