Moerman: Flanders must choose innovation

The 9th of December the Flemish Government has approved the Innovation Plan of Science and Innovation Minister Fientje Moerman (VLD). In this the Minister calls on the other members of the Flemish Government to set aside a budget for innovation in their policy areas. Flanders must resolutely choose the knowledge society, since the link between innovation and development on the one hand and economic growth and falling unemployment has been demonstrated many times, claims the Minister (FF).

FREDERIC PETITJAN • DE STANDAARD • 9 DECEMBER

In the Innovation Plan Moerman proposes nine lines of force for a stronger, more streamlined Flanders. Creativity and innovation are being stimulated in all sectors of society and Flanders must be promoted as an active knowledge region. The Minister also hopes to attract more top researchers to our country, but realises such a thing costs money. She also wants to devote money to the role of hot-spots, knowledge regions such as, for example, Ghent and Leuven, and believes it is up to the government to set a good example. ‘It’s extremely important that efforts in the field of research and development are not limited to one segment, but that we choose a horizontal approach that extends across Welfare, the Environment, the Economy, and so on.’ As an example of trans-policy cooperation she cites the Inter-University Centre for Broadband Technology, a research institute set up by the Flemish Government to develop innovative IT and broadband applications.

To involve the whole of Flanders in the new innovation policy the Minister is organising an ‘Innovation Week’ in 2006. During this week the innovative actions of all Flemish ministers will be presented to the general public.

CONTENTS
Social Policy, Politics, Justice, Education 2
Dutch is condition for social renting 2
Francophones furious about housing code 2
VLD seduces the hard working Fleming 3
CD&V still wants compulsory voting 3
Adoption rights for gays and lesbians 3
Verholtstael threatens to veto Blair 4
Soon a surplus of teachers 4

Economy
Dredger DEME recruits 220 people 4
Europe approves ABX restructuring 5
National Bank calls for more competitive strength 5
Strong year for capital market 5
Belgians are the wealthiest in Europe 7

Media and Culture
Father Damian is the greatest Belgian 7
Drawings of Flemish Primitives in Bruges 7

Correction
In issue 43, page 4 an article appeared on the China mission led by Flemish Minister-President Leterme and Foreign Trade Minister Fientje Moerman, in which the reporter referred to discord among the accompanying business leaders and the lack of cooperation between the Leterme and Moerman teams. Given the rather subjective tone of the article, it would have been wiser to include the article as an opinion piece and not as the report of a trip, for which we apologise.

INTRODUCTION

When on 1 May 2004 ten new countries acceded to the EU, there were only three old European Member States which allowed inhabitants of these countries onto their labour market without a compulsory work permit. These were the United Kingdom, Sweden and Ireland. Like the other EU countries, Belgium opted for a transitional system for two years (until 1 May 2006) in which Poles, Hungarians or Czechs who are in paid employment here need a work permit. Flemish Socialists and Christian Democrats believe our labour market is do away with the transitional ruling next year. They are calling for stricter controls of foreign workers as a stop to these abuses is to immediately throw cheap Poles who will price the regular wages of Belgian workers out of the market. The socialist SP.A therefore believes that the transitional measures must be extended until 2009. Its Flemish and Federal Employment Ministers, Frank Vandenbergroucke and Peter Van Velthoven, have already drawn up a plan to this effect. The Christian Democratic CD&V led by ACV MP Greta D’hondt, still in the opposition on a federal level, support that plan and offer the Socialists an alternative majority in the Parliament.

Everyone is now well aware of the mass abuses. According to estimates, around 100,000 Poles are already working in this country. They arrive here via indirect circuits, the so-called ‘Poland constructions’. Via secondment they come and perform a service for a Polish company here - the services are free in the EU - and pay taxes and social contributions in Poland, at least if they do so at all. Then there are the Dutch temping agencies that send Silesian Poles here who can work here without restriction under their German passports. Finally there are the many fake self-employed Poles and moonlighters. So there is no lack of ‘roundabout constructions’.

The Liberal VLD, the SP.A’s coalition partner in the Federal Government, claims the best way to put a stop to these abuses is to immediately throw open the borders. The party is thus resolutely playing the employers’ card. Unizo boss Karel Van Eetvelt articulates that employers’ standpoints via De Standaard (8 December). He calls on the labour market to throw itself open from 2006, so that Poles can be employed here under our working conditions. Then you know who is working where, everyone contributes to our social security and competition for wages will be less than it is now, he argues. Then the Poles can also fill the 70,000 to 80,000 pressure jobs in Flanders for which no more Flemish workers can be found. ‘If, on the other hand, the labour market is not opened up on 1 May, there will even more moonlighting and downward pressure on wages and therefore social dumping,’ he predicts. And he has a further argument up his sleeve: the economy is growing more quickly and unemployment is lower in the three countries that have opened their borders.

Frank Vandecaveye • editor in chief
On 2 December the Flemish Government approved the draft decree for a new Flemish housing code. In it, Housing Minister Marino Keulen (VLD) sets out the basic rules for the renting of social housing. The Flemish Parliament will vote on the decree next year, once the draft has passed the test of the Council of State. The most notable requirement for being eligible for social housing is a basic knowledge of Dutch. Anyone without this basic knowledge must be prepared to take an appropriate Dutch language course. The rule is aimed mainly at immigrants, to encourage them to learn Dutch as part of their integration.

The tenants' associations find the obligation for non-Dutch-speakers to take Dutch lessons 'a step too far'. They also believe tenants may not be evicted during the trial period without a court ruling. According to Jozef De Witte, Director of the Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight against Racism (Centrum voor Gelijkheid van Kansen en Racismebestrijding), the measure is exceeding its objective - to improve the quality of life in certain residential districts. At the same time, the problem is not so much a lack of knowledge of Dutch as it is noise from neighbours, refuse and the poor condition of the hallway. If one of them isn't doing so, then we expect them to discuss it among themselves. If that's not possible because of language problems, then they come to us, the landlord. Asking for our help often causes more bad blood among those we have to reprimand than if they can sort it out among themselves. The intervention of the landlord just makes the situation worse.'

De Goede Woning also organises introductory days with coffee and cakes when a new or renovated building is opened. Forier: 'It's a good start for the residents, but if you have to employ two or three interpreters on such days, you're not really doing your job properly.'

De Goede Woning also organises introductory days with coffee and cakes when a new or renovated building is opened. Forier: 'It's a good start for the residents, but if you have to employ two or three interpreters on such days, you’re not really doing your job properly.'

Officially the company can only communicate in Dutch. Folders on fire prevention are only available in Dutch. 'A case of CO poisoning in Antwerp-Kiel appeared to be the result of the fact that the resident had not understood the language,' says Forier.

WWW.MARINOKEULEN.BE

GUY FRANSEN • DE STANDAARD • 6 DECEMBER

The rule is aimed mainly at immigrants, to encourage them to learn Dutch as part of their integration.

Dutch becomes condition for renting social housing

Francophones react furiously to Flemish housing code

The draft for a new housing code from the Flemish Government, which imposes knowledge of Dutch as a requirement on social tenants, has not gone down very well at all with Francophone politicians.

There even appears to be a common front of Francophone politicians in the making who intend to fight the housing code politically and legally. The Minister-President of the Walloon Region, Elio Di Rupo (PS), believes the housing code is aimed at foreigners and Francophones. He called the code a discriminatory policy of exclusion and wants to invoke a conflict of interests over the code and put the problem on the agenda of the Consultative Committee between the governments.

Walloon Housing Minister André Antoine (CDH) has already announced that he will use all legal means available to oppose the measure. According to him the measure is unconstitutional and goes against basic European values.

Finally Marie Arena (PS), Minister-President of the French Community, feels that the housing code also discriminates against Francophones in the Flemish periphery around Brussels. She announced she would take all measures available to her to defend the Francophones in the Flemish municipalities around Brussels.

Flemish Housing Minister Keulen (VLD) is not impressed by the protest and does not intend amending the housing code. The Francophones can only invoke a conflict of interests when the draft is discussed in the Flemish Parliament, says his spokesperson. What is more, according to the Minister's office, Belgian Francophones have sufficient knowledge of Dutch to be exempt.

According to constitutional specialist Paul Van Orshoven, the measures can easily be defended. 'De Standaard, 5 December.' In the first place because it is not a measure that concerns merely French- or German-speakers, but all non-Dutch-speakers. Also, he says, there is no question of the principle of equality being violated because the government is employing objective and pertinent criteria.
VLD becomes the party of the hard-working Fleming

Party Chairman Bart Somers was especially pleased that there was no sign of the many internal rows between party agents

In Ghent the Flemish Liberals of the VLD kicked off a series of conferences on ‘the hard-working Fleming’. The party wants to hold a total of four conferences on ‘Four pillars for the future’, each of which will address a topic of interest to hard-working Flemings. Those who work should be better rewarded was the topic on 4 December. The other conference days will be devoted to commuting, creativity and the home/work combination respectively. Party Chairman Bart Somers was especially pleased that there was no sign of the many internal rows between party agents in recent months. The conference also signalled the start of the campaign for the local elections of October 2006 [FF].

Opinion

WIM WINCKELMANS • HET NIEUWSBLAD • 5 DECEMBER

People laughed long and hard over ‘Little Bart Somers’, the lightweight that chairman was allowed to become in the shadow of the real Liberal greats (Verhofstadt, Dewael, De Gucht, but also De Decker, ed.). Somers was not taken seriously, had to thrash about to survive in a party torn apart by internal rows. Now the greats have seen what they created with their constant wrangling, it appears that Somers was one of the few who was still concerned with his party’s Liberal line. And that pays off. The results cannot yet be seen in the opinion polls, but internally the violins are tuned to the line that the VLD must be the party of the hard-working Fleming, the modern dual-income couples who are the engine of our economy - with thanks to the new party strategist behind the screens, Fons Van Dijck, who until last year was still active for the Flemish Socialists. A new stepping stone has been found with which the VLD can again appeal to a wide range of voters. What were ‘the people’ for the Flemish Socialists under Stevaert is gradually being eclipsed by the ‘hard-working Fleming’ of the VLD and ‘the families’ of the CD&V. All these are paraphrases for the broad middle classes, who will be dished up one tempting offer after the other over the next few months: tax cuts, ways of combining work and family, service cheques for childcare… you name it. The local elections are on the way.

WWW.VLD.BE

CD&V also wants compulsory voting in 2006

Last week Flemish MP Johan Sauwens announced he wanted to use the parliamentary discussion of the new Municipalities Act to question compulsory voting. By so doing Sauwens wanted to put a stop to ‘dis-satisfied voting’ (‘I’ve had enough of politics’), as it only leads to unbridled populism. But it appears he spoke out of turn. His party, the CD&V, does not want to put the abolition of compulsory voting on the political agenda, at least not before the local elections of October next year. Up to now only the VLD, Spirit and Groen! were in favour of the abolition of compulsory voting. The CD&V and SP.A were, and still are, in favour of retaining it. The Liberal VLD does, however, support a debate in the Flemish Parliament [FF].

FILIP ROGIERS • DE MORGEN • 3 DECEMBER

‘Some time ago we decided with the parliamentary groups and the party to discuss the matter thoroughly,’ says Peter Poulussen, spokesman for CD&V Chairman Jo Vandeurzen. ‘But the arrangement was also not to do it now, a year before the local elections. For the CD&V now is not the time to be changing the rules in a rush. Also, there has been no consultation on this matter with the coalition partners in the Flemish Government.’

Up to now only the VLD, Spirit and Groen! were for the abolition of compulsory voting. The CD&V and SP.A were, and still are, in favour of retaining it. Like the CD&V, the fact that compulsory voting has only made the Vlaams Belang even bigger is no reason to change the rules as far as SP.A Chairman Johan Vandelanotte is concerned. ‘Compulsory voting is a principle for us. Until further notice it’s still the best way to make the political representation of the people as democratic as possible. If you don’t like the result then that’s a problem, but no reason to abandon your principles.’ Vandelanotte also sees no reason whatsoever to open the debate over voting rights/compulsory voting in the Flemish Parliament, let alone in the Flemish Government.

Adoption rights for gay and lesbian couples approved in the chamber

The bill tabled by SP.A MP Guy Swennen which gives gay and lesbian couples adoption rights was approved in the Chamber on 1 December. The SP.A, Spirit, PS, Ecolo and N-VA voted for the bill, the CDH and Vlaams Belang against. Most MPs belonging to the Christian Democratic CD&V voted against; a substantial majority from the Flemish Liberal VLD were in favour, and opinion was divided in its French speaking sister party the MR. The act still has to pass through the Senate before it comes into force. Observers are assuming that the pro majority will be much narrower there. In principle the Senate can only ‘evoke’ the bill for amendment. In that case it has to return to the Chamber, where it risks being put on the back burner.

WWW.FED-PARL.BE
Verhofstadt threatens to veto Blair

According to Verhofstadt, the public wants a strong Europe

FF EDITOR

Just before the decisive discussions on the European multi-year budget for 2007-2013, Premier Verhofstadt came out with some surprisingly strong words at his party the VLD’s conference. He warned that a budget that dropped further to 1.02 to 1.03% of gross domestic product would be unacceptable to Belgium. Verhofstadt is thus opposing Tony Blair’s proposal to accept an extremely frugal multi-year budget of 1.03%.

According to Verhofstadt, the public wants a strong Europe that tackles problems such as cross-border crime or terrorism. But also a Europe that can adopt a strong foreign policy, that has its own defence and that has an economic answer to the Asian boom. Last week Verhofstadt presented his manifesto ‘The United States of Europe’, in which he calls for greater European collaboration. He believes a wall of silence and shame was erected after the failed European referendums in the Netherlands and France. He feels the analysis that people no longer want to hear about Europe is wrong. For many no-voters there was precisely too little Europe, after all there was no socio-economic policy. He is therefore proposing taking a new step in terms of socio-economic policy with the current eurozone countries.

The book opens with a quote from Winston Churchill and has already been translated into English, French and German.

Flemish education will soon be struggling with a surplus of teachers

THE SURPLUS IS PARTLY DUE TO THE INCREASED RETIREMENT AGE

PIETER LESAFFER • DE STANDAARD • 8 DECEMBER

Over the next four years there will be a surplus of teachers in Flanders, according to the ‘Labour Market Report 2005’ of the Department of Education. This shows that between 2005 and 2008 there will be a surplus of around 7,000 teachers. That surplus is partly due to the rise in the retirement age, which was increased from 55 to 58 under the former Education Minister Marleen Vanderpoorten (VLD). In addition, more and more employees from other sectors are training to be teachers. (FF).

According to the report, government campaigns such as ‘Word leerkracht’ (‘Become a Teacher’) and the now abolished replacement pool also contributed to the rise in the number of teachers. This global reserve of staff does not mean that schools are not still having trouble finding teachers for certain subjects. Not all vacancies are being filled for Catholic religion, Dutch, French, mathematics, nursing and mechanics.

Cities such as Antwerp and Brussels are also not finding it as easy to attract teachers. In the capital in 2004, around half of primary school teachers threw in the towel within five years. In Brussels secondary schools that figure was as high as 64%, around the same as in previous years.

Flemish education is also experiencing a significant outflow of young teachers. The data from 2004 confirm this trend. One in three teachers in secondary education leaves within five years. In lower schools that is approximately one in five.

A survey shows that in particular uncertainty over a permanent appointment is what plays tricks on these young people. Often this permanent appointment is a long time coming. And for new teachers that was precisely one of the reasons for choosing education. In addition, the pressure of work also drives these young people out of education. From 1 January the Education Minister, Frank Vandenbroucke (SP.A), is releasing around 3,000 experienced teachers to assist their young colleagues. These mentors must keep the young people interested in a career in the classroom.

Dredger DEME recruits 220 people

Over the next few months the Flemish dredging company DEME is taking on 150 site workers and 70 crew members for its worldwide dredging activities. The company’s order book is growing steadily. On 2 December DEME signed its eighth contract in Spain and its 55th worldwide. In total DEME employs 2,600 people, 750 of them in Belgium (FF).

Since 2000, DEME has invested an average of 80 million euros each year in the construction of new dredgers. As the fleet expanded, so the order book grew. Last Friday DEIVI landed another contract for 40 million euros to develop the Spanish port of Sagunto, the group’s 55th contract worldwide. All of which has been translated in recent months into 180 mainly Belgian jobs, and at least 220 more next year. ‘Permanent contracts,’ says Personnel Director Patrick Demoor. The main problem remains the recruitment of ships’ crews, as too few young people are choosing a career at sea.

DEME employs 2,600 people, 750 of them in Belgium (FF).
Europe approves ABX restructuring

O\v\_ver the years, the entire ABX adventure has cost the NMBS around 1.2 billion euros

The restructuring plan of Belgian Railways (NMBS) for its logistical subsidiary ABX is not government support and is therefore in line with European rules, according to a ruling by the European Commission. The NMBS may inject the planned 175 million euros into its German and Dutch subsidiaries. The only condition for the capital increase is that ABX comes into private ownership within twelve months. That too will happen. Next year ABX Germany is being sold to the British investment fund 3i. An agreement in principle already exists in this connection. ABX France was sold to the local management at the beginning of this year. Without the approval of the capital increase ABX Germany and the NMBS would probably have gone bankrupt and the question is whether 3i would have still been interested in a take-over. The value of ABX is currently estimated at 300 to 400 million euros, but that amount does not include debts (De Standaard, 7 December). In 2004 the group made an operational profit for the first time against a turnover of 2.5 billion euros. Over the years, the entire ABX adventure has cost the NMBS around 1.2 billion euros (FF).

GUY MEEUSSEN - DE TIJD - 7 DECEMBER

According to the Commission, this financial injection is acceptable because ABX is once again viable and activities have been significantly reduced, mainly in France and Germany. The Commission is only attaching one condition to its approval. ABX Logistics must be entirely privately owned within twelve months. The buyer must pay the market price and invest heavily in ABX. In March NMBS Holding concluded an agreement in principle with the British investment group 3i over the sale of ABX.

National Bank calls for more competitive strength in Belgian businesses

Next year the Belgian economy will experience greater growth than the eurozone as a whole, claims the Nationale Bank. Governor Guy Quaden is predicting growth of 2.2% in 2006, compared with 1.9% for the eurozone. This year’s growth of 1.4% is in line with the average for the eurozone. Families’ real available income will also rise next year to 1.8%, so families will also spend more (+1.6%), while saving will stagnate at 12.3% of available income. Only employment growth seems not to be profiting from the economic growth. Only an increase of 0.5% in 2006, compared with 0.6% in 2004 and 0.7% in 2005, or 74,000 new jobs over three years. Unfortunately this is not enough to force the 8.4% unemployment level down, since the working population will also continue to increase. In this connection Quaden expressed his particular concern over the worsening of Belgian firms’ competitive strength. The Central Business Council (Centrale Raad voor het Bedrijfsleven) earlier reported that the increase in labour costs this and next year would be 2% higher than in neighbouring countries. The lapse is down to higher-than-expected inflation and wage indexing, while neighbouring countries have moderated their wages. Quaden is therefore calling on the social partners to scale down the wage handicap by negotiating a competition pact (FF).

Opinion

WOUTER VERVENNE • DE TIJD • 6 DECEMBER

One of our national symbols, the linking of wages to consumer prices, is therefore once again up for discussion.

Guy Quaden, Governor of the Nationale Bank, called yesterday for the wage index to be modified to protect the competitive strength of Belgian businesses. A generalisation of agreements on nominal wages must help prevent the further derailment of wages. It is not the first time the indexing of wages has been up for discussion. Each time inflation rises or competitive strength comes under pressure, voices call for the indexing mechanism to be changed or even abolished. And yet the Governor’s warning is significant. If wages rise more quickly than in neighbouring countries, many jobs will be lost. Negotiations on nominal wages have the advantage that Belgium will tailor its policy more to neighbouring countries. Wage restraint on the part of employees is required to restore our competitive strength, but it is not enough. Employers also have to make more of an effort. The Nationale Bank announced that businesses are spending more and more money on training their staff. Permanent training is needed to keep people in work longer.

Www.nbb.be
Belgian capital market completes strong year

WITH five introductions on the regulated market of Euronext Brussels, four capital increases and five bids for listed companies, 2005 was a strong year on the Belgian capital market, according to the annual review of Fortis Bank. In total, 1.8 billion euros in fresh capital was contributed. The listing of the Flemish cable and telecoms operator Telenet and the high-voltage network manager Elia accounted for the lion’s share of the money contributed (FF).

PASCAL DEN DOOVEN • DE STANDAARD • 7 DECEMBER

Max Jadot, Head of Business Banking at Fortis, said yesterday he expected three to four introductions in 2006. ‘But I don’t see any major introductions happening.’ That may have to do with the availability of cheap credit or the option of selling the company in its entirety. Laminates group Unilin, for example, opted for a sale instead of applying for an official quotation. This trend will apparently also continue this year. Venture capital funds are sitting on considerable funds, and the banks continue to be lavish with credit. The mergers and acquisitions market also continues to do well for the same reasons.

What is striking is that a great many small Walloon and Brussels companies have recently discovered the non-regulated market and are getting themselves listed on the free market. This year the segment acquired a further seven companies. Up to now it was smaller stock market houses that were interested in this market because of the limited critical mass.

Next year Euronext Brussels will also add the French model of Alternext. Alternext is a stock market segment with a minimum of rules aimed at medium-sized companies. In France this model works well. Via Aim (Alternative Investment Market) the London stock exchange has a market with fewer rules.

Belgian IPOs (introductions on Euronext Brussels)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regulated market</th>
<th>Amount in million euro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SALAPAGOS</td>
<td>32.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEVLEN</td>
<td>14.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELIA</td>
<td>194.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TELINET</td>
<td>1,059.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZETES INDUSTRIES</td>
<td>61.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1,772.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Capital increases (in million euro)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Amount in million euro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ZENITEL</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MITISKA</td>
<td>12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROPHEREX</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPECTOR</td>
<td>STILL RUNNING</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Free market

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Amount in million euro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PROXIMEDIA</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REIBEL</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEWTREE</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZNI</td>
<td>STILL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEWTON 21</td>
<td>STILL RUNNING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAL ST. LAMBERT INT'L</td>
<td>STILL RUNNING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SODIFLAN</td>
<td>STILL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bids for listed companies (in million euro)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Buyer</th>
<th>Amount paid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SOLVUS</td>
<td>UNITED SERVICES GROUP</td>
<td>$49.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOCOPHARMA</td>
<td>MATRIX LABORATORIES</td>
<td>$157.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KEYTRADE BANK</td>
<td>LANDBROUWEREDDET</td>
<td>$22.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TELINDUS</td>
<td>BELGACOM</td>
<td>STILL RUNNING</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

source: DS Infografiek

Belgians are the wealthiest in Europe

According to the half-yearly investment barometer of the research and consultancy agency GfK Worldwide, Belgians are Europe’s wealthiest citizens. 31% of Belgians say they possess more than 50,000 euros, not including property. In the spring of last year that figure was just 23%. The Belgians have thus overtaken the Swiss. GfK attributes the rise to the fact that last year many Belgians brought money back from abroad during the fiscal amnesty. Another part of the explanation is that the Belgian stock market has performed very well over the past two years. In recent years Belgians have invested extremely diligently, says GfK Director Mark Hofmans in Knack (7 December), particularly in property, shares and stock funds. After all, the alternatives, such as savings accounts and bonds, are still producing hardly any returns at all. Click funds with guaranteed capital in particular are very popular here.

Hofmans attributes this country’s welfare partly to the excellent performance of the Belgian economy. There is, however, a flipside, namely the ever-widening gap between rich and poor. 15% of Belgians and 8% of Flemings say they have not been able to put any money aside in the past six months. A further indication of this is that the number of bad payers is also on the rise.

The difference between Flanders and the rest of Belgium is marked. Almost twice as many Flemings (38%) possess more than 50,000 euros, compared with only 20% of Francophones, and that also includes the wealthy inhabitants of Brussels. 84% of Flemish households have savings deposits, compared with only 53% of Francophones. Financially and economically they are two different countries, concludes Hofmans.

WWW.GFK.BE
focus on flanders • 3 December - 9 December 2005 • Number 46

Father Damian is the greatest Belgian

The missionary, who went to live among the lepers on the island of Molokai is an icon of charity for Flemings

FF EDITOR

On the evening of Thursday 1 December television-watching Flanders chose Father Damiaan as the Greatest Belgian. This missionary, who in the 19th century gave up all his worldly goods to go and live among the lepers on the island of Molokai (Hawaiian islands) and ultimately died of the disease himself, is an icon of charity for Flemings. In contrast to our large neighbours the United Kingdom, France and Germany, who all chose heads of state (Churchill, De Gaulle and Adenauer respectively), Flemings chose someone who could have been their next-door neighbour.

According to former CD&V Chairman Herman Van Rompuy, the choice says a lot about our national character. Flemings do not appreciate grandiloquence or theorising. They prefer someone who does real things for people in an inconspicuous fashion. The ten candidates for Greatest Belgian were each defended by a Flemish TV celebrity. For Damiaan that advocate was Jef Vermassen, who in his defence emphasised the rebel character of Damiaan, who was much more concerned with the living conditions of the lepers than with converting them to Christianity. Witness the obstinacy with which he disregarded most of his clerical superiors’ instructions and advice.

According to Etienne Vermeersch, moral philosopher and figurehead of the Flemish free-thinkers, there is no need to look for a Catholic lobby behind Damiaan’s selection (Gazet van Antwerpen, 3 December). Flemings still attach considerable importance to people who selflessly devote themselves to their fellow man, says Vermeersch. Also, according to most commentators, Belgium does not have any great statesmen who would be eligible for the title. Damiaan won it in the first round with 40% of the votes, compared with 18% for Paul Janssen, the founder of Janssen Pharmaceutica, and cyclist Eddy Merckx with 13%.

www.degrootstebelg.be

Drawings of Flemish Primitives in Groeninge museum

All of them come from the ‘Staatliche Kunstsammlungen’ (‘State Art Collections’) of the German city of Dresden, which house the collections of the dukes of Saxony

The Groeninge Museum in Bruges is exhibiting sixty drawings and a dozen panel paintings by the Flemish Primitives. The drawings in particular are hidden treasures. In the entire world only around 600 such drawings from the fifteenth century have survived. They are therefore incredibly valuable. All of them come from the ‘Staatliche Kunstsammlungen’ (‘State Art Collections’) of the German city of Dresden, which house the collections of the dukes of Saxony. From the sixteenth century on, these drawings and paintings by the Flemish Primitives (FF),

BERT POPELIER • DE TIJD • 7 DECEMBER

The Flemish Primitives, regardless of where they came from, worked in Bruges, Ghent, Brussels and Leuven. They found the breeding ground for their Gothic art in these flourishing mediaeval cities and worked in the artistic tradition of their predecessors, the Flemish book illuminators. The Flemish Primitives never intended their drawings to be independent works of art. Nor are the sheets signed. Often they were drafts or preliminary studies for paintings. We know from documents that some Flemish Primitives, such as Gerard David, stored their drawings carefully. They served as a basis for later compositions and as a store of motifs. In a painter’s studio the drawings of the master could also be used as models by his employees. Even in the fifteenth century the sheets were seen as a major source of working capital. Misuse by third parties even led to civil action. Because scholars want to do away with the nineteenth-century name ‘Flemish Primitives’, the drawings were labelled Old Dutch.

Yet more discoveries await the visitor. Several of the drawings contain symbolic representations of monsters and planets. Representations of planets are fairly uncommon among the Flemish Primitives, who mainly dealt with religious subjects. The sheets were probably produced around 1410 by a Franco-Flemish artist. It shows that some Flemish Primitives did indeed have contact with Italy, where such representations, under the influence of the emerging Renaissance, were in vogue. Perhaps the drawings were produced by a travelling artist who copied murals in Italy. Several other drawings from the Dresden collection show that in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the Flemish Primitives did not limit themselves to religious subjects. Hunting scenes and love gardens can be seen in Bruges.

For the first time the reverse of some of the drawings can also be seen, and these reveal somewhat unexpected motifs. On the reverse of an uplifting scene of a ‘Madonna with Child’, an important drawing after a lost original by Rogier van der Weyden, pornographic subjects are depicted. It was evidently not unusual for some pupils in an artist’s studio to put their sexual fantasies down on paper, despite their master having given them the task of copying a crucifixion, for example. The young Flemish Primitives were not all that devout after all.

‘OLD-DUTCH MASTERWORKS FROM DRESDEN’, VAN EYCK TO BOSCH’ UNTIL 26 FEBRUARY 2006. WWW.MUSE-ABRUGGE.BE
**CULTURE**

**Diary**

**MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE**

- 13 December: Frank Bralley, Renaud Capuçon, Gouiter Capuçon (piano, violin and cello) with Ravel; De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- Until 31 December: Der Fliegende Hollander by Richard Wagner, director Guy Cassiers; De Munt, Brussels; info: www.desumt.be 02/229 12 00
- 15, 16 and 17 December: Kassandra, speaking in twelve voices by Anne Teresa d’Ol Jolente De Keersmaeker, Kaaitheater, Brussels; info: www.kaaitheater.be 02/201 59 59
- 13 December: Hélène Grimaud (piano) with Frédéric Chopin, Johannes Brahms and Sergey Rakhmaninov, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- 13, 14 and 15 December: Histoire des Larmes, De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- 13 to 23 December: Semelle by WF Haendel, Opera In居民; Bijloke, Ghent; info: www.bijloke.be
- 14 December: Jerusalem Quartet; De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- 14 December: Freiburger Barockorchester - Choir Of Clare College Cambridge conducted by René Jacobs with Patricia Bar- dan Lawrance Zazzo, Kerstin Aveno, Bobie Van Rensburg, David Pittsinger, Messiah, Oratorio by Georg Friedrich Han-del, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- 14 December: Il Trovatore by Giuseppe Verdi, Concertgebouw, Bruges; info: www.concertgebouw.be
- 14 December: Susheela Raman, Handel, Hands; Ghent; info: www.handlesbeurs.be
- 15 December: André Cabaço (Mozam-bique) concert, Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
- 15 December: Robert Dean Smith/Ivan Paley and Stephan Matthias Lademann (piano) with Das Lied von der Erde (Mahler), Flanders Operahouse, Ghent; info: www.vlaamseopera.be
- 16 December: Munt Symphonic Orches-tra conducted by Marco Giudarini, Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
- 16 December: Derocoh Flamenco, Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be
- 17 December: De Andenken eines Engels, Flemish radio orchestra conducted by Carlos Kalmar, violin; Otto Dorolez with J.Bach, Franz Schubert, Bijloke, Ghent; info: www.bijloke.be
- 17 December: Miroto (Indonesia), dance, Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
- 17 and 18 December: Symphonic Orches-tra of Flanders conducted by Etienne Siebens with Ravel, Saint-Séans and C. Franck, Concertgebouw, Bruges and De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.symfonieorkest.be
- 18 December: Christianne Stotijn mezzo - sopran Breitnall, piano with Schubert, Berg, Tchaikovsky and Rossini; Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- 18 December: Carols for Christmas, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- 19, 20, 21 and 22 December: Wim Van- dekeybus (dance) with Puur, De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- 20 December: Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin Rias Kammerchor conducted by Daniel Reuss with Weihnachtsoratorium by JS Bach; De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- 20 December: The Russian Sinfon Choir, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- 21 and 22 December: Vincent Dunoyer and Vanini with Shortcuts: Ciadvye Exquis, Kaaitheaterstudio’s, Brussels; info: www.kaaitheater.be 02/201 59 59 Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderpershuis.be

**EXPO**

- From 5 February onwards: The memory of Congo, the colonial period, exhibition, Museum for Central Africa (Tervuren); info: 0484/42.10.70
- Until 18 December: Sixty anonymous photographs. Something fascinating facts about the route to Vladivostock, KMSK, Cinquantenaire, Brussels; info: 02/742.72.11
- Until 8 January: Sixty anonymous photographs. Something fascinating facts about the route to Vladivostock, KMSK, Cinquantenaire, Brussels; info: 02/742.72.11
- Until 23 December: Symbolism in Russia, Museum of Elsene, info: 02/515.64.32
- Until 4 December: Information/Transforma-tion, Extra City, Antwerp, info: 0894/42.10.70
- Until 31 December: Extravagant, rediscovery of the Anton Van Wayer Masterpieces; KMSK, Antwerp, info: 03/238.78.09 www.museum.antwerpen.be/kmska
- Until 8 January: Something, exhibition, Sixty anonymous photographs. Something that turns up without being invited, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be

**Focus on Flanders**

Foci on Flanders provides a weekly overview of articles from the Flemish press and appears in English, French and German. This newsletter is published by Uitgeverij Lanoo nv, Kasteelstraat 97, 8700 Tielt and can also be obtained by e-mail. The website www.focusonflanders.be contains an electronic archive of published articles

**Send your email-address to info@focuseonflanders.be and receive a password for www.focusonflanders.be**

---

**Editor in chief:** Frank Vandecasteele
**Advisory panel:** Luc Demeester (Lannoo), Rik Van Cauwelaert (director Knack), Wim Coensens (Man-aging director, De Morgen), Frans Croo (Director, Trends), Jan Denayer (Information Officer, Flemish Community), Mark Dewerdt (journalist, De Tijd), Michael Stabenow (Correspondent, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung), Luc Staendaert (journalism, Algemeen Nieuwsblad), Jan Van Doren (Deputy Director, VOKA-VEV), Bernard Bulcke (De Standaard).
**With thanks to:** Concentra nv, De Vlijt nv, De Vlaamse Uitgevermaatschappij nv, De Persgroep nv, Uitgeversboedt Tielt nv and Roualda Media Group nv and their editorial teams for supplying the articles.

---

**Translation:** Eurologos
**Printing:** Drukkerij Lanoo nv, Tielt
**Issues:** 48
**Subscription rate printed edition + e-mail editions + password to search the archive** (www.focusonflanders.be): 233 euro
**Ether exchange the subscription account:** 473-1010001-19 with the KBC in Roeselare
**Or give us the number and expiry date of your cred-it card (Visa/Eurocard):**
**Telephone:** 051/44.71.99
**Fax:** 051/44.71.53
**E-mail:** frank.vandecasteele@lannoo.be