Explosive rise in hospital costs

In 2004 hospital costs paid by the patient, those that are not reimbursed by health insurance, were as much as 41% higher than in 1998. This is the conclusion reached by the Christelijke Mutualiteit (CM). The health insurance fund analysed the rates of 500,000 hospital bills and compared these with the figures from 1998 and 2003. Apart from the contribution the patient pays out of their own pocket, supplements are increasingly being added to doctors’ fees and medical tools. True to tradition, doctors mainly charge supplements for single-person rooms, but this is also happening more and more for twin rooms. The CM wants supplements in communal and twin rooms to be banned. Hospitals attribute the prolific growth in supplements and other patient costs. 'We realise this could be annoying for some hospitals,’ says CM Chairman Marc Justaert. ‘But it is explicitly not our intention to apportion blame. Nor does the financial cost say anything about the quality of care. We hope to encourage hospitals in this way to put certain wrongs right.’ The CM Chairman also has another suggestion for Social Affairs Minister Rudy Demotte (PS). ‘Minister Demotte had intended to tackle the underfunding of hospitals with a special financial injection. He had set aside 100 million euros in three years for this. As far as I know, nothing has happened yet, but the Minister now has the perfect tool to put certain wrongs right.’ The CM Chairman also has another suggestion for Social Affairs Minister Rudy Demotte (PS).

To protect patients from unpleasant surprises the CM has installed a module on the website on which patients can compare the financial costs of various hospitals. The differences between hospitals were mapped on the basis of their own members’ bills. ‘We realise this could be annoying for some hospitals,’ says CM Chairman Marc Justaert. ‘But it is explicitly not our intention to apportion blame. Nor does the financial cost say anything about the quality of care. We hope to encourage hospitals in this way to put certain wrongs right.’ The CM Chairman also has another suggestion for Social Affairs Minister Rudy Demotte (PS).

MINISTER DEMOTTE HAD INTENDED TO TACKLE THE UNDERFUNDING OF HOSPITALS WITH A SPECIAL FINANCIAL INJECTION. HE HAD SET ASIDE 100 MILLION EUROS IN THREE YEARS FOR THIS.
The fuel oil discount: Freya Vanden Bossche admits error in communication

HER PARTY STILL EXPECTS THE OIL SECTOR TO PAY FOR PART OF THE DISCOUNT OUT OF ITS OWN POCKET

On 23 December last year 16 oil companies entered into an agreement with the Federal Government in which they undertook to lend 100 million euros. That money allowed the government to grant a discount to consumers of domestic fuel oil, the price of which has risen sharply. Many families were, after all, placed in financial difficulties by the high fuel oil bill.

At the same time, the government put the sector under considerable pressure. It absolutely did not want to take the money from the treasury, because Budget Minister Freya Vanden Bossche (SP.A) and Finance Minister Didier Reynders (MR) were insistent on beginning the new year with a balanced 2005 budget. Alongside the take-over of pension funds and the sale of buildings, the prefinancing appeared to be just one of the many one-off financial operations by which she managed to avoid a deficit.

Until recently Freya Vanden Bossche maintained firmly that the oil sector would pay (some of) this 100 million itself. Reynders and the oil companies denied that and maintained that the amount would be repaid in full. In the end a document that fell into the hands of the opposition revealed in black and white that Reynders was right. At the weekend Vanden Bossche admitted that she ‘miscommunicated’, but that her party still expected the oil sector to pay for part of the discount out of its own pocket.

The government calculated that the measure would cost around 140 million euros. It has already set aside 80 million of the budget for that. Therefore it is still looking for 60 million. At the SPA conference Chairman Vande Lanotte endorsed that idea. He also alleged that in September - when he himself was still Budget Minister - the government had indeed agreed that the sector would pay for part of the fuel oil discount. For the moment the oil sector is opposed to the idea. Thanks to the rise in the price of oil in 2005, the Federal Government has 550 million euros in extra revenue from duty, claims the oil federation. It is therefore perfectly able to repay the loan itself, it maintains (FF).

It became clear on Thursday that Vanden Bossche had also signed the agreement with the oil sector. This stated in quite clearly that if the government does not let the consumer pay, it must repay the 100 million on 31 March. Last Sunday Premier Guy Verhofstadt (VLD) had already announced that under no circumstances would the consumer foot the bill for the discount. On Friday the SPA Vice-Premier searched her own conscience. ‘I didn’t always communicate clearly in this dossier. It could have been better and clearer,’ she said. ‘The 100 million must and shall be repaid to the oil sector. That’s beyond question.’

‘But that doesn’t mean we’re going to sit down round the table again with the whole sector,’ says Van den Bossche. ‘Things aren’t going badly in the oil sector. I’m aware companies have to make a profit, but they also have a social role to play. Therefore the government is going to ask them to pay part of the bill.’

She wants an agreement with the oil sector before the budgetary control at the end of March. On Friday Jacques Vandenberge of the Belgian Oil Federation announced that the sector was not prepared to pay.

Vanden Bossche defends herself in federal Chamber

FOR VANDEN BOSCHE AND HER COLLEAGUE IN FINANCE, REYN德ERS, THE CONCLUSION REMAINS THAT IN ANY EVENT THE CONSUMER WILL NOT BE THE VICTIM

More journalists than MPs turned up in the Federal Chamber on 24 January to hear how Budget Minister Freya Vanden Bossche (SP.A) - wearing a neck brace for the whiplash she suffered during her car crash - would defend herself against the torrent of questions which the opposition CD&V, Cdh, N-VA and Vlaams Blok parties would unleash at her concerning the 100 million loan to the oil sector. This loan was used to pay for the promised fuel oil discount for families. Vanden Bossche, who had claimed that the government would not repay the loan, later had to admit that the government had indeed agreed to do so, and by 31 March. She once again apologised for this ‘error in communication’. But she denied that the oil sector added to that a further exorbitant profit of 3% (12% over 3 months), as CD&V figures specialist Hendrik Bogaert alleged. However, 3% interest must be paid if the repayment is made over 12 months.

Vanden Bossche still expects a contribution from all 54 oil companies to help pay for the measure, which will cost 140 million euros. She also denied the fact that the additional revenue from VAT and duty following the rise in the price of oil had generated 550 million euros, as State Secretary against Fiscal Fraud Hervé Jamar (MR) had claimed. According to the Inspectorate of Finances, the figure is a mere 212 million euros. The oil federation, which is still refusing to pay its share, felt that the government simply had to dip into this additional fiscal revenue to finance the measure. But apparently by the end of December this had already been spent elsewhere. For Vanden Bossche and her colleague in Finance, Reynders, the conclusion remains that in any event the consumer will not be the victim. *De Standaard* believes the government now has to give up the fetish of the zero budget deficit (FF).
American investments exaggerated by Verhofstadt

According to De Tijd, Verhofstadt is relapsing into ‘government by announcement’, a nasty habit for which he has already been criticized by the press.

Opinion

STEFAAN HUYSENTRUYT • DE TIJD • 21 JANUARY

Once again Premier Guy Verhofstadt has been unable to resist the temptation to present the results of his promotional tour to the United States as rather more handsome than they actually are.

Foreign investments do not fall from the sky. Sometimes they spend years in the pipeline. It is not uncommon for the final signatures to be placed during a foreign mission by Flemish or Federal members of government. To the honour and greater glory of those members of government. They can put feathers in their cap, even though they can take little if any credit for attracting the investment. But up to now no one has dared take it as far as Guy Verhofstadt.

Instead of new feathers, the Federal Premier is putting all the feathers in his cap that he can find, both real and imaginary, a question of not having to return home from a fruitless journey.

And we who thought that the Purples had foresworn “government by announcement” and that from now on the Premier would indulge his irresistible voluntarism in actions and no longer in words. Some are saying frankly that the Federal Premier cannot let it lie. Others talk of an irresistible urge to exaggerate, to jazz things up a little. Still others speak of the deliberate misleading of the public, of blowing out fog or - to use a fashionable word - of spinning. Be that as it may, in his desire to present the reality as Purpler than it is, the Premier is regularly stretching the truth.

Opinion

BART STURTWEGEN • DE STANDAARD • 25 JANUARY

What is the most important thing to be learned from the row over the 100 million fuel oil loan? That the Federal Government, despite the heavily swollen revenue from duty and VAT on oil products, had no money to pay for its own promises. It had announced that it would compensate some of the more costly fuel oil costs, because it did not want to earn money from a calamity under which our entire economy is groaning. Fine. But as the end of the year approached, panic struck. Only by pulling out all the stops could the government avoid pushing the budget into the red by living up to this promise. In simple terms that means that the extra money earned with taxes on the costly oil had already been spent. That is the crux of the matter. Expenditure is not under control and so spurious revenue had to be found to gloss over the truth.

If Vanden Bossche does not want to be deadlocked again at the coming budgetary due dates, she should do herself a favour and abandon the idolatry of the zero deficit. Precisely how much the government had in its coffers at midnight on 31 December is hardly relevant if that figure is influenced to the tune of hundreds of millions by robbing Peter to pay Paul. A Budget Minister knows that.

American investments exaggerated by Verhofstadt

The investment dossiers Premier Verhofstadt had announced last week during his American roadshow appear to be wildly exaggerated, reports De Tijd (21 January). The 100 million in investments by Johnson&Johnson subsidiary Janssen Pharmaceutica appear to be the normal annual maintenance investments. They do not relate to new buildings or projects. J&J has never made investment promises, a spokesperson for Janssen Pharmaceutica maintains.

The General Manager of the Bank of New York in Brussels has also denied that the Bank has plans to set up a European subsidiary in Brussels. After all, the branch has been in existence for 10 years already. It is, however, right that the Bank will change its status to profit from the notional interest deduction currently being promoted by Verhofstadt and Minister Reynders in the US.

Tax specialists confirm that Belgian businesses and foreign businesses with an office in our country want to profit from the interest deduction. Many are therefore already busy adapting their capital structure to be able to gain maximum benefit from the measure. The news that Cargill would build a biodiesel plant in Ghent with a value of 75 million euros also appears exaggerated. Cargill, however, is only one of the candidates to build the plant, which will also cost significantly less than 75 million. According to De Tijd, Verhofstadt is relapsing into ‘government by announcement’, a nasty habit for which he has already been criticized by the press (FF).

Hospital tariffs (costs paid by the patient)

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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLICY

ENERGY POLICY

SP.A joins battle with cost of living

One way of achieving this is by tackling companies’ exorbitant profits

At the Flemish Socialists’ New Year’s reception, Chairman Johan Vande Lanotte proposed abolishing the federal taxes on electricity, which provide 200 million euros each year, and replacing them with a levy on power stations. Electricity must be cheaper for the consumer, he feels, especially when you know that Electrabel, which still produces more than 85% of this country’s electricity, is making a 100% profit on the production of some nuclear power stations. After all, the old power stations have long since been written off and the retail price of electricity from these power stations is twice the production price, he concludes. Also, Electrabel was only able to write off these power stations so quickly by passing on the costs in the retail price. This means that in the past the consumer has paid for this write-off, claims Vande Lanotte. It was the most concrete proposal in his call to tackle the cost of living. The SP.A is prepared to discuss wage restraints in order to boost the competitiveness of the economy, provided the cost of living is brought down. One way of achieving this is by tackling companies’ exorbitant profits (FF).

PIETER BLOMMEE • DE TIJD • 23 JANUARY

Vande Lanotte anticipated the debate on competitiveness and wage restraints that will be held this year. Some people want to improve our country’s competitive position in 2006 by tackling wages. We are quite prepared to discuss wages, but then we also have to discuss the cost of living that is at the bottom of rising wages.’ According to Vande Lanotte, rising electricity prices, rents and insurance costs are ensuring that inflation grows and wages rise. He is therefore proposing tackling companies’ ‘exorbitant profits’. Last year rents rose by 5% and insurance premiums also became much more expensive, as did electricity prices. The SP.A Chairman wants to force prices down via levies. ‘If we can limit wage rises with a law, why not the rise in company profits?’ he argued.

Vande Lanotte also called for the seriously ill to be reimbursed for a number of standard drugs. ‘Cancer patients, for example, use large amounts of painkillers, anti-inflammatories and sleeping tablets. But health insurance does not reimburse these drugs.’ The SP.A wants to change that. The party claims the measure would cost two to three million euros. According to Vande Lanotte, being ill must not lead to social dramas. ‘People should not have to sell their house because they have cancer,’ he stressed.

www.sp.be

JOB MARKET

Socialist Vandenbroucke calls for wage restraint

A day before his Chairman Johan Vande Lanotte proposes levies on the exorbitant profits of companies such as Electrabel to tackle the cost of living, Flemish Employment Minister Frank Vandenbroucke (SP.A) delivers a warning in De Morgen directed at the social partners who are shortly to negotiate on the derailment of wages compared to neighbouring countries. Vandenbroucke makes what is at first sight a rather un-Socialist-sounding call for wage restraint. Without blushing he agrees with companies that claim that labour costs are too high here and are therefore calling for tax cuts. In exchange, however, he wants companies to apply his more-jobs plan for the employment of older workers, foreigners and the disabled on the ground. Because it is not only labour costs that are booming, the same is also true of unemployment. There are currently 70,000 more people seeking employment in Flanders than in 2000, he stresses. He therefore insists that companies accept their responsibilities (FF).

WALTER PAULI/FILIP ROGIERS • De Morgen • 21 JANUARY

This week Flemish Employment Minister Frank Vandenbroucke (SP.A), architect of the active welfare state and until 2004 Minister for Employment in Verhofstadt’s Federal Government, erected a wall above the Generation Pact from within the Flemish Government with his ‘more-jobs plan’. The Minister also gave his advice to the social partners and the Federal Government, who this week began addressing a new pact designed to boost the competitiveness of Belgian businesses. ‘We are too expensive,’ says Vandenbroucke bluntly. ‘Our labour costs are too high, relatively but also in absolute terms. Of that there is no doubt. It will take considerable time and effort to bring them down. It will require years of a sustained policy of wage restraint, with little room on top of inflation.’ And yet today Vandenbroucke does not want to touch the index any more than the Federal coalition partners or the trade unions. For him, wages can keep pace with inflation in the future, but he is precluding extra wages on top of that. The Minister also believes that companies have good arguments for controlling labour costs, wants to invest in that as a politician via tax cuts, but feels that in exchange these companies must also accept their social responsibilities. For example, by also offering jobs to older workers, people with a disability and foreigners. Vandenbroucke also believes that the Flemish Government must prepare itself for a far-reaching socio-economic state reform. ‘Within a few years we will be called on to take over part of the social order: a major socio-economic state reform is imminent. The Federal State alone is not in a position to guarantee the future of our social model. Anyone who thinks that is choosing actual privatisation. The regions and communities will have to take on part of this, at their own expense. We must have the budget for this ready after 2009.’

www.ministerfrankvandenbroucke.be
**ECONOMIC POLICY AND ECONOMY**

**BREWERS**

**Inbev pays 641 million Euros for Chinese brewer**

The Belgian-Brazilian beer group InBev has once again consolidated its position on the largest growth market that is China. Specifically, InBev has won the beer battle from competitors Heineken and Anheuser-Busch for Fujian Sedrin, the biggest brewer in the south-eastern province of Fujian. According to analysts, the take-over price of 614 million euros that InBev paid is fairly high. But geographically the take-over fits perfectly into InBev’s strategy of focusing on the richer south-east of China, more specifically on the provinces of Zhejiang, Fujian, Jiangxi, Jiangsu, Hunan, Guangdong and Hubei. The take-over will make InBev the second-largest brewer in China. InBev will immediately acquire the 39.48% interest of the government shareholders and will apparently acquire the remaining 60.52% before the end of 2007. After the take-over InBev has become the largest beer group in China after Tsingtao, with sales of 35 million hectolitres and a national market share of around 13% and 45% in the south-east of China (FF).

**STEPHANIE DE SMEDT • DE TIJD • 24 JANUARY**

For several years Chinese brewers have been the favourite take-over targets of international beer groups. While beer consumption in Western countries is under pressure, China offers attractive prospects for growth. Over the next 15 years China will apparently account for almost half of the growth in worldwide beer consumption. In InBev’s own words, the national market share is not so important. Rather, the group is focusing on its dominant position in the south-east of China. Including Fujian Sedrin, which is being renamed InBev Sedrin, InBev will have a market share of 40 to 45% in this region. InBev first became acquainted with the region in the 1980s. In 1984 the then Leuven brewer Artois supported its Chinese sector partner Zhujiang in the construction of a new production plant. Since then the two have always maintained their relationship. In 1997 InBev, then still Interbrew, became active for the first time in China when it took over Nanjing and Jining. Seven years later the group cashed in its relationship with Zhujiang: it acquired a 24% interest in the Chinese brewer, the most profitable in the country. InBev developed further in China by taking a 70% interest in both brewery K.K. Group and Zhejiang Shiliang and taking over the Chinese beer activities of the Malaysian Lion Group. With Fujian Sedrin InBev now has a firm foothold in the province of Fujian. Fujian Sedrin also occupies a strong position in the neighbouring province of Jiangxi. With Fujian Sedrin on board, InBev is now active in eight provinces in the south-east of China. In most of these the group is the biggest or second-biggest player. The Leuven group has 30 sites there, and achieves sales of almost 35 million hectolitres.

**www.inbev.com**

**EMPLOYERS**

**Leterme warns against complacency**

According to Voka Chairman Verhoeven, the reorganisation of work and pay conditions is unavoidable, with performance-related pay, and not seniority and automatic indexing, as the principle.

**ERIK ZIARCZYK • DE TIJD • 25 JANUARY**

In his speech at Voka yesterday evening Leterme looked back with satisfaction at the work his government has achieved thus far. ‘The Archimedes Rule and the Friends Loan are a fact and must make venture capital more accessible to young and first-time entrepreneurs.’ He also referred to the Flemish Entrepreneur Agency (Vlaams Agentschap Ondernemen) and the More-Jobs Plan of last week. ‘But more is needed to resume our place in the leading group,’ he warned. ‘Flanders has become too complacent. We have too readily assumed that we have the best employers, the hardest workers and the best-trained employees. We are indeed doing well compared with Wallonia. But our touchstones must be the top European regions, not Wallonia.’ ‘Flanders cannot afford to be mediocre,’ said Leterme. ‘We must achieve results by rewarding work and risk.’ And anyone who talks of risks must also talk of innovation. Leterme: ‘Innovation is also taking risks, daring to make mistakes, being adventurous. Innovation is also accepting setbacks, it is not a quiet escalator to success.’ Leterme repeated that his government wants to be a government of investment. In his address Voka Chairman Ludo Verhoeven called for a broad Flemish project from grass roots up. ‘That has to be more than the sum of existing plans,’ said Verhoeven, ‘It must be a clear reflection of where we have to go in Flanders.’ He looked ahead to the discussion of competitiveness. ‘Many of our members are increasingly asking whether central wage agreements are still worthwhile.’ Pay and work conditions have to be reorganised on the basis of different principles. Verhoeven: ‘No more on the basis of seniority and automatic indexing, but on the basis of work- and performance-related pay.’

**www.voka.be**

**www.yvesletcherme.be**
Yale University and the Earth Institute of Colombia University have investigated the environment in 133 countries. Each country was assigned an Environmental Performance Index on the basis of figures to 2004. This reveals that Belgium is in 39th place in the world, and in 19th and last place in Europe. The results of this study were presented at the World Economic Forum in Davos on 26 January. As there is nothing to be gained from comparing large, thinly populated countries with small, densely populated countries, the results must be put into perspective, says Environment Minister Tobback (SP.A). The Bond Beter Leefmilieu also puts the results into perspective, but is also extremely critical of failing policy, especially where water management is concerned (FF).

SYBILLE DEECO • DE MORGEN • 26 JANUARY

The selective media interest in the environment, following a ‘arguable’ ranking, is not appreciated by Federal Environment Minister Tobback (SP.A). On 25 January Tobback had to answer the media because his Flemish counterpart, Kris Peeters (CD&V), was abroad. Peeters was the more obvious choice to be called to account by media and opposition because he is responsible to be called to account by media and opposition because he is responsible for those areas where we score badly: water quality, air quality, biodiversity. Tobback: ‘I can’t get worked up about that sort of study. It compared countries that cannot be compared. Belgium is densely populated, has a dense road network and a strong chemical industry presence. There is no point in comparing us with countries such as France and the US, where the statistics are embelished by extensive open spaces and nature. Not that we should not take the underlying message seriously. We still have a long way to go. But even the Netherlands, which compared to Flanders pursues a more intensive policy of nature conservation, biodiversity and water quality, will never be able to overtake the US, a country where waste is dumped anywhere and where CO2 emissions have exploded.’

Jan Turf of the Bond Beter Leefmilieu (BBL) partly goes along with the shading of the Davos classification. ‘All international comparisons fall short to a degree, but this still confirms what we know from internal European comparisons: that Belgium scores badly in terms of water quality, air quality and biodiversity. There are in fact objective factors, which show that the quality of our environment is worse than that in many other countries but even if this is cleaned up Flanders is doing much worse than comparable regions. In a study that compared Flanders, the Ruhr area and the Paris region, Flanders was generally the worst.‘ According to the BBL the poor water quality is caused by ‘failing policy’. Turf: ‘Not only are we at an historical disadvantage, investment in water treatment is misplaced.’

Source: Tijd Graphics

More and more cars bought on credit

FF EDITOR

On 22 January the 84th motor show at Heizel in Brussels closed its doors. 725,000 visitors came to take a peak. The record of 750,000 was therefore not quite achieved. A study revealed that one in two visitors intended to buy a new car. At the motor show or afterwards in their own garage, since the special sales terms still apply until the end of January. According to the automotive federation Febiac, sales results are way above expectations. What is also striking is that more and more cars are being bought on credit. During the motor show banks arranged up to 65% more loans compared with 2004, reports Gazet van Antwerpen [23 January].

www.febiac.be

Top-5 health and environment

1. NEW ZEALAND 99,4
2. SWEDEN 99,2
3. FINLAND 99,0
13. US 98,3
22. BELGIUM 96,6

Top-5 Water quality

1. COSTA RICA 100
2. LIBERIA 100
3. SIERRA LEONE 100
96. US 73,9
112. BELGIUM 53,2

Top-5 Biodiversity

1. BENIN 88,0
2. VENEZUELA 88,0
3. JAMAICA 86,1
33. US 66,8
130. BELGIUM 16,7

Top-5 Air quality

1. UGANDA 98,0
2. GABON 96,1
3. RUANDA 91,1
51. BELGIUM 51,0
97. US 44,7

Top-5 Sustainable energy

1. UGANDA 92,4
2. MALI 92,1
3. CONGO 90,1
73. BELGIUM 73,3
86. US 66,7

Source: Tijd Graphics
Catering sector in deep crisis

There will be no reduction in the VAT rate for the catering industry. On 23 January the sector once again met to repeat this demand. But European finance ministers, who met the next day in Brussels, are refusing to implement the rate cut from 21 to 6%. For six years Belgium has been experimenting with a low VAT rate for the renovation of old housing and for repairs to, for example, bicycles and clothing. That low rate for this type of service would be extended until 2010. But for the time being café and restaurant owners will have to make do with a European study, which will calculate the impact of a possible VAT reduction.

FRANS DE SMET • HET NIEUWSBLAD • 24 JANUARY

Restaurant and café owners have long been calling for a cut in their VAT rate to 6%, a cut that incidentally was included in the coalition agreement by the Verhofstadt government. But this cut must be made at European level, and there’s the rub. Among others, mighty Germany wants to keep VAT rates high to balance its budget and our country is powerless to oppose that, not even with the support of France. The proposal did not even make it onto the agenda of the European Council of Ministers on 26 January and is likely to be put on ice until 2010. The sector reacted with horror. ‘This is a drama,’ says Luc De Bauw of Horeca-Vlaanderen. For the 33,000 café and restaurant owners in our country this was their last chance. The true consequences of the European ‘niet’ cannot be overlooked. According to CD&V MP Trees Pieters, ‘a wave of bankruptcies’ is unavoidable. Pieters calculated that the difference between 21 and 6% VAT amounts to 450 million euros a year. She wants the money to be put back into the sector. Also, the 100% fiscal deductibility for restaurant expenses is still not in place. The independent employers’ organisation Unizo is calling for urgent talks with the government. It is demanding alternative supporting measures, such as lower taxes on seasonal work.

Anciaux hammers away at public broadening

Flemish Culture Minister Bert Anciaux (Spirit) gave his New Year’s speech before a full room of culture workers in the Flageyegebouw in Elsene, the first co-community cultural house of the French and Flemish Communities. In this speech he once again tackled his favourite subject: cultural participation. He expects the cultural world to reach as broad and diverse a public as possible. Theatres, orchestras, dance troupes, cultural houses, museums and film-makers are expected to make an effort to achieve this. Up to now he has not refused a single request for subsidy because too little attention was paid to public broadening. But what isn’t there may still come, is now the threatening message. All too often companies and artists try and get out of it by appealing to artistic freedom.

LEO BONTE • DE STANDAARD • 18 JANUARY

‘We don’t have a problem with genres that only appeal to a niche public, but that has to be proportional to the subsidies they ask for and their social relevance,’ Anciaux’s office qualified following the speech. ‘Artistic freedom is constantly abused, especially to avoid taking social responsibility,’ says Anciaux. ‘We no longer have to put up with that. [...] Innumerable institutions and organisations are now fully expressing that social commitment in their daily activities. To the stragglers I say: the time of no commitment is past.’

As is known, Anciaux wants more consideration for foreigners and the poor, and proclaimed 2006 as the year of cultural diversity, but good intentions alone are no longer enough, and genuine commitments to results are needed, he claims. Anciaux’s spokesperson said afterwards that there can be no question of quotas. The Minister first wants a social debate on how results should be achieved. He sees his speech as fuel for that debate. Anciaux argued his demand by referring to the increased cultural budget. In 1999 this came to 225 million euros, and this year 400 million euros will be distributed and the culture sector should do something in return for this effort, he believes.

‘As a sector you cannot shut yourself off with impunity from the society that exhibits great concern and responsibility for this sector.’ By 2009 the Flemish cultural budget will grow to 450 million, but, Anciaux immediately added, ‘after this legislative period the limits of what is achievable through the budget will gradually have been reached’. Finally the Minister hopes to reach a valid cultural pact with the sector in which the expectations of all parties are sealed. The sector had come out en masse, with the most surprising appearance being that of VRT boss Tony Mary with the heads of cultural radio station Klara in his wake. Although Anciaux received polite applause, reactions were divided.

EVOLUTION OF ELECTRICITY PRICE FOR DOMESTIC USE

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SOURCE: TID GRAPHICS

focus on FLANDERS • 21 January - 27 January 2006 • Number 4
• 2 February: Florestan Trio with Schumann, Singel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
• 1 February: The Strings, Quatuor Arriaga and Trio Tango with Antonio Vivaldi Le 4 Stagiioni, Georges Delerue, Paul Hindemith, Emilio Balcarce, Mario Demarco, Astor Piazzolla and Vincente Greco, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00
• 2 February: Trio Grande, Belgian jazz, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00
• 2 February: Huelgas Ensemble conducted by Paul Van Nevel with compositions by Claude Lejeune (le Printans, 16th century), Flagey, Brussels; info: www.flagey.be
• 2 February: Chinese Folk music and poetry, Chen Lei-Ji, Fleuve Jaune, conducted by Teun Verbruggen, Nozzle slag, Jaz, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
• 2 February: John Cale & band, Lee Blakeley, director; Flanders Opera, Concertgebouw, Brussels; info: www.desingel.be 02/507.82.00
• 2 February: Aristide Ciamaglia, Muybridge, Gaudenzio Marconi, Irving Penn, Marke Demeester, Luc Van Cauwelaert (directors), Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00
• 1 and 3 February: Terza Pratica, Montiverdi and contemporaries by Hermines Ensemble conducted by Koen Kessels, sample and composition: Gert Keunen, De Bijloke, Ghent; info: www.debijloke.be 09/233.68.78
• 5 February: Black Milk, director: Sylvie De Braekeleer, theatre, in French, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00
• 3 February: Daniel String Quartet with Gérard Caussé, cello; Johannes Brahms and Arnold Schönberg, Conservatory, Brussels, www.bozar.be
• 3 February: Rodrigo Rojahnelsis with Frédéric Chopin, Ludwig van Beethoven, Sergey Rakhmaninov et Robert Schumann, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00
• 3 February: African Diva’s Night with Yinika Adesina Ø Busi Mlhongo, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
• 3 February: Jordi Savall, viola da gamba, Pierre Hantaï harpsichord, Roll Lislevand theorbo with Diego Ortiz, Santiago de Marcia, Gasper Sanz, Tobias Hume, Domenico Scarlatti and Marin Marais, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00
• 3 February: Il Sinfonio by Compagnia Pippo Delbono, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00
• 4 February: Flemish Radio Orchestra and Philippe Catherine with his trio, Scorched, Flagey, Brussels; info: www.flagey.be
• 5 February: Hespèrion XXI Ensemble - La Capella Reial de Catalunya conducted by Jordi Savall, Works by Frei Filipe da Madre de Deus, Gaspar Fernandez, Luis Ruiz de Rihayaz, Juan Blas de Castro, Juan Perez Bocanegra, Luis del Mila and others, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00
• 5 February: Midori Seiler, violin, Ute Peterslidge, Cello and Jos Van Immerseel, Piano with WA Mozart, Concertgebouw, Brugge; info: www.concertgebouw.be
• 5 February: Exhibition Spencer Tunick, Concertgebouw, Brugge; info: www.concertgebouw.be
• 5 to 23 February: Die Lustige Witwe by Franz Lehár, Michel Tilkin, conductor and Lee Blakeley, director, Flanders Opera, Ghent; info: www.vlaamseopera.be
• Until 14 February: Cosi fan tutte by WA Mozart, conductor: Alessandro de Marchi, director, Vincent Boussard, De Munt, Brussels; info: www.desemunt.be
• 6 February: Ensemble Pierre Robert conducted by Frédéric Desenclos with Daniel Daniels and Henri Du Mont [French Baroque music]; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00
• 6 to 7 February: Meg Stuart/damaged goods - Auf den Tisch!, dance, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: www.vooruit.be 09/267.28.28
• 7 February: Manolo Franco [Flamecon], Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
• 8 February: Ouvert de Chambre de Wallonie conducted by Augustin Dumas, WA Mozart, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00
• 8 February: Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra with Groot Omroep Orkest conducted by Valery Gergiev with The Damnation of Faust by Hector Berlioz, De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
• 8 February: Flemish Radio Orchestra conducted by Johan Duyck, In this multimedia-project, the orchestra focuses on the romanticist William Blake, Flaggey, Brussels; info: www.flagey.be
• 9 February: defilharmonie conducted by Daniele Callegari with Michelle De Young, mezzo and Giuseppe Sabatini, tenor with Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00

FOCUS ON FLANDERS

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CULTURE

EXPO

• Until 2008: Art at the Frontline 1914-1918, Royal Army and Military History Museum, Brussels, info: 02 737 78 33 www.klm-mra.be
• Until 30 April: Pain, exhibition, Museum Chisulain, Ghent; www.museumghisulain.be
• Until 26 February: The Trans-Siberian Express: fascinating facts about the route to Vladivostock, KMSKG, Cinquantenaire, Brussels; info: 02/742.72.11
• Until 5 February: The Blue Rose – Symbolism in Russia, Museum of Elsene, info: 02/515.64.22
• 17 December to 26 February: Interittal, exhibition, MUKHA, Antwerp, info: www.mukha.be
• Until 12 March: The Construction of the other, exhibition, photographic portraits by Diane Arbus, Dirk Braeckman, Eudward Maybridge, Gaudenzio Marconi, Irving Penn, Marc Trivier, August Sander, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00
• Until 14 February: In the video installation S’ckmyP a text by Peter Verhelst interacts with images by Kurt D’Haeseleer and music by Köhn, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00

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