VLD troubled by Jean-Marie Dedecker

The enfant terrible of the VLD is currently Senator Jean-Marie Dedecker. This past week the former national judo coach has been a permanent fixture in the media. Today, for example, he is introducing his book ‘Rechts voor de raap’, in which he makes a determinedly populist and right-wing call for co-operation with the far-right Vlaams Belang and in which he treats almost the entire Belgian political leadership with contempt. Dedecker aims his arrows mainly at the Socialists, and in particular SPA Party Chairman and fellow townsmen Johan Vande Lanotte. Dedecker portrays Vande Lanotte – whose party has been in power for years in Ostend – as a local mafia leader. However, Dedecker continues to receive the backing of VLD Chairman Bart Somers, who has already hailed other party mandarins before the party’s disciplinary committee for much more moderate comments. But for the time being the book is not putting any noses out of joint within the VLD, and within the government the SPA is applying pressure to Premier Verhofstadt. For the SPA enough is enough. It rakes the party that Dedecker does not take any notice of coalition agreements (FF).

FRANK POOSEN/PEETER DE BACKER • HET NIEUWSBLAD • 10 FEBRUARY

On Wednesday morning, when Het Nieuwsblad published the first advance publication in which Dedecker lays into the Socialists, SPA Chairman Vande Lanotte was particularly affronted. He contacted Premier Verhofstadt, whom he urged to do ‘something’ about Dedecker. After all the insults directed at the Socialists, who are after all a coalition partner, went much further. The whole afternoon was taken up by intense deliberation between Verhofstadt, Vande Lanotte and VLD Chairman Bart Somers. The result was a press release which would be distributed by the press agency Belga: ‘The government believes government work is more important and wishes to pay the writings of Mr Dedecker no more attention than they deserve.’ The press release was pulled at the eleventh hour because Johan Vande Lanotte suddenly realised that it was wiser not to react. The conclusion: the whole thing will blow over. After all the insults directed at the Socialists, who are after all a coalition partner, went much further. The whole afternoon was taken up by intense deliberation between Verhofstadt, Vande Lanotte and VLD Chairman Bart Somers. The result was a press release which would be distributed by the press agency Belga: ‘The government believes government work is more important and wishes to pay the writings of Mr Dedecker no more attention than they deserve.’ The press release was pulled at the eleventh hour because Johan Vande Lanotte suddenly realised that it was wiser not to react. The conclusion: the whole thing will blow over.

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief
Brussels moslems demonstrate peacefully

A couple of thousand Moslems organised a spontaneous demonstration in Brussels on Sunday against the notorious cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed. The demonstration came about following a call via SMS. The demonstrators headed from the city centre to the VRT and RTBF building on Reyerslaan. The public broadcaster was chosen as a symbol of freedom of speech. They want the media to stop disseminating the offensive cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed. According to Hacer Düzgün of the Belgian Moslem Executive, the Prophet is being depicted in a degrading way (with a bomb on his head).

Ergün Top, CD&V City Councillor in Antwerp, finds it regretful that the Moslem Executive has not explained that in the Moslem world you can laugh at anything: at Rammadan, the mosque and headaddresses, but not at Mohammed, Allah and the Koran. According to Senator Fatma Pehlivan (SPA) the West misjudges the sensitivities of Moslems. The cartoon makes a link between Islam and terrorism, while Islam rejects any form of violence. That is what makes it so offensive, claims Pehlivan.

Ghent philosopher Etienne Vermeersch believes that the Moslem Executive is at fault. According to him, it is not making any effort to put the importance of such cartoons into perspective with its supporters, for example by pointing out that similar ones depicting Jesus Christ also appear here. Vermeersch also received hate mail after being quoted on CNN. In the newspaper Het Volk he had said that Belgian papers should publish such cartoons each week, so that Moslems get used to the idea. By way of a quip, he added later. Vermeersch believes suicide and other muslim terrorists continually link their attacks to their faith. On VRT he criticises channels such as Al Jazeera which broadcast the entire religious ceremony that precedes an ‘execution’ by terrorists.

That the protest flared up only four months after the cartoons were published points to manipulation in these Moslem countries, says Kevin McGwin in De Standaard (4 February). He points to the visit of Danish Moslem organisations to Egypt and Lebanon, who showed the cartoons and called for protest and to the refusal of the Danish prime minister Rasmussen to receive the ambassadors of 11 countries. According to Claude Moniquet of the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Centre in Brussels, it is the Muslim brotherhood who triggered the protest worldwide via their networks. The affair benefits a great many Moslem regimes to allow their people to let off steam, concludes De Standaard. The authorities there allow almost no criticism of their own policy, but turn a blind eye to violence and arson against Danish embassies, claims the paper [7 February]

WWW.ESISC.ORG

How absolute is the right to freedom of speech?

As in most Western countries, the Flemish press believes the right to freedom of speech and the freedom of the press take priority over the protection of religious feelings. Whether the cartoons display a fundamental lack of respect or are tasteless is less important, believes Het Laatste Nieuws (6 February). For the paper, the principle that you may not ban them is sacred.

In its Friday edition De Standaard printed the twelve cartoons published by the Danish newspaper Jyllands Posten in September. In so doing De Standaard wanted to show solidarity with its Danish colleagues and stand up for the freedom of speech, which it sees as an essential foundation of democracy. That same day the entire editorial team received a mail containing a death threat. The right to express one’s opinion freely must be defended, but is not an end in itself. It is an essential means of entering into a debate that allows the truth to be revealed through reciprocal discussion, the comment said on Monday. De Morgen believes freedom of speech is not an absolute right and must always be seen in context. In this case the cartoons and the vehement protest by Muslims must be seen against the background of current world politics (FF).

Opinion

FILIP ROGIERS • DE MORGEN • 6 FEBRUARY

‘The fury over the cartoons may well have remained a local dispute between some Moslems and a Danish newspaper if three other key factors were not currently in play: the American war against terrorism, the rise of violent political Islam and the modern worldwide media,’ writes Magdi Abdelhadi, BBC correspondent. It was not by chance that yesterday young Moslems spontaneously marched on the transmission mast of the VRT.

Here, in our lovely free West, it is rather too non-committal to want to have a long discussion on freedom of speech. It is also too abstract as a discussion for the very real rage that has taken over the global Moslem community. We may believe the cartoons were just ‘innocent’ jokes. The fact is they were not perceived as such by a large part of the world’s population. Freedom of speech is the same as freedom period: the question is always who starts what. If the offence is that great, we have the minimum human duty to try and understand why. ‘It’s not the images themselves, but their content, namely equating the Prophet with a terrorist, that has caused so much rage,’ says political scientist Sami Zemni further on in the paper. ‘Moslems see it as a sign that the West equates all Moslems with terrorists.’

We should at least give it a lot of thought. And above all use all possible existing bridges with the Moslem community that are available in our own country, and there are still too few, to really come to a better understanding. In the Moslem community itself supporters of such bridges will themselves become rarities if the escalation is not stopped. It is that or, here and elsewhere, seeing The Clash of Civilizations by Samuel P. Huntington coming true.
New Flemish integration decree approved

On 3 February the Flemish Government approved the draft of its new integration decree. Anyone living in Flanders who does not come from an EU country must take an integration course. He or she must learn Dutch and take courses to become familiar with the rights and duties of their new society. New compared with the previous integration decree is that the integration course is also compulsory for anyone who marries a Belgian and comes to live here. This applies to a Turkish man who marries a Belgian woman of Turkish origin, for example. Anyone who refuses to take the integration course or does not attend sufficiently may be liable to an administrative fines of up to 5,000 euros or the suspension of their OCMW or unemployment benefit. Previously such people were taken to court. But because the courts did not make any time for them, hardly any of the refusers were punished. Immigrants who have lived here for some time, are on minimum income benefit and do not speak Dutch will also have to follow the integration course. In addition to the new integration decree, the government also approved another insertion decree with extra measures to assist foreigners in accessing the labour market.

The most important new aspect is that compulsory integration is being extended to all newcomers who come to live permanently in Flanders through family reunification. European law excludes EU citizens from this, but not new Belgians. The obligation will also apply to foreign religious ministers (e.g. imams).

Recognised refugees will also have to integrate. An asylum-seeker whose application is accepted will be exempt from this obligation, but not from the basic course in social orientation. The obligation also covers: established migrants, those living off minimum income benefit or unemployment benefit. Anyone who was not born here, is not an EU citizen and has lived in Flanders for longer than 12 months is an established migrant. This category mainly applies to the growing children of newcomers. If they are on minimum income benefit or are drawing unemployment benefit, they are subject to compulsory integration. Those who have a job can still make a priority application for these courses.

The following are not subject to compulsory integration: scientists, investors, IT experts, specialists and anyone with a temporary work permit. The requirement does not apply to those over the age of 64, nor to the sick.

In total the scheme involves 18,200 compulsory and entitled newcomers and 9,950 established migrants annually, but this is a category which according to Minister Keulen must be done away with in four to five years’ time. Around three in five newcomers are seeking work: that means the VDAB has to support thousands of extra job-seekers.

Integration and insertion into the labour market run smoothly one into the other. Step one: social orientation. Reception agencies will register and monitor the integratees while they learn about our values and standards, rights and obligations. Step two: a basic course in Dutch. This could be from 600 hours for unlettered people to 90 hours for the well-educated in a university language centre. The VDAB can then impose a further language course on the integratee, aimed directly at the labour market. The VDAB will also continue to monitor the integratees in their search for work.

Keulen is increasing his budget for integration from 40 million euros this year to 70 million euros in 2009. This year Vandenbergroucke will find an additional 3.4 million euros and by 2008 will provide 9.2 million euros extra for the insertion of foreigners into the labour market.

Flemish parliament approves EU constitution

Belgium is ready to become the fourteenth country to ratify the EU Constitution. Because the EU Constitution governs both regional and community powers, the approval of all the parliaments in the land was needed: the Chamber, the Senate, the Walloon Parliament, the Brussels Parliament, the Community Committee of Brussels, the French Community Committee in Brussels, the Parliaments of the French Community and the German Community and finally the Flemish Parliament. The Flemish Parliament was the last one to do so, on 8 February, by a large majority.

The reason it took so long is simply down to the fact that Flanders wants to be able to take action itself in Europe in areas where it is competent, such as culture, the environment or agriculture. The fact is that under the princi- ple of subsidiarity, European Member States can intervene if Europe exceeds its authority. Flanders wants to do that itself for its own areas of competence. But all the parliaments first had to sign a co-operation agreement to this end which states that Regional and Community Parliaments must also be seen as chambers of the National Parliament. That agreement was only forthcoming on 19 December. Only from then on did the Flemish Parliament have the go-ahead (De Standaard, 9 February).
Government keeps to businesslike approach in take-over bid for Arcelor

On 7 February Premier Guy Verhofstadt (VLD) and the Minister-President Yves Leterme (CD&V) and Elio Di Rupo (PS) received the bosses of steel groups Arcelor and Mittal Steel in the Premier’s official residence. In the morning it was the turn of Guy Dollé from Arcelor, and after lunch Lakshmi Mittal paid his respects. Both business leaders were asked to support their views with an industrial plan.

For the government leaders, maintaining employment and production is crucial. They are therefore standing by their initial assertion that they would not want to touch the system of study grants. The European Metalworkers’ Union is rejecting a take-over of Arcelor by Mittal, but the Belgian trade unions are not taking this route. They want the agreements to be respected which they made with Arcelor’s bosses at the time. The Belgian Government and the unions thus appear to be on the same wavelength.

Also, Guy Dollé now appears to be easing off the gas. As it now appears that Arcelor is having difficulty finding an ally to fend off Mittal’s bid, there is a good chance the Indian steel magnate will get everything he wants. 80% of the shares are spread among the general public. However, according to Dollé, who is in fact now ready to talk with Mittal, the bid of 18.6 billion euros is way below Arcelor’s value. Nevertheless Dollé is apparently still looking for a partner with whom he wants to obstruct the take-over by Mittal Steel.

The government of Luxembourg, which with 5.6% is the biggest Arcelor shareholder, lent him a hand in this. In the heat of the take-over battle it has cobbled together a bill which makes possible defence with the so-called poison pill.

WWW.ARCELOR.BE
WWW.MITTELSTEEL.COM

More study grants for secondary education next year

Last year around 70,000 Flemish pupils in secondary education received a study grant. In 1991 that figure was 100,000. This is because more and more parents are exceeding the income threshold that entitles them to a study grant. Flemish Education Minister Frank Vandenbroucke (SP.A) also notes that the amount of study grants for secondary education fell from 16.7 million euros to 11.9 million euros in this period, while the budget for study grants rose from 39 to 55 million euros. He wants to make sure that more pupils can claim grants and apply the same criteria to them as in higher education. That also implies raising the income threshold for a grant in secondary education. The amount of the grant must also be increased. The Minister is to set aside up to 10 million euros for this (FF).

DE STANDAARD • 8 FEBRUARY

At the same time it will become easier to apply for a grant, both for higher and secondary education. From the next academic year an application must be complete in 25 minutes. It currently takes 3.5 hours. Vandenbroucke does not want to touch the system of study grants in higher education. After all, a study by sociologist Bea Cantillon (University of Antwerp) shows that our country colleges do that only sparingly. Students only repay their grant to the government once they have found a job. In the heat of the take-over battle Luxemburg has cobbled together a bill which makes possible defence with the so-called poison pill in the case of hostile take-overs without the permission of the general meeting of shareholders. Thanks to this construction, companies that are threatened by hostile take-overs can place shares with a friendly party, making the take-over more difficult or more expensive.

WWW.MINISTERFRANKVANDENBROUCKE.BE

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<th>average grant (EUR)</th>
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SOURCE: DE TIJD
Car sharing, a solution to the inner-city parking problem

**On 7 February Flemish Transport Minister Kathleen van Brempt (SP.A) opened the first Cambio ranks in Antwerp**

Anyone who drives less than 10,000 kilometres a year is better off participating in the car-share project ‘Cambio’ than buying their own car. The system works with a chipcard and an on-board computer. Cambio cars can be booked by telephone or online. The price is calculated according to time and distance. The system has already been a minor success in Brussels. There, 40 cars are now used by around 1,200 customers. Cambio is especially interesting in an urban environment because the benefits of having your own car are increasingly being eroded by queuing and parking problems. Car-sharing has its roots in Germany and is already used in Wallonia and Brussels and in the Flemish cities of Ghent, Bruges and Leuven. On 7 February Flemish Transport Minister Kathleen van Brempt (SP.A) opened the first Cambio ranks in Antwerp. (FF).

**TOM YSEBAERT • DE STANDAARD • 8 FEBRUARY**

Cambio is collaboration between Taxistop, the Flemish tram and bus company De Lijn and the automobile federation VTB-VAB. Flemish Transport Minister Kathleen Van Brempt (SPA) yesterday solemnly opened the first Cambio ranks in Antwerp. (FF). Cambio yesterday calculated that the system can work out cheaper than having your own car. Someone who drives an Opel Corsa from Cambio for three hours and covers 15 kilometres pays 8.85 euros. A day trip with this Corsa (12 hours, 100 kilometres) costs 45 euros. The average monthly bill for users is 77.35 euros.

According to calculations by VTB-VAB the potential for car-sharing in the Scheldt city is massive. 32% or 38,245 of families in Antwerp do not have a car. Across the whole of Flanders that is 14%. 32,509 families travel less than 10,000 kilometres a year. Together this means a target group of 70,754 families. One shared Cambio car is used by 20 to 25 people. The ideal is 30-35.

**www.cambio.be**

Belgian wind farm capacity rises by 74%

Last year a record number of wind turbines were erected in Belgium. In 2005 capacity rose by three-quarters to 167 megawatts. By 2010 Belgium plans to generate 6% of its power using renewable energy. Wind energy and the incineration of biomass are the most obvious sources of energy for this. But the potential of wind energy on the mainland is limited in our country by the lack of space. Capacity is estimated at 700 to 1,900 megawatts, depending on the source. But expansion is possible into the North Sea. There, more specifically on the Thornton Bank, C-Power will from 2007 begin operating the first turbines of a farm intended to generate a total of 216 to 300 megawatts (FF).

**DAVID ADRIAEN • DE TIJD • 14 FEBRUARY**

Until three years ago the number of turbines was growing very slowly, says Christa Schaut, wind turbine specialist for the Organisation for Sustainable Energy Flanders (Organisatie voor Duurzame Energie – ODE – Vlaanderen). In recent years, however, the law has become clearer. The system of green power certificates has given the sector a massive boost. Last year a record number of wind turbines were erected in Belgium. The installed capacity rose by 74% to 167 megawatts, calculated the sector association EWEA. The power produced by a wind turbine depends on the weather conditions and location. On average, a turbine with a capacity of 1 megawatt should be able to deliver as much power as is consumed by 750 families. This growth has allowed Belgium to catch up significantly on other European countries. In the 25 countries of the European Union, production of wind energy rose by 18% to 40,317 megawatts. Germany and Spain are still easily the largest producers of wind energy. Belgium is in thirteenth place. Flanders is ahead of Wallonia in the erection of wind turbines. The 100th Flemish wind turbine was constructed at the end of last year in Puurs. The farm at Zeebrugge is the biggest, with 25 wind turbines installed. But these old turbines only provide a minimal amount of power. The wind farm along the Kluizen Dock in the port area of Ghent has the greatest capacity, at 22 megawatts.

**www.c-power.be**

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<th>Wind energy production in Europe (capacity in megawatts)</th>
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<td>Finnland</td>
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<td>Polen</td>
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**SOURCE: DE TIJD**
Suspicions increase in gambling scandal in Belgian football competition

The KBVB, the Belgian football federation, appeared to be hardly aware of what was going on

Back in July last year Sport/Voetbal-magazine tried to expose the wheeling and dealing of the Chinese Zheyun Ye and his Belgian contacts. The magazine explained how Ye tried to buy his way into Belgian clubs with the aim of rigging matches and in so doing earn vast sums of money via Internet and other gambling channels.

Several months later Roland Duchâtelet, Chairman of Sint-Truiden and of the VLD cartel partner Vivant, again made reference to major bets on certain Belgian matches, including two involving his own club. He promptly lodged a complaint with the federal police. Shortly afterwards the chairman of another top-flight club, SK Lierse, did the same. Since then the revelations have not stopped.

Suspicion is currently directed at the Walloon club La Louvière. With an anonymous witness and a hidden camera the VRT programme Panorama revealed a whole host of indications – up to now no material evidence – that many matches in the Belgian competition were fixed under the influence of Chinese gambling syndicates. Fourteen players and two trainers are apparently involved.

Among the clubs attention is focused on La Louvière, but Bergen, Brussels, Charleroi and Lierse were also mentioned. The pivotal figure is apparently the players’ agent Pietro Allata, a relation of Ye, who is familiar with the clubs Bergen and La Louvière.

Meanwhile the team of Brussels examining magistrate Silviana Verstreken, who is in charge of the investigation, is looking for traces of financial transactions between the chief suspects. The police’s Computer Crime Unit has sifted through the suspects’ computers and mobile phones.

The KBVB, the Belgian football federation, is troubled by the affair of the Ye. Such influence of Chinese gambling syndicates is apparently involved.

The KBVB also wants to question the players’ agent Pietro Allata, a relation of Ye, who is familiar with the clubs Bergen and La Louvière.

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Vankrunkelsven calls for ceremonial King in Senate

CROWN PRINCE FILIP, PRINCESS ASTRID AND PRINCE LAURENT, WHO DO THE SWEARING IN OF MINISTERS, CALLED FOR THE MONARCHY TO BE LIMITED TO A PURELY CEREMONIAL ROLE.
**MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE**

- **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.demunt.be
- **14 February**: Orchestre des Champs Élysées and Collège Vocal de Gent, Philippe Herreweghe, conductor with J. Brahms and R. Schumann, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00
- **16 February**: MâaK’s Spirit (be), Jazz, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: www.vooruit.be 09/267.28.28
- **16 February**: Job Loy Nichols, AB, Brussels; info: www.abconcerts.eu 02/548.24.24
- **17 February**: Orchestre De Munt, Christopher Franklin, conductor - Juan Diego Florez, tenor, with Bellini, Rossini and Mozart, De Munt, Brussels; info: www.demunt.be
- **17 February**: AQME; AB, Brussels; info: www.abconcerts.eu 02/548.24.24
- **17 and 18 February**: nsvl Eszet Salamony, dance, Kaaitheater, Brussels, info: www.kaaitheater.be
- **16 February**: Peter Kabelka, The Essence of Cinema 1, Metric Films, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00
- **16 February**: Eric Legnini, Jazz, Flagey, Brussels; info: www.flagey.be
- **17 February**: Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra o/c Choirm, conducted by Ton Koopman; Krönungsmesse, César Pierre, Handel; with Bellini, Rossini and Mozart, De Munt, Brussels; info: www.demunt.be
- **24 February**: Myrdinn, Flamenco, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
- **24 February**: Urmla Sathyanarayanan o/ Ensemble, dance, India, Zuiderspershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderspershuis.be
- **23 February**: Roestfestival, Jan Blohm o/ Band (South Africa), Zuiderspershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderspershuis.be
- **23 February**: Flemish Radio Orchestra, conducted by Yoel Levi with Anna Stéphanie (mezzo soprano), with von Zemlinsky, Schönberg and Richard Strauss, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00
- **24 February**: Antje Weithaas and Tabea Zimmermann; violin and alt violin with Mozart, Spohr, Bartok and Martinu; De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- **20 February**: Gabrieli Consort and Players. Paul McCreesh, Gillian Webster, Anna Burford, Christopher Purves with Händel, Acis and Galatea e Polifemo, De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- **20 February**: Gabrieli Consort and Players. Paul McCreesh, Gillian Webster, Anna Burford, Christopher Purves with Händel, Acis and Galatea e Polifemo, De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- **21 February**: Gitanos De Granada (Flamenco), Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
- **21 February**: Beethoven Academie conducted by Hervé Niquet, Cédric Tiberghien, piano with Schumann, De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- **22 February**: Dave Burrell/Joe McPhee duo, Jazz, De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- **22 February to 1 March**: Jan Decorte/Boet vzw o/ Kaaitheater, Rare works 2: Dieu et les esprits vivants in French, Kaaitheater, Brussels, info: 02/021 59 59 www.kaaitheater.be
- **22 February Big Star (US), Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
- **22 February**: Orquesta tipica Fernandez Fierro, Argentina, Zuiderspershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderspershuis.be
- **22 February**: Flemish Radio Orchestra, conducted by Yoel Levi with Anna Stéphanie (mezzo soprano), with von Zemlinsky, Schönberg and Richard Strauss, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00
- **21 February**: Stephan Dheedene and Phil Collins, SMAK, Ghent; info: www.smak.be 09 221 17 03
- **23 April**: Eugene Ijoos, In Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres 057/239.220
- **Until 19 February**: Either transfer the sum to account no.: 03/248.28.28
- **Until 23 April**: J. Brahms and R. Schumann, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00
- **Until 19 February**: Stephan Dheedene with Freespace, exhibition, Bozar, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00
- **17 February to 28 May**: Markus Dohne, exhibition, The Wiener Werkstätte and the Stoclet Palace, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00

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