Energy regulator CREG severe for merger Suez-GdF

If the merger between the energy groups Suez and Gaz de France goes ahead, the merger company must relinquish its interests in gas supplier DistriQaz and network managers Fluxys (gas) and Elia (high voltage). So says CREG, the Belgian energy regulator, in a memo to the Energy Minister, Marc Verwilghen (VLD). In addition, GdF must sell the smaller electricity producer SPE and Suez must sell a number of nuclear power stations. The fact that the French State will be the major shareholder in the new merger company is a further cause of concern for CREG. Without these interventions the young competition on the Belgian natural gas and electricity market risks becoming distorted, according to CREG.

DAVID ADRIAEN • DE TIJD • 10 MARCH

The merger will consolidate Electrabel’s dominant position on the electricity market, via the interest Gaz de France has in the electricity producer SPE. GdF must therefore sell this participation. The merger will also bring the two biggest suppliers of gas on the Belgian market together under one roof: Suez subsidiary DistriQaz and GdF. Suez must therefore relinquish DistriQaz, or at least transfer some of its supply contracts to other parties. Also striking is the requirement to sell some nuclear power stations to other reliable market players. The fact that the French State will be the major shareholder in the Suez-GdF merger group is a cause of concern for CREG. ‘It is unknown anywhere in the world for the government of a country to own and control the nuclear power stations of another country,’ writes the regulator. The regulator also focuses on the nest egg (around 4 billion euros) Electrabel has created to safely demolish the nuclear power stations in the future: ‘Because a foreign government is a shareholder a strong arrangement is required.’

CREG is also in favour of Suez withdrawing fully from the natural gas network manager Fluxys and the high-voltage network manager Elia. A minimum condition for Fluxys is that Suez scales down its interest from over 50% to below a blocking minority.

www.creg.be

INTRODUCTION

The Francophones are terrified that Flanders wants nothing more or less than the splitting up of Belgium. They appear to be aiming primarily at luring away large numbers of jobs and businesses from Brussels to prepare a set of demands for the capital in reserve as a crowbar (Le Soir). Moureaux is calling for a front with the Wallonians, is firmly opposed to the splitting of the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde constituency and is calling for more money for the Brussels Region.

He is supported on this last point by the Brussels Minister-President Picqué (PS) with a report full of figures showing that financially Brussels is being treated harshly. Because of the concentration of business in the Region, the Gross Domestic Product per inhabitant in Brussels is twice as high as in Flanders, claims Picqué (De Tijd, 9 March). One third of businesses with foreign capital are based there and the broad environmental policy of Brussels and Wallon Brabant profits from this. 220,000 Flemings and 125,000 Wallonians, mostly highly skilled commuters, travel daily to their Brussels’ office. The Brussels Region pays for their transport and public facilities, but they pay their taxes in their place of residence. Picqué is therefore well and truly fed up with Flemish references to the financial transfers from North to South. If one Region is paying, it is Brussels, he claims. To be able to continue to perform the role of international magnet and economic lever, his Region needs more financial resources more than any other, of that he is absolutely convinced. (Table p.5)

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief
Towards a Belgian strategy regarding GdF-Suez merger

WIM VANDE VELDEN • De Tijd • 8 March

On 8 March Premier Verhofstadt and the Flemish and Walloon government leaders Yves Leterme (CD&V) and Elio Di Rupo (PS) consulted to agree on a joint strategy for the talks with Suez and Gaz de France due to take place today, 9 March. It was agreed that three problems would be highlighted. Firstly: how can competition in Belgium and the interests of the consumer be protected? Secondly, how can the commercial interest of the gas terminal at Zeebrugge as an interchange for northern Europe and the provision of gas via Fluxys be guaranteed? And finally, how can Belgium acquire sufficient say in a French merger group? According to the Premier, Europe will play a key role in the merger. He emphasised that he would explicitly ask the European Commission for advice on the consequences of the merger for the Belgian market. The Commission may establish a maximum market share for gas and electricity and that will strengthen Belgium’s negotiating position, claims De Tijd (9 March).

Nor can potential buyer Enel be discounted yet. Increasing numbers of reports are doing the rounds in the Italian press that a bank consortium is in the process of being formed which wants to lend the Italian energy group money to make a bid for Suez. There is talk of a loan of 40 to 50 billion euros. These reports are pushing up the price of the Suez share. As a result, Suez is apparently worth 43 billion euros on the stock exchange. WWW.SUEZ.COM

Belgian position on Mittal Steel-Arcelor merger by April

At the beginning of April Belgium will make known its position regarding the take-over bid of Mittal Steel for Arcelor, stated Premier Verhofstadt after his meeting with Lakshmi Mittal. At this meeting the Indian boss of the steel company unveiled his industrial plan, in which a separate chapter outlines the consequences of the merger for our country. In Belgium, Arcelor’s sites employ 12,500 people. Together with the Minister-Presidents of Flanders, Yves Leterme, and of Wallonia, Elio Di Rupo, Verhofstadt has charged the commercial bank Lazard with comparing Mittal Steel’s industrial plan with Arcelor’s (FF).

WIM VANDE VELDEN • De Tijd • 8 March

Verhofstadt again pointed out that Mittal Steel’s commitments in relation to employment were of particular importance to Belgium, the investments in research and development in our country. Earlier Lakshmi Mittal announced that he was prepared to re-examine the planned closures of Arcelor plants in Wallonia to see if they were actually necessary. With a 2.4% interest in Arcelor, the Walloon Region has a major role to play in the take-over struggle. But Lakshmi Mittal also began a charm offensive in Flanders. He announced he wanted to increase investment in research and development at Sidmar in Ghent. Flanders previously disposed of its interest in Arcelor, but did invest in the expansion of the Occam steel knowledge centre close by Sidmar, in the hope of being able to anchor a high-quality steel sector in Flanders. As well as Sidmar in Ghent, the steel company ALZ in Genk is also part of the Arcelor group. WWW.SIDMAR.BE WWW.OCCAM.BE

Leterme is moderately optimistic after talks with Mittal

FF EDITOR

Flemish Minister-President Yves Leterme (CD&V) is not pessimistic after the talks he had together with Elio Di Rupo (PS) and Premier Verhofstadt with Lakshmi Mittal, the boss of Mittal Steel. During question time in the Flemish Parliament he went into the talks in greater detail. According to the Minister-President, Mittal stressed that Sidmar (Ghent) and ALZ (Genk), the two Arcelor sites in Flanders, are highly efficient companies. Mittal also revealed itself to be extremely happy with the research centre in Ghent. The three sites have therefore been given an important place in the industrial plan put forward by Mittal. There is even the prospect of more jobs, according to Leterme. For ALZ, however, the future does not look as good as it does for Sidmar, claims Leterme. ALZ produces stainless steel and that is not part of Mittal’s core business. There are therefore several question marks hanging over ALZ’s position. If Mittal takes over Arcelor, the Indian steel group will certainly not buy ALZ straight away, but action will have to be taken to keep activities profitable. Leterme again stressed that himself, Di Rupo and Verhofstadt are opting for a rational approach. Keeping jobs and anchoring added value in Flanders, these are their main concerns.
Record profits for Electrabel

With profits of around 1.9 billion, Electrabel has improved on last year by 40%. That is largely due to the stock market floatation of its subsidiary Elia, which manages the high-voltage network. This floatation was a massive success and provided additional revenue of 626 million euros. Electrabel also sold other interests in the telecoms group Telenet and the Spanish electricity producer Union Fenosa, generating a further 85 million euros. Electrabel’s current operating result remained stable at 1.44 billion euros. Electrabel lost customers in Belgium, but gained them in other countries (FF).

DAVID ADRIAEN • DE TIJD • 4 MARCH

Electrabel was able to increase electricity production abroad by building new power stations and increasing the capacity of old sites. This was done in the Italian Voghera and Torrevallalga and the German Römerbrücke. Last year Electrabel also acquired a 40% stake 40% in the hydroelectric power stations of the French SHEM. This year the group will further expand its foreign production park.

Electrabel’s Board of Directors also decided to transfer the Brussels network activities of Electrabel (Netten Réseaux Brussel) to the Brussels intermunicipal company Sibelga, which is responsible for electricity and gas distribution in the capital. The electricity producer is also to gradually withdraw as shareholder of the intermunicipal company Sibelga. The operation is similar to the reforms of the Flemish distribution landscape. Then Electrabel transferred its network activities (Electrabel Netmanagement Vlaanderen) to the intermunicipal companies. That operation led to the creation of Eandis, a company that is responsible for all network management in the largest part of Flanders.

Electrabel is to pay a gross dividend of 16.60 euros, an increase of 5.3%. Almost all the payment of 911 million euros is going to the parent group Suez. After last year’s bid, this owns 98.6% of the Belgian electricity producer.

WWW.ELECTRABEL.BE
WWW.SUEZ.COM

Table p. 2

Belgian banks jointly made around 10 billion euros’ profit in 2005

The Belgian banks are mostly using their record profits to expand abroad. And they are doing so primarily for their shareholders, not their employees or clients

The four main banks, KBC, Dexia, Fortis and ING België, made on average 27% more profit than in 2004. Fortis made 3.9 billion euros’ profit, while KBC (2.2 billion euros) and Dexia (2 billion euros) passed the threshold of 2 billion in profit for the first time. ING België reported profits of 878 million euros. Three years ago they recorded a joint profit of only 3.1 billion euros. The rise is not only due to the flourishing financial markets, but also to the fact that in past years they have had to invest considerably in mergers. These mergers are now behind them. The sharp rises in profits in the sector are mainly down to the increase in customers’ saving and lending activities. It also appears that the four banks have also sharpened up their returns. In their own country they have above all heavily rationalised and outsourced or liberalised activities. Workers who end up in a liberalised department often lose their status of employee in the banking sector, with reduced pay as a result. Such actions have earned the banks strong criticism from trade unions. The banks claim to be investing their massive profits better in jobs and training, but the opposite is true, claims Tjeu Thijskens from the Christian trade union the LBC in De Morgen (4 March).

The Belgian banks are mostly using their record profits to expand abroad, notes De Tijd (4 March). And they are doing so primarily for their shareholders, not their workers, the paper claims. The consumer organisation Test-Aankoop also confirms that the profits are not benefiting the consumer (FF).

Opinion

ROLAND LEGRAND • DE TIJD • 7 MARCH

The banks are busy hoarding their profits. So said former SP.A Chairman Steve Stevaert at last year’s 1 May celebrations, and he was right. Around 10 billion euros, that is more than half the Flemish budget. The conclusion on the Left that the banks are concerned with making profit, and a vast amount of profit, is therefore correct. Except in itself there is nothing wrong with that. Until things change, banks are private companies. Their ultimate goal is not to provide as much credit as possible on as favourable terms as possible, nor to create as many jobs as possible. Banks want to earn money for their shareholders, and if they are not earning enough, these shareholders will sell, share prices will fall and these banks will end up in foreign hands. Conversely, if banks are profitable, their value also increases for the shareholders and they can finance themselves more easily. This enables them to expand their activities at home and abroad and possibly take over banks themselves. The banking sector is one of the few national sectors that can still pride itself on several companies that mean something internationally. Profitable banks can also establish buffers more easily for less successful times. They are sensitive to the economic climate and the ups and downs of the capital markets. Solvency is not only important to shareholders, but also to the millions of customers who depend on the financial services groups.
Opposition finds Dewael and Onkelinx responsible for Erdal’s escape

In the statements of Koen Dassen, the outgoing chief of the State Security Police, the opposition found new information for their attack on Dewael and Onkelinx.

For six years the Turkish activist Fehriye Erdal lived in hiding in a flat above the premises of the information office of the Turkish liberation army, the DHKP-C, in Brussels. In August 2000 she lived for a while in Charleroi, but when that address was leaked in the Turkish press, she moved to Brussels, where she spent six years under the surveillance of Home Affairs. The evening before her hearing on 27 February, leading member Musa Asoglu left the DHKP-C offices in a car together with Erdal and shook off the State Security Police. The next day, however, he appeared in court, but not Erdal. According to the police it was Asoglu who directed the whole escape. Prior to this he had first spent years establishing a relationship with the State Security Police based on trust.

According to Home Affairs Minister Patrick Dewael (VLD) and Justice Minister Laurette Onkelinx (PS), who had to justify themselves before Parliament on 7 March, they did not have the legal means to arrest Erdal. Only a judge could give the order to do so. CD&V legal experts Vandenberghe and Van Parys dispute this. They claim that Erdal could have been detained administratively. In the statements of Koen Dassen, the outgoing chief of the State Security Police, the opposition found new information for their attack on Dewael and Onkelinx. Dassen promised to release the Erdal file shortly (FF).

Meanwhile the opposition found new ammunition in Dassen’s statements, behind closed doors in the Senate. According to CD&V Senator Hugo Vandenberghe, the documents contain new elements that could embarrass the government. They apparently reveal, for example, that over the past few months the State Security Police warned several times that Erdal was in danger of escaping. Those warnings were intended for Home Affairs Minister Patrick Dewael, with copy to Justice Minister Laurette Onkelinx and Premier Guy Verhofstadt (VLD).

Also according to Vandenberghe, Dassen told the committee behind closed doors that the State Security Service had only been ordered to observe Erdal, in other words not even to shadow her, and to report if she crossed the border. ‘The Belgian authorities were therefore well aware that Erdal was likely to try and escape,’ concludes Vandenberghe.

Dassen first has to select which documents in the six-year-old file can be made public, without compromising the identity of officers of the State Security Service or secret operational information. A strict timing was agreed for making public the documents in question.

Without access to the new information the opposition had no choice but to repeat the legal-technical yes-no debate that has been held in recent days in the media.

Why Onkelinx and Dewael have survived the Erdal case

The CD&V/N-VA and the Vlaams Belang are calling for the resignation of Justice Minister Onkelinx (PS) and Home Affairs Minister Patrick Dewael (VLD). The fiercest fire was reserved for Minister Dewael. His decision to only return from a skiing holiday on Thursday, three days after Erdal’s disappearance, for a press conference, to explain Erdal’s escape there and then dash back to the pistes, where his children had remained, is now being held against him as a gross underestimation of the Erdal case. Only on Monday 6 March, one week after the facts, did he defend himself before Parliament. For the time being Dewael has survived the Erdal case because he knows how to defend himself in a strict legal sense and because the Erdal case is not a major issue in Francophone Belgium. Gazet van Antwerpen explains why (FF).

Opinion

The opposition has never yet been able to force a minister to step down. The opposition can make life difficult for a minister. It can reveal troublesome facts, ask annoying questions, expose and highlight a minister’s mistakes. But bring him/her down? No. Only the majority can ‘bring down’ their own excellencies. Only if the leaders of the coalition parties find that this or that minister is best sacrificed because this would come across better to public opinion, then the time has come.

The time has not yet come. Vice-Prime-
Government likely to dump boss of State Security Service

Tony Van Parys, is calling for a parliamentary investigation commission to be set up to determine who is responsible and gain access to the documents of the State Security Police, which are currently still secret.

Upheaval in the Senate. The advisory committee to the I Committee, which monitors the information services, yesterday wanted to examine all the documents on the Erdal case, but was not given them.

Initially the committee was merely given the documents for the period between 20 and 28 February, the period just before the ruling of Bruges summary jurisdiction court in the Erdal case. The committee found this not nearly enough.

'TIt would be unacceptable for these to remain hidden from Parliament. That would be more in keeping with a police state, which is precisely what Dewael is fighting against,' said CD&V Senator Hugo Vandenberghe. In the late afternoon the Administrator-General of the State Security Service, Koen Dassen, was therefore summoned to the Senate. On Monday Dassen read from documents which related to a much longer period in the committee.

The senators wanted those documents too. But it appears that is not possible for the time being. The members of the committee will only be given documents going back to the start of this year to be able to investigate how Erdal was able to escape.
Rain in Rotterdam, drops in Antwerp

The Dutch local elections are eliciting a great deal of comment in Flemish newspapers. The victory of the left-wing PvdA and SP and the dressing down of the governing CDA, VVD and D66 is an indication of how the election results will turn out in the parliamentary elections next year, many claim. An opinion poll held at the exits to polling stations reveals that the current governing coalition would lose its majority and the left wing PvdA, SP and Groen Links would just achieve a majority. But even more surprising is that Leefbaar Nederland, the successors to figurehead Pim Fortuyn, who caused an electoral shockwave in 2002, are dealt the greatest blow. Only in Rotterdam were they able to hang on, and there too they are having to yield to the PvdA. As a result of the polarisation between Leefbaar Rotterdam and the Social Democrats, the CDA and VVD, which govern together with LR, were pushed into the margins. Will the same thing happen in Antwerp in October with the VLD and CD&V/N-VA in a titanic struggle between the SP of Mayor Patrick Janssens and the Vlaams Belang of Filip Dewinter, De Morgen wonders (FF).

TOM COCHEZ • DE MORGEN • 9 MARCH

According to Rotterdam political scientist Rinus Van Schendelen, comparison between Rotterdam and Antwerp is pointless. ‘LR cannot be compared with the Vlaams Belang, which takes a xenophobic and extremely negative line. What I can imagine, however, is that there will be a similar polarisation in the campaign between Mayor Janssens of the SP and the Vlaams Belang, which will make things difficult for the other parties.’ The CD&V and VLD are also aware of this. ‘It’s an obvious risk,’ says CD&V Alderman Marc Van Peel. ‘But there is one major difference. In contrast to the PvdA the SP give such more leeway to the right. We’re still stuck with a sort of Red-green rivalry, in which both parties want to appear the friendliest towards asylum-seekers and immigrants.’

According to VLD Alderman Ludo Van Campenhout there is also room in Antwerp for a ‘third way’. ‘The SP is still responsible for a sort of misconceived casual policy with regard to naturalisation. There is a huge void between the PvdA and the SP.’

Mayor Patrick Janssens himself wants to do all he can to avoid a polarisation between him and Philip Dewinter. ‘Rotterdam and Antwerp cannot really be compared. Sociologically, perhaps, but not on a purely party-political level. What happened in the Netherlands in four years took fifteen years here. There is also a significant ideological difference between the VB and LR.’

WWW.ANTERP.BE
WWW.ROTTERDAM.NL

Service Cheques cost government a fortune

Service cheques for home help or cleaning help are a huge success. But financially they are becoming a real problem for the Federal Government. It set aside 386 million euros for the cheques, but according to the latest estimates the cost may amount to 528 million euros. If a cheque costs an individual 4.7 euros, this same cheque costs the Federal Government around 14.8 euros (FF).

WIM WINCKELMANS • HET NIEUWSBLAD 8 MARCH

Service cheques are cheap for the user, but expensive for the taxpayer. Now the system risks becoming the victim of its own success. An answer by Employment Minister Peter Vanelthoven to a question from CD&V MP Greta D’Hondt reveals that this year the cheques are likely to cost the government 528 million euros, while only 386 million was set aside. The system has also helped fewer people find work than was hoped. The government was counting on 25,000 new jobs. According to the Nationale Bank the figure is closer to 18,000. ‘That’s because many of these jobs already existed,’ says MP D’Hondt. ‘Services such as family help and help for the elderly, for example, have converted some of their employment into service cheques.’

The result is that the government cannot also count on the recovery effects of these new jobs, which makes the system even more expensive. ‘The situation urgently needs assessing,’ says D’Hondt. ‘I wonder whether we should tighten up the rules again. Otherwise there’s likely to be a massive drain on social security or the taxpayer.’

WWW.DIENSTENCHEQUES.BE

Flemish party chairs on Dutch election results

For all Flemish party chairs in De Morgen (9 March) it is clear that the Dutch local elections had a strong national bias and that consequently local politics played too small a role in determining voting behaviour. This national impact is always more pronounced in the Netherlands than in Belgium, because there mayors are not elected, while here they are. For Flemish SPA Chairman Johan Vande Lanotte it is clear that with the clear victory of the left the Balkenende government has lost its credibility and that it can put that down to its social breakdown policy. VLD Chairman Bart Somers hopes that the Flemish local elections in October will deal more with local topics than was the case in the Netherlands. CD&V Chairman Jo Vandeurzen also believes that not enough emphasis was placed on local politics. He shares the analysis of Premier Balkenende that sister party CDA has not yet been able to reap the rewards of the unpopular measures it had to take to clear away the rubble. Groen! Chairwoman Vera Dua concludes that the progressive parties could achieve a majority in around 50 Dutch towns and municipalities. It would be a mistake to let this historic chance go, says Dua.
N-VA and Groen! demand explanation from Turkey over murder of parents of Kurdish activist

The Flemish Minister for Foreign Policy, Geert Bourgeois (N-VA), is demanding an explanation from Turkey over the murder of the parents of Derwish Ferho, Chair of the Kurdish Institute in Brussels. Bourgeois has written a letter to this effect to the Turkish ambassador in Brussels. According to Ferho, his father was killed in his bed and his mother had her throat cut by the Contra-Guerrilla, which has links with the secret service and Home Affairs. It is claimed the murders were in retaliation for the fact that their sons are part of the anti-Turkish opposition in Belgium. Bourgeois and with him party and Groen! are demanding that Turkey investigate the murders thoroughly. If it emerges that Turkey is so flagrantly violating human rights, it will be of enormous significance in determining whether Turkey can become part of the European Union, he believes.

De Gucht: Bourgeois mustn’t interfere with murder of Kurdish Couple

Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs Karel De Gucht (VLD) believes the Minister for Foreign Policy in the Flemish Government, Geert Bourgeois (N-VA), did not have the authority to write a letter to the Turkish ambassador demanding an explanation for the murder of the parents of Kurdish activist Derwish Ferho. Certainly not when in that letter he hints at the involvement of the Turkish government and links Turkey’s membership of the European Union to this. De Gucht believes Bourgeois should have sent the letter to him asking if he (De Gucht) wanted to ask the Turkish embassy for an explanation, explains the Federal Minister in De Morgen (8 March). According to him, Bourgeois us taking steps that are the exclusive territory of the Federal Foreign Affairs Minister. De Gucht himself has already announced that he will ask for clarification via the Belgian embassy in Ankara. But for the time being there is insufficient evidence to believe the allegations of Bourgeois.

The parents of the Kurdish activist Ferho, who lives in Belgium, were horrifically murdered on 2 March in a small village in Turkish Kurdistan. In the past the couple had often been threatened regarding the anti-Turkish activism of their sons in Belgium. According Ferho himself, the murders were carried out by a death squad on the orders of the Turkish government. According to De Standaard (9 March), it is not by chance that as well as Bourgeois other ex-Volksunie members leap to the barricades if the Kurdish cause is treated unjustly. Bart Staes (Groen!), Nelly Maes (Spirit) or Geert Lambert (Spirit) take up the cause of Kurds, Basques or Chechens much more often out of a sense of national feeling. Nor is Bourgeois’ party, the N-VA, in favour of Turkey’s accession to the EU. Karel De Gucht’s VLD, however, is.

As regards the conflict of powers between ministers, Bourgeois believes human rights are also a Flemish power. And since Ferho is a ‘Fleming’, he can make a stand, he feels. Foreign Affairs points out that the relationship between states is organised by the Federal Government and that Turkey only recognises Belgium as an official state.

www.diplomatie.be

‘L’enfant’ scoops almost all Plateau awards

After the Palme d’Or in Cannes, the film L’enfant by the Dardenne brothers from Liège has now scooped almost all the national Joseph Plateau prizes in Ghent. Five, to be precise: the prize for best film, best direction, best actor (Jérémie Renier), best actress (Deborah François) and best scenario. Since its success in Cannes the film, about a young marginal who sells his child, has also carried off the Guldbagge for best international film in Sweden. There were consolation prizes for Georges Van Dam, who composed the best film music, and for cameraman Danny Elzen, who bagged the Plateau prize for best cinematography. The public prize went to Jan Verheyen for the film Buitenspel. Despite the preponderance of French-language films, the Francophone press stayed away from Ghent. Evidently there are still too many associations with the Flanders Film Festival in the city, concludes De Standaard (FF).

STEVEN DEFOER
DE STANDAARD • 8 MARCH

Jacques Dubrulure, Chairman of that festival, which took the organisation upon itself out of genuine shame - every self-respecting country has film prizes - has had enough. Yesterday evening he repeated his call to the sector for more support for the initiative, which otherwise risks disappearing. According to the Arts Decree, the festival does not receive any subsidies to organise the ceremony. It is a private initiative, for which external funds are sought each year. The Flemish Government does not view the awarding of these ‘federal’ film prizes as a priority.

And so the Plateau prizes risk disintegration. ‘Popular film-makers such as Jan Verheyen say that the Plateau prizes are too elitist,’ says Dubrulure. ‘But rules are rules. The prizes reflect the views of the film industry and film press.’ There is also the budget problem and the disagreement over what the future should bring: Belgian film prizes or Flemish film prizes? Dubrulure believes more people should stick their necks out. For the time being there are two hypotheses. The Plateau prizes may remain national and in the future be awarded alternately in Ghent and a Walloon city. Exploratory talks are being held in this connection. The alternative is that Flanders awards its own film prizes and that TV series are also involved.
**CULTURE**

**Diary**

**MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE**

- 24 February to 21 March: Martin Arnold (Vienna, 1959) has established himself as one of the most brilliant of today’s experimental filmakers, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00
- 21 to 25 March: Mathilde Monnier and Centre Choreographique de Montpellier, F. de Singel, Antwerpen, info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- 22 March: Ars Antiqua Austria, Gunar Letzbor, violin and conductor

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