Job opportunities for underprivileged and immigrants

Today the Flemish Government approves the cooperation agreements with four industrial sectors that have set up action plans to help underprivileged unemployed people and unskilled young people into a job or placement. Immigrants will be given special attention. The initiative comes from goods transport companies, temporary employment agencies, removal firms and the food industry. In all 500 additional work placement places for young people from technical and vocational training have been created, alongside 800 work experience placements for the long-term unemployed and sectoral training for 2,000 underprivileged people in the food industry. The action plans fit into the policy pursued by Employment Minister Frank Vandecaveye (SPA) to boost diversity on the work floor and leave the initiative to companies in the process (FF).

JOHAN RASKING • DE STANDAARD • 31 MARCH

The four sectors have set down on paper dozens of major and minor commitments. On logistical support to technical and vocational training, for example, or to the VDAB’s vocational training courses. This approach should help promote the filling in of bottleneck professions. In the goods transport sector, it concerns training courses for forklift truck drivers, but also refresher courses for teachers. Free Dutch courses will be provided for on the work floor, and in the temporary employment sector special attention will be going to the learning of basic ICT skills. The removal firms are striving for 20% immigrants in their training programmes.

Sixteen special sector consultants, paid by the Flemish Authorities, should coach companies in the preparation of diversity plans. Of particular note is the initiative taken by temporary employment companies to put on special temps’ buses to take temporary workers who are doing shift work to industrial estates, so they don’t have to use public transport. After a trial project in the port of Ghent, there are also plans for the airport region of Zaventem and for Turnhout and Sint-Niklaas.

The most far-reaching commitment comes from the temporary employment companies. They are promising to help 1,125 underprivileged job-seekers to find a job, outside the normal influx of groups with opportunities in the tempting agencies.
Verhofstadt warns Suez about the sale of Belgian assets to Enel

Reports that the Italian electricity producer Enel had secured 50 billion euros to proceed with a bid on Suez, have prompted the French energy and utilities group to opt for discreet negotiations with the Italians. According to De Tijd (30 March), it looks more and more likely that Suez and Gaz de France will sell parts of the Belgian energy company Electrabel to Enel in an attempt to protect their announced merger.

WIM VANDE VELDEN • DE TIJD • 30 MARCH

Verhofstadt has earlier been told in Paris that Belgium would maintain an important position in the new French merger group. But it now looks as though Suez is preparing another deal with Enel, with Belgium as the bartering coin. This is happening without Belgium’s involvement and risks thwarting all Verhofstadt’s attempts to break open the electricity and gas market here.

That is why the Prime Minister is sending out a strong signal. ‘The concentration problem remains with Enel itself. The aim is still to throw open the Belgian market, both for electricity and gas, and attract as many players as possible’, Verhofstadt announced.

The warning is unambiguous. If Paris thinks it can sort out its business by going against Belgian interests, the Belgian government will make things as difficult as possible for the French merger group before the European and Belgian competition authorities.

The Belgian government still has other irons in the fire, such as SP.A chairman Johan Vande Lanotte’s so-called football tax. He is urging that a duty be levied on written-off, very profitable power stations, so that new players can gain access to the Belgian market.

Wages

Trade unions and employers make agreements in favour of business competitiveness

At the request of the federal government, trade unions and employers have drawn up a joint declaration on the competitiveness of the Belgian economy. The trade unions are entering into the agreement for a ‘stricter application’ of the wage standard. That translates into a recommendation to all industrial sectors that a correction mechanism be introduced so that the rise in wage costs does not turn out to be more than the agreed maximum, and in the agreement that any reductions in charges for companies should ‘not be converted into wage increases’, but should be used for additional employment. The employers, for their part, recognise that in addition to wage restraint and reductions in charges, there is a need for extra investments in training and innovation.

There is nothing on wage restraint in the agreement. The real wage talks will probably only start in the autumn, according to De Standaard. Prime Minister Verhofstadt showed himself to be satisfied with what he called ‘a new step in the process of cranking up the competitiveness of companies’. By the end of April he is promising new reductions in charges for employers and employees.

WwW.ACW.BE/ WwW.ABV.BE/ WwW.VBO.BE/ WwW.UNIZO.BE

Flanders builds on relations with China

FF EDITOR

Geert Bourgeois, the Flemish Minister of Foreign Affairs and Tourism, is making a tour of China this week. He signed a protocol agreement yesterday in Beijing with Hainan Airlines, a Chinese Company, which will fly to Zaventem, Brussels four times a week from July onwards (De Tijd 28 March). In return, ‘Tourism Flanders’ will also open an office in Beijing this year. Meanwhile, Chinese tourism continues to flourish in Belgium. ‘Tourism Flanders’ believes that this number will grow substantially in the next few years.

Furthermore, Flanders trade relations with China are proving successful. Last year, Fientje Moerman, Flemish Foreign Trade Minister presented her ‘China Strategy’ during a trade mission in China. The most important projects included a Chinese school based in Flanders for the children of Chinese business people, a manual for Chinese investors and the establishment of a business service centre providing interpreters for these investors.

WwW.MINISTERGEERTBOURGEOIS.BE WwW.FLANDERSINVESTMENTANDTRADE.BE

ECONOMY AND FOREIGN POLICY

Quarterly growth of Gross Domestic Product

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Quarter</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>1ST QUARTER</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2ND QUARTER</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3RD QUARTER</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4TH QUARTER</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1ST QUARTER</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2ND QUARTER</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3RD QUARTER</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4TH QUARTER</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>1ST QUARTER</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2ND QUARTER</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3RD QUARTER</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4TH QUARTER</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>1ST QUARTER</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2ND QUARTER</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3RD QUARTER</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4TH QUARTER</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quarterly surveys by the Federal Plan Office for 2006
**BUDGET AND MONARCHY**

**Oil sector pays small part of fuel oil discount for families**

A thorny problem in the federal budgetary control was the financing of the fuel oil discount which the ‘purple’ government awarded families last year. At the time the government borrowed EUR 100 million from sixteen oil companies to get the measure financed. That loan had to be repaid before 1 April, without interest. The order for the repayment has already been given, according to Finance Minister Ryders. Deputy Prime Minister and Budget Minister Freya Van den Bossche (SP.A) got into a fix when she stated in January that the loan did not have to be repaid to the petroleum sector, despite this having been laid down contractually. Later she said that the loan would be repaid, but that the oil sector would have to help finance it. The government asked the oil sector to make a contribution of some EUR 20 million, finally this amount was toned down to EUR 12 million (FF).

**ISABEL ALBERS • DE STANDAARD • 29 MARCH**

The government wants to put the money into a fund. Even though EUR 20 million (toned down to Eur 12 million, ed.) is only a fraction of the total cost price of the fuel oil discount (EUR 140 million), Van den Bossche is saving her skin with it. The SPA has already been demanding for weeks that the oil sector make a contribution and, in so doing, likes to point to the enormous profits that the international oil companies are making.

In Parliament yesterday, Van den Bossche was already preparing the news that the eventual contribution would probably be small. ‘It would be shocking if we were to let the sector bear the entire cost price’, she said. According to opposition member Hendrik Bogaert (CD & V), the minister had begun a ‘strategic retreat’ with that statement. ‘First the oil sector had to cough up EUR 100 million, then the amount was EUR 60 million, and now it’s less again’, he gibed.

---

**Budgetary control balances budget again**

Wednesday night the Federal government finished its work on budget control. All gaps in the budget were closed. The main focus of attention was the sum the oil sector would be contributing to pay for the discount (140 million euro) given to households to reduce their cost of heating oil. Eventually, the oil sector coughed up 12 million euros. Consequently, Budget Minister Freya Van den Bossche, who had insisted on a contribution from the oil sector, doesn’t lose too much face.

Apart from the fuel oil discount, the largest deficits in the budget were caused by service cheques (165 million euros) and a lower than anticipated income from the tax on company cars (70 million euros). Following a cut in the defence budget (20 million euros), an intensified campaign against tax and social fraud, and a stricter control on the taxing of company cars, the government may once again be able to balance the budget (FF).

**DE STANDAARD • 30 MARCH**

Prospects for economic growth are not being tinkered with. However, interest - which caused a large amount of surplus expenditure - is being adjusted downwards. The situation in the social security system is under control. The security system for self-employed persons - which is contending with a debt mountain - should start with a clean sheet by 2008, when the compulsory insurance of self-employed persons should also cover small risks.

The government has also decided to raise the bonus for contractual civil servants - as already occurred at the beginning of the year for the private sector - from EUR 125 to 140. In this way the discrimination between the two categories is removed. The measure costs EUR 30 million.

In addition to the already announced initiative to tackle social fraud (EUR 80 million), the fight against tax fraud is again being stepped up. Control of payment of the duty on company cars is also being tightened up. The tax office will compare various databases to check which companies are not declaring. Any company not putting its house in order within a certain period will have to pay a fine on top of the tax.

As regards the high expenses for service cheques, the government is mainly waiting for the report that should be ready at the end of April. That should show how much the system really costs, taking into account the cost-recovery effects created by extra employment.

In any case tax deductibility is not being touched and the price of the cheques is not going up. The pre-financing of Accor, the company that issues the cheques, is being tinkered with.

**WWW.FREYAWEB.BE/**

---

**MONARCHY**

**Prince Philippe does not want to be a media star**

**FF EDITOR**

In a written interview with De Standaard [25 March] and La Libre Belgique Crown Prince Filip claims not to be indifferent to the criticism on his leadership of the trade mission to South Africa. Flemish business men described the prince’s behaviour as fairly uninterested and denounced his rather uninspired speeches. In the interview the prince emphasises that he is not expected to be a media star, but that his duty is first and foremost to be at the service of Belgian society. When he was asked for his opinion on the plea by some Flemish politicians to reduce the role of the king to a sheer ceremonial one, he answered evasively and stated that is ‘was a matter for politicians’. All the Prince’s answers are to be submitted to Prime Minister Verhofstadt before publication.
Doctors should talk to patients about euthanasia

This is laid down in the Code of Ethics that the Association of General Practitioners amended a few days ago (FF).

WIM WINCKELMANS AND GUY TEGENBOS • DE STANDAARD • 27 MARCH

If the doctor himself has ethical objections against euthanasia, he should report this in good time so that the patient has the chance to consult another doctor. ‘Only then do you avoid misunderstandings’, says Ivo Uyttendaele, deputy chairman of the Association. It has already occurred that a doctor invoked ethical objections at the last moment in order not to agree to a patient’s request for euthanasia. Doctors also avoid or ignore such requests. The new duties in the professional code of ethics relate to euthanasia and the other forms of medical intervention at the end of the patient’s life, such as the decision not to start any more treatments, the discontinuation of fluid supplies and life-shortening pain control.

At the same time the Association confirms its rejection of ‘therapeutic stubbornness’: the pointless prolonging of life, or pointless treatments when a patient is about to die. We had to adapt the code of ethics; the previous version had become outdated by the euthanasia law’, says Ivo Uyttendaele. ‘We opted to wait for application of the law in the field’. In the meantime the Catholic Church and the Muslim Executive are campaigning together to prevent the euthanasia law being extended to include demented persons. This was confirmed by cardinal Godfried Danneels and Hacer Düzdün of the Muslim Executive on Saturday in De Morgen. The cardinal is striving for a rejection of that extension for the three main monotheist faiths: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. The Jewish Community has not been informed of the ‘religious front against euthanasia’. The Protestants have, but for the time being are not taking part.

A survey by the Free University of Brussels shows that a large majority of the population accepts euthanasia, or what they understand by the term. A study by the Catholic University of Leuven (DS, 8 March) reveals that Rome’s doctrine on euthanasia no longer forms the basic principle for Catholic hospitals.

WWW.ORDOMEDIC.BE

Virtually no shifts in La Libre Belgique poll

FF EDITOR

The federal elections are due to be held in 2007. De Morgen reports that if they were to take place today, they would reveal a breath-taking tie between Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt (VLD) and Flemish Prime Minister Yves Leterme (CD&V).

This emerges from the latest poll conducted by De Morgen and La Libre Belgique, in which both politicians lead the pop poll. De Morgen reports that the left wing parties SP.A-Spirit and Groen!, would suffer as a result.

In La Libre’s quarterly tracker-poll conducted during the second week of March, the positions of the different Flemish parties have changed very little. The conglomerate CD&V-N-VA remains the biggest political group, accounting for 26.9 %. The extreme right Vlaams Belang has 25.7% (+0.3%), whereas SP.A-Spirit (19.6%) is losing ground (-0.9%). The liberal party VLD remains fixed upon the position it held three months ago (18.9%). Groen! has decreased by 0.5% holding 6.8% of the vote. In short, there are no significant electoral shifts to be recorded.
Tax office and social security contributions reduce gap between rich and poor

According to a recent study from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), nowhere in the world are incomes taxed more highly than in Belgium. After social security contributions - both those paid by employers and employees - and taxes, only around 44.9% of an average income is left. In the Netherlands, for example, that is 57.5% and in the United Kingdom the figure is 70.5%. But those high taxes result in a considerable redistribution between high and low incomes, to the extent that Belgium is the country where the income gap between low earners and high earners has been reduced the most. However, the results of the study should be put into perspective somewhat. The study uses figures from 2002 for comparison. Between 1999 and 2006 the tax burden fell by 1.34% of GDP and social security contributions by 0.70% of GDP, according to Guy Clemers, chief economist of Prime Minister Verhofstadt in De Tijd (28 March) (FF).

De STANDAARD • 28 MARCH

The high taxes lead to a substantial redistribution between high and low incomes, between families with few or numerous children, and between families with one or two incomes from work. The social security contributions and taxes result in the gap between those who earn little (67% of the average gross salary) and those who are on an average income, is reduced by 11.86%. On the other hand, the tax system sees to it that the high earners also shift 12% towards the average salary. The share of the richest 10% of the population in the national incomes amounts to 7.8 times that of the poorest 10%. The richest 20% receive 4.5 times as much as the poorest 20%.

The OECD has also calculated the degree to which families without children provide a contribution for families with children, via their taxes. In our country the gap between a family with one person earns everything and the others nothing.

In Belgium the Gini coefficient was at 27.2% in the mid nineteen nineties, slightly higher than in the mid nineteen eighties. In the United States, for example, it is at 34.4%.

The OECD has also calculated the degree to which families without children provide a contribution for families with children, via their taxes. In our country the gap between a family with one person earns everything and the others nothing.

The OECD also comes to the conclusion that all countries are making greater efforts to close the income gap between single parents with children and married parents with children. The OECD also comes to the conclusion that in most tax systems households in which both partners work are placed at an advantage vis-à-vis households in which one person provides for the income. In our country the advantage is 2 to 4%.

Picanol law seems buried

FF EDITOR

The Picanol law, which obliges listed companies to publish the salaries of their managers, appears to have died a premature death in Parliament’s Commercial Law Committee. The bill, an idea of VLD senator Patrick Vankrunkelsven, was toned down at the last moment at the request of the Federation of Belgian Businesses. In the adaptation, the VLD felt that it was sufficient for only the salary of the CEO and the management as a whole to be published. The Socialists were firmly opposed to the toning down, whilst the Christian-Democrats were mixed in their reactions. The votes of the Vlaams Belang would therefore be decisive. Originally the Vlaams Belang supported the changes, but the extreme right-wing party withdrew its support when the VLD refused to have the salaries of trade union and health insurance fund managers published, as the Belang requested. The Socialists and Spirit are refusing to follow the VLD’s ‘paths’, which means that the Liberals are on their own with their amended bill, which will be voted on after the Easter recess.

Increase in number of businesses failing to pay taxes, despite new measure

Last year, some 38,950 companies and 21,692 self-employed persons failed to submit their tax declarations. 16,824 firms and 36,661 self-employed people were overdue and hadn’t requested a deferral. In 2005, the federal government decided to impose a fixed tax payment from all companies and self-employed persons who failed to pay their taxes. It seems the measure has failed to frighten tax evaders. In fact, in the previous year, 2004, there were fewer firms evading taxes than in 2005.

CD&V Member of Parliament, Carl Devlies, has asked Minister of Finance Didier Reynders (MR) for an explanation, doubting whether the new measure has actually ever been applied. Reynders responded, stating that his administration doesn’t have figures available regarding the implementation of the fixed rate taxation measure.

In a reaction Reynders qualified the report in De Tijd. Among the companies that did not make a tax return, there are also many companies that have gone into liquidation, are no longer trading or are loss-making. According to Reynders, the effect of the lump-sum tax measure is not yet measurable.
New investigation department to deal with social fraud

The federal government wants to adopt a tougher line on dubious temporary employment agencies hawking East European workers, and on people traffickers offering illegal immigrants to Belgian contractors at social dumping prices. To this end it has set up a new department, the Social Information and Investigation Department. The department is also expected to coordinate the existing social inspection departments, so that cheats claiming unemployment support twice or working and signing on at the same time can be traced more easily. The new department should bring in a further EUR 80 million this year. That is but a fraction of the estimated social fraud, which is put at EUR 1.4 billion. The government reached an agreement on this in the framework of its talks on budget control (FF).

Traffic fines become more logical and simpler

The adaptation of the traffic law comes into force on 31 March. Then the dreaded ‘super-fines’ will become a thing of the past. The new fine system is constructed more logically and simply. It is based on the principle that the more dangerous the offence, the higher the fine. The offences are classified in four grades. There is a EUR 50 fine for a first-degree offence, a EUR 100 fine for a second-degree offence (driving with a mobile phone in the hand), and a EUR 150 fine for a third-degree offence (jumping a red light). And finally for the most dangerous offences (such as overtaking on a bend), drivers will be summoned to appear in the magistrates’ court.

Speeding fines go up much more gradually than before. Driving at less than 10 kilometres per hour over the limit is penalised with a EUR 50 fine. For every kilometre over the limit thereafter, an additional EUR 5 is added to the fine (EUR 10 in built-up areas). The automobile associations, but also cyclists’ and pedestrians’ associations, are reacting positively (FF).

KATRIEN VERSTRAETE • DE TJUD • 29 MARCH

The Flemish motorists’ association VAB considers the new traffic law to be ‘logical and reasonable’. ‘The fines are dropping by an average of 11%’, it says. ‘Belgium is no longer the country with the highest traffic fines’, the VAB concludes from a comparison with neighbouring countries. Belgium is now in fourth place. ‘The Netherlands has the highest fines. And France and Luxembourg have stricter punishment, because they combine a financial penalty with penalty points’. The VAB does note, however, that not enough of a distinction is made between one-off offenders and serious repeat offenders. The other motorists’ association Touring is also ‘quite satisfied’ with the adapted traffic law. In 2004 Touring had protested with a petition of 50,000 signatures against the then ‘super fines’. ‘The new law is now more acceptable for people and they will therefore abide by it better’. However, according to Touring there are still a few flaws. ‘Motorised road users are systematically dealt with more severely than ‘vulnerable’ road users’.

The other motorists’ association (Fietsersbond) is generally satisfied with the adaptations. The division of the offences according to risk of accident is a rational criterion, in the association’s view. The Pedestrians’ Movement had not asked for a review of the traffic law. ‘The law gave the signal that vulnerable road users should be better protected’. But that is still the case in the new law, the organisation states.

WWW.VAB.BE
WWW.TOURING.BE
WWW.MINISTERNLADUYT.BE
WWW.FIETSESBOND.BE

NEW SPEEDING FINES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In limited speed zones and built-up areas</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LESS THAN 10 KM/H OVER SPEED LIMIT</td>
<td>EUR 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 TO 30 KM/HOUR OVER SPEED LIMIT</td>
<td>EUR 50 + EUR 10 FOR EVERY KM/H OVER LIMIT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MORE THAN 30 KM/HOUR OVER LIMIT on other roads</td>
<td>IN COURT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LESS THAN 10 KM/H OVER SPEED LIMIT</td>
<td>EUR 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 TO 40 KM/HOUR OVER SPEED LIMIT</td>
<td>EUR 50 + EUR 5 FOR EVERY KM/H OVER LIMIT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MORE THAN 40 KM/HOUR OVER LIMIT</td>
<td>IN COURT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>other offences</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st degree: EUR 50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAR HAS BEEN LEFT UNLOCKED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd degree: EUR 100 (causing indirect danger)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRIVING WITH A MOBILE PHONE IN THE HAND</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd degree: EUR 150 (causing immediate danger)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUMPING A RED LIGHT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th degree: (causing inevitable danger)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVERTAKING IN A BEND</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: THE
**Risk of lung cancer also high in rural Flanders**

The risk of lung cancer due to air pollution is five times higher in Flanders than had hitherto been assumed. This is one of the findings from a study by Doctor Vincent Dufour who used a new measuring method and wrote a Ph.D about it at the University of Ghent. His method is biological instead of chemical. It involves adding samples of air with carcinogenic materials to test bacteria and seeing what genetic changes they undergo. Since the measurement only tests organic matter and for example no heavy metals, the risk is in fact a lot higher, says Dufour (FF).

**HET BELANG VAN LIMBURG • 29 MARCH**

The study was part funded by the federal government and the Flemish Environment Company. ‘In the current chemical analysis only a small number of carcinogenic materials were outlined. In our study we have measured the biological effects. That means that we measure an entire sample of air for its carcinogenic capacity’, explains Dufour.

The results are frightening. ‘In a traditional chemical measurement, we arrive at 461 lung cancer deaths in 1 million people. In a biological analysis, that number is five times higher. Then we come out at 2,000 deaths’. The study was carried out at eighteen places throughout Flanders, both in rural areas and in cities and industrial environments. The situation is just as bad everywhere, says Dufour. ‘You would think that the air in rural areas was purer. Not so. Flanders has become one large city. The background air pollution is more or less equal all over. Air pollution has the advantage that it can easily travel over a long distance’.

**2006 Beaufort takes over the Flemish coast**

As occurred in 2003, this year Beaufort is descending on the Belgian coast. Spread over the entire breadth of the Flemish coastal strip, dunes, beach and dikes become the setting for the most diverse sculptures and other works of art. 2006 Beaufort runs until the autumn and gives a pleiad of international artists the chance to exhibit their work. In De Panne the South African Andries Botha has placed a herd of life-size wooden elephants on the beach. The Italian Mimmo Paladino has placed a series of terracotta sculptures of sleeping figures in the ruins of the Ten Duinen abbey in Koksijde, whilst in Knokke a gigantic floating stainless steel island appears offshore, the work of the Chinese artist Zhan Wang. Above James Ensor’s grave in Mariakerke the American artist Louise Bourgeois has erected a gigantic spider. And on the roof of the Ostend Casino Jan Fabre has set up a figure of the Belgian astronaut Dirk Frimout with a baton in his hand. According to Willy Van den Bussche, the commissioner general of Beaufort, the strongest works enter into a relationship with their environment. Beaufort is aimed at bringing daytrippers closer to art and art lovers to the coast (FF).

**GEERT VANDER SPEETEN • DE STANDAARD • 25 MARCH**

Elephants coming out of the sea: that must be art. Early-morning walkers stop and look in curiosity at the figures, which will be erected in their definitive positions this weekend. Andries Botha: ‘For me this work is a community project. The signature belongs to others: the black Africans that I called in. Normally they carve little souvenir elephants in wood. This work refers to that, too. It looks as though souvenirs of outsized proportions have been washed ashore. These elephants highlight a long period of one-way traffic. They are the reflection of the monument to King Leopold, which stands on the other side of the dike’.

A work of art may be touched, in Giuseppe Penone’s view. ‘If it’s done respectfully’. The Italian arte-povera artist creates a poetic image in the dunes of De Haan. Riveted to a concrete plinth is a white marble plate a good five metres high, against which Penone has placed a little bronze tree. Like all trees on the coast, it has grown at a slant, against the wind. Commissioner-general Willy Van den Bussche: ‘The strongest works make the reality, and their environment, their own. They enter into a relationship with them, which is different from the respectable, folkloric images that the dikes are full of along the coast. I want to raise the awareness of visitors and daytrippers to another kind of coast, which has more to do with mysteries’.

This time there are fewer well-known names. Van den Bussche: ‘The first edition was very well received. The effect could be expressed in figures, extra income. All resorts were keen to cooperate with the event again. So I could go a step further: introduce more new names, and let my own taste show through. This selection is the work of years of prospecting and experience’. Two father figures pop up: Magritte and Ensor. Over Ensor’s grave in the...
**CULTURE**

**Church of Our Dear Lady of the Dunes**, there is an enormous spider grave: it's a nice homage.

**Diary**

**MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE**

• 28 March to 7 April: Il Barbiere di Seviglia by Paisiello, conductor: Rinaldo Alessandrini, director Omar Potter, Théâtre National, Brussels; info: www.demunt.be

• 29 March to 2 April: Beats with Roland, Josse De Pauw and others, poetry and music dedicated to the beat poets, Kaaithéater; info: www.kaaithéater.be

• 31 March and 1 April: Mette Edvardsen (dance), Kaaithéaterstudio’s, Brussels; info: www.kaai.be

• 1 April: Choir and Orchestra of De Nederlandse Bachvereniging, conducted by Jos van Veldhoven with Matthijs Passion by JS Bach, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 02/507.82.00 www.kaaithéater.be

• 1 April: Stabat Mater/Messa di Gloria, Orchestral de Bruxelles - Brussels Choral Society, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00 www.kaaithéater.be

• 2 April: Nils 2 Petter Molaer trumpet, Paal Jørgen Graven turntables, Jan Bang Live Sampling/Electronics, Rune Arnesen drums, Eivind Aarset guitar, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.kaai.be

• 3 April: Leela James, AB, Brussels; info: www.abconcerts.be

• 5 April: K’Maro, AB, Brussels; info: www.kaai.be

• 6 April: La Petite Bande conducted by Sigiswald Kuijken with Johann Sebastian Bach, St John Passion, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00

• 2 to 9 April – 11 to 18 April: Maria Stuarda (opera), by Gaetano Donizetti, conductor: Silvio Varviso, Roma, Antwerp and Flemish Opera House, Ghent; info: www.vlaamseopera.be

• 6 April: Ifj Neve, Klassiek, jazz CC Strombeek; info: 02/263.043.19

**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 THE END OF MARCH**

• Until 30 April: Pain, exhibition, Museum Ghuislain, Ghent, www.museumghuislain.be

• Until the end of March: SMAK exhibitions: Franky DC, Henk Visch, Stefan Dheedene and Phil Collins, SMAK, Ghent, info: www.smak.be 09/221 17 03

• Until 23 April: Eugene Joors, In Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres 057/239.220

• Until 24 June: Kijkdozen en denkmodellen (Showcases and models of thought), Jan Fabre, exhibition, Flemish Parliament, Lokettenzaal, Brussels; info: www.vlaamsparlament.be

• Until 31 May: Theo Van Rysselegh, exhibition, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00

• Until 23 April: The Collection XIV, exhibition, Muhka, Antwerp; info: www.muhka.be

• Until 30 April: Noli me tangere: Maria Magdalena in multilingual, Library of theology, Louvain, www.theo.kuleuven.be

• Until 28 May: Yearning for Beauty, The Vienna Künstler, exhibition Bozar, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be

• Until 31 May: Antwerp-Frankfurt: Migration and innovation around 1600, exhibition, Museum Ghuislain, Ghent, info: www.smak.be

• Until the end of March: Alert!, Picastro + 31, exhibition, Muhka, Antwerp; info: www.muhka.be

• Until 23 April: Migration and innovation around 1600, exhibition, De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28

SmaK exhibitions: until 2 April: Franky D.C, Phil Collins; until 23 April: recollecting landscapes, until 7 May: Dora Garcia, Smak, Ghent; info: www.smak.be

Until 28 May: Kutlug Ataman (Turkey), De-Regulation, exhibition, Muhka, Antwerp; info: www.muhka.be (0)3 260 99 99

**FOCUS ON FLANDERS** • 2 March - 31 March 2006 • Number 13

Focus on Flanders provides a weekly overview of articles from the Flemish press and appears in English, French and German. This newsletter is published by Uitgeverij Lannoo nv, Kasteelstraat 97, 8900 Tielt and can also be obtained by e-mail. The website www.focusonflanders.be contains an electronic archive of published articles

---

**DAILY NEWS ON WWW.FOCUSONFLANDERS.BE**

---

**Editor in chief:** Frank Vandecaveye

**Art director:** Luc Demeester (Lannoo), Rik Van Cauwelaert [director Knack], Wim Coeckens [Manager director, De Morgen], Frans Crois [Director, Trends], Jan Denayer [Information Officer, Flemish Community], Mark Deweerdt [Journalist, De Tijs], Michael Stabenow [Correspondent, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung], Luc Standaert [journalist, Belang van Limburg], Jan Van Doren [Deputy Director, VOKA-VEV], Bernard Bulcke [De Standaard]

**With thanks to:** Concentra nv, De Vlijt nv, De Vlaamse Uitgeveremaatschappij nv, De Pergroeps nv, Uitgeversbedrijf Tijd nv and Roularta Media Group nv and their editorial teams for supplying the articles.

**Translation:** Eurologos

**Printing:** Drukkerij Lannoo nv, Tielt

**Responsible editor:** Luc Demeester, Mark

**48 issues**

**Subscription rate printed edition + 2 e-mail editions + password to search the archive (www.focusonflanders.be): 233 euro**

**Either transfer the sum to account no.: 473-101001-19 with the KBC in Roeselare or give us the number and expiry date of your credit card (Visa/Eurocard)**

**Telephone:** 051/42.42.99

**Fax:** 051/42.42.99

**E-mail:** frank.vandecaveye@lannoo.be