Diversity on shop floor: an economic trump card

Flanders is limping along in terms of diversity on the shop floor. The level of employment among foreigners is barely 38.5%, compared with an average of more than 53% in the 15 old EU Member States. The over-50s or disabled people is hardly any better. The Flemish Government is therefore shifting up a gear in its diversity policy. To get more foreigners, elderly and disabled people into work, a series of projects has been started aimed at combating the under-representation of these groups on the job market. Minister-President Leterme and his deputies Fientje Moerman (VLD) and Frank Vandenbroucke (SP.A) signed a protocol to this effect in the Brussels KVS with trade unions, employers’ organisations, foreigners’ and disabled organisations (FF).

Each year the government frees up 8.7 million euros for a shopping list of concrete actions and projects. Thus trade unions are to engage extra diversity consultants with a view to convincing the entire trade union movement of the importance of more colour on the shop floor. Foreigners’ organisations have undertaken to refer young people who are having trouble finding a job to the VDAB (the Flemish Public Employment Service). Employers are putting all their money on the ‘Jobkanaal’, which temporarily reserves vacancies for people from so-called disadvantaged groups. For its part, the government is launching a call to individual firms to draw up diversity plans. For this they can count on subsidies of between 2,500 and 10,000 euros. ‘Diversity is an economic trump card,’ says Economic Affairs Minister Moerman. ‘Flanders has a problem in this area, because the job market does not reflect society. More effort is needed.’

According to Employment Minister Vandenbroucke, it is important to break through vicious circles of dependency: ‘Many social problems have to do with exclusion. And that is often the result of exclusion from the job market.’

Mohammed Chakkar of the Federation of Moroccan Associations agrees: ‘The lack of work weighs heavily on the foreign community, especially on the young people. Things have to improve, because polarisation in society leads to tragedy.’

Gorik Van Holen • De Morgen • 19 May

Saint Paul’s Church in Antwerp was too small for the funeral of little Luna, the two-year-old girl who last week died together with her Malinese babysitter Oulemata N’Doe under the bullets from an unleashed racist. People of every colour and every stripe gathered together in the square outside the church. Inside the church there was an atmosphere of solidarity of the families of Luna and Oulemata. The family of the Turkish woman who survived the shooting match was also present. There had seldom been such a feeling of solidarity in Antwerp as now, said the priest at the end of the farewell service. Gazet van Antwerpen (17 May) and De Morgen (18 May) cites numerous anonymous mails that are not happy that VB is being (partly) blamed for the shooting match. The party’s leaders are clearly irritated by the tragedy. They decided to no longer use the poster with the photo of — irony of ironies — a little girl seeking protection from her father in their campaign for the local elections. The solicitor of Luna’s parents, Jef Vermassen, had requested this. The party claims it had already taken the decision earlier, although the post still figured prominently in the décor at their election conference on Sunday.

Meanwhile the tragedy has once again set legislation in motion. A bill for stricter arms laws banning the open sale of weapons was given the green light by the Justice Committee and Parliament in a matter of days. That is even quicker than the approval of the youth penalty law that dragged on for just as long, directly after the murder of Joe Van Holsbeek, concludes De Standaard (18 May).

Henceforth, firearms will therefore require a licence, except for hunting and sports weapons, for which a hunting or sports licence must be able to be produced. At a stroke, the Francophone MR and PS abandoned their years of opposition to the stricter laws. Especially when — once again — Jef Vermassen, the solicitor of Luna’s parents, called for stricter arms laws banning firearms. Henceforth, firearms will therefore require a licence, except for hunting and sports weapons, for which a hunting or sports licence must be able to be produced. At a stroke, the Francophone MR and PS abandoned their years of opposition to the stricter laws. Especially when — once again — Jef Vermassen, the solicitor of Luna’s parents, had requested this. The party claims it had already taken the decision earlier, although the poster still figured prominently in the décor at their election conference on Sunday.

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Stricter Arms Law has been accepted

**FF EDITOR**

On 18 May the federal parliament has almost unanimously accepted the bill for a new, stricter arms legislation. Under the new law, no firearms may be placed on free sale. In future, anyone wishing to purchase a firearm will have to apply for a licence from the provincial governor's office, which must first seek the opinion of the local police. Applicants must pass a practical test and must have legitimate grounds for the purchase. For sporting and hunting guns, applicants will either require a hunting licence or must be a member of a shooting club. Under the new law, officer Van Themsche would never have been able to purchase a sporting gun. The matter of stricter arms legislation had been dragging on for fifteen years and has been postponed time and again.

Parents of murdered Luna called for stricter arms law

**FF EDITOR**

This week the lawyer of the parents of murdered toddler Luna appeared before Parliament's Justice Committee to call for the arms law to be tightened up quickly. Vermassen did this not only on behalf of Luna's parents, but also as an expert. After all, Vermassen is the most well-known Flemish Assize Court barrister. More than one third of all murders in Flanders involve firearms and many murders would not have happened if no firearms were available, claims Vermassen. People take guns home out of self-defence and then shoot their spouse with them, Vermassen alleges.

At the hearing arms manufacturers, sports-shooters and hunting associations asked that the arms law not be amended 'in this air of hysteria'. The U-turn of MR MP Philippe Monfils was also remarkable. If he used to be one of the most vociferous opponents of stricter arms laws, he was now the first to press for a swift vote on the bill of Justice Minister Onkelinx (PS).

Antwerp killer confesses planning punitive expedition against foreigners

**FF EDITOR**

Hans Van Themsche, the 18-year-old man who shot dead a toddler aged two and a Malian babysitter and severely wounded a Turkish woman in the streets of Antwerp, had planned to strike more than three victims. Had he not been brought to a stop by a duty police officer, he would also have shot the next foreign passers-by who crossed his path. He straightforwardly confessed as much on first questioning. He had also told a fellow pupil at the boarding school he attended that he would commit suicide if he were expelled from school, but only after having killed at least ten foreigners. Van Themsche was caught smoking in his room, which was strictly forbidden, and had learned that the school was to expel him on 12 May. Things have not reached this stage. One day before he left school in Roeselare, he bought himself a gun in an Antwerp store and started his punitive expedition, which lasted exactly four minutes. That the killings were inspired by racism is beyond any doubt, all newspapers believe.

Did Antwerp murderer imitate video game?

**Opinion**

The judicial authorities are examining whether Hans Van Themsche's brutal rampage was inspired by violent video games, reported Het Nieuwsblad and De Standaard on 16 May. Some aspects of his deadly spree bear strong resemblance to sequences from Grand Theft Auto, currently one of the most popular video games on sale. In this game, the perpetrator must buy a gun before beginning his violent journey, and when he reaches a certain level, he must kill several Spanish-speaking immigrants. Van Themsche was a fan of such violent video games. The two teenagers who perpetrated the Columbine High School massacre and German student Robert Steinhauser, who performed a similar act in Erfurt, were also video game fanatics. The Antwerp court authorities are appointing a team of experts to carry out psychiatric assessments on Van Themsche. According to his solicitor, he had acted on impulse when he committed the murders, showed remorse for his acts and was prepared to accept his punishment. De Morgen [17 May] does not agree with the video game theory. No level of any official game whatsoever invites players to murder people of a different colour, claims De Morgen. That only happens on some Internet sites, in particular far-right ones where blacks are sometimes literally the target, says De Morgen. The paper claims that the videogame path was partly prompted by the murderer's solicitor (FF).

The fact that the solicitor of Hans Van Themsche is diligently looking for non-racist motives to try and get the jury that is waiting for him to be a little more lenient may well be a good legal strategy. To declare violent video games to be the problem of the moment is to enter into the wrong social discussion, de morgen believes.

**Opinion**

PETER MIJLEMANS • DE MORGEN • 17 MAY

The fact that the solicitor of Hans Van Themsche is diligently looking for non-racist motives to try and get the jury that is waiting for him to be a little more lenient may well be a good legal strategy. To declare violent video games to be the problem of the moment is to enter into the wrong social discussion after what happened in Antwerp last Thursday. This reflex looks very much like looking for an excuse not to have to admit that Flanders has for years been suffering from a systematic and widespread form of both overt and covert racism. The advantage of the games theory or the ‘borderline explanation’ is that once again we can skirt around this more than embarrassing problem.
Vlaams Belang washes hands of racist murderer at party conference

The majority of the conference was - true to tradition - devoted to vilifying asylum seekers, immigrants and illegal immigrants

Vlaams Belang rejected all responsibility for the racist murders committed by Hans Van Themsche in Antwerp at its election conference in Mechelen, held around the theme ‘Safe, Flemish and Liveable’. The party distanced itself from Van Themsche and described him as a psychopath. Key players Filip Dewinter, Gerolf Annemans and Frank Vanhecke hit back at anyone trying to blame their party for the prevailing racist climate. And at Prime Minister Verhofstadt, in particular. According to Dewinter, Annemans and Vanhecke, the Prime Minister is flogging a dead horse. Jürgen Verstrepen appealed to fellow party leaders to make it clear that skinheads, Neo-Nazis and other extremists were not welcome in the party, and this was promptly done by Dewinter. This was greeted with loud applause. However, Dewinter and Vanhecke both returned to the problem of illegal immigrants, asylum-seekers and foreigners, which still goes hand in hand with the problem of insecurity. And for the first time in a long while Alexandra Colen was able to mount the platform once again to hit out at ‘perennial 68-er’ Cardinal Danneels, who supports church asylum. ‘In some churches that are currently occupied by illegal immigrants’ banners bearing the name of Allah are put up, the altar moved and the images of saints covered with banners so they don’t offend the Moslems,’ she shuddered.

Vlaams Blok or Vlaams Belang, before or after the murders in Antwerp, nothing has changed. That was the message Dewinter and Co. wanted to give their supporters. ‘Don’t lose your head. Persevere, we’ll get there, our own people first!’

Vlaams Belang floundering after murders

This time they cannot simply lean back and let the protest votes come flooding in, De Standaard believes

According to the Liberal VLD, the far-right Vlaams Belang must bear the overwhelming responsibility. The Socialist SP.A and the Christian Democratic CD&V believe Vlaams Belang may not be held directly responsible for the extreme violence, but also that it has been sowing the seeds of hatred for years. De Standaard (15 May) finds that the party is partly to blame for the current climate, in which disturbed people may draw the wrong conclusions. De Morgen (13 May) compares Vlaams Belang to drug dealers selling racism rather than drugs, and declining any responsibility when one of their addict customers starts committing offences. In one reaction the parents of the murdered toddler Luna rejected the expressions of support from Vlaams Belang.

They did so on local Antwerp TV channel ATV (FF).

Opinion

BART STURTEWAGEN • DE STANDAARD • 16 MAY

In the aftermath of the murders in Antwerp, Vlaams Belang is having a hard time of it. The party is getting its just deserts. Anyone who has eyes and ears can see and hear how its spokespeople are struggling to survive under the moral responsibility for the drama. This time they cannot simply lean back and let the protest votes come flooding in. This time there is nowhere left to go. The Flanders they stand for does not and cannot exist. The oversimplifications they proposed as solutions to all our troubles have lost all meaning. The party is going through an existential crisis. And not a day too soon. What it now boils down to is offering the many who were driven into the arms of Vlaams Belang through fear and frustration a better home. Only if someone who voted for the far-right last time does not do so at the next opportunity will our democracy have taken a step forwards. We must do what is necessary to achieve that with unwavering dedication. We must abstain from anything that gets in its way with iron discipline. Both are difficult, both are necessary. Our society fails to recognise and deal with nuisances. The front line is too weakly manned. That is a mistake for which we are paying heavily.
Very broad performance gap between immigrant and Flemish pupils

There is currently no other region in Europe where the performance gap between pupils of local and foreign origin (with parents born abroad) is wider for mathematics than in Flanders. This information has emerged from a study carried out by the OECD, which based itself on the information from the Pisa study from 2003 among fifteen-year-olds, who took a maths, science and reading test. 42.3% of the second-generation foreigners did not even achieve an acceptable basic level for maths. Even more remarkable is that they even score worse than first-generation pupils born in their country of origin. For sciences only Germany performs worse, for reading only Wallonia performs less badly.

A small part of the lost ground can be explained by an unsatisfactory knowledge of the Dutch language or by parents’ profession and level of education. But it is not clear why the gap is so much wider than in other EU countries. Another difference as opposed to immigrant pupils in other countries is their motivation to obtain a university degree, which is less marked among Flemish immigrant pupils. Pupils of Flemish origin achieve outstanding results in mathematics and are in fifth position for the sciences. Minister of Education Frank Vandenbroucke (SP.A) describes the gap as ‘morally unacceptable’ (FF).

PIETER LESAFFER • DE STANDAARD • 16 MAY

Language is the main area where foreigners lag behind. ‘We must therefore test the language abilities of young people as early as possible. A school can only tackle these arrears if it can identify the bottlenecks.’ So says Frank Vandenbroucke in a reaction to the OECD study of foreign pupils. The study shows that the arrears are smallest in countries where foreign pupils are immediately placed in classes with native children, and at the same time receive support.

‘The comparison shows that we in Flanders are missing the mark,’ says the Minister. Especially where support is concerned, despite the current policy of equal opportunities. Among other things, that policy involves schools receiving additional subsidies for pupils who don’t speak Dutch at home. That can be refined further, says Vandenbroucke. ‘Specifically, we are now giving schools the freedom to use these extra funds. We’re also no longer directing them as to how to tackle language problems. Also, the equal opportunities policy mainly applies to primary school and the first two years of secondary education.’

For Vandenbroucke, changes in order to accommodate this are fuel for discussion. At the same time he is emphasising that the money is evenly distributed.

‘It’s not only the financial side of things that’s important. I’m also learning that the aspirations of young foreign people are initially high. But after a time they lose their motivation. We therefore have to make sure that the level of aspiration remains high enough.’

‘Investing in success,’ the Minister calls it. ‘We have to break the vicious circle of low expectations.’

Frank Vandenbroucke does not want to draw any firm conclusions just yet. He wants to further investigate how the Flemish arrears can be broken.

WWW.MINISTERFRANKVANDENBROUCKE.BE

Performance of immigrant pupils compared with score of ‘native’ pupils (difference in PISA marks)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>1st generation</th>
<th>2nd generation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>-109</td>
<td>-92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flemish Region</td>
<td>-95</td>
<td>-122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Community</td>
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<td>-56</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
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<td>France</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Austria</td>
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<td>-56</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
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<td>-39</td>
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<td>OECD-average</td>
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<td>Luxemburg</td>
<td>-45</td>
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<td>Canada</td>
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<td>+6</td>
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SOURCE: Eurostat

Flanders must reduce energy consumption to meet Kyoto targets

Over the next six years the Flemish Government is to spend 500 million euros to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. So announced Flemish Environment Minister Kris Peeters (CD&V) after the Council of Ministers had approved his new climate plan. The plan contains a whole series of measures aimed at encouraging families, businesses and government to consume less energy. Energy consumption in Flanders is up by 45.8% compared with 1990. To meet the Kyoto targets the Flemish Region has to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases by 5.2% compared to 1990 by 2012. In 1990 we emitted 87,700 kilotonnes of the main greenhouse gas, CO2. This has to fall to 83,436 kilotonnes in 2012. If no action is taken, emissions will rise to 103,000 tonnes. The first target is 86,650 kilotonnes in 2010, or a drop of 1.5% compared with 1990, claims Peeters. Industry, road traffic, the heating of buildings, electricity and heat production and agriculture all have to make an effort to reduce energy consumption and emissions of greenhouse gases. Flanders is also buying emission rights abroad by supporting environmentally friendly projects there.

This year Flanders is setting aside 37 million euros for such projects.

WWW.MINISTERKRISPEETERS.BE
ECONOMIC REPORT

Flanders: prosperous, but not innovative enough

Flanders is a prosperous region, but its economy is vulnerable. That is the conclusion of Leo Sleuwaegen, lecturer in economics at the University of Leuven. He compared Flanders DC with six top regions in the European Union (Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Lombardy, Catalonia, Baden-Württemberg, Rhône-Alpes, Scotland) and two in North America (Maryland and Quebec). In terms of prosperity, Flanders is run of the mill in that company. That prosperity that is expressed in gross regional product per inhabitant. The economy is growing, but that is mainly due to traditional sectors which provide few new jobs. To make the economy less vulnerable, more businesses have to invest in innovation. Three-quarters of the money that is ploughed into R&D here comes from barely ten businesses. We are well-trained, but unfortunately many highly skilled employees are working to a government budget. According to Sleuwaegen, that mortgages growth. Flemings have to believe more in their own abilities and the government must cut taxes on wages, according to the conclusions of his report ‘The Creative Economy’ (FF).

BART HAECK • DE TIJD • 17 MAY

Sleuwaegen lists a series of sticking points. One in two Flemings sees no advantage in foreigners living in our region. In regions that outperform Flanders, such as Maryland, the majority of the population believes diversity makes a society stronger. We are well-trained, but do too little with this training. Many highly skilled people work in healthcare, education or other sectors that work to a government budget. ‘As a result, we’remortgaging our growth,’ says Sleuwaegen.

Although Flanders beats all other regions in terms of exports, the proportion of services in exports is twice as low as in the US. That is all down to those government sectors. We are also too sensible and believe too little in our own ability, according to figures on intellectual property. Although Flanders spends a fair amount on research and development, Flemish companies hold few patents. The assessment of entrepreneurship is more mixed. Flanders has a great many new businesses, but they rarely progress. There also remains an excessive aversion to risk. Where internationalisation is concerned, Flanders scores highly. We have the most open economy of the ten, but we export too little hi-tech and too few services. And we continue to focus too much on neighbouring countries, while growth lies elsewhere. In China and India, for example. Another problem is that since the attacks on New York American investments in Flanders have stalled.

TABLE P. 7

ECONOMIC POLICY

Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai to become first Eurodistrict

A great many initiatives involving cooperation for the organisation of Careers Fairs, cross-border television, etc. beyond the national and language barriers have originated recently in the highly urbanised triangle of Lille, Tournai and Kortrijk. Yet the Belgian-French border and the border between Wallonia and Flanders often constitute an obstacle to the smooth running of such cooperation. For this reason, mayor of Kortrijk Stefaan De Clerck (CD&V) is taking all necessary measures to set up the very first Eurodistrict. Alongside Pierre Mauroy, former French prime minister, and former mayor of Lille and the Belgian Minister of Social Affairs Rudy Demotte (PS) he has been working on plans for the new European metropolis within a French-Belgian parliamentary commission. Agreements have been made with a view to the improved organisation of day-to-day life in the ‘lattice metropole’ (as De Clerck calls the urbanised region) in the areas of postal delivery, public transport, telephony, money transfers, etc. This project is unique of its kind in Europe. De Clerck views it as a model framework for the sweeping away of Europe’s old borders. The agreement is scheduled for signature on 12 June (FF).

FRANS DESMET • HET NIEUWSBLAD • 18 MAY

De Clerck gives two examples. One: the TGV station in Lille was and is a major springboard for that city. Kortrijk wants to tie in with that. Two: the Paris-Antwerp water link along the Seine and the Scheldt cannot pass through Doornik because of the preservation of historic heritage, but has to be extended along the Leie through Kortrijk. The aim is to be able in the foreseeable future to sail inland vessels loaded three-high with containers between Paris and Antwerp. ‘The French are going to dig more than 100 km of new canals for this. Zeebrugge also wants to link up to this new waterway.’

The new Eurodistrict will have its own legal personality, with its own bodies such as a Board of Directors - in which all the elected bodies of the towns, regions and departments concerned will be represented - and its own bilingual administration, which will allocate funds to joint projects. These will cover the complete administrative spectrum: town and country planning, infrastructure, employment and economy, environment, healthcare, public transport, security and any other area. This Eurodistrict will obviously remain bound by the laws and decrees of the countries and regions in which it operates. The aim of the district is to have joint dossiers made ‘ready for a decision’ on both sides of the border. ‘This Eurodistrict will create added value for those who live in it. It comes down to creating a more efficient cross-border society.’

focus on flanders • 13 May- 19 May 2006 • Number 20
BASF buys biotech firm CropDesign

**The planned floatation of the Ghent biotech firm has been abandoned**

The planned floatation of the Ghent biotech firm CropDesign has been abandoned. Instead, the company is being taken over by the German chemicals group BASF, reports De Standaard (17 May). The choice was obvious: BASF’s Plant Science division entered into an agreement at the end of last year to market CropDesign’s research results. After all, BASF wants to become the market-leader in the improvement of agricultural crops and wants to invest 700 million euros in plant genetics over the next few years. CropDesign evolved out of research into plant biotechnology by the University of Ghent. The company conducts research into plant genes that increase crop yield or make crops more resistant to drought. Nonetheless, the bankers’ preparations for the planned floatation of CropDesign were already at an advanced stage. The aim was to generate 40 million euros. However, BASF is apparently going to pay around 100 million euros for CropDesign (FF).

**Roula rta targets floatation in Paris**

Roula rta, the publisher of the magazines *Knack* and *Trends* and owner of half the commercial broadcaster VTM, is considering a listing on the Paris stock exchange. Roula rta is already listed in Brussels but wants to lend weight to its presence in France by floating there too. The extra floatation would also have to bring in money for the full take-over of the French magazine publisher Groupe Express-Expansion, which publishes *L’Express*, among others. Roula rta already owns 35% of the French group. The quarterly result of Roula rta Media Group was rather disappointing. The printed media continued to do well, but the results of the audiovisual arm leave something to be desired. The falling advertising revenue of the Flemish Media Company, the umbrella organisation of the commercial television channels VTM, Kanaal Twee, Jim TV and radio channel Q Music, are disappointing (FF).

**Volvo Ghent builds new model, Volkswagen Vorst also assembles Polo**

The Ghent plant of Swedish car manufacturer Volvo can begin production of a new model, the XC50, before summer. Volvo Cars Ghent will now build the large (S60 and V70) and small models (S40/V50). It is important that the Ghent plant also builds the chassis - the so-called EUCD platform - on which all future large Volvos will be built, says Managing Director Peter Leyman in *De Tijd* (17 May). Volvo Cars Ghent is the biggest Volvo plant in the world, and produces 258,000 cars a year. There was also good news in the Volkswagen plant in Vorst. The management announced that this the plant can also assemble 10,000 Polos, because the VW plants in Pamplona and Bratislava cannot cope with increased sales. At present, only the Golf is build in the Vorst plant (FF).

CropDesign evolved out of research into plant biotechnology by the University of Ghent. The basis was also laid there for the successful Plant Genetic Systems (PGS), the current Bayer Cropscience.

www.cropdesign.be

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**Press releases**

*Pascal Den Dooven • De Standaard • 17 May*

In recent weeks it was clear that the company was employing a dual approach. While bankers and the stock exchange supervisor the CBFA were putting the finishing touches to the prospectus, CropDesign was holding sale talks with BASF. The numerous venture capital funds of CropDesign saw a sale as a means of making crops more resistant to drought. The main shareholders of CropDesign - itself a spin-off of the Flanders Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) - are the Belgian venture capital groups GIMV, ING Private Equity, KBC Private Equity, TrustCapital, Burrill, Rothschild and Sofinnova.

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**Jeroen Lissens • De Tijd • 17 May**

In terms of production figures, Volvo Cars Ghent is also Belgium’s biggest car plant, ahead of Opel Antwerp (253,000 cars), Volkswagen Vorst (204,000) and Ford Genk (180,000). Since 199 Volvo has been part of the American Ford group. To save on the development costs of new models, this company uses the same chassis for all its makes. The large Ford S-Max and Galaxy, which have been rolling off the production lines in Genk since last month, are also built on the EUCD chassis. The XC50 is not the only new model coming to Ghent. This summer the firm will begin assembly of the small Volvo C30, a three-door car designed to lure away customers of the German Audi A3.

www.volvobe

Roula rta targets floatation in Paris

www.roularta.be

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**Bart Broens • De Tijd • 16 May**

Roula rta has already concluded a provisional agreement for the absorption of the remaining 65%, but will only know for certain if that operation is going through in September 2007. If that is the case Roula rta wants to finance half the amount of each take-over (145 million euros) with debts and a capital increase. It also did this for the 35%. Roula rta is thinking of a double operation, in Brussels and Paris with the emphasis on the Paris stock exchange. The extra listing could be a fact by the end of 2007. If the climate on the stock market looks too unhealthy for this, that will not threaten the take-over. Roula rta now has all the lines of credit it needs to pay for everything through the banks. Later on Roula rta can then still head to Euronext Paris.

www.roularta.be
The Federation of Private Broadcasting Companies, which brings together commercial radio and television broadcasting companies in Flanders, finds that the public broadcaster, the VRT, is continually making more and more use of commercial revenue from the market. Last year it raised 152 million euros in commercial revenue. That is 92% more than is allowed in its management agreement with the government. The VRT does this through all manner of back doors such as the sponsoring of events-based programmes, the federation claims. As a result, the VRT is disrupting competition. The public broadcaster is also exceeding its allowed operating costs by 27%. That is mainly due to the sharp rise in the price of audiovisual productions and sports rights. In other words, the VRT’s budget is much too high, according to the POF. The Flemish Media Company, which brings together VTM, Kanaal 2, Jim TV and Q Music, claims that the VRT has twice as many operating resources as itself. At the time the VMMa even lodged a complaint with the European Commission.

In contrast, the VRT maintains in its annual report that it is operating cost-effectively. Compared with public broadcasters in other European countries, it has the third-lowest budget. Calculated per annum per inhabitant it received financing of 66 euros per inhabitant per annum. This puts it in 2nd last place, states the VRT annual report. www.vrt.be

The selection of the Greatest Belgian was a successful history lesson for a large public on the Flemish public network VRT. For each candidate - from cyclist Eddy Merckx to King Boudewijn -for the title one Celebrity Fleming ran a campaign. In the end the winner was Father Damiaan. The success of The Greatest Belgian with the general public gave the VRT the idea to make the public more aware of Flemish monuments with a similar formula. In the Battle of the Monuments, the event is being billed, TV-viewing Flanders will crown a monument which will then be renovated. Each project will be defended by a well-known personality in programmes on VRT radio stations and on the second network. The VRT took its inspiration for this competition again from the BBC, more specifically its successful ‘Restoration’ series. The VRT will also be working closely with the competent Minister Dirk Van Mechelen (VRT) and four heritage associations. (FF).

LEO BONTE • DE STANDAARD • 17 MAY

Yesterday a ‘public appeal’ was launched. ‘Together with the VRT we’ve chosen to highlight the massive wealth of our immovable heritage,’ says Minister Van Mechelen. ‘The projects therefore involve monuments, landscapes or archaeological objects.’

The closing date for the submission of candidacies is 20 June. The sector will set up a selection committee to choose 25 candidates from all the projects submitted, in principle five projects per province. These will be announced during August. An initial spearhead will be the Open Monuments Day on 10 September, at which the 25 selected projects will play a prominent role. After that the drop-out race will begin which will culminate in the grand finale.

A project such as this is only worthwhile if the money is available to finance the restoration. If a protected monument is chosen, Minister Van Mechelen guarantees he will grant the restoration subsidy as quickly as possible from his ‘strategic reserve’. A special restoration fund of 500,000 euros will be set up for the restoration of unprotected monuments. Be that as it may, it remains a modest amount. Major restoration projects of castles or churches will have no chance at all, while chapels or orangeries will do. The selection committee will examine the feasibility of the projects closely. The winning project will be restored in any case, but the other finalists will also receive financial support from the fund. The first results must be visible to the public in 2008. According to TV director Van Hecke, with this cross-media project the VRT is proving that it performs an important social role. And Van Mechelen is also convinced that this competition can provide a new impetus to the fight for the protection of monuments. For the Minister it must not therefore be a one-off initiative.

www.onroerenderfgoed.be/openoproep

Report ‘The Creative Economy’

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SOURCE: DE TIJD

www.vrt.be
CULTURE

Diary

**MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE**

**• Until 27 May: KunstenaarFestivaldeArts** with artists from all over the world on 18 spots in Brussels with Christoph Marthaler, Meg Stuart, Romeo Castelluci, Alain Platel, Wang Bing, Marie N'Diaye, Chris Kondek, Frank Theys and others, Brussels; info: www.kdfa.be 070/0222.199

**• 22 and 26 May: Martha Argerich & Aleksander Rabinovitsj-Barakovsky (Argentina/Russia), piano adventures, De Singel, Antwerp and Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be, www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28

**• 24 May: Dutch Chamber Choir and The Raschèr Saxophone Quartet conducted by Tõnu Kaljuste with Mauricio Kagel, Erkki-Sven Tüür and Giya Kancheli, Miniemen Church, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00

**• 28 May: Jean-Louis Hebert, Vorst National, Brussels; info: www.vorstnational.be

**• 27 May: Sarah Hay song, Tylaïne Van den Broeck, piano, work from Stephen Sondheim, Maltby & Shire and a series of new composers, all within the ‘typical British cabaret’ like can be seen in London’s West End. Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00

**• 27 and 28 May: Florilege by Movimenton’s Dance School, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00

**• 29 and 30 May: Collegium Vocale conducted by Philippe Herreweghe with JS Bach, Mass, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00 and www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28

**• 30 May: Zappa plays Zappa, Vorst National, Brussels; info: www.vorstnational.be

**• 30 May: Lais and Flemish Radio Choir, Flagey, Brussels; info: www.flagey.be

**• 30 May: Richard Goode piano with Johann Sebastian Bach, Arnold Schönberg, Johannes Brahms and Franz Schubert, Royal Conservatory, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be 02/507.82.00

**• 31 May: Eric Clapton, Antwerp Sportpaleis, Antwerp; info: www.sportpaleis.be

**• 2 and 3 June: Night music for chorus, choral music by Vic Nees and Kurt Bikkebergs with the Choir of the Flemish Opera, Flanders Opera, Ghent and Zuidervierschuis, Antwerp, info: www.zuidervierschuis.be/ vlaamsopera.be

**EXPO**

**• 27 April to 18 June: Serodio, Furtado & Associates (architectural school from Porto), exhibition, De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be

**• 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 24 June: Kijkdozen en denkmodellen [Showcases and models of thought], Jan Fabre, exhibition, Flemish Parliament, Lokettenzaal, Brussels; info: www.vlaamseparlement.be

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

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, Kasteelstraat 97, 8700 Tielt and can also be obtained by e-mail. The website www.focusonflanders.be contains an electronic archive of published articles

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**• Until 28 May: Kutlug Ataman (Turkey), De-Regulation, exhibition, Muhka, Antwerp, info: www.muhka.be 03 260 99 99

**• Until 28 May: Kutlug Ataman, Kuba, exhibition, Extra City, Antwerp, info: www.extracity.org

**• 2 April to 28 May: International Festival of Photography, CC Scharpoord, Knokke; info: www.fotofestival.be Until 1 October: Beaufort Outside: open air exhibition along the Flemish coast; info: www.2006beaufort.be

**• Until 3 September: Beaufort Inside, exhibition, PMMK, Ostend; info: www.2006beaufort.be www.pmmk.be 070/22.50.05

**• Until 29 May: New Territories, exhibition about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, De Hallen, Bruges; info: www.culturecentrumbrugge.be

**• 26 and 27 May: Technocamps, documentary by Frank Theys, KVS, Brussels, info: www.kvs.be

**• Until 3 September: Homo Faber, Jan Fabre and the ancient Masters, KMSKA, Antwerp, info: www.kmska.be 03/238.78.09

**• Until 15 August: Homo Faber, Jan Fabre, the early work, Muhka, Antwerp; info: www.muhka.be

**• Until 3 September: Bruegel 06, summer festival with exhibitions and events in connection with the 16th century painter, Bruegel printed and Bruegel imaginary, Royal Library, Brussels; info: www.bruegel06.be 02/454.87.54

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Translation: Eurologos

Printing: Drukkerij Lannoo nv, Tielt

Responsible editor: Luc Demeester, Marke

48 issues

Subscription rate printed edition + 2 e-mail editions + password to search the archive (www.focusonflanders.be): 2.43 euro

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