

focus on FLANDERS

THE DUTCH SPEAKING PART OF BELGIUM

PRESS REVIEW

WEEKLY, DOES NOT APPEAR IN JULY • NUMBER 34 • 5 OCTOBER – 11 OCTOBER 2002

Flanders is the most prosperous region in the world

FLEMINGS HAVE NO CAUSE FOR COMPLAINT

Each year the United Nations has a human development index calculated for all countries. This is done on the basis of life span, health, level of knowledge (degree of education), and standard of living. In his policy statement, Premier Verhofstadt (VLD) pointed out that based on this index, Belgium occupies a creditable fourth place, behind Norway, Canada, and Sweden. The Flemish Administration for Planning and Statistics has now recalculated the data using Flemish indicators. What does this show? That together with Norway, Flanders is the most prosperous region in the world. It should immediately be added, however, that here Flanders is being compared with countries and that we do not know the results of other wealthy regions such as

Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg in Germany or Emilia-Romagna in Italy. For Minister-President Dewael (VLD) this was still an opportunity to once again point out that Flemings have no cause for complaint (FF).

LUC STANDAERT • HET BELANG VAN LIMBURG • 11 OCTOBER

The UN's Human Development Index is put together on the basis of three indicators of prosperity: life expectancy, level of education, and standard of living (wealth, expressed in gross domestic product per capita of the population). Across all three indicators, Belgium scores 0.939. Flanders on its own scores 0.942, exactly the same as top-of-the-list Norway. The higher score is the result of the higher life expectancy that a Fleming has compared to a Belgian, because education levels in Flanders and Belgium are the same and strangely enough the standard of living of Flemings is even slightly below that of Belgians. This last fact should not necessarily be taken as evidence of Flemish money disappearing to Wallonia (via the federal collection of taxes, social security contributions, etc.). After all, there is still Brussels, which as an urban region almost automatically has a higher GDP per capita of the population (many Flemings work in Brussels and their productivity is counted there). What's more, the degree of prosperity does not vary much in the top 20. Italy still scores 0.913 in twentieth place.

INTRODUCTION



The Bel-20 Index has fallen to its lowest level in six years, we learned on 9 October (*De Financieel-Economische Tijd*). That is mainly due to the free-fall of bank insurers' shares (prices down by 60 to

80% since the beginning of 2002), which account for a fairly large part of the BEL20. As elsewhere, the insurance sector is also taking a beating in Belgium. Insurance companies invested heavily in shares and are therefore losing heavily. As a result, they are increasingly seeking sanctuary in premium increases and excluding policyholders who represent too great a risk (*Knack*, 9 October). Banks are also losing large sums of money on their portfolio shares and on top of this have to create more and more reserves for bad credits. To boost their own financial results a little they are being forced to make cuts in personnel costs. Therefore, lay-offs that were planned as a consequence of merger operations such as that of Dexia, Bacob, and Artesiabank are now being brought forward. At the same time, the banks are becoming increasingly strict with less solvent companies. This was discovered last week by the Turnhout printers Brepols. A consortium of eight banks decided to close the credit lines. Six hundred jobs are hanging in the balance. The company has applied for a judicial settlement. Nor was that the only bad news from the business world. When an international group restructures, people start quaking in the Belgian plants. Alcatel did so recently, this week it was the turn of the German chemicals giant Bayer and the Dutch electronics group Philips. Bayer announced that it wants to close its BSI plant in Antwerp, which it operates in a joint venture with Shell. The trade unions fear some 400 jobs will go. At Philips the components division (e.g., loudspeakers) is simply being shut down and cuts are being made in the optical storage systems division (CD and DVD). In the Flemish sites at Dendermonde and Leuven (components) and Hasselt (CD and DVD) this would put some 950 jobs under threat. And yet according to *Knack*, Belgians (8 out of 10) still have one certainty in these tough times: their own home. Property seems the safest investment and at present the market is operating at full speed. The magazine does, however, warn against a possible doom scenario even here. If large numbers of buyers can no longer afford their mortgage payments due to the continuing poor economic situation, property prices will unavoidably fall.

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief

CONTENTS

Politics

A federal budget with red, green and blue accents	2
Government debt falling more slowly	3
Row over reduction of allocation for regions	3
Row with opposition over crime figures	4
Some remarks at the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Vlaams Blok	6

Economy and defence

Delsey Airlines go through an eventful week	5
Bomb spotting becomes a tradition	5

Culture

Van Grembergen reassures cultural sector	7
--	---

A federal budget with red, green and blue accents

A CAUTIOUS BUDGET THAT STILL LEAVES ROOM FOR NEW INITIATIVES

After a marathon 22-hour meeting, the Federal Government managed to come up with a balanced budget. It is assuming economic growth of 2.1%. According to Premier Verhofstadt, it has become a cautious budget that still leaves room for new initiatives. The Government has found 1.5 billion euros worth of savings and new income. That is half a billion more than was strictly necessary to balance the budget. Because no single party can afford to lose face in the run-up to the elections, the Blues, Reds, and Greens all seem to have got what they wanted. For the Liberals, the announced cut in personal income tax and corporation tax (Reynders, MR) was sacrosanct. The reforms of justice (+5%, Verwilghen, VLD) and the police (Duquesne, MR) could also not be touched. It can also claim the merits for the sharp cut in social security contributions, which employers in the hotel and catering industry have to pay for temporary workers. Obviously the Greens and Socialists also demanded their piece of the pie. The Greens got a generous increase of 9% or 64 million euros for the development co-operation budget (Boutmans, Agalev), a growth path was traced out to achieve the proposed 0.7% of GDP by 2010 and they received the promise that a Kyoto Fund would be created to buy possible saleable emission standards if Belgium fails to achieve the Kyoto standard for greenhouse gases. The Flemish Socialists (Vandenbroucke, SP.A) got an increase of 6.5% in care insurance to 15.342 billion euros. Vandenbroucke was also able to announce an increase in the minimum pensions for both employees and self-employed (+5.6%). The French-speaking Socialists (Onkelinx, PS) were able to land an increase in the minimum wages (for 530,000 workers) of up to 40 euros per month. The Railways' debts will be taken over, not in 2003, but in 2004. For next year the state enterprise must make do with an increase of 150 million euros, while the other state enterprise, the Post Office, is getting an extra 300 million euros (FF).

Opinion

STEFAAN HUYSENTRUYT •
DE FINANCIËEL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD •
8 OCTOBER

The Socialists have emerged from the budgetary conclave as undoubted winners. Next year, the funds for care insurance will nominally rise by 6.5%, significantly greater than the real growth of 2.5% specified in the coalition agreement. The lowest pensions have not been forgotten either, and the Silver Fund (270 million euros to cope with the ageing population) will be further strengthened according to agreement. But without doubt many will claim credit for the increase in social expenditure. The Greens will point out that the Red-Green social front has been a success, whereas the VLD will call the rise in social expenditure the best evidence that it has indeed become a broad people's party. Whatever, none of the coalition partners will allow their budgetary booty to be touched. That means that if the economy plummets further, early elections will be the only way out.

GUY TEGENBOS • DE STANDAARD •
8 OCTOBER

'Just because a villain reoffends three times doesn't mean you shouldn't lock him up the fourth time,' said Flemish Liberal Parliamentary Party Leader in the Chamber Hugo Coveliens (VLD) last week about Frank Vandenbroucke (SP.A). The Social Affairs Minister had already managed three times to substantially increase the healthcare costs budget. Surely Vandenbroucke could not think it would work a fourth time! But he is doing it again. Yet another one billion euros. How does Vandenbroucke do it? When it came to power the Purple-Green coalition agreed that the budget for care insurance should increase by 2.5% per annum (excluding inflation). The truth is that the care-insurance budget has risen by an average of more than 6% each year in this period of government, producing a profit of some 25% or 3 billion euros af-

ter four years. How can that be explained? What does Vandenbroucke have that others do not? His greatest strength is his seriousness. His S-factor. He is a serious man who knows his files, who looks before he leaps, who always wins in technical political discussions because he always knows that bit more than the other person, and who is selective in what he asks. But such an S-factor is not enough to succeed in the tough world of politics. Vandenbroucke can rely on three other power factors, which can be represented by the letters A, B, and C. A stands for the Vandenbroucke-Verhofstadt Axis. They were the two strong figures who drafted the Purple-Green coalition agreement. At the time they entered into a silent pact. Verhofstadt could be the undisputed leader of the government and could also embody Vandenbroucke's active welfare state; in exchange, Vandenbroucke could dominate social policy. B stands for benchmarking and Baumol. William Baumol is the economist who demonstrated in The unbalanced growth that expenditure on care in Western states is rising irrevocably more quickly than other expenditure. That is because care requirements are constantly on the increase, partly due to the ageing population and medical advances. B also stands for benchmarking, the increasing tendency to refer to the best or average scores in Europe (5 to 6% per annum). Countries that do not factor this into their budget end up either in Dutch situations - waiting lists and ultimately a rebellion by voters - or in earlier Belgian situations, with the budget constantly being exceeded. The third power base comes under the C of consensus and coalition. Recent polls taught all the political parties that voters have put healthcare right at the top of their list of concerns. Often it even comes before safety. Last year the VLD still dared to attack expenditure on healthcare, but not this year. Coveliens did not know this and came under heavy fire. Vandenbroucke is also crafty enough to enter into coalitions. He linked the increase in pensions for the self-employed, a must for the Liberal VLD, to the things he himself absolutely wanted.

Public debt falling more slowly than promised

INITIALLY THE AIM WAS THAT THE 2002 AND 2003 BUDGETS WOULD NOT BE BALANCED, BUT WOULD CLOSE WITH A GROWING SURPLUS

In his fourth policy statement, Premier Verhofstadt was again overflowing with self-confidence. There is no point speculating on early elections, as many papers did, the Premier claims. The arrangements will be carried out. The people want us to finish our work, says Verhofstadt. There are twenty-three major bills in the pipeline. On a wide range of subjects such as road safety, doing away with nuclear energy, cutting corporation tax, increasing pensions, and a whole host of social measures. Verhofstadt wants them to be approved by Parliament before June 2003. The one-and-a-half billion euros, which the Verhofstadt government saved when making up the budget has met with criticism in the press. A great many accounting tricks were employed and it is absolutely not the case that only the ministries are footing the bill, claims *De Standaard* (9 October). Individuals and companies are also contributing. Thus there is an increase in excise and VAT on tobacco of 191 million euros, and businesses are paying 30 million euros more for submitting their annual accounts. According to *De Financieel-Economische Tijd* (9 October), one third of the savings is one-off and therefore not structural, because the effect will only be felt in 2003. Thus the municipal surcharges in the payroll tax are being increased from 6 to 6.7%. That will provide the Federal Government with 260 million euros in 2003, but that money will have to be passed on to the municipalities. In contrast to the Netherlands, France, and Germany, Belgium balances its budget without a deficit, Verhofstadt also announced proudly. But *De Standaard* points out that for the sake of convenience he omitted the financial planning his government initially used. Initially the aim was that the 2002 and 2003 budgets would not be balanced, but would close with a growing surplus (FF).

Opinion

BART STURTEWAGEN • DE STANDAARD
9 OCTOBER

If you put the old graph alongside that which the government unveiled yesterday, you can see that next year's government debt had only been allowed to amount to 97.7% of GDP. In reality, the figure is 102.3%. That seems a minor difference, but in absolute figures it equates to roughly 12.5 billion euros. It is not now a question of whether the government could have done better in the given economic circumstances. It is, however, a clear warning that voluntarism, apart from the benefits of its dynamic, also comes at a price.

We do not expect a government to promise so many sweets to so many target groups in the run-up to the elections. Nor do we expect it to appropriate temporary economic windfalls as if they were the fruits of its superior policy.

We do expect it, without tricks, to cope with the peaks and troughs of the economic roller coaster. That means that if it is unexpectedly lucky one year, it saves for later. If that happens, it can temporarily relax its discipline in times of decline. There is now a risk that it has not done the first half, but is still doing the second.

The vulnerability of this budget is therefore considerable. If it falls short, the correction will be all the more painful. But that will have been Saddam's fault.

Row over reduction in allocation to federal states

FF EDITORIAL TEAM

The Communities and Regions receive allocations from the Federal Government to finance their policy. One of these allocations consists of some of the revenue from personal income tax. To establish the amount of the personal income tax allocation for a given budgetary year (e.g., 2002), the personal income tax allocation of the previous budgetary year (2001) is adjusted to the inflation and real growth of gross domestic income (GDI) for the budgetary year in question (2002), or more precisely, using the expected inflation and expected growth of gross domestic product (GDP). In the course of the next budgetary year (2003) the precise calculation is made, based on actual inflation and real GDI growth. Last week, however, experts from the Institute for National Accounts (Instituut voor de Nationale Rekeningen, INR) published new, downwardly adjusted figures for GDI growth, not only for 2001 (0.5 instead of 1%), but also for 2000 (2.22 instead of 2.82%) and 1999 (2.47 instead of 2.51%). Although Premier Verhofstadt reassured the Community and Regional Governments that the Federal Government would not demand repayment of the overpaid amount, the Communities and Regions are now calling for a meeting of the Interministerial Committee for Finances and the Budget to clarify things. Because there is a threat that the allocation to the Federal States (Communities) will be cut by 332 million euros compared to the budget drawn up for 2003. According to *De Financieel-Economische Tijd* (8 October), the Finance Act does not provide a conclusive answer to the question of whether the personal income tax allocation can be reduced on the basis of lower growth figures for 1999, 2000, and 2001. The paper notes that in the meantime, the Federal Government has incorporated the 332 million euros into its budget for 2003.

DEBATE ON THE BUDGET

AVIATION

Verhofstadt answers opposition with favourable crime figures

FF EDITOR

Yves Leterme, Parliamentary Party Leader of the CD&V opposition in the Parliament, accused Premier Verhofstadt in the Parliamentary budget debate of having manipulated the budget, of making false promises, and of not taking sufficient account of the poor economic climate. According to Geert Bourgeois, Parliamentary Party Leader of the N-VA in the Chamber, the government is doing nothing more than handing out sweets to win votes at the elections in 2003. Both are convinced that the economic growth of 2.1% is far too rosy. But feelings only began to run really high when the opposition (CD&V, N-VA, Vlaams Blok) wondered aloud what had happened to the crime statistics for 2001, which they had been asking for in vain for weeks. To their great surprise, Verhofstadt came up with the goods shortly afterwards. According to figures from Internal Affairs, crime in Belgium fell by 8% in 2001. A total of 886,695 offences were recorded, which is 77,572 fewer than in 2000. 'This proves that our policy is working and that the police reform is bearing fruit,' said the Premier. The opposition was knocked for six (*De Standaard*, 10 October) and Verhofstadt was able to leave the room contented.

Delsey Airlines lives through an exciting week

RUMOURS ABOUT CAPITAL INCREASE OR SALE OF COMPANY ARE DENIED

For a whole week there was speculation in the papers over the possible sale of Delsey Airlines. Owner Tony Gram, who earlier this year took over all the shares in Van Gaver Airlines and then changed the airline to Delsey Airlines, had apparently been negotiating with various potential buyers, but he himself refused to say anything to the press. Losses at Delsey Airlines, which flies from Brussels to New York, Boston, Los Angeles, and Yerevan (Armenia) with large Airbuses, have apparently been mounting up. The company is said to be battling with fundamental problems: clients such as Air Holland and Armenian Airlines pay nothing or very little for the flights made by Delsey on their behalf. To put pressure on Armenian Airlines, on 8 October Gram even cancelled the flights to New York and Boston and delayed the one to Los Angeles. The Armenian company had apparently bought seats on these flights. Gram recently acquired a majority interest in Air Holland, but it quickly emerged that this company was on the edge of bankruptcy. Delsey Airlines' Atlantic flights are heavily loss-making, because they are not even half full and cannot compete with American carriers such as Continental, who in contrast to Delsey do offer a transfer facility, so that passengers in the US can easily transfer to a flight to their final destination (*De Morgen*, 8 October). The result was also that suppliers did not get paid. Sabena Technics, who carries out maintenance on the Airbuses, threatened to stop technical inspections if Gram did not pay them.

But on 10 October it emerged that Tony Gram had paid most of his outstanding Sabena Technics invoices at the last moment. Other suppliers had apparently also largely been paid. Fundamental solutions in the form of a substantial increase in capital or the contribution of new shareholders are not at issue, says Gram (FF).

JEROEN LISSENS • DE FINANCIËLE-
ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 10 OCTOBER

According to Gram, there was never any question of a chronic problem in paying his suppliers. Gram ensures us that at no time did he consider closing the books. He denies actively looking for a buyer, 'but, of course, partners and investors frequently come forward of their own accord'. There is no talk of an imminent sale of Delsey Airlines, says Gram.

'We are a rich company. Few new companies have a capital of 3.5 million euros,' states Gram. 'We have never gone knocking on anyone's door.' Gram does, however, admit that the company will stand or fall by its own willingness to open or close the money tap. How much he has already invested in Delsey Airlines is not clear. The consequence of the new round of fighting for the pennies was that passengers on the midday flight to New York and Boston were faced with a delay.

In a press release Delsey Airlines also announced that the agreement with Armenia had also been extended and expanded. The Yerevan-Brussels-Los Angeles route will therefore continue to operate.

CRIME FIGURES PROVIDED BY THE FEDERAL POLICE

	FIGURES NIS* 2000	FIGURES VERHOFSTADT 2000	FIGURES VERHOFSTADT 2001
THEFT, BURGLARY, CARJACKINGS, HOLD-UPS	420,897	468,868	440,789
VIOLENT ATTACKS ON PROPERTY (DESTRUCTION, ARSON, HOOLIGANISM...)	89,605	98,396	92,211
VIOLENCE AGAINST PEOPLE (MURDER, INJURIES, SEXUAL OFFENCES...)	60,748	68,937	65,795
TOTAL	848,648	964,267	886,695
			-8%
			+3%

* NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STATISTICS

SOURCE: INFOGRAFIEK RUG

ARMS FOR NEPAL

Greens can make good damage suffered in Nepal crisis

WHETHER THE ARMS WILL BE DELIVERED OR NOT, ARMS MANUFACTURER FN WILL RECEIVE ITS MONEY

The Nepalese King Gyanendra announced last week that he was fed up with incompetent politicians and sacked Premier Deuba and his government. The elections planned for November have been postponed indefinitely. The King has temporarily assumed total control. Since the lifting of the state of emergency on 28 August, the internal conflict between the government army and Maoist rebels has again flared up violently. These developments have put the future of the decision of the Belgian Government to grant an export licence for the sale of 5,500 machine-guns by the FN weapons factory in Herstal to the regime in Nepal at risk. For the Greens, the Socialists and the Liberals it is clear that there can be no more talk of democracy in the Himalayan state. For the Greens of Agalev, who have always opposed the sale of arms but in the end came off worst at the hands of Foreign Affairs Minister Louis Michel (MR), the statement by VLD Chairman De Gucht that Nepal can 'no longer be viewed as a young democracy' was like music to their ears. All parties, however, even the Greens, are prepared to wait for the report of a Belgian committee of observers who have travelled to Nepal to gauge the political climate. But regardless of whether the export licence is now suspended, FN will get its money, according to *Knack* (FF).

PATRICK MARTENS • KNACK •
9 OCTOBER

There are a great many questions concerning the insurance policy which the Delcredere Service issued for the export risk incurred by FN in Nepal. On 5 August the Board of Directors, which included representatives of six Federal Ministries and the Flemish and Walloon Governments, approved this policy for a sum of 15.4 billion euros (on a contract value of 25 million euros). But this was not done with the required quorum. Only 7 of the 18 directors were present. What's more, the representative of Finance Minister Didier Reyn-

ders (MR) voted against it, because he found the amount to be insured for Nepal 'exceptionally high'. Even before the Board of Directors could deal with the matter on 23 September, the policy had already been granted to FN Herstal. Meanwhile the legal validity was contested in letters by the Dutch-speaking Co-Director of the Delcredere Service, Christian Vincke and by State Secretary for Development Co-operation, Eddy Boutmans (Agalev). But that does not in any way alter the insured risk. FN Herstal wins in any event, because it will receive 15.4 million euros, even if not a single minimi goes to Nepal. The cautious manoeuvres by the Purple-Greens also have to do with the discussions currently being held between the Government and representatives of the majority on changes to the law on arms trading promised by Verhofstadt. This concerns the integration of the European arms code into the law, the extension of article 4 to also extend the ban on arms sales to police forces and countries that use child soldiers and on parliamentary control of decisions relating to arms sales.

FF EDITOR

On 10 October the government reached an agreement on the adaptation of the Arms Act of 1991 to the European code of conduct. Once the adapted Act has been ratified, Belgium will no longer be able to grant export licences if another European country has refused a similar licence. The export of arms - but also of equipment for the police (water cannons, handcuffs) and hi-tech equipment used for non-military purposes - to countries that spend more on arms than on social policy is no longer possible. Sales will also no longer be made to countries that use child soldiers. If there is any doubt as to a country's eligibility to receive arms sales, a monitoring team can be sent there to produce a report in situ. Finally, parliamentary control is also being strengthened.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Bom Spotting becomes a tradition in Kleine Brogel

FF EDITOR

It has become an annual tradition: the bomb-spotting demonstration at the air base at Kleine Brogel in Limburg. Each year groups of demonstrators gather there and try to scramble over the fencing to 'peacefully occupy' the base. They want the nuclear weapons that are stored there to be removed. However, the peace activists - who include a number of Green politicians and even one Liberal senator (Patrick Vankrunkelsven, who recently switched from Spirit to the VLD) - are fed up that their actions hardly have any effect. They had therefore announced that they would 'disarm' the base themselves, for example by painting the cockpits of F16s black. However, the first thing the bomb-spotters are aiming at is to provoke lawsuits, to be able to initiate proceedings themselves and argue against the stores of nuclear weapons. The force mobilised by Mayor Kelchtermans (CD&V) of Peer for this weekend was impressive: 2,000 soldiers, 400 police officers and helicopters. Kelchtermans had heard rumours that a number of campaigners had other than peaceful intentions. For many campaigners the whole thing was a bit of an anti-climax. This time, the tactics of the forces of order consisted of settling in behind the fencing. This meant it was possible to climb over the fencing, but as soon as the bomb-spotters set foot on the base they were rounded up, searched and had to surrender their ID cards. A total of 1,120 administrative arrests were made, both inside and outside the base, where the ban on gatherings also applied. Those apprehended on the base will not be prosecuted, as it involves a political offence and must be brought before the Court of Assizes. That is a far too costly and time-consuming procedure, which means the Public Prosecutor's Office is not considering prosecutions. Mobilising the impressive force of order has already cost the Public Prosecutor's Office enough money, according to Public Prosecutor Marc Rubbens in *De Standaard* (7 October).

Some remarks on the 25th anniversary of the Vlaams Blok

THE DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES OF A SHARE IN GOVERNMENT FOR THE LIJST PIM FORTUIN IN THE NETHERLANDS AND THE FPÖ IN AUSTRIA HAVE PUT IDEAS INTO POLITICIANS' HEADS.

The far-right party, the Vlaams Blok, which bagged fifteen seats in the Federal Parliament at the last parliamentary elections in 1999, is celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary. That was celebrated with a spectacular show in the Ghent Capitool Hall and as always with the obligatory counter-demonstrations in the vicinity of the event. The 'Own People First' party continues to rely on arousing anti-Islamic feelings, xenophobia, and feeding latent feelings of insecurity. Immigration and crime are once again the central themes of their election campaign and will - as the other parties are also claiming - again become the actual stakes of the elections. Of this Gerolf Annemans (*Gazet van Antwerpen*, 5 October) and Frank Vanhecke (*Het Volk*, 6 October) are firmly convinced. In the election campaign the Blok therefore wants to direct its arrows firstly at the liberal VLD, because it has apparently failed to keep a number of promises relating to safety, justice, and immigration. In these twenty-five years, the Blok has also - at least to the outside world - become somewhat more moderate and civilised. Thus, the motto now reads 'Aanpassen of oprasssen' ('Fit In or Leave'). In other words, foreigners who want to fit in can stay in Flanders. But for their own followers Philip DeWinter can still not keep himself from pulling out all the stops. At his party's celebrations, Dewinter made jeweller Wouter Tiberghien out to be a hero because he shot dead an Eastern European assailant and in the same breath he also regretted that he did not shoot the man's two companions. And invariably this same Dewinter conjures up the spectre of a Flanders where the churches are being replaced by minarets and mosques. The other Flemish parties still have a mutual agreement that political and administrative agreements will not be entered into on any level with the Blok. But many commentators feel this 'cordon sanitaire' is one of the main reasons why the Blok has become big without any effort, why it has become the

biggest party in many working-class areas. Furthermore, for years this cordon paralysed any debate on 'the multicultural society'. Anyone who dared criticise it was often tarred with the same brush as the Blok, claims *De Standaard* (FF).

BART BRINCKMAN • DE STANDAARD •
6 OCTOBER

The debate on the black marks of integration policy has hardly been brought up in Flanders. Barely one week ago Antwerp's SP.A Chairman Robert Voorhamme admitted that for years his party had laughed off the signals from their supporters. He felt uncomfortable about 'this abdication'.

Too late. The Vlaams Blok has become the biggest workers' party. It was the first to successfully convert the raw but no less real dissatisfaction with foreigners into political power. The decision at the end of the 1980s to embroider the separatist discourse with a virulent anti-foreigner attitude and a tough approach to crime was a stroke of genius.

Scientific research showed that Blok voters did not allow themselves to be led by ethical conservatism or Flemish nationalism. The immigration problem will also be the making of the Vlaams Blok over the coming years.

The party is reaping profit from the fear of the unknown provoked by advancing globalisation.

Increasing mistrust of institutions (political and legal) and a tendency towards individualism - not to say egotism - nourish the breeding ground still further. In recent years mistrust among Flemings has increased sharply. Doubts over their own future add to that mistrust. It is therefore no surprise that the Blok is particularly successful with the elderly and working classes.

In recent years the party tried to polish up its racist foreigner discourse. The party wants to come across as a decent right-wing people's party: the party of

common sense, that says what is on the tip of the man in the street's tongue.

The other parties have given up trying to win back the Blok voters. Everyone is targeting the centre because no one appreciates how to approach the right. Whether they should simply turn their noses up at the electorate.

Meanwhile, the cordon is under pressure. The disastrous consequences of a share in government for the Lijst Pim Fortuin in the Netherlands and the FPÖ in Austria have put ideas into politicians' heads. Because if the Blok makes further electoral gains, the whole of Flanders will be threatened with the same scenario as in Antwerp, with all the parties having to govern against the Blok. That is a perfect recipe for further growth. Antwerp has already shown that.



Van Grembergen reassures cultural sector

IT IS NOT THE JOB OF THE GOVERNMENT TO INSTRUCT ARTISTS TO ACHIEVE SOCIAL OBJECTIVES, HE EXPLAINED

Last week the new Culture Minister Paul Van Grembergen (Spirit) unveiled his policy in a speech in the Ghent cultural temple 'De Vooruit'. His predecessor and fellow party member Bert Anciaux had stirred up many bad feelings among playwrights, visual artists, musicians, and other cultural workers by repeatedly calling for greater cultural participation and dissemination. The cultural sector now wanted to know whether Van Grembergen would be following the same line. Whether, for example, they would have to reduce the quality of their work to reach a greater public. Van Grembergen reassured them. There would be no need to do any such thing, he said. It is not the job of the government to instruct artists to achieve social objectives, he explained. Culture is simply a basic right. (FF).

KARL VANDEN BROECK • DE MORGEN • 7 OCTOBER

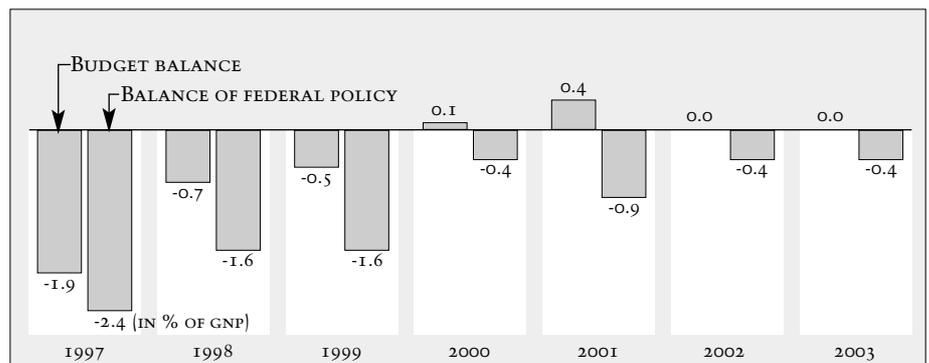
temporary artists live badly by the grace of traditional and sacred art. I did not choose in favour of modern dance and against classical, I chose both,' said the Minister, referring to a row over ballet subsidies. Van Grembergen also pointed out that the 'border area between non-commercial or subsidised culture and commercial culture was becoming larger. Managing that border area would undoubtedly be a major challenge for future culture ministers. The arts sector must not be under any illusion. Perhaps the visual arts will get extra money, but any additional budgetary funds will go to heritage as a priority. Van Grembergen announced a genuine 'master plan' for heritage policy. Van Grembergen is and will remain - despite the Spirit alliance with the SPA - a Flemish nationalist. His call to strengthen Flemish cultural identity by confronting other cultures fits in with the old 'open tradition' of the Volk-sunie. He also mentioned the emanci-

pating and socially activating function of culture. 'Instructing artists or cultural organisations to achieve social objectives is going too far. But nor should we go to the other extreme by denying the social impact of culture.' Socio-artistic projects will therefore be given a permanent place. Finally, a short to-do list: broaden and anchor the cultural debate, extra funds for heritage and visual arts, attention to special public target groups and the reform of the advisory councils. Van Grembergen has another eighteen months to implement his plans and those of his predecessor Anciaux. As the icing on the cake, the right to culture should be included in the new Flemish Constitution. 'Culture is the home of the spirit,' the Minister concluded.

'Cultural participation is not the sole responsibility of the artist, but also of authorities and organisations that choose to disseminate art. Not everyone must go to the theatre, the opera, or the museum. But if culture is a basic right, the government must be inspired so that as many people as possible can experience art and culture. You shouldn't have to, but you must be able to,' said Van Grembergen in his speech in De Vooruit.

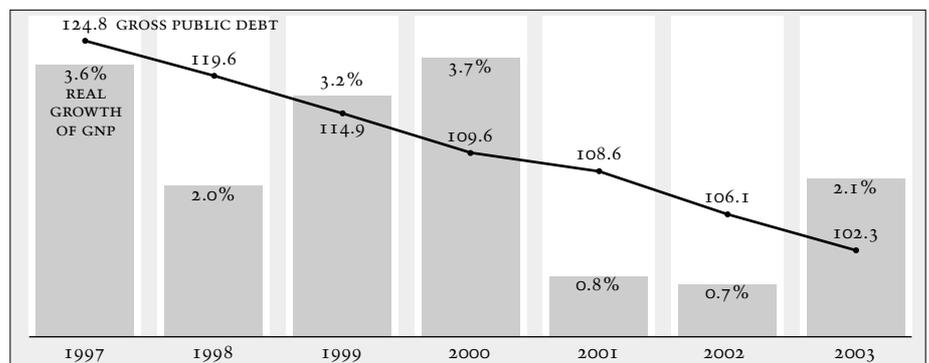
On the budget: the increase in the culture budget played too much into the hands of those who already had it: the Mattheus effect. The differences between the sectors 'are not always the result of an explicit policy choice by this or that culture minister, but rather a result of history'. Thus, contemporary visual arts and architecture, cultural heritage, museums, popular culture, and the archives are undervalued. 'There will be a correction,' warned Van Grembergen. Van Grembergen also took seriously the criticism that a system that is based heavily on the opinion of experts leads to preferential treatment for innovative art forms. 'The avant-garde reacts or reinterprets the repertoire. Con-

EVOLUTION OF BELGIAN BUDGET BALANCE



SOURCE: DE STANDAARD

GROSS PUBLIC DEBT



SOURCE: DE STANDAARD

Diary

MUSIC, DANCE THEATRE

- 8 to 19 October: *Flanders Internatiol filmfestival*, Ghent; info: 070/225.225 www.filmfestival.be
- 16 October: *ZZ Top*, Vorst Nationaal, Brussels; info: 0900/000991
- 14 October: *Recital Elena Prokina*, Flanders Opera, Ghent; info: 09/225.24.25 www.vlaamseopera.be
- 18 October: *Prince @ The New Power Generation*, Sportpaleis, Antwerp; info: 0900/26060
- Until 20 October: *South Africa in residence*, exhibition with sculptures by Noria Mabasa, photos by Tswaledi Thobejane and theatre play *Fanon's children* by Lesego Rampolokeng, Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderpershuis.be 03/248.01.00
- Until 19 October: *format.2000, multimedia festival with Ballet Mécanique (Antheil), Les Noces (Stravinsky), Déserts (Varèse), Bobo in Paradise (HushHushHush) etc*, Brugge; info: www.brugge2002.be
- From 3 October onwards: *Three for the road, three ballets by choreographs Mauricio Weinrot, Peteris Vasks and Nicolo Fonte, Koninklijk Ballet van Vlaanderen*, Antwerp; info: www.koninklijkballetvanvlaanderen.be
- 15 October: *The mighty mighty Bosstones*, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
- 15 October: *Prima La Musica*, conducted by Dirk Vermeulen, Symphony nr.9 by Haydn/Ouverture by Haydn, Kortrijkse schouwburg; www.festivalvanvlaanderen.be
- 17 October: *Oxalys Ensemble with Richard Strauss, Dvorak and Brahms*, Zaal Emily Fabry, Sint-Pieters Woluwe; info: 02/773.05.88
- 17 October: *The last Butterfly, I Fiamminghi with music by Chostakowich, Schnittke, Bartok and Haas*, Bijloke, Ghent; info: 09/269.92.92 www.bijloke.be
- 20 October: *Brainpower*, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
- 22 October: *Maria Joao Pires @ Augustin Dumay*, PSK Brussels; info: 02/507.82.00
- 11 to 20 October: *Il Trittico by Giacomo Puccini, director: Robert Carsen*, Flanders Opera, Ghent; info: 09/225.24.25 www.vlaamseopera.be
- 16 October: *Enrique Moriente @ Trilok Guru, flamenco*, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: 09/265.91.65 www.handelsbeurs.be
- 15 and 16 October: *Distanzlos and Mono Subjects*, by Thomas Lehmen, dance, Kaaitheaterstudios, Brussels; info: 02/201.59.59 www.kaaitheater.be
- 16, 17, 18 and 19 October: *Defilharmonie conducted by Philippe Herreweghe with Beethoven symphonies* in De Warande (Turnhout), PSK (Brussels), Koningin Elisabethzaal (Antwerp) and Concertgebouw (Bruges); info: 070/22.33.02
- 18 October: *Wiener Klaviertrio with compositions by Mendelsohn, Brahms and Rihm*, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be

- 21 October: *Roby Lakatos and Ensemble Piacevole with Yiddish and Hungarian gypsy songs*, Kortrijkse schouwburg; www.festivalvanvlaanderen.be
- 22 October: *James Taylor and his quartet*, De Kreun, Bissegem; www.audijazz.be
- 23 October: *Dave Douglas New Quintet*, Flagey, Brussels; info: 0900/00565 www.audijazz.be
- 23 October: *Hooverphonic*, Hof ter Lo, Antwerp; info: 03/543.90.30
- 24 October: *ADD N TO*, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
- 25 October: *Maxim Vengerov*, PSK, Brussels; info: 02/507.82.00
- 25 and 26 October: *Gonzales, Muziek-O-Droom*, Hasselt and Monty, Antwerp; info: 0900/00600
- 25 October: *Herbaliser Live*, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: 09/267.24.24 www.audijazz.be
- 27 October: *Madreus and the Flemish Radio Orchestra*, Vorst Nationaal, Brussels; info: 0900-0600
- 28 October: *Moreno Veloso (Bra)*, Botanique, Brussels; www.audijazz.be

EXPO

- **Bruges 2002**: info: 070/22.33.02 www.brugge2002.be
- Until 17 November: *Closed world - Open books*, exhibition, medieval manuscripts and contemporary art in a splendid the splendid site of an abbey; Bruges; info: 070/22.33.02 www.brugge2002.be
- Until 31 October: *Station2station*, exhibition: art in petrol stations along the roads leading to Bruges; info: www.station2station.be
- Until 17 November: *A tale in free images*, exhibition of video-art, Bruges, www.brugge2002.be
- Until 17 November: *Dead lines*: War, media and propaganda in the 20th century, exhibition, Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres
- Until 1 December: *Tyndale's Last Will* (the Coverdale Bible), exhibition, Museum Plantin-Moretus, Antwerp; info: 03/221.14.50
- Until 27 October: *Aztecs and Mayas*, pre-columbian art, CC Sint-Niklaas; info: 03/777.29.42
- Until December: *Festival art and equal rights*, women artists show their work in 40 places, organisation: Gynaika; info: 03/232.22.29 www.gynaika.be
- 20 September to 3 November: *ArchiLab: ecology in contemporary architecture*, exhibition, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28
- Until 17 November: *Graphical work by Max Ernst*, exhibition, Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent; info: 09/240.07.00
- Until 12 January: *Deir el-Medina and the Valley of the Kings, The artists of the Pharaoh*, exhibition, Jubelparkmuseum, Cinquantenaire, Brussels; info: 02/741.73.11
- Until 5 January: *7000 years of Persian art*, exhibition, Sint-Pietersabdij, Ghent; info: 09/243.97.30
- 21 September to 16 February: *Selection 1/Backstage*, Fashion exhibition, Antwerp Modemuseum (MoMu), Antwerp; info: 03/470.27.71 www.momu.be
- Until 8 December: *Between city palaces and castles in the air*, engravings and paintings by Hans Vredeman De Vries (1526-1609), exhibition, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp; info: 03/242.04.16
- Until 8 December: *The world is a garden*, exhibition, garden architecture (prints) by Hans Vredeman De Vries, Rubenshuis, Antwerp; info: 03/232.01.03
- Until 8 December: *Magistral Middle Ages*, Miniatures and manuscripts from Charlemagne to Charles the Brave (800 - 1475), City Museum, Louvain; info: www.mm.leuven.be 016/22.45.64
- Until 17 November: *CIVIL, Honoré d'O and Franciska Lambrechts*, installation in the Open Air Museum Middelheim, Antwerp; info: 03/827.15.34 www.antwerpen.be
- Until 1 December: *Oscar Niemeyer*, architect, survey of his works, exhibition at the CIVA, international centre for town, architecture and landscape; info: 02/642.24.50 www.civa.be
- Until 17 November: *Portrait of a city*, Bruges 1847-1918 photographed, Arentshuis, Bruges; info: www.brugge2002.be
- Until 5 January: *50 portraits of the artist*, exhibition, Dexia Gallery, Brussels; info: 02/222.57.37
- Until 27 October: *Japanese designers: textile, jewels, ceramics, leaded windows*, exhibition, Vizo Gallery, Brussels; info: 02/227.49.05
- Until 24 November: *'Paramount Basics'* by Richard Venlet and Guy Mees, exhibitions, Muhka, Antwerp; info: 03/238.59.60
- Until 14 December: *Symptomania*, Finnish contemporary art in Kunsthalle Lophem, Loppem-Zedelgem; info: 0477/832.370
- Until 11 November: *Forward, Nico Dockx, Paul van Eerden, Anri Sala, Cerith Wyn Evans, Dieter Lesage and others*, exhibitions in PSK, BBL-building, Royal Library and other locations in and around de Kunstberg in Brussels; info: 02/547.22.92
- Until 9 November: *Hermann Nitsch*, Das Orgien Mysterien Theater, Exhibition, Galerie Fortlaan 17, Ghent; info: 09/222.00.33 www.fortlaan17.com
- Until 1 December: *The Misfits* (film with Marilyn Monroe), 9 Magnum photographs, Caermersklooster, Ghent; www.filmfestival.be
- Until 2 February: *Gaude succurere vitae*, exhibition: drawings and films by Jan Fabre, SMAK, Ghent; info: 09/221.17.03 www.smak.be
- Until 8 December: *'Drawings from the Baudelaire Cycle, the first period'*, exhibition by Jan Van Oost, Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens; info: 09/282.51.23 www.museumdd.be
- Until 5 January: *Europalia*, Guest country: Bulgaria, *The Gold of the Thracians*, exhibition, PSK, Brussels; info: www.europalia.be 02/507.85.94
- Until 8 December: *Bourdon 1811-1967*, jewels and cutlery, Silver; Museum Sterckshof Antwerp; info: 03/360.52.50 www.sterckshof.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 nv, Kasteelstraat 97, 8700 Tielit and can also be obtained by e-mail.

- Translation: Eurologos
- Printing: Drukkerij Lannoo nv, Tielit
- Responsible editor: Luc Demeester, Marke
- Subscription rate by post and e-mail: 220 euro
- Either transfer the sum to account no.: 472-1010001-19 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: 051/40.11.52 E-mail: frank.vandecaveye@lannoo.be

- Editor in chief: Frank Vandecaveye
- Advisory panel: Luc Demeester (Lannoo), Rik Van Cauwelaert (director Knack), Koen Clement (Managing director, De Morgen), Frans Crols (Director, Trends), Francis Decoster (Information Officer, Flemish Community), Mark Deweerdt (Journalist, Financieel-Economische Tijd), Michael Stabenow (Correspondent, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung), Luc Standaert (Journalist, Belang van Limburg), Jan Van Doren (Deputy Director, Vlaams Economisch Verbond), Bernard Bulcke (De Standaard)
- With thanks to: Concentra nv, De Vlijt nv, de Vlaamse Uitgeversmaatschappij nv, De Persgroep nv, Uitgeverijbedrijf Tijd nv and Roularta Media Group nv and their editorial teams for supplying the articles.