



focus on flanders

THE DUTCH SPEAKING PART OF BELGIUM

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No provincial constituencies for regional elections

The regional elections of 13 June 2004 will probably not be held in large provincial constituencies, as was the case in the federal elections this year. Speaking in parliament on 16 October, the federal Interior Minister Patrick Dewael (VLD) said that the federal government would not be taking any further legislative initiatives to amend the electoral system. That does not rule out the possibility of another bill being tabled in parliament, but a two-thirds majority is required for that, and the Liberals and Socialists should not count on the support of the Christian-Democrats (CD&V and CdH), Ecolo or the Flemish-National N-VA. The same day the Speaker of the Flemish Parliament Norbert De Batselier (SP.A) already hinted in an interview in *De Morgen* that there would probably be no change to the electoral system. He

said that the legal procedure was too complicated for the law to be changed in a short space of time (FF).

MARK DEWEERDT/RENAAT SCHROOTEN
• DE FINANCIËEL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD •
17 OCTOBER

Dewael gave a short answer. It is up to the Flemish Parliament to change the constituencies with a special majority. A federal initiative is necessary to reduce that special majority to an ordinary majority. The federal government does not intend to take such an initiative. That applies for the rest, too, said Dewael. The fact that the government is not taking any initiative does not prevent members of parliament of the 'purple' governing parties from being able to table bills for a review of the regional electoral system. The introduction of provincial constituencies would be possible with an ordinary majority, but a two-thirds majority would be required for all other aspects. Liberals and Socialists in parliament fall three votes short of achieving such a majority. There is obviously little point in the PS and MR calling on help from a French-speaking opposition party, i.e. the CdH. At the talks between the chairmen of the purple parties on Wednesday, it appeared that the French-speaking Liberals also fear that the formation of a provincial constituency of Flemish Brabant would result in there no longer being any representative from the Francophone periphery in the Flemish Parliament. The SP.A no longer regards the introduction of provincial constituencies as a matter of vital importance. Chairman Steve Stevaert is regularly quoted as saying that politics should concern itself 'with the people' and not overly so with itself. ■

INTRODUCTION



After being under fire for a while (both in the papers and within her own party) in the Antwerp bench of aldermen Visa affair, but eventually not stepping down, Agalev alderman Chantal Pauwels

was last week once again the subject of a controversy that extended far beyond Antwerp's city limits. The *Gazet van Antwerpen* reported that Pauwels was renting a house, which is owned by the Antwerp OCMW (Public Social Welfare Centre), for just EUR 144. The information, which clearly originated from the Vlaams Blok, was contained in an OCMW memo sent to the city council. Parliamentary party leader Philip Dewinter did not waste a moment in attacking alderman Pauwels at the following city council meeting. What Dewinter did not add, however, is that the house concerned is not categorised as social housing, but is a neglected property from the OCMW's property holdings that Pauwels has renovated with her own money. In other words, it is a home on the private market, the rental price of which is not dependent on family income. There is thus little for which Pauwels can be reproached, and all the coalition partners, led by mayor Patrick Janssens (SP.A), agreed on that. They therefore continued to support her, not least since a little team spirit in the bench of aldermen was absolutely vital on the eve of the Visa investigation. This was in contrast to the attitude adopted by her own party. Agalev-Antwerp and the national party leadership felt that Pauwels should step down, even though strictly speaking she had done nothing wrong. The official standpoint was that the political climate in Antwerp and the atmosphere surrounding her person were such that she could no longer function. But her party could not force Pauwels to resign. If she were to lose the support of her party, she could keep her seat as an independent. Pauwels felt supported by a part of the Agalev grassroots... and by the commentators in *De Morgen*, *Het Laatste Nieuws* and *De Standaard*. They felt that Agalev had let itself be led by perception (created by the Vlaams Blok) and not by reality. Frightened by the massive support that Pauwels was receiving, the party leadership abruptly changed its standpoint on 16 October, because 'signals from society had indicated that Pauwels' resignation would be interpreted as giving in to the extreme right'. Pauwels thus emerges stronger from the crisis (*De Morgen*, 17 October), but Agalev gives an impression of being rudderless and divided – a fresh blow for a party that simply does not seem to be recovering from its electoral defeat on 18 May.

Frank Vandecaveye | editor in chief

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Income from Belgacom Pension Fund saves budget

Without that one-off extra revenue, there would be a deficit of EUR 2.4 billion this year, and of EUR 1.3 billion next year.

In the morning of Monday 13 October, the Federal Government reached an agreement on the budget control for 2003 and the budget for 2004. Budget Minister Johan Vande Lanotte (SPA) was able to report with some satisfaction that the budget was being kept out of the red in both 2003 and 2004. In 2003 there is a surplus of 0.2%, whilst in 2004 the draft budget is balanced. But he conceded that he had a piece of good luck to thank for this. For 2003 and 2004, the government is booking income from the acquisition of the Belgacom pension fund for a joint amount of EUR 5 billion (EUR 3.6 billion for this year and EUR 1.4 billion for next year). Without that one-off extra revenue, there would be a deficit of EUR 2.4 billion (0.9% of GDP) this year, and of EUR 1.3 billion (0.46% of GDP) next year. Vande Lanotte claims that it is not an accounting trick although it concerns a one-off revenue item The Euro-

pean accounting rules allow these to be booked under ordinary income. The government therefore has not had to organise an extra savings round. More than that, the income from the Belgacom pension fund is paid into the 'Silver Fund' (Zilverfonds), which results in the public debt being reduced by the same amount. Next year that debt might already come out at less than the 100%-of-GDP threshold. With the cut in interest charges, the government can amply pay the Belgacom pensions. In its budget calculations for 2004, the government is reckoning on economic growth of 1.8% (FF).

ERIC DONCKIER • HET BELANG VAN LIMBURG • 14 OCTOBER

Primary expenses, or - roughly translated - expenditure for policy, will increase next year by an average of 3.3%, including inflation. Some departments will be

allowed to spend more. The Justice Department (Onkelinx, PS) will be able to spend EUR 70 million more, chiefly for prisons. And the Department of the Interior (Dewael, VLD) sees its permitted expenditure raised by EUR 20 million. The extra money for the Justice Department is worthy of special note. In government circles it is frankly being conceded that the Justice Department has systematically been allotted too little money in recent years. That will be no music to the ears of former justice minister Marc Verwilghen (VLD).

The agreements entered into by the social partners during the employment conference are observed. The bill runs to EUR 945 million in 2005. The measures are to be introduced gradually in 2004, which means that the bill for next year is restricted to EUR 424 million. The revenue from the tax amnesty is officially estimated at EUR 850 million. For next year a social security deficit of EUR 1.6 billion is expected, with the government using the ordinary budget to pay this deficit. The health care budget can increase next year by 4.5%, to EUR 16,258 billion.

www.fgov.be/policy

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Budget is accounting trick, says opposition

All Flemish opposition parties feel that the budget has in fact gone into the red and are 'exposing' the booking of the pension fund under income as an accounting trick. Before the agreement was reached, SPA chairman Steve Stevaert announced that he was not against a deficit in the budget. Job creation had absolute priority for the SPA figurehead (FF).

DE FINANCIËEL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 14 OCTOBER

How can you use the money from the Belgacom pension fund both to keep the budget balanced and to feed the Silver Fund? That is the question that the Flemish opposition parties are raising in the federal parliament. 'Either you use the money from the Belgacom pension fund to top up the budget deficit or you deposit it in the Silver Fund (the national Pension Reserve, ed.). But in the latter case that money should remain

there, untouched,' says Hendrick Bogaert of CD&V. The Flemish-nationalist N-VA agrees. 'The revenue from the fund is used to cover the budget deficit for 2003 and 2004,' says N-VA Chairman Geert Bourgeois. 'To cover current expenditure, in other words. How can you then use that same money for the Silver Fund? All Johan Vande Lanotte is doing is popping a voucher into the Silver Fund with the words 'valid for EUR 5 billion'.

Opinion

STEFAN HUYSENTRUYT • DE FINANCIËEL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 14 OCTOBER

The government claims that the European authorities accept the trick, since France and Portugal have reportedly already set up a similar structure for which the EU is about to give the green light. However, we are talking here

about two countries that no longer know where to turn as regards their budget. The 2004 draft budget is tinged red not only as regards the figures, but also in political terms. By accepting a further relaxation of the budgetary policy, the Liberals have resigned to the Socialists, who were not losing any sleep over a balanced budget. When the government was formed the Liberals already agreed on a weakening of the budgetary rules for the first time. Then they changed their minds because the Socialists would not hear of savings unless the tax cut (1 billion euro as from January 2004, ed.) was nibbled away at. Here, too, the Liberals were faced with a choice: reduce the tax cut or agree to a de facto deficit in 2004. The 2004 draft budget demonstrates that the 'purple' government continues to conduct a policy geared to the economic cycle. The whole budget calculation is aimed at getting through the recession unscathed, from a budgetary standpoint, with any and all manner of artifice. This is in the belief that once the slump is over and the economic climate improves, all problems will melt away like snow in the sun.

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POLICY DECLARATION OF PRIME MINISTER

The policy statement of Guy Verhofstadt

he promised that the Federal Government would not let itself be distracted by the regional elections that are just eight months away.

The new parliamentary year began on 14 October, in traditional style, with the federal policy statement given by the Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt (VLD). There is just one priority for this government, Verhofstadt said: 'work, work and work again', whereupon he summarised the long list of measures on which employers, trade unions and the government had reached agreement at the employment conference. He flatly rejected the assertion, made by the opposition and many press commentators, that the Belgian government's taking over of the Belgacom pension fund was a trick aimed at keeping the budget out of the red. No, it was piece of good luck that fits perfectly into the European rules, said the Prime Minister. He went on to confirm that the Purple government was remaining true to its ethically inspired foreign policy under the leadership of Louis Michel. And he promised that the Federal Government would not let itself be distracted by the regional elections that are just eight months away. De Standaard (15 October), for one, attaches little belief to that. The Government of Flanders was brought to a standstill for months because Government of Flanders ministers ran as candidates in the federal elections. And now it looks as though federal ministers will be running in 2004, according to the paper. One aspect of Verhofstadt's speech that was new was the tone, which was no longer

uninhibitedly optimistic. *De Morgen* gave him a pat on the back for that (FF).

Opinion

YVES DESMET • DE MORGEN •
15 OCTOBER

Verhofstadt was risking gradually becoming a caricature of himself: stubbornly and solitarily (if need be) maintaining that this country was a hair's breath away from achieving model-nation status, heaping all praise upon himself for this, and hushing up or denying any fact or circumstance that might diverge from this utopian message. Yesterday it suddenly looked as though there was a different man on the platform. It's not that he has reduced his ambitions, but he, too, recognises that there is still a long way to go in order to see them realised. He finally acknowledged that the economy was shaking, and made it clear that the government's priority coincides with that of public opinion, i.e., employment. Proud and modest at the same time, and more realistic than optimistic - no, this was one of the better policy statements of recent years.

www.fgov.be/policy

TAX POLICY

Government adapts tax amnesty bill

FF EDITOR

Last week the Luxembourg Association of Banks reported that it would be lodging a complaint with the European Commission against the Belgian tax amnesty regulation. It is of the view that the amnesty regulation is not in keeping with the free movement of capital in Europe. Our own Council of State has also raised an objection, in its opinion on the bill, against the obligatory role that Belgian banks have to play in the operation, because they enjoy a competitive advantage over foreign banks. The Council also wondered why the tax amnesty could only apply to money or securities in an account abroad, and not to money or securities held in a safe.

During the budget conclave the Federal Government therefore decided that tax amnesty could also apply to money that is not repatriated and remains abroad. But in that case the person in question is subject to the highest penalty rate (9%) and his/her file is automatically forwarded to the tax authorities. In the case of repatriation, anonymity is guaranteed and a rate of 6% is possible. A similar regulation has also been applied in Italy and approved by the European authorities, according to *De Financieel-Economische Tijd* (14 October).

According to the World Knowledge Competitiveness Index 2003-2004 Flanders scores poorly as an information and technology economy. Compared to standards with respect to employment in information technology and bio-technology, employment in the chemical, computer and car sector and expenditure for research, development and education and the number of Internet connections Flanders occupies the 101st position in the World and the 32nd in Europe. Brussels scores much better with the 56th position in the world and the 7th in Europe.

1	san francisco (vs)
2	austin (vs)
3	boston (vs)
4	rochester (vs)
5	minneapolis (vs)
6	denver (vs)
7	hadford (vs)
8	raleigh (vs)
9	grand rapids (vs)
10	san diego (vs)
15	tokio (japan)
56	BRUSSELS
101	FLANDERS
125	bangalore (india)

SOURCE: TIJD GRAPHICS

CHIEF INDICES OF GOVERNMENT BUDGET (IN % OF GDP)

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
PRIMARY BALANCE*	6.8	6.6	6.9	7.1	6.1	5.6	5.1
federal authorities	5.4	4.9	5.8	5.3	5.4	5.3	4.2
social security	0.4	0.7	0.5	0.6	0.2	-0.5	0.0
regions/ communities	0.6	0.6	0.5	1.0	0.1	0.4	0.5
local authorities	0.5	0.4	0.0	0.2	0.5	0.4	0.4

BUDGET BALANCE	-0.7	-0.4	0.2	0.6	0.1	0.2	0.0
federal authorities	-1.6	-1.6	-0.4	-0.8	-0.2	0.3	-0.4
social security	0.5	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.3	-0.4	0.1
regions/ communities	0.3	0.4	0.2	0.8	-0.2	0.2	0.3
local authorities	0.2	0.1	-0.2	-0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1

REAL GROWTH OF GDP (IN %)	2.0	3.2	3.8	0.6	0.7	0.9	1.8
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*expenses and revenues without interest charges

SOURCE: DE STANDAARD DS-INFOGRAFIEK

Agreement on 60,000 extra jobs

These 60,000 jobs are in addition, over and above the jobs that will be created by economic growth, Verhofstadt says

After five days' talks at the employment conference, trade unions and employers agreed on measures designed to create 60,000 extra jobs. Companies will be increasing financial efforts for training to 1.9% of the total wage bill. From 2004, 60,000 employees will receive extra training. The government will spend EUR 400 million on the reduction of wage costs in 2004, with this sum rising to EUR 840 million per year thereafter. According to the chairman of the conference, Employment Minister Frank Vandenbroucke (SP.A), this could result in 18,000 jobs in companies. A reduction in wage costs in the care sector (EUR 37.5 million in 2004, and EUR 115 million the following year) should produce 5,000 jobs. Moreover, the use of the so-called 'service cheque' – whereby private individuals pay for home help (i.e., cleaning ladies) legally – is made simpler. Here Vandenbroucke is expects the creation of 25,000 extra jobs. Finally, Social Economy Minister Bert Anciaux (Spirit) will create additional jobs for some 12,000 long-term unemployed persons. In total, all measures will cost EUR 1 billion from 2005. However, the compromise that was reached is not yet definite. Both trade unions and employers still have to submit the agreement to their grassroots. Is Prime Minister Verhofstadt abandoning his original aim of creating 200,000 jobs in this legislature? No, Verhofstadt says. These 60,000 jobs are in addition, over and above the jobs that will be created by economic growth (FF).

EVELYNE HENS • DE FINANCIËLE-
ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 11 OCTOBER

The Federal Government and the federal states ranged themselves behind a thorough change of the service cheques. At the moment both the federal authorities and the federal states finance the service cheques for home help. With the cheques, families can call on services of a cleaning lady at home. They pay EUR 6.2 per hour for the service. The federal government is taking over the system completely, including the EUR 25 million that the regions currently pump into the system. The feder-

alisation of the service cheques means that EUR 13.8 million is released at Flemish level. This money will be going into new initiatives, such as service cheques for nursery services. Service cheques have hitherto created 688 jobs in Flanders. The new system is simpler for the user, and the employee achieves social rights.

Getting unemployed people back to work remains a regional competence. Flemish Employment Minister Landuyt (SP.A) reiterated his commitment to offer all people out of work training or support within three months.

JOHAN CORTHOUS/RUUD GOOSSENS •
DE MORGEN • 13 OCTOBER

It is striking that there is no lowering of upper limits on the social security contributions for expensive skilled jobs, which the Federation of Belgian Businesses (VBO) had pleaded for. However, the employers do receive a discount on their employers' contributions for this kind of job. Noteworthy as well is the removal of the over-55s as one of the target groups for an easing of the labour cost. The unskilled, part-time workers and the non-profit sector are eligible, however. According to Vandenbroucke, it is better to set aside an extra kitty for restructuring: EUR 25 million in 2004 and EUR 50 million from 2005. 'With this, we want to encourage companies to have employees who are laid off put to work somewhere else,' said Vandenbroucke. 'In that way the employer undergoing restructuring will have the costs of outplacement, for example, reimbursed up to EUR 1,800.'

The laying-off of staff at Ford Genk has led to the government making an extra effort to make shift-work fiscally more attractive. The reaction of the employers' organisations to the agreement was moderately positive. Among the unions there was clearly disappointment. The Christian union ACV regards it as insufficient by far, but does not plan to block the agreements. The socialist union ABVV 'for the moment is not saying either yes or no'. The liberal union ACVLB was the only organisation that wholeheartedly approved the agreement. In Vandenbroucke's view, it is not incomprehensible that the trade unions should regard the results as inadequate. 'But this is only the beginning. Our labour market needs to be organised much more flexibly. That calls for radical efforts: we must do away with "diploma fetishism", change end careers, and increase employee mobility. If we keep to the well-trodden paths, we will not be able to guarantee the future of our pensions and health care.'

www.vandenbroucke.com

TOTAL PACKAGE FOR REDUCTION OF WAGE COSTS (IN MILLIONS OF EURO)

	2004	2005
semi- and unskilled workers	51	178.8
reserve kit for restructuring	25	50
part-time work	28.5	38
non-profit	40	120
start-up jobs	30	30
strengthening of structural reduction of tax burden	146.5	146.5
reduction in size of contributions	78.9	276.7
TOTAL	400	840

SOURCE: DE MORGEN

FORD GENK

Verhofstadt furious about 'thoughtless opposition'

a 'rumour' that the State Security Department had received from an 'occasional, unverifiable and anonymous source'

Did the State Security Department already know at the beginning of June that there was a major restructuring, or even a closure, on the cards at Ford Genk, and was this down to the anti-American position of the government on Iraq, as was suggested by the Chairman of the Committee I, Jean-Claude Delepière, in a secret parliamentary commission? Het Belang van Limburg and Gazet van Antwerpen reported this news on Friday 10 October, and provoked spontaneous outbursts of anger among the Ford Genk workers, who heard the news on VRT radio at 2 a.m. They promptly started another 24-hour strike and called for the resignation of Foreign Affairs Minister Louis Michel (MR). They were given the answer to the two-part question the same evening, by Prime Minister Verhofstadt (VLD) himself. It was nothing more than a 'rumour' that the State Security Department had received from an 'occasional, unverifiable and anonymous source', and that had been forwarded to Luc Coene, then chairman of the management committee of the Chancellery and right-hand man to Verhofstadt.

Coene immediately asked the State Security Department to substantiate the news. This came to nought, and the report was dismissed as empty talk. That was why Coene did not inform Verhofstadt. Ford Genk and the US embassy also confirmed that there was no connection whatsoever between the restructuring and Belgium's policy on Iraq. It is not known who leaked the report from the secret commission to the newspapers, but *De Morgen* suspects the Vlaams Blok. According to some liberal commission members, Delepière said it in the conditional, in a kind of aside comment whilst holding forth on industrial espionage - nuances that were lost in the newspaper reports. Verhofstadt said it was offensive and unbelievably thoughtless that some papers and politicians should have aired such a story (FF).

ISABEL ALBERS • DE STANDAARD •
11 OCTOBER

Verhofstadt is angry that information based on 'one anonymous, unverifiable source' was leaked. 'Hundreds of

anonymous testimonies are received by the State Security Department every day. If it then turns out there is not even a basic truth in it, in whose interest is it nonetheless to see it reported?' He accuses the opposition of being 'unbelievably thoughtless'. 'This is playing with the feelings of the Ford Genk workers at a time when governments and unions are side by side in the struggle to keep jobs.'

Opinion

YVES DESMET • DE MORGEN •
11 OCTOBER

We are inclined to acknowledge that, for once, Verhofstadt is right. If newspapers were able to run stories on this basis, there would not be enough courts in the country to handle all the lawsuits for slander and defamation. If the government had to examine every rumour it receives, via its security services or through other channels, it would have no time to do anything else. In this case the government's position appears to be correct: criticise us if you manage to get that rumour confirmed as being well founded. For the time being, there is nothing more to it than that. That a number of members of the opposition felt it necessary, in spite of this, to play a media policy game purely on the basis of information, verges on the rancid.

RECORDINGS OF SECRET PARTY MEETINGS

Watergate in the Flemish Parliament?

At the end of last week civil servants in the Flemish Parliament notified a number of CD&V mandataries that the computer installation recorded not only the plenary sessions, but also everything that was said in the committee rooms (i.e., both committee meetings and secret meetings of the parties' parliamentary groups). The recordings are there for the benefit of the civil servants who make up a stenographic report of the debates. The parties thought that by simply pressing the 'secret' button at the beginning of their meetings the recordings would be turned off, but all it did was switch off the loudspeakers in the Parliament's corridors. However, there was one party, the SP.A, which never used the microphones. According to the *Gazet van*

Antwerpen, which published the news on its front page on 15 October, the SP.A knew that it was possible for conversations to be monitored. CD&V members of parliament Trees Merckx and Johan Sauwens are now calling on the president of the Parliament De Batselier (SP.A) to provide an explanation as to what has happened with the recorded conversations and who has had access to these recordings (FF).

BART DOBBELAERE • DE STANDAARD •
16 OCTOBER

The services of the Flemish Parliament have known for some time that sittings behind closed doors are nonetheless recorded by the internal listening system whenever members of parliament

use the microphones. In this way, even secret parliamentary party meetings have been recorded on the Flemish Parliament's digital sound recording tapes. Committee secretaries, who assist the political reporters, need the audiotapes in order to draw up their reports as accurately as possible. But evidently they also manage to listen in on secret meetings. For complete clarity: the members of parliament themselves do not have access to these audio files.

What rankles most parties more than anything is that all parties are listened in on, except one: the SP.A - the party to which president De Batselier belongs. But Bruno Tobback, the SP.A parliamentary party leader, has a logical explanation: 'We hold our parliamentary party meetings in a smaller room. We don't need those microphones.' What is more, he is of the X-files generation, and does not always trust all that computer science.

COMPANIES

Ford Genk will not be closing, says European management

FF EDITOR

After refuting the rumour from the State Security Department, Prime Minister Verhofstadt announced that Ford Europe had guaranteed, at the Ford Genk works council meeting, that the plant would not be closing. According to the unions, John Flemming, vice-president manufacturing of Ford Europe, has repeated 'a good 50 times over' that there are no plans to close Ford Genk (*De Standaard*, 11 October). However, he could not yet say for sure whether the new model of the Mondeo would be built in Genk. The decision on that is expected in mid-December. In the meantime the trade unions are still preventing parts intended for other Ford plants from leaving the factory. This has brought production of the Ford Transit in Southampton to a standstill, according to the unions.

www.ford.be

Miko: Flemish Enterprise of the Year

FF EDITOR

The listed company Miko from Turnhout has been declared Flemish Enterprise of the Year. The award, which is an initiative of De Financieel-Economische Tijd, the business channel Kanaal Z, Fortis and Ernst & Young, is presented to the enterprise that has seen its turnover, added value or staff grow by 50% over a period of five years. Miko, the company owned by the Michielsen family, was originally a coffee-roasting house and grew in the 1970s on the sale of coffee for offices, companies and the hotel, restaurant and catering industry. The company also has another business branch, namely plastic packaging for multinationals. In the first half of 2003 Miko recorded a turnover of EUR 38.89 million and a net profit of EUR 2.56 million.

www.miko.be

COMPANIES

Power struggle at Real Software

On 10 October Dilissen reached an agreement with the banks. Of the 198 million liabilities, no fewer than 99 million are waived and 65 million become repayable in a period of ten years.

The largest Belgian software company Real Software has for weeks now been the stage for an internal struggle between the management and current Managing Director Theo Dilissen and a group of reference shareholders led by former managing director and founder Rudy Hageman. Dilissen and his management team have been working for a year on a rescue plan for the company, which was on the verge of bankruptcy due to a failed takeover in the USA. They were able to extract a moratorium on the repayment obligations from the banks, but this runs out at the end of October. However last week, led by Rudy Hageman, the company's reference shareholders, who together hold 51.8% of the shares, announced that they wanted to appoint a new board of directors at the general meeting of shareholders in November, because they have lost their faith in the current management. They were also going to attract a new financial or operational partner for Real Software (Telindus), but that plan has fallen through. They also viewed the debt rescheduling that Dilissen had arranged with the banks unfavourably, for they fear that their shares will be diluted.

On 10 October Dilissen reached an agreement with the banks. Of the 198 million liabilities, no fewer than 99 million are waived and 65 million become repayable in a period of ten years. The remaining 34 million consists of a convertible loan that the banks can convert into shares. According to Managing Director Theo Dilissen and his legal adviser Christian van Buggenhout, the rescheduling is of such a unique character that it is inconceivable that the reference shareholders would dare reject it. Moreover, the management also announced that it had already lodged a complaint against Hageman in September for misappropriation of company assets to the tune of EUR 26 million. Now that it is getting through to them that their opposition will most probably result in a bankruptcy of Real Software, the reference shareholders are beginning to talk in a more conciliatory tone(FF).

PASCAL DENDOOVEN • DE STANDAARD
15 OCTOBER

According to lawyer Johan Verbist (Linklaters De Bandt), who is acting for the coalition of reference shareholders, Real Software's plan is not incompatible with the coalition's plan but rather complementary to it. Nobody was able to confirm whether it is correct that the coalition, on the basis of the current price, would fall back to around 25% as a result, and the banks would obtain 50%, since the discussions with the banks are still ongoing. The banks could in principle convert at any time, but would normally only do so if a sale of Real Software were on the cards or if the company were better off. On paper this means that the coalition has time to carry out the 'complementary' part: the buying off of the remaining bank loans. The framework agreement in any case paves the way for renewed interest to be aroused in the company. For that, Real Software will first have to prove that it is a going concern. The struggle waged in recent weeks has caused the company serious damage, with a judicial settlement looming a little closer with every passing day. Restoring the calm, as the coalition asserted yesterday, cannot come too soon. Theo Dilissen, managing director of Real Software, said yesterday evening that a lasting solution had to be found. In a communiqué the coalition has invited the Real Software board of directors for talks. The company, which determines the agenda and order of business of the general meeting of shareholders, will only have a vote held in November on Article 633 of the Companies Act: will the company continue operating, yes or no? For Real Software it comes down to swiftly repairing the accumulated damage.

www.realsoftware.be

AVIATION/TOURISM

TUI to set up its own Belgian airline

TUI wants to cover its back in the event of a bankruptcy of Sobelair

The German tour operator TUI, the largest in Europe, is planning to set up its own Belgian airline. TUI is the parent holding company of the Belgian holiday company Jetair and is planning to operate some of the holiday flights itself with the new airline from Easter 2004 onwards. Sixty-five percent of the charter flights for Jetair are currently operated by the former Sabena subsidiary Sobelair. Bart and Annemie Brackx, who run Jetair, do not deny that with this plan TUI wants to cover its back in the event of a possible bankruptcy of Sobelair, which is in financial difficulties. The owners of Sobelair Aldo Vastapane and Luc Mellaerts can't hit it off together. Mellaerts recently stood down as managing director because it emerged that on a high-risk flight to Basra, in Iraq, the crew had not been insured. But there's more to it than that. The two chief executives

have a fundamental difference of opinion. Mellaerts wants Sobelair to try to extricate itself from the problems on its own. Chairman Vastapane wants a partner to strengthen the capital, although so far there seem to be few potential candidates interested (neither SN Brussels Airlines nor Birdy Airlines) (FF).

GUIDO MEEUSSEN • DE FINANCIËLE-
ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 15 OCTOBER

Three years ago TUI Belgium also announced the establishment of Hapag Lloyd Belgium, but that airline never got off the ground. Instead, the TUI subsidiary Jetair concluded a long-term contract (until 2007) with Sobelair. 'We need more seats than the capacity to which we committed ourselves with Sobelair then,' says Bart Brackx, managing director of Jetair. 'We also want

greater flexibility and a better spread of the risk.' That last comment is an unambiguous reference to the negative reports concerning the uncertain future of Sobelair. Brackx adds, 'The financial situation at our most important carrier is not clear and we want greater certainty.' He claimed that the fact that rival Thomas Cook has had its own Belgian airline since the spring of 2002 had not played any part in the decision. Jetair stresses that Sobelair remains its main supplier and is keeping the long-haul flights. Brackx gave an assurance that he was satisfied with the service and quality provided by the Sobelair fleet. But the advent of TUI's own airline would have a not inconsiderable impact on the activities of the former Sabena subsidiary. In the high season Sobelair operates eight or nine aircraft for Jetair. Two of those are to be replaced by TUI aircraft. TUI Belgium accounts for 56 to 60 percent of Sobelair's turnover every year. Jetair has promised that it will give preference to the recruitment of Sobelair employees for the new airline.

www.jetair.be
www.sobelair.be
www.tui.be

EXHIBITION

Venus Unveiled: Titian in Brussels

The Italian semiologist and writer Umberto Eco once expressed the desire to set up a museum centred on a single work of art. Europalia and the Brussels Palais des Beaux Arts have given him the opportunity to do just that. The result is 'Venus Unveiled', an exhibition arranged entirely around Urbino's Venus, the masterpiece by Titian, the Venetian counterpart to Michelangelo. Eco was involved in the project, but it is Omar Calabrese, professor at the University of Sienna, who worked out the concept for the exhibition. Both the previous history and the after-effects of the masterpiece have been worked out. Calabrese sought Titian's sources of inspiration in classical antiquity, and set about ascertaining how the spiritual climate in the Venetian cinquecento impacted on the master. Titian's Venus is compared with the painting used as a model, Giorgione's Venus. And the theme of the reclining female nude is explained in detail with extra attention paid to the way the symbolism and eroticism shifts

through the centuries. But those who are not necessarily so interested in the conceptual elaboration can visit the exhibition simply to admire the 123 works on display, by such renowned names as Cranach, Tintoretto, Jordaens, Giordano, Modigliani and Magritte (FF).

BERNARD DEWULF • DE MORGEN •
15 OCTOBER

The exhibition consists of three parts: the history of the work, the details of the work, and the history of the Venus figure. The first part also looks at the client who commissioned the canvas, the intellectual climate from which this Venus originates and the so-called 'new eroticism' in the Venice of the cinquecento. All three aspects guarantee the necessary piquancy. There is a fair bit of sexual connotation involved in this languorous Venus. For example, it is still not clear why the Duke of Urbino commissioned this canvas. Was it a wedding painting or did the Duke

want a painting of a coveted courtesan? Such a Venetian courtesan had an important function in a culture in which sensuality and sexuality were gaining in importance. Urbino's Venus is therefore increasingly considered as a highly erotically charged image, and not - as had long been contended - as a demure ode to conjugal fidelity. As the exhibition progresses, the canvas simply becomes more intriguing. For example, there is the striking composition, in which nothing tallies and which reinforces the intangible nature of this Venus - something that the many objects inhabiting the painting also do. There are stories to be told about each and every one of these ingredients. The fact is that with these objects Titian has not only given an overview of the material life of the court nobility, but also exercised considerable influence over Italian decorating art. Finally, the exhibition gives us an overview of the figure of the naked or scantily clad reclining woman, especially personified by Venus, in painting down the ages - with all the associated shifts in meaning. This takes us from the very earliest fertility symbolism through to the ambiguous use of advertising images. Venus Unveiled is not a ground-breaking concept exhibition, but rather a fas-

cinating exposition which, with the help of some fine opinions, simultane-

ously explains and reveals Urbino's Venus, unravelling it bit by bit, yet not

trying to solve its riddle.
www.europalia.be

Diary

MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE

- 23 October: *Paolo Conte*, Royal Circus, Brussels; info: 02/507.82.00 www.audijazz.be
- 23 October: *Pharaoh Sanders Group*, jazz, Théâtre 140, Brussels; info: www.audijazz.be
- 23 October: *Hiroshi*, Flagey, Brussels; info: 02/641.10.20 www.audijazz.be
- 24 and 25 October: *Sergent Garcia Sound System*, Botanique, Brussels and N9 Eeklo www.audijazz.be
- 26 October: *The Cinematic Orchestra*, jazz, Concertgebouw, Brugge; info: 0900/00600 www.concertgebouw.be www.audijazz.be
- 26 October: *Carla Bley*, Flagey, Brussels; info: 02/641.10.20 www.audijazz.be
- 21 to 23 October: *Vincent Dunoyer with Solos for others*, dance, Kaaithheaterstudio's, Brussels; info: 02/201.59.59 www.kaaithheater.be
- 23 to 25 October: *Jan Lauwers & Needcompany*, *No Comment*, Kaaithheater, Brussels; info: 02/201.59.59 www.kaaithheater.be
- 23 October: *Ensemble intercontemporain* conducted by *Pierre Boulez* with compositions by *Alban Berg, Boulez and Carter*, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- 25 October: *XVIII-21 Musique des Lumières - Jean-Christophe Frisch*, Musica Antiqua, De Bijloke, Ghent; info: www.bijloke.be
- 23 to 26 October: *Flanders Symphony Orchestra* directed by *David Angus* with *Beethoven, symphony nr. 5, Imperial Concerto and Westerland*, Bruges (Concertgebouw), Ghent (Bijloke), Brussels (Conservatory) and Antwerp (De Singel); www.symfonieorkest.be
- Until 25 October: *October/Oktobre* by *Dito Dito*, Beursschouwburg, Brussels; info: 02/513.82.90
- 19 to 25 October: *International week of the Organ*, different churches in Brussels; info: 02/219.26.61
- 23, 29, 30 October and 6 November: *Night of the Proms with INXS, Tot, En Vogue etc.*, Sportpaleis, Antwerp; info: 070/345.345 www.notp.com
- Until 25 October: *Argos Festival*, audiovisuel arts from Belgium and abroad, Brussels; www.argosarts.org
- 23 October: *Panta Rhei*, Concertgebouw, Bruges; info: www.concertgebouw.be
- 25 October: *Sand table/Magali Desbazeille & Meg Stuart*, dance, Concertgebouw, Bruges; info: www.concertgebouw.be
- 24 and 25 October: *Teorema* by *Emio Greco and PC*, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: 09/267.24.24 www.vooruit.be
- 24 October: *Tony Touch*, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: 09/267.24.24 www.vooruit.be
- 26 October: *Eugene Chadbourne*, Chadklap-pmzzz, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: 09/267.24.24 www.vooruit.be

- 27 October: *Felicity Lott/Thomas Allen/Graham Johnson*, songs & opera, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- 28 October: *Arid*, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: 09/267.24.24 www.vooruit.be
- 27 October: *Charles Lloyd Quartet*, Flagey, Brussels; info: 02/507.82.00 www.audijazz.be
- 28 and 29 October: *Zoo and Thomas Hauert*, Verosimile, dance, Kaaithheater, Brussels; info: www.kaaithheater.be
- 28 October: *Nanni Moretti presents 2 recent films (Il grido d'angoscia dell'uccello predatore and The Last Customer)*, PSK, Brussels; info: 02/507.82.00 www.bozar.be
- 28 October: *Gloria Banditelli and Ensemble Salomone Rossi*, Jewish Baroque music, Concertgebouw, Bruges; info: www.concertgebouw.be
- 29 October: *Laborintus II/Ictus/Nederlands Kamerkoor/Portal/Visual Kitchen/Funki Porcini*, Concertgebouw, Bruges; info: www.concertgebouw.be
- 29 October: *Ethnic Heritage Ensemble*, Limelight, Kortrijk ; info : 056/22.10.01 www.audijazz.be
- 29 October: *Ana Moura* (Por), Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
- 30 October: *Jony Iliev & Band (Bul)*, Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
- 31 October: *Ensemble Luigi Nono, Das atmende Klarsein*, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- 31 October: *Marc Vanrunxt/Kitty Kortess Lynch, Unspeakable*, De Vooruit, Ghent; info: 09/267.24.24www.vooruit.be
- 31 October: *Willy Deville Trio*, Arenbergschouwburg, Antwerp; info: 070/222.192 www.arenbergschouwburg.be
- 1 November: *The Danish Radio Big Band* with compositions by *Ivan Lins*, PSK, Brussels; info : www.bozar.be
- 5 to 8 November: *Piotr Fomenko and Atelier Piotr Fomenko, War and peace by Tolstoj*, theatre, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be

EXPO

- From 22 March to 17 January: *Jacques Brel, 'The right to dream'*, exhibition, Schildknaapstraat 50, Brussels; reservation required; info: www.jacquesbrel.be 02/511.10.20
- Until 9 November: *Guided by Heroes*, exhibition, Z33, Hasselt
- Until 18 December: *The museum evenings*, every Thursday; www.museumvereniging.be
- Until 26 October: *Maya-textile*, mirror of a world vision, ethnographical museum, Antwerp; info: 03/220.86.00
- Until 9 November: *L'Amour toujours*, Wedding pictures from the 20th century in Antwerp, Museum van Volkskunde, Antwerp; info: 03/248.15.77

- 11 September to 30 November: *Urban Dramas*, photo and film exhibition on urban life, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 03/248.28.28 www.desingel.be
- Until 2 November: *Fashion, evening and party dress, exhibition*, CC, Knokke-Heist; info: 050/630.430
- Until 28 March: *Genovanversaevicaversa*, exhibition about Fashion, Antwerp and Genova, Fashion Museum, Antwerp; info: 03/470.27.70 www.momu.be
- Until 9 November: *John Isaacs (UK)*, exhibition with sculptures, installations and video-shows, CC, Bruges www.west-vlaanderen.be/brok
- Until 29 February: *Vietnam*, Art and culture from Prehistorian times to today, exhibition, Royal Museum of Art and History, Jubelpark, Brussels; info: www.kmkg-mrah.be
- 3 October to 11 January: *Europalia, Italy: a particular Renaissance, Ferrara and the dukes of Este*, exhibition, PSK, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- 4 October to 4 January: *Anversa e Genova*, A summit in Baroque art, exhibition, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp; info: www.europalia.be
- 4 October to 30 November: *Michelangelo Pistoletto and Citadellarte*, exhibition, Muhka, Antwerp; info: www.muhka.be/www.europalia.be
- 7 October to 4 January: *The breath of soul. Morandi and still life*, exhibition, Groeningemuseum, Bruges; info: www.europalia.be
- Until 30 November: *Fort Wheeling by Hugo Pratt - Guido Buzzelli*, exhibition, Centre Belge de la Bande dessinée, Brussels; info: 02/219.19.80 www.europalia.be
- Until 10 January: *Nel Mezzo del cammin...*, *Dante in seven centuries of texts and images*, Bibliotheca Wittockiana, Brussels; info: 02/770.53.33 www.europalia.be
- Until 30 November: *Il Nuovo Rit-tratto d'Europa, new horizons of Italian contemporary art*, exhibition, Anciennes Ecuries Royales, Brussels; info: 02/550.22.55 www.europalia.be
- Until 15 November: *Questions of women, Jef Geys*, exhibition, Kunsthalle, Loppem; info: www.kunsthalleloppem.be
- Until 16 November: *Travellings by Ann Veronica Janssens*, Open Air Museum Middelheim, Antwerp
- Until 16 November: *2003 Beaufort*, Seascapes in painting with *Turner, Courbet, Monet, Ensor, Spilliaert, Magritte, Permeke, Tuymans, Kiefer* and others, pmmk, Ostend; info: 059/70.11.99 www.pmmk.be
- Until 31 December: *Art-deco Jewels*, Diamond museum, Antwerp; info: 03/202.48.90
- Until 10 March: *Icons of Flemish Design*, Lokettenzaal, Flemish Parliament, Brussels; info www.vlaamsparlement.be
- Until 11 January: *Venus Unveild*, PSK, Brussels; www.europalia.be, www.bozar.be



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