THE ROAD TO SLOVAKIA
Social dumping:
this is how it works
BTB investigates

Foreword

The transport and haulage sector in Belgium has seen more than 6000 jobs lost over the past ten years. And yet there are no fewer trucks driving on our roads – on the contrary in fact. Many Belgian businesses have set up letterbox companies, mainly in Slovakia, obliging Eastern European drivers to work for months on end in Belgium and to live in appalling conditions.

In the spring of 2017, the inspection services conducted investigations at many Belgian haulage companies. A great many of them – and it's no coincidence – have a Slovakian subsidiary. These include Jost, Rosantra, Maes, Van Dievel and many others. But this is just the tip of the iceberg. In 2010 and 2012, BTB conducted investigations in Slovakia, each resulting in a black book. These two black books are now being named as a source by the inspection services. This gives us mixed feelings: it boosts our own vanity, of course, but it also shows that only now is any real work being done in the fight against social dumping.

Right before summer vacation we again sent a team to Slovakia – this time not just to the country's capital of Bratislava, but also to other cities. BTB visited dozens of companies that have Belgian owners, but on this occasion we went a step further. For instance, we also examined how a whole industry has come into being: from Slovakian consultancy firms that help with setting up a company, to subsidiaries of Belgian business offices and leasing companies in Bratislava, etc. These firms do everything they can to demonstrate that it is all done entirely in line with the law and so there is nothing to get in a flap about. But even if you are looking for loopholes in the law and call it 'legal', social dumping is alive and well! BTB continues to call for "equal pay for equal work".

This black book is about Slovakia. But let us be clear: Belgian hauliers also have (letterbox) companies in other countries. One of them, for instance, is Van Roosbroeck-Maes, whose managers were held in custody for a considerable time this spring and which has a subsidiary in Poland. There are also plenty of other Belgian transport companies that have a business in Romania or Bulgaria.

Not only do we expect a great deal from the Belgian inspection authorities and the law courts, but there is also a lot of work to be done on a Europe-wide scale. We are demanding that the European rules on letterbox companies are finally tightened up and there also need to be more controls. Because BTB has had a very negative experience in that regard: for instance, we passed on to the European Commission a list featuring dozens of letterbox companies in Slovakia. We had to wait eighteen months before we had a response from them: the trading licence of just one company was withdrawn. So we want extremely tough measures introduced, so that the "letterbox company industry" can be stopped in its tracks.

Frank Moreels
BTB President

Off to Bratislava

ISC Trans: emergency helper for Belgian hauliers flying their flag of convenience

Hraničná 18, a bleak office building that someone has tried to brighten up with a lick of paint. This where, according to the Slovakian trade register, at least 110 companies have their offices, including around twenty transport companies of Belgian origin.

Strict access control. We report to the doormen, who note the time we arrive and which company we are visiting. But once we are inside, we are free to go where we want. There are various buildings, each with uninviting corridors dotted with lots of offices on either side. As if by chance, a great many "Belgian" companies are housed in the same wing (AB 5).

A long corridor, with a nameplate on each door, often accompanied by the name of the Belgian manager.

But – and this is important – there is also a consultancy here: ISC Trans. Established in 2008 by Alain Muller, who has dual French and Swiss nationality. He has "helped" dozens of Belgian haulage businesses to set up letterbox companies in Slovakia. And, of course, he doesn't do it for nothing. In fact, he asks for 5000 euro per company. Maybe that's the reason there are so many Belgian companies all located at the same address as ISC Trans. Muller was arrested in March 2017 in the wake of the raids on Van Dievel, Rosantra and Maes.

ISC Trans occupies the whole of the ground floor. There is a great deal of activity going on in various offices. ISC Trans claims to be responsible for personnel matters and accountancy. We report in and are asked if we will wait in Alain Muller's office – probably because it is not being used at the moment because he is in custody...

A manager comes to see us and sends us on our way in a friendly but firm manner... But we do have the time to look around and poke our head into the offices: we see dozens of filing cabinets displaying the names of the companies located on the floor above ISC Trans.

Good clients, clearly, because we go and take a look. We knock on lots of doors and try to make conversation. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. And at lots of the offices there's no reply. No one at work?

Sometimes it's hilarious. We knock at Deer Trans. A female employee comes to open the door, but says there is no one there to speak to us, because the manager isn't in. And she closes the door.

The name on the next door is Milo Slovak Road. The same lady opens it. We're surprised, isn't this another office? She looks at us in equal surprise and quickly closes the door. We manage to get a look inside, over her shoulder: there is no partition between the offices of Deer Trans and Milo Slovak Road. But there are 2 separate offices...

Deer Trans is linked to the D'Eer company from Kruibeke. And behind Milo Slovak Road is no less a force than the Michel family of Transports Fernand Michel and Michel Logistics in Houdeng. Didier Michel and Hand D'Eer are both members of the management board of Febetra, where Michel is deputy chairman and D'Eer secretary. As administrators of Febetra, they have both signed the code of ethics, which we also find on the Febetra website: http://febetra.be/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/CodedeontologiqueCdA-2014.pdf) However, this code doesn't contain anything about fair competition and letterbox companies.

About Milo Slovak Road: on the door hangs the manager's business card. He's Tom Lokere. A native of West Flanders, previously operating as a haulier in Belgium. Now living in Riga, Latvia. Even Brussels is closer than Riga... Indeed, his business card states "Eurokamion". According to the trade register, this company is registered at another address.

Carlog, belonging to Hertsens in Kruibeke (a member of the UPTR employer federation), place an advertisement online at www.profesia.sk, a jobs website used by many companies to find drivers. They look for drivers to work in Belgium, the Netherlands and France. We ask the female employee whether the process is running smoothly, with lots of job-applicants. "Not many really," she says. "The advertisement only runs until 21st May and we paid for one month." She also tells us that two people work in the office, but that her co-worker is not there at the moment. "Oh yes," she adds, "there is also 'the lady from Belgium', but she's not coming until next week... Would we like to come back?"

TH Trucking has seven Romanian drivers who work in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. The drivers are, of course, taken by minibus to Belgium, organised by TH Trucking itself. How long do they drive for in Belgium? That depends a little, but many of them drive in Belgium for three weeks and then come back for one week. The employee also tells us that the owner of TH Trucking is a Belgian; she gives us his Belgian mobile phone number and e-mail address in Slovakia, because he is not there this week. In Belgium, Filip Heeze is the business owner of Transheeze in Lochristi.

The little Bobortrans office is empty, which we can see through the window in the door. Bobortrans was originally called Bevertrans Slovakia. It is owned by the Verhegge family, and the Belgian parent company is called – you guessed it – Bevertrans, which is located in Zedelgem in West Flanders. Bevertrans Slovakia was established in 2010 and changed its name in 2017. BTB has learned from good sources that after the first inspections in 2017, the owners of Bevertrans were already in the process of closing their Slovakian subsidiary. Those drivers that wanted one were even given a Belgian contract. And yes, that's right: the office has been completely cleared out. Even more, a few days after our visit, Bobortrans was officially closed down, as we read in the Slovakian trade register. So inspections do work! Some haulage companies have the wind just knocked out of them.

Belgian haulier owns a consultancy!

Pluhová 2. A well-known address for many Belgian haulage companies. This is where SK Service is located. A consultancy co-owned by Roland Peeters of Peethultra Transport in Malle. Interesting detail: Roland Peeters is also a director of Febetra.

SK Service was set up in 2010. SK Service provides Belgian haulage companies with information and assistance, from setting up the business through to day-to-day management. The company manager, Bibiána Žigová, has been in business for many years. She previously worked for other consultancies and knows the ins and outs of the business with the best of them.

There are 55 companies located at Pluhová 2, some twenty of which we can link to Belgian haulage companies.

We visit SK Service and ask to speak to the manager. The doorman tells us that she is at the office. But the employee who talks to us, asks to come back next week, because she's not in... But we're not palmed off so quickly...

The day before, we were at another address nearby. At Hattalova 12/A there are quite a few companies that we can link to Belgian hauliers. They also have little offices where no one ever comes, confirms the doorman at Hattalova 12/A. But the post for these companies is picked up regularly, by 'someone from Pluhová'.

Behind Antrum Transport Services lurks the Weduwe Frans Put company from Mechelen. DV Trans relocated eighteen months ago from Pluhová to Hattalova and is owned by someone from West Flanders. DPC-Trans is the property of a Frenchman. Intraslova is linked to Transport Devoldere from Tielt.

And so back to SK Service. We are shown the door, but as we are going, we ask “Do you know a company called Antrum?” The employee answers, “Yes, of course.” But we will never know the answer to our question about whether she is the person who goes and empties the mailbox at Hattalova 12/A. Mainly because she shows us the door...

Račianska 66 – faded glory?

In our previous black book, this was an address that came up repeatedly. It was where lots of companies of Belgian origin were located. And some of them are still on the name board in the hall. We ask the receptionist whether he knows which companies are still located there. According to him, there are only a few companies now that have links to Belgium. He knows that J&E Trans is looking for drivers and we are given the Belgian mobile phone number for the manager. We are able to link J&E to Transport De Vreese from Ghent.

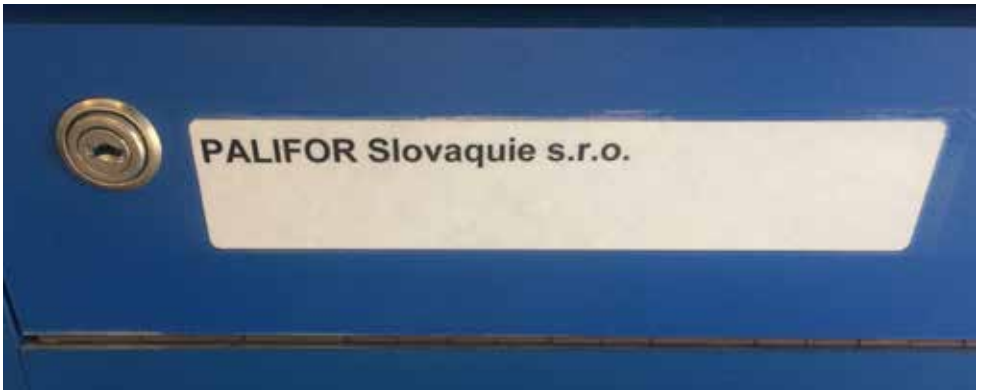
Palifor is still located there and is also looking for drivers.

A number of firms have left to go to Bratislava Logistics Park in Senec. These include Gilbert De Clercq Slovakia and Transgem.

The parent company of Trans Ginis went bankrupt in Belgium.

Sventrans, owned by Sven Geerts, the son of Marc Geerts, and grandson of Corneel Geerts, moved a few years ago.

According to the trade register, Beldyslova is still here, but the doorman had never heard of it. The website of Beldyslova mentions Trenčianska 57 as contact address. Which is also where Intrabel Spedition (Bellekens Transport from Heist-op-den-Bergh) is located. Beldyslova is linked to Vervoer Van Dyck from Hoogstraten.



Off to Bratislava - Delcatrans

At the ISC Trans offices we see a whole lot of document folders featuring the name “Delcatrans”. The official name is DELCA ŠPEDÍCIA SLOVAKIA. This appears to be Delcatransport from Moorslede.
We are able to find the address – Radničné námestie 4 – but then the search begins. Apparently Delca is unknown here.

The doorman looks stunned and goes to fetch a colleague, who knows more. It seems that Delca is very well hidden, somewhere in the offices of another company. He walks ahead of us and takes us to a little back office on the ground floor of the office building. When we knock on the door, the employee there nearly jumps out of his skin. Yes, this is Delca’s office, he says, but I have only just started working here and will call ‘someone’. We are escorted back to the reception hall, where we wait. We hear him say to the lady on reception that she should never let anyone in before calling ‘the boss’. And that is the man we are now waiting for.

He comes along fifteen or so minutes later and looks at us suspiciously. However, we do dare ask him a few questions. He thinks it is normal for Belgian haulage companies to have an office in Slovakia, because 'every company wants to keep on existing'. He confirms that drivers are taken by minibus to Belgium, but also says that it is not easy to find drivers. They are currently working with Romanian drivers. These Romanian drivers have to pay for their own courses to gain their certificate of professional competence. He says that Delca only makes an exception for 'very good' drivers.

Delca has 32 employees and 20 trucks. This is just the company's little office. The truck part is ten minutes away, which is where he works himself. Delca moved a few weeks after our visit. Their office is now located in an hotel.

Looking for more Belgian companies

Bazová 9. The previous black book contained numerous companies with Belgian roots registered to this address, but now there aren't any more. We also can't find any companies with Belgian connections in the trade register at www.orsr.sk. In total, there are now 21 companies in it. None of them Belgian.

Pristavná 10. The companies that we came across here in 2012 are still located there. Sodema and Glass Partners Transport. Glass Partners Transport can be linked directly to Glas Partners in Jemeppe.

At Pestovateľská 4 we find Belutra. Until a few years again, Belutra was located at Hraničná 18, which is where ISC Trans is also located. Belutra belongs to Luc Beyers Transport in Liège.

Belutra is located in a new office building. We call there, but are given excuses by the manager. "This is a Slovakian firm, what did you think it was? Belutra is in Slovakia and Luc Beyers Transport is in Belgium – they're two separate companies." End of quote.

Saelens Slovakia, according to the trade register, has relocated from Kopčianska 65 to Panónska cesta 34. And yet, nothing has changed. They are still in the same building, only the address has changed. What do you call that - an administrative change of address?

The wall in the car park could definitely do with a lick of paint. Maybe SITRA from Ieper, the parent company of Saelens Slovakia, could take care of it?

Looking for drivers online

Yes, truck driving really is a bottleneck profession. Certain in Slovakia, where the concentration of haulage companies is very high. Over the years, Slovakian drivers have become a lot wiser – i.e. they have become more expensive.

Which is why companies are looking increasingly far away. Mainly in Romania and Bulgaria. Using advertisements on the Internet, which is where companies recruit drivers to work in Belgium. And they promise them haulage heaven: good working and living conditions, proper payment, good wages and per diem expenses, free transport to and from Belgium, even with insurance for the journey.

Yes; so far so good. They advertise openly and claim that they are looking for drivers who will be taken by minibus to Belgium, where they have to work for months in a row. But with proper pay, they say!

Here again the doorman is an invaluable source of information. Every Friday evening the drivers come back from Belgium by minibus. Some of them have left their car parked on the company's land and come to collect their car keys so that they can drive home.

Kopčianska 92. The company INGCO is still located here: a subsidiary of Transport Vermeulen from Hulshout. The doorman is able to tell us that the drivers arrive back from Belgium every Friday night/Saturday morning. As is the case at Saelens, he has their keys. They wake him at night when they arrive.

"Hello Mr Dandoy"

Rybničná 40. This is the address where we find Eurotrucks SK. Owned by the Dandoy family from the Transport Dandoy firm in Mollem. Dandoy made it into the news because one of the Eurotrucks drivers suffered burns at the company's premises in Belgium. There was also damage to the truck. The driver was given no medical care and had to pay back the cost of the damage to the truck. This was taken in monthly instalments out of his pay. Nicola Brezeanu, the Romanian driver, has since left the company, but still hopes to get the money they deducted back. In the Belgian media, Dandoy denied having anything to do with Eurotrucks in Bratislava.

When we arrive at the office building, we can't believe our eyes: a Dandoy tractor unit and trailer outside the door! Before we go knocking, we talk first to the doorman: two people work at Eurotrucks. We go calling on Eurotrucks and who should answer the door...? Dandoy himself!

When we ask him in English whether he knows Nicola Brezeanu, the penny drops. We are no longer undercover.

Nicola Brezeanu, a Romanian driver working for Eurotrucks, suffered serious burns in a fire at Dandoy in Belgium, but was given no medical treatment.

Dandoy winds himself up and says that BTB needs to leave him alone. "Everything is in order here and this is the way I have to work, because I can't find drivers any more in Belgium."

Looking for ECS

And, yes, ECS also has an office in Bratislava. Bratislava Trucking is the name. The address is stated clearly on the website: Slovnaftská cesta 102. A piece of cake, it seems, although different satnav systems can't find it...

We drive around here and there and only after repeated questions at a petrol station and in a number of businesses are we directed to Moony's restaurant. It seems that Bratislava Trucking is located on the third floor, along with Bratislava Equipment.

The doorman lets us in, but once we reach the third floor, the hospitality evaporates. When we say to the manager that we are delighted finally to have found ECS and that he has done his best not to be located, he becomes bad tempered. And shows us the door. Do we need to say that Moony's doesn't have parking for trucks and that there isn't even a warehouse with loading docks? We try again, asking why ECS is recruiting drivers online in Slovakia and Hungary? That is one question too many, in friendly but firm fashion, he tells us, "Our conversation ends here."

But although we are only there briefly, what we see is well worth it: newly fitted out offices and a pinboard showing the bonuses paid out for bringing in new drivers. With a summary for January to August 2016, in Slovakian and in Hungarian. The highest bonus paid out is more than 2000 euro. So, truck driving also appears to be a bottleneck profession in Slovakia, too...

Trans-Union and SK Line: better known as Jost

Trans-Union is one of the Slovakian companies in the Jost group. Trans-Union was established in 2004. The initial office for the company was located at Račianska 66. In 2005, Trans-Union relocated to Panónska cesta 17. This is where three employees work and the drivers are taken by minibus to Belgium, according to the doorman there.

In the meantime, Trans-Union has moved again, to Ul. Svornosti 42, also in Bratislava. This is a new office building, with a retail space downstairs. No parking, no workshops.

This address is also where SK Line is located, established in 2011 by 's Heeren from TTS.

Since then, TTS has been taken over by Jost. In 2016, Jost also took part of the share capital in SK Line. SK Line had its first office in the same building as Eurotrucks (Dandoy).

We are received in the offices by two employees. One works for Trans-Union, the other for SK Line. Without us asking, they allow us to see the offices where dispatching was once located, before it was moved to Romania in December 2016. They tell us that they have also been raided by the police, at the same time as the house searches in Belgium in Spring 2017. The investigators took copies of lots of documents, as well as the hard drives. But they emphasise that the trucks belonging to Trans-Union and SK Line are still operating. They don't understand. Surely, this isn't a letterbox company, like they think it is in Belgium?

According to them, everything is run correctly at SK Line and Trans-Union. They tell us that Slovakian drivers work at Trans-Union, while they are Romanian drivers at SK Line. It appears that the pay conditions differ and that the Slovaks are better off than the Romanians. But they all do the same work. All of the drivers come to the office in Bratislava to sign their contracts, but the trucks are maintained at Bratislava Logistics Park in Senec.

Another major difference between the drivers of Trans-Union and SK Line is this: Trans-Union's Slovaks are taken to Belgium by minibus, while SK Line's Romanians go by plane. The Slovaks stay working in Belgium for 4 weeks, the Romanians for five to six weeks.

Visiting Rovetra Slovensko in the town of Nitra

Rovetra Slovensko was established back in 1999 by the Robrechts family from the Rovetra haulage company in Westerlo. Since 2000, the company has been located in Nitra which, with 78,000 inhabitants, is the fourth-largest city in Slovakia. Nitra is some 90 kilometres from Bratislava.

We call at Rovetra and it is immediately made clear to us that we are unwelcome guests. This simply serves to make us even more curious. In Belgium, Rovetra was established in 1992. There is no mention of a subsidiary in Slovakia on the company website, but it does say that it is a family company.

What is surprising at Rovetra Slovensko is the high level of share capital: 497,510 euro! At the other haulage companies with Belgian roots, capital only goes as high as a few thousand euros, with a couple of exceptions up to around twenty thousand euro.

Rovetra is right in the centre of town and takes some finding. Even then we think we are in the wrong place, because the entrance is at the back, on a footpath, with a beautiful array of letterboxes. There must be at least nineteen companies accommodated on the modern first floor.

Letterbox companies for dummies – CS Service in Zvolen explains how!

Zvolen, 190 kilometres from Bratislava, has a population of around 42,000. At Lučenecká Cesta 2266/6, a dreary office building, is CS Service. Not unexpectedly, they state that they also offer their services in English and French.

A good 59 companies are registered at this address. That's a lot of letterboxes. CS Service lives on the second floor, along with a whole lot of other companies. And certainly more than 20 of them have Belgian roots. Not just in road haulage, with trucks and a surprising number of them that only operate with vehicles up to 3.5 tons.

But there are also companies operating in passenger transport and in the construction sector. The articles of association of all these companies have clearly been drafted by the same author: CS Service.

There are lots of little offices on both sides of the corridor on the second floor. On one side of the corridor are the offices of CS Service. On the other side of the corridor, nothing but closed doors, the offices of the clients of CS Service. At nine o'clock in the morning, only the CS Service office is showing any activity. There is no one in the other offices. Alongside all the doors hang little boards stating the names of the companies located there, sometimes with the names of the managers or members of staff. Some boards even have two company names, which seem to be accommodated in the same office, such as Railroadtrans and Onewaytrans. Both of these are owned by the Verjans, the first by Guillaume and the second by Guy. Thank you, Slovakian trade register, for this information.

CS Service was established in 2007. Until 2013 it was run by the Belgian Roland Delbrouck. The Slovakian trade register tells us that at the time he was living at Comblain-au-Pont, near Liège. So not in Slovakia. Currently, the firm is in the hands of Lenka Franková and Vladimira Uhrinová. They bought the shares from Delbrouck. And continue to work there.

Both of these directors take their jobs seriously! The visiting BTB team is welcomed with open arms, because the ladies think that we have come prospecting on behalf of a Belgian haulage company. We, of course, play along with this. And after a conversation lasting more than an hour, we leave their office with truckloads of do's and don'ts.

Clearly it is a very special business, setting up companies for Belgian entrepreneurs. A small miscellany of what they are willing to provide us with: setting up the company, articles of association, haulage permits, accountancy, staff policy, frontmen for establishing the company ("it does not make sense for you to set it up yourself, be

cause then your name and Belgian address will be in the trade register"), contacts with leasing-companies, recruitment of local staff ("that's really necessary and you will also have to come here at least once a month to sign all the documents"). Laughing, they say: "Actually it would be best if you had a Slovak wife, but that's something we can't provide you with." They also stress that the vehicles have to come back to Slovakia at least once a year for their technical inspection and that we have to provide cargoes for them to do so. And it's a good idea to drive up and down more at least to keep up appearances.

They also offer support in recruiting drivers, because ads need to be placed for this in Romania and Bulgaria. Slovak drivers don't want to work for the wages that Slovakian companies pay.

Both ladies are proud of the fact that they continue to refine their system. No more companies are being established at the office building itself now, but at other addresses in other municipalities and towns instead. They emphasise repeatedly that everything is entirely legal and above board: this is a genuine company location and dispatching is done from Slovakia. But naturally we can also simply do this from Belgium so that our employee is able to give our drivers their pro forma documents every day. They tell us with pride that there have been repeated visits from the Slovakian inspection services, but there have been no breaches of the rules on letterbox companies "because genuine operating haulage companies are located here". Indeed, they refer to the inspections in Belgium conducted at various hauliers and, jokingly, Mrs Franková says that "Mr Jost is now on holiday" (editorial note: we were in Slovakia just a few weeks after Roland Jost was arrested), but that we don't have to worry about that, because with them, everything is in perfect order.

The homepage of the CS Service website (www.csservice.info) states that the website is temporarily out of service. However, the pages behind it are still online in full. Still giving Delbrouck as the person to contact. The webpages are filled with good reasons why we need to set up a company in Slovakia.

The company describes itself as follows: “CS Service is a consultancy company specialising in supporting companies seeking to develop their business activities in Slovakia or wanting to come and set up in the country.” They stress that (wage) costs are lower in Zvolen than they are in Bratislava. They also write that they are able to provide their services in French. Well, now we know why all of their clients from Belgium seem to be based in the Liège area.

Excellent service, though! For the trifling price of just 3500 euro, they will draw up a comprehensive proposal for us. Naturally we offered them our grateful thanks. We now have all of the information that we could every wish for.

Playing hide and seek: looking for Gobo Trans Slovakia?

Senec, a small town with 19,000 inhabitants, is about 30 kilometres from Bratislava. At a single address there should be 3 companies: Gobo Trans Slovakia, Meulenberg Logistics Slovakia and Lux Trans Slovakia. At the address given – Pezinská Cesta 30 – no trace of any haulage activity. Just a villa.

No reference to the haulage companies on the letterbox or the doorbell either. Close to the villa is a traffic sign. Want to guess what's on it?

Curious as we are, we ring the bell. No answer. So we ask around the surrounding houses. Yes, this is the office for Transport Gobo, they confirm. There is a parking area a little further up, on the other side of the street. Which we find after a little searching! You can barely see the sign from the public highway, but it's there.

After a public entrance, where there are also other companies, such as a DIY store and a car bodyshop, a few dozen metres further along we finally find the parking area. Enclosed by a fence and locked with a sturdy chain and padlock. Asking workers from the surrounding companies we learn that there haven't been any trucks on the land here for over a month, whereas previously it was the permanent truck park. They also confirm that the office is indeed in the villa on the other side of the street.

We keep relocating until you give up looking...

Gobo Trans Slovakia was established in 2005. In Bratislava itself, but according to the trade register, Gobo moved to Senec in 2013. After our visit to Slovakia, we consulted the trade register once again. And yes, barely a week after our visit, there was another change of address. The company's registered office is now in Bratislava Logistics Park, also in Senec. This is a big industrial estate, where of course we went visiting. But we didn't manage to locate Gobo Trans Slovakia. Not even the letterbox...

Belgian hauliers get help... from Belgium

Setting up a letterbox company in another country can be quite an adventure. Fortunately for the poor Belgian haulage companies taking this step, they can be helped along the way by companies such as ISC Trans, SK Service and CS Service.

But it goes further than that: Belgian business offices are now opening up in Slovakia to give their clients support.

And one good thing for the Belgian haulier is that he can simply go to his own bank to handle his financial affairs. Because his bank manager will settle things with his colleague working in Slovakia.

There is also a solution for leasing: Belgian companies are now setting up small branches in Slovakia so that Slovakian haulage companies – on paper at least – can do business with other Slovakian firms. All this while the leased tractor units and trailers are delivered direct to Belgium.

Business office VGD offers 'tailored independent financial advice' and states proudly on its website that 'it is following its clients to other countries. VGD offices are located in the Middle East region, where cultural identity is important.'

VGD has its office in Bratislava in the same building as the Belgian consulate and has been operating there since 2004. Interesting detail: Bart Waterloos, business manager of VGD in Slovakia, is also honorary consul for our country in Bratislava.

Max Rental Slovakia is located at Dunajská 27 and doesn't even have its own doorbell.

Bratislava
LogisticsPark
DSV
vitazel
Coca-Cola

Bratislava Logistics Park, Senec

"Bratislava Logistics Park" was built in Senec about ten years ago. It is still expanding, with lots of separate sites, fenced and tightly secured. Surveillance staff on the barriers control who can go in and who can't.

And, yes, there are also plenty of subsidiaries of Belgian companies located here. Gilbert De Clercq, Transgem, Galliker and others. We are unable to spot where Gobo is located.

There is also a van in front of the door at Transgem and on the estate we also saw a tractor unit from TTS drive by.

Bratislava Logistics Park is also home to a lot of dealers and maintenance centres: Volvo, Renault, DAF, etc. as well as a number of international players who are located here: Movianto, Raben, Agility, DSV, Nagel, Coco-Cola, Geodis and so on.

On the parkinglot of the DAF garage we see a trailer from Van Dievel and a tractor unit from TTS.

In the section of Bratislava Logistics Park where Gilbert Declercq Slovakia is located, the man on the gate opens the barrier without any questions. At the end of March 2017, Gilbert Declercq Slovakia changed its registered office from Račianska 66 in Bratislava to Senec.

There are four tractor-trailers with Slovakian number plates at the loading dock. There is also a trailer with a Belgian number plate.

Very strange that the vehicles with Slovakian number plates should refer to www.gilbertdeclercq.com while the Belgian one has www.gdeclercq.be.

We ring the bell and are let in. The sales & operations manager speaks to us.

He doesn't commit himself and answers our questions briefly but in businesslike fashion He doesn't even ask us what organisation we work for. He understands – without us having to say anything – the obstacles that exist in the Western haulage sector; but he emphasises that this is an operating site and that this is a company that does haulage work in Slovakia. In Western Europe, too. When it becomes clear to him that we are really very inquisitive, he escorts us in a friendly but firm manner to the door...

As if by chance, at that particular moment there is a van fully loaded with the luggage of drivers on the point of leaving for Western Europe. It may well be an operating company, but it's still social dumping: drivers are taken for months to the West, where they drive constantly, but they are not paid entirely in line with the pay and working conditions that apply.

So it's not equal pay for equal work...

Fringe benefits for Belgian hauliers: the drivers' withholding tax

The withholding tax that is paid monthly by the drivers is paid by the Slovakian firm to the tax department. After a year, an adjustment is made: virtually always the driver has paid too much. So he simply gets a refund, doesn't he? Not a bit of it: the Slovakian taxman simply pays it back to the employer... You've guessed it: the driver never sees a red cent of that money back. At CS Service, they say that this can be as much as 600 euro per driver. But the aim is for the driver to get that money back. At the same time we also hear people say: "If someone doesn't work for you any more, it is of course not easy to pay it back..."

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www.stopsocialdumping.com

Read our previous black book:

Black book social dumping 2012

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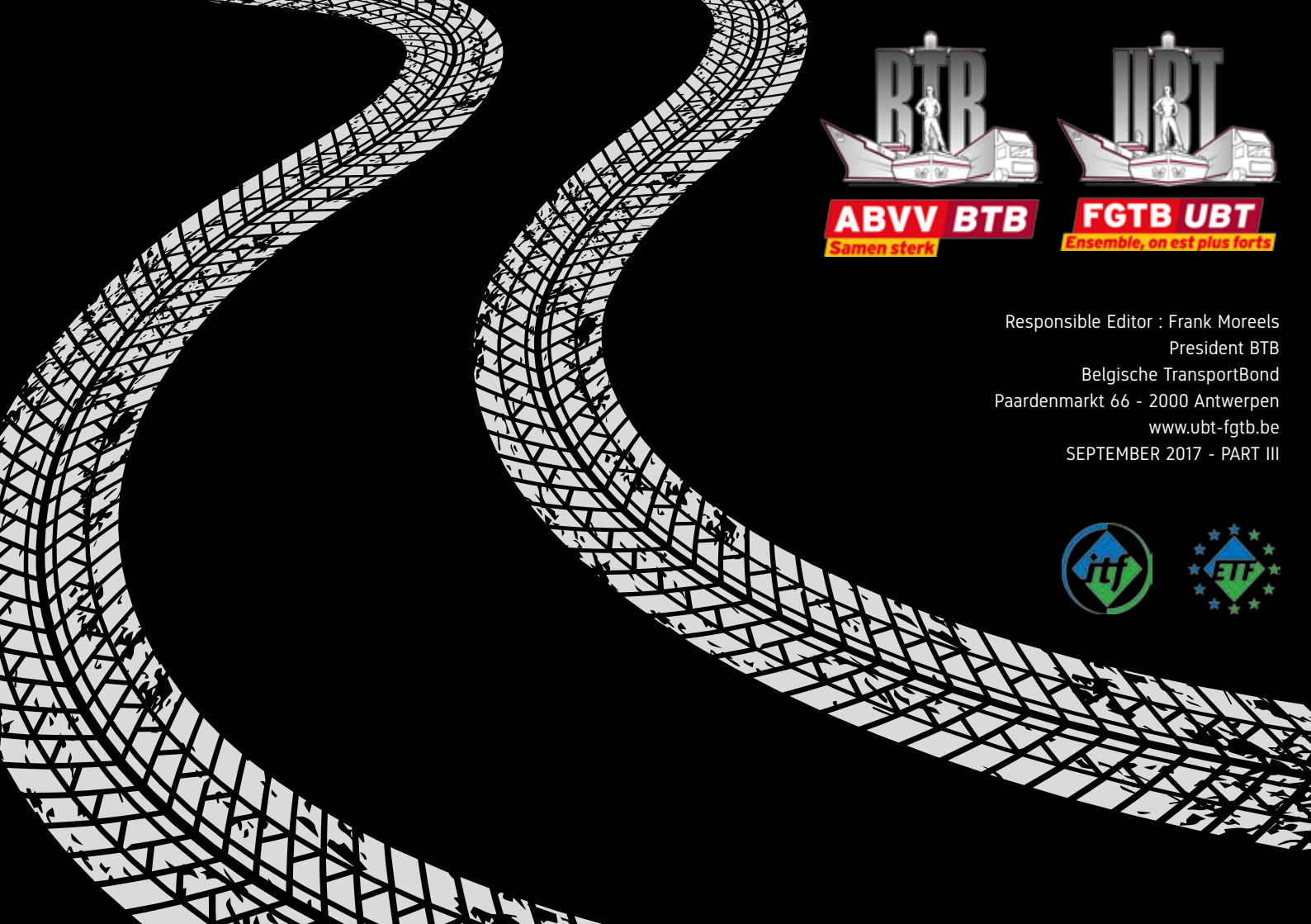

ABVV BTB
Samen sterk

FGTB UBT
Ensemble, on est plus forts

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