

## ALEXIS WALCKIERS

## A man with his eye on



## CV Express

**1976**

Born in Uccle

**1994-1996**

Studied for a degree in Physics

**1997**

Studied for a degree in Philosophy

**2000**

Graduated in Economic Sciences from the SBS-EM

**2000-****2006**

Teaching assistant in Economics at the SBS-EM

**2002**

Master in Economics from the SBS-EM

**2007**

Doctor of Economics from ECARES (European Center for Advanced Research in Economics and Statistics)

**2007-2010**

Consultant in Economics at Oxera

**2010**

Professor at the Brussels School of Competition

**2010**

Chief Economist with the Belgian Competition Authority

**2011**

Visiting Professor in Microeconomics at the SBS-EM

**2012-2013**

Expert in Competition Policy to the Federal Minister for Economic Affairs

**Alexis Walckiers' career is that of a man who seeks to understand and explain the world around him. After more than 10 years on university campuses, he is now keeping an eye on the smooth running of the markets...**

**"T**hroughout my career, I've let myself be guided by the encounters and chances life offers. I've learned to seize the opportunities that came my way... sometimes by instinct – like when I'm cooking. But I'm really happy with the path I've followed!" And, let's be honest, Alexis Walckiers' academic career doesn't exactly follow a straight line... veering from physics to philosophy before finally setting a firm course on economics. Since then he's become one of Belgium's leading specialists in market regulation and competition.

**A real little Uccle boy**

Growing up in the heart of Brussels' southern municipality, the first years of the Belgian Competition Authority's future Chief Economist were exactly what you might expect... "I was a real little Uccle boy", he smiles. "After a spell at the Dutch-speaking Sint-Jozefschool, I studied humanities at the Uccle Atheneum." At the same time, Alexis became a keen golfer and frequented the Royal Léopold Club – the famous (for those living in Brussels at least) Léo – where he played tennis. "To complete the picture, I was a scout with the Belgian Lonescouts..." He led a rather tranquil youth that took him to the benches of the University. Which path to follow? Well, let's just say that the competition was tough...

**Economics... but spoilt for choice**

His own preference was for philosophy – in order to understand the world around him. "My parents weren't too keen. Coming from a family of Solvay



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# the markets...

**Text:** Nelson Garcia Sequeira  
**Pictures:** Laetizia Bazzoni



- ▶ Chief Economist with the Belgian Competition Authority
- ▶ Eco Sciences 2000

in my academic career because it was he who persuaded me to do a master's. And it was he too who supervised my doctoral thesis." The third key moment occurred during his PhD at ECARES (the ULB's European Center for Advanced Research in Economics and Statistics). "The ambience there was very international. A real window on the world and I made the most of it, especially through some wonderful acquaintances I made there." →

“TEACHING IS AN EXCELLENT WAY OF CONTINUING TO MASTER THE FUNDAMENTALS OF ECONOMICS”



graduates (ed. note: his grandfather, mother and uncle), I could tell that they weren't exactly overjoyed by this choice, so I started by studying physics." And this worked, because he was successful. However, he decided to stop at that point and embark on philosophy. "I still had this desire to understand my environment... But to fulfil my parents' wish, I doubled up with Economic Sciences at the ULB." And that was the start of a great love story...

### Three key moments

"At the start, I couldn't say that it enthralled me. I was really more involved with student life, still keen to get to grips with the world. The student delegation was my passion, almost to the point of turning it into an occupation." But during the last year of his degree, something clicked. "Writing my dissertation under Françoise Thys-Clément, I realised that economics really was the subject for me and I became assistant to Mathias Dewatripont (ed. note: see his portrait in issue 51). This was an important encounter

### The BELGIAN COMPETITION AUTHORITY... for Dummies

**The role of this independent administrative authority is to help in determining and implementing competition policy in Belgium. What does this mean in practice? If company X reaches a price agreement with competitor Y, the Belgian Competition Authority (BCA) can intervene to re-establish healthy competition in the market. For instance, this happened when the major supermarkets and some of their suppliers were hit by a 174 million euro fine in 2015 for price fixing.**

But the BCA has a broader remit than this: it also oversees and controls abuses of dominant position and major company concentration and merger operations. For example: when Tecteo acquired Éditions de L'Avenir, it was with the blessing of the BCA.

In today's globalised economy, the BCA naturally acts in consultation and cooperation with the competition authorities in other EU Member States as well as the European Commission within the European Competition Network (ECN).

## “ I AM CONTINUALLY MOVING FROM ONE SECTOR TO ANOTHER... ”



### From thesis to consultancy

With a very keen interest in life on campus, Alexis then started work on a doctoral thesis about the management of universities and, in particular, the coexistence of research and teaching within the same institution. "My initial idea gained momentum, only to turn into another topic. On the advice of Mathias Dewatripont, among others, I decided to focus on an in-depth analysis of the scientific publishing market." He completed his PhD at the University of Toulouse, before heading to Oxford to become a consultant at Oxera, a firm specialising in the financial regulation of the markets. "I honed my skills as a specialist in competition. A very valuable experience but, with the financial crisis, the Brussels office that I'd joined fell from 7 to 3 employees, including... me." In spite of all this, feeling a change in the wind, Alexis set off in a new direction...



### From private to public

... and became the first Chief Economist to the Belgian Competition Authority. "I applied and... they took me on! Then I was seconded to the office of Johan Vande Lanotte, the Minister for Economic Affairs, with a clear objective: reforming the institution!" A challenge that he seized with both hands

If you'd like to suggest an alumnus or alumna or present your project in this section, write to us at [sbs-em@elixis.be](mailto:sbs-em@elixis.be).

and which, in 2013, led to the creation of a totally independent body. "Carrying out reforms of this scale in the public sector requires an enormous investment. When you set your mind to changing an institutional body, you soon come up against a number of obstacles. But that's also what makes it so thrilling!" It's an ambitious project that he's confronting head on, along with one of his other key interests: teaching. "It's an excellent way of continuing to master the fundamentals of economics. And the interaction with the students is extremely rewarding too."

### From cinema to telecoms

Firmly installed in his office in the heart of Brussels, Alexis Walckiers seems to be thriving in his role as "competition guardian". With good reason, as the challenges facing the Belgian Competition Authority are often crucial to the smooth running of the markets and the Belgian economy in general. And there's the "consumer protection" aspect too. "I am continually moving from one sector to another. Today, it's the pharmaceutical industry, tomorrow cinema or telecoms. And each time I have to immerse myself in the sector in order to understand what its main drivers are." Which is ideal for someone who has always wanted to grasp the different facets of the world around him. But for this new father, there's one sector where there's no competition at all – his love for his little daughter Marina... ■

## LEISURE and hobbies

- **Walking in town:** "I enjoy walking about the city, with no real aim in mind, seeking out our urban limits..."
- **Jogging:** "It's an essential... in order to keep fit."
- **Cooking and inviting friends round:** "I love this! Trying out unusual combinations, marrying tastes, sometimes intuitively... and always making sure there's a good bottle of wine on the table."
- **Painting:** "I get this from my father; he's passionate about Belgian painters. I enjoy going to auctions (small scale only). I often lose but sometimes I win too..."
- **Travel:** "My wife's Italian and we have a soft spot for that country... But that's not all: I've been to Kenya a few times and I must have explored at least half the 50 states in the USA!"