

Beursvennootschap NV Leleux Associated Brokers SA Société de bourse

Press Review as of  
Thursday, 06 May 2004

EVOLUTION OF SOME MAJOR INDEXES

Price on (d-1)		Last Price	Return on (d-1)	return on 31/12/2003	YTD	Return on Max	Return on Min
2.450,43	BEL 20	2.458,80	0,34%	9,56%	27,86%	(-)23,13%	72,36%
3.990,75	DAX Xetra	4.022,10	0,79%	1,44%	31,14%	(-)46,23%	82,58%
10.317,00	Dow Jones	10.310,95	(-)0,06%	(-)1,37%	20,06%	(-)9,06%	41,51%
2.915,63	DJ Transp.	2.923,01	0,25%	(-)2,81%	17,56%	(-)7,08%	50,50%
1.950,48	Nasdaq Composite	1.957,26	0,35%	(-)2,30%	28,45%	(-)54,21%	75,68%
3.700,79	CAC 40	3.729,38	0,77%	4,82%	21,97%	(-)46,13%	55,19%
4.547,20	FT-100	4.569,50	0,49%	2,07%	14,06%	(-)32,78%	39,02%
11.761,79	Nikkei 225	11.761,79	clos	10,16%	45,50%	(-)33,07%	54,60%
343,09	AEX	345,63	0,74%	2,36%	18,92%	(-)50,73%	58,23%
2.737,98	DJ Stoxx 50	2.753,15	0,55%	3,49%	16,37%	(-)46,86%	44,22%
392,65	Gold	393,25	0,15%	(-)5,43%	14,23%	(-)7,79%	53,70%
188,94	Indice HUI (Gold)	184,74	(-)2,22%	(-)23,95%	37,48%	(-)28,07%	413,31%
6,03	Argent en \$	6,13	1,58%	3,11%	28,14%	(-)25,58%	50,86%
36,39	Baril en \$	37,08	1,90%	21,65%	57,79%	(-)0,30%	126,65%
6,24	Gas Natural	6,17	(-)1,12%	6,20%	16,42%	(-)78,26%	290,51%
1,2100	Euro / \$	1,2175	0,62%	(-)2,96%	6,44%	(-)5,19%	47,41%
89,81	Indice DXY (\$)	89,32	(-)0,55%	2,73%	(-)6,31%	(-)26,12%	5,12%
4,565%	Taux 10 ans USD	4,579%	0,31%	7,84%	21,01%	(-)22,31%	47,14%
4,158%	Taux 10 ans Euro	4,162%	0,10%	(-)3,10%	2,21%	(-)22,07%	19,98%
1,530%	Taux 10 JPY	1,530%	clos	11,68%	147,17%	(-)22,34%	241,52%

BIGGEST MOVERS

	Price on d-1	on the day	Last Price	Return on d-1	Return on 31/12/03	Return on max
11 = +	50,27	COCA COLA CO	51,09	1,63%	0,67%	(-)18,90%
	43,28	BOEING CO	43,76	1,11%	3,84%	(-)41,60%
	43,52	EXXON MOBIL	43,99	1,08%	7,29%	(-)58,55%
<b>DJIA</b>						
19 = -	47,94	GENERAL MOTORS	47,56	(-)0,79%	(-)10,94%	(-)37,21%
	86,50	3M CORP	85,75	(-)0,87%	0,85%	(-)6,22%
	54,80	JOHNSON&JOHNSON	54,08	(-)1,31%	4,68%	(-)48,53%
0	4,97	IAMGOLD	4,97	0,00%	(-)28,39%	(-)40,48%
	17,02	RANGOLD	16,89	(-)0,76%	(-)38,24%	(-)40,76%
	5	COEUR D'ALENE	4,95	(-)1,00%	(-)14,36%	(-)35,46%
<b>Mines d'or</b>						
18 = -	4,92	GOLDEN STAR	4,72	(-)4,07%	(-)32,28%	(-)43,13%
	5,88	KINROSS GOLD	5,63	(-)4,25%	(-)29,54%	(-)82,81%
	2,84	DURBAN DEEP	2,69	(-)5,28%	(-)15,14%	(-)54,25%

	indice	Price on d-1	on the day	Last Price	Return on d-1	Return on 31/12
	DAX	87,66	ALLIANZ AG	90,89	3,68%	(-9,18%
	FTSE	741,5	WHITBREAD	768,5	3,64%	6,88%
	CAC	87,1	PINAULT-PR RED	90,25	3,62%	17,74%
	AEX	24,81	NUMICO	25,66	3,43%	17,12%
	BEL	33,72	UCB	34,7	2,91%	16,09%
	FTSE	139,5	VODAFONE GROUP	143,5	2,87%	3,61%
	AEX	22,96	VNU	23,61	2,83%	241,18%
<b>157 = +</b>	DAX	97,65	ADIDAS SALOMON	100,3	2,71%	11,07%
	BEL	47,23	UMICORE	48,5	2,69%	(-12,85%
	DAX	21,85	BAYER AG	22,43	2,65%	(-3,40%
	CAC	39,46	MICHELIN	40,5	2,64%	11,32%
	BEL	18,97	AGFA-GEVAERT	19,45	2,53%	(-13,94%
	CAC	13,95	ARCELOR	14,25	2,15%	3,11%
	CAC	25,97	TF1	26,52	2,12%	(-4,19%
	DAX	37,2	METRO AG	37,98	2,10%	8,67%

#### 215 European Stocks

	FTSE	285,5	BRADFORD & BING	282,75	(-0,97%	(-7,30%
	BEL	51,9	GBL	51,4	(-0,97%	15,07%
	AEX	1,86	HAGEMEYER	1,84	(-1,09%	2,79%
	BEL	13,9	DEXIA	13,75	(-1,09%	0,66%
	CAC	75,2	CASINO GUICHARD	74,35	(-1,14%	(-3,57%
	DAX	45,7	DT BOERSE N	45,16	(-1,20%	4,18%
	FTSE	591	SMITH&NEPHEW	583,5	(-1,29%	24,35%
<b>50 = -</b>	FTSE	283,75	BRITISH AIRWAYS	280	(-1,34%	20,43%
	FTSE	94,25	LEGAL & GENERAL	93	(-1,34%	(-7,23%
	FTSE	741	HBOS	731	(-1,37%	1,04%
	DAX	12,88	MLP	12,68	(-1,58%	(-18,19%
	FTSE	864,5	BRIT AM TOBACCO	850,5	(-1,65%	10,45%
	FTSE	190	RENTOKIL INITIAL	186,75	(-1,74%	(-1,71%
	DAX	13,24	DT LUFTHANSA AG	12,82	(-3,28%	(-3,25%
	FTSE	1722	ROYAL BANK SCOT	1625	(-5,97%	(-1,28%

#### Business news at a glance

Our sources are the following :  
**Bloomberg (B), Financial Times Information (FT ou AFX),  
 Les Echos (E) and Vie Financière (VF)**

#### Economic Overview

##### BEF

##### **BELGIQUE: la compétitivité belge chute par peur du changement**

(Echo) Classée ces cinq dernières années autour de la dix-huitième position du très attendu classement IMD de la compétitivité mondiale, la Belgique chute en 2004 à la vingt-cinquième place. La cause? La conjoncture économique rouillée, l'euro fort, mais aussi une certaine inertie de la population belge née de la crainte face à la nécessité du changement, constate Stéphane Garelli, professeur à l'Institut lausannois éponyme et co-auteur du rapport. Les faiblesses belges sont connues: dépenses publiques trop élevées, fiscalité trop lourde et coût du travail démesuré... S'ajoute toutefois à présent une dégringolade en quatre ans de la 32e à la 44e place sur le plan de l'efficacité de l'Etat. Ainsi qu'une 59e place sur 60 en ce qui concerne les menaces de délocalisation, entre l'Irlande et l'Ecosse. "Des nations dont le modèle d'attraction des capitaux étrangers est mis en péril par la concurrence de l'Europe centrale, de la Chine ou de l'Inde", souligne Stéphane Garelli. Au niveau mondial, notons que le profond déficit commercial des Etats-Unis n'entame en rien la compétitivité du géant américain, la moitié de ses importations étant en fait constituée de produits fabriqués par des firmes US à l'étranger. Les USA restent donc leader de l'opus 2004 grâce à leur capacité à profiter de "low-costs" aux quatre coins du monde. Selon l'IMD, au-delà des délocalisations, si l'Asie et l'Europe de l'Est offrent des opportunités aux entreprises occidentales, ces régions vont progressivement les concurrencer avec leurs

propres marques et prendre d'assaut les marchés occidentaux, comme jadis le Japon. Mais à bien plus grande échelle, avertissent les auteurs.

## USD

### FED: la Réserve fédérale maintient ses taux mais perd patience

(Echo) Le mot "patience" a été remplacé par "mesuré", un glissement sémantique bien digéré par les marchés... La Réserve fédérale a en effet décidé hier, à l'issue de la réunion de son comité monétaire, de maintenir ses taux directeurs inchangés, mais a infléchi son discours, préparant les marchés à un resserrement à terme. Elle n'a pas répété dans son communiqué qu'elle pourrait se montrer "patiente" avant de relever ses taux, comme elle le faisait depuis janvier, préférant dire qu'"une politique accommodante peut être supprimée à un rythme qui sera sans doute mesuré". Les analystes, qui s'attendaient au statu quo, ont globalement jugé rassurant le mot "mesuré": la hausse à venir sera donc graduelle et progressive, ont-ils conclu. Reste à voir quel sera le timing du relèvement: en juin, en août? Ici, les avis divergent. Wall Street a également apprécié le message puisqu'alors qu'ils étaient quasi inchangés avant l'annonce de la Fed, les indices S&P 500 et Nasdaq Composite ont ensuite progressé de 0,18% et 0,61% respectivement. Sur le marché pétrolier, la crainte de voir compromis l'approvisionnement en provenance d'Arabie Saoudite, le plus gros exportateur d'or noir au monde, a propulsé hier les cours du brut à un plus haut depuis près de 13 ans. Le cours de référence du baril de Brent a atteint un temps la barre des 36 dollars avant de se replier légèrement.

### U.S. Economy: ISM Services Index Rose to a Record in April

May 5 (Bloomberg) -- An index of U.S. service industries, which make up the largest share of the economy, unexpectedly rose to a record in April and more companies were hiring than at anytime since November 2000, a private survey showed.

The Institute for Supply Management's index of financial services, construction, retail and other non-manufacturing enterprises rose to 68.4 in April from the previous high of 65.8 the month before. Readings greater than 50 indicate expansion.

The gauge of supplier deliveries, a measure of the time it takes for companies to complete orders, rose to the second-highest level on record. Stronger consumer and corporate spending, more hiring and signs of rising inflation prompted Federal Reserve policy makers yesterday to take a step toward the first increase in interest rates since May 2000.

"The economy is getting even better," said Robert Mellman, an economist at J.P. Morgan Securities Inc. in New York. "Business spending and hiring are driving things. We look for an acceleration to 5 percent GDP this quarter."

The economy grew 4.2 percent pace from January through March, according to the latest Commerce Department data. Economists surveyed by Bloomberg News predict growth will exceed a 4 percent annual rate in every quarter this year.

Services account for about 85 percent of the economy. Economists expected the Tempe, Arizona, institute's index, which was initiated in July 1997, to fall to 65, based on the median of 61 forecasts in a Bloomberg News survey. Estimates ranged from 60 to 69.

An index of service industries in the dozen euro nations expanded in April for a 10th month. The measure compiled for Reuters Group Plc by NTC Research Ltd. rose to 54.5 from March's 54.4.

The U.S. survey's employment index rose to 54.5 in April, the highest since 54.6 in more than three years. A measure of new orders rose to the highest since August of last year.

#### 'Picking Up All Year'

"The job market globally has been picking up all year," said Paul Reilly, chief executive officer at the executive search firm Korn/Ferry International, in an interview. "We see CEOs budgeting for capital expenditure and employment. We are seeing the numbers. We have seen it since late summer and since the first of the year really picking up. It will be steady job growth for the next year."

Treasury securities held gains after the report after the Fed signaled yesterday it's not in a hurry to raise interest rates. The 4 percent note maturing in February 2014 rose 11/32, pushing down the yield 5 basis points to 4.52 percent at 10:24 a.m. New York time.

Today's statistics follow other data so far this week showing increases in factory orders and construction spending as the first-quarter ended.

#### Construction

Construction spending increased 1.5 percent, three times the median estimate in a Bloomberg News survey. Private residential construction, which accounts for more than half the total, rose 0.7 percent.

"We're pretty optimistic right now," Tom Leppert, chief executive of the Turner Corp., a Dallas-based construction company, said yesterday in an interview. "Clearly, the economy has got to continue to hold strong, and I think employment numbers in the second quarter will be important in that regard."

The economy added 308,000 jobs in March, the most in almost four years, and 759,000 in the last seven months. Another 168,000 jobs were probably created in April, according to the median forecast ahead of Friday's Labor Department report. Last year the U.S. lost an average of 5,000 jobs a month.

Job growth becomes more important each month for President George W. Bush as the November presidential election nears. Democratic candidate John Kerry, a Massachusetts senator, has said Bush's policies have done little to put more Americans back to work. Some 1.8 million jobs have been lost since Bush's term began in January 2001.

#### Hiring

Plano, Texas-based Perot Systems, the second computer- services company founded by billionaire H. Ross Perot, said first- quarter sales grew 25 percent, helped by acquisitions and sales to hospitals and governments.

Perot plans to add employees through hiring, acquisitions and new contracts, Chief Executive Officer Ross Perot Jr. said in an interview yesterday. The company hired 4,000 people last year and now employs 14,400. The economy is forecast to grow at a 4.6 percent rate this year, based on the median forecast in a Bloomberg News survey, the fastest in two decades.

Fed policy makers yesterday voted unanimously to keep the benchmark U.S. interest rate at an almost 46-year low of 1 percent and suggested they will lift borrowing costs at a ``measured" pace to head off inflation.

#### Industries

As long as central bankers raise the overnight rate in ``a few or several 25 basis-point steps, it will not restrain a healthy economy," said Chris Rupkey, senior financial economist at Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi Ltd. in New York.

In today's report, 16 of 17 industries reported increases in activity, led by finance, banking, retail and transportation, the institute said.

The survey's index of prices paid, a measure of costs for purchased materials and services, rose to 68.6 from 65.7 in March.

The index of new orders for non-manufacturing companies increased to 65.6, the highest since August of last year, from 62.8 in March.

Order backlogs rose to 53.5 from 52.5. The inventory index increased to 56.5 in April from 51.5 in March.

#### Manufacturing

The supply managers group's companion index of U.S. manufacturing held close to a two-decade high last month as production increased and more factories added workers than at any time since 1987, the institute said in a report Monday.

New orders at U.S. factories rose 4.3 percent in March, the biggest increase since July 2002, bolstered by demand for machinery, metals and petrochemicals, a government report yesterday showed.

A recovering labor market may underpin consumer spending, which rose at a 3.8 percent annual rate in the first quarter following a 3.2 percent pace in the previous three months.

Spending on services contributed 1.77 percentage points to first-quarter gross domestic product, which grew at a 4.2 percent annual rate, Commerce Department figures showed last week.

Minneapolis-based Target Corp., the No. 2 U.S. discount retailer, said last week that April sales at stores open at least a year were rising within its forecast for a gain of 4.5 percent to 6.5 percent.

#### **ETATS-UNIS: Bush demande 25 milliards USD de plus pour l'Irak et l'Afghanistan**

(Echo) Le président américain George Bush demandera au Congrès 25 milliards de dollars supplémentaires pour les opérations militaires en Afghanistan et en Irak, a-t-on appris mercredi de sources proches du Capitole. Bush avait pourtant promis de ne pas demander de crédits supplémentaires avant l'élection présidentielle du mois de novembre. Joshua Bolten, directeur du budget à la Maison blanche, et d'autres hauts responsables de l'administration ont commencé à rencontrer certains députés pour les informer de ce projet. Les fonds supplémentaires seraient ajoutés au budget proposé par Bush pour l'exercice budgétaire 2005. "Cette demande ne sera pas étudiée avant 30 jours", a déclaré un collaborateur d'un représentant républicain. La Maison blanche, qui avait affirmé à plusieurs reprises qu'elle ne demanderait pas le déblocage de fonds supplémentaires avant le début de l'année prochaine, n'a pas fait de commentaires pour l'instant. Quelque 160 milliards de dollars ont déjà été dépensés pour les opérations américaines en Irak et en Afghanistan.

### **Stock Exchanges**

#### **ASIA**

##### **Japan's Toyota, Fuji Photo Drop; Leighton Plunges**

May 6 (Bloomberg) -- Japanese stocks fell, led by companies that rely on overseas sales such as Toyota Motor Corp. and NEC Electronics Corp., as a gain in the yen against the dollar threatened to reduce the value of earnings.

``The yen's move against the dollar is encouraging investors in the short term to sell shares of exporters," said Masanao Yoshitake, who helps manage \$2.5 billion in Japanese equities at Meiji Dresdner Asset Management Co. in Tokyo. He said he plans to reduce his holdings in exporters and increase his stake in banks, declining to name the stocks.

The Nikkei 225 Stock Average slid 0.6 percent to 11,693.02 as of 1:11 p.m. in Tokyo, while the Topix index lost 0.6 percent to 1179.45. Trading resumed after a three-day holiday. Fuji Photo Film Co. dropped after the world's second-largest maker of camera film said group operating profit will drop this business year.

The Morgan Stanley Capital International Asia-Pacific Index, which tracks more than 800 companies in the region, fell for the first day in three. Australia's Leighton Holdings Ltd. is set for its biggest drop in at least 17 years after the construction company cut its profit forecast by a quarter.

Samsung Electronics Co., poised for its longest losing streak since December 1996, helped send South Korea's Kospi index down 1.8 percent. Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index rose, led by mainland shares such as CNOOC Ltd. and PetroChina Co., after the South China Morning Post reported Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao as saying that the government won't slam the brakes on growth.

All other benchmarks in the region declined except in Malaysia, Taiwan, Thailand and Sri Lanka. China's stocks markets are closed today for a holiday.

#### Yen Strengthens

Toyota shed 0.8 percent to 3,960 yen. The world's largest automaker by market value gets 80 percent of its operating profit from North America. NEC Electronics, the world's biggest maker of semiconductors for mobile-phone displays, declined 2.1 percent to 7,610 yen.

"The yen's gain certainly made shares of automakers and technology-related stocks a bit less attractive in the short term," said Minoru Tada, a managing director at World Nichiei Frontier Securities Co. in Tokyo.

The yen recently traded at 108.93, strengthening from about 110 yen per dollar at the close of Japanese stock trading last Friday. A stronger yen reduces the value of exporters' dollar-denominated sales.

Mitsubishi Motors Corp. sank 5.1 percent to 259 yen. NHK television said police raided the company's head office on suspicion it may have destroyed evidence related to a fatal accident involving a truck made by its unit Mitsubishi Fuso Truck & Bus Corp.

#### Earnings

Fuji Photo slumped 3.9 percent to 3,410 yen. Group operating profit will decline 9.1 percent to 164 billion yen (\$1.5 billion) this fiscal year. A strengthening yen remains a risk, said Toshio Takahashi, a company director. Fuji Photo predicts a rate of 108 yen to the dollar this year.

Leighton plunged 22 percent to A\$8.01. Australia's largest construction company said full-year profit would be little changed from last year's A\$140 million (\$102.5 million) because of delays in construction projects and the closure of a coalmine. That's lower than a February forecast for A\$190 million for the year to June.

"People will question what other problems are yet to be found and it will have a big impact on investor confidence," said Brent Mitchell, an analyst at Shaw Stockbroking in Melbourne who rates Leighton a "sell."

#### Memory-Chip Prices

Samsung Electronics, the world's No. 2 chipmaker, slid 3.2 percent to 537,000 won.

Spot prices for 256-megabit, 333 megahertz double-data-rate dynamic random access chips may trade between \$4.95 and \$5.25 until May 11, according to a forecast by Taiwan-based Dramexchange.com. It closed at \$5.15 yesterday.

Hynix Semiconductor Inc., the fourth-largest chipmaker, fell 3.4 percent to 12,750 won. Rambus Inc., a computer-memory chip designer, filed a lawsuit that claims Hynix, Micron Technology Inc. and Infineon Technologies AG conspired to fix prices and keep Rambus out of the memory-chip market.

The Hang Seng added 1.1 percent to 12,083.99. Wen said the government won't slam the brakes on growth, the South China Morning Post reported, citing comments the Chinese premier made during his European tour.

"Investors should respond positively to Premier Wen's comments," said Frederick Tsang, head of research at China Everbright Ltd. Mainland shares have fallen recently "because of fears of credit tightening or interest-rate rises in China."

#### 'H' Shares

The Hang Seng China Enterprises Index, which tracks 37 mainland companies, or H shares, rose 1.2 percent to 4268.27. The H-share index slumped 15 percent last month.

The Chinese government last week clamped down on lending to industries it said were expanding too rapidly, including steel, cement, autos and real estate.

CNOOC, China's largest offshore oil producer, climbed 1.7 percent to HK\$3.025. PetroChina, China's biggest oil producer, gained 2.1 percent to HK\$3.65.

The stocks also advanced after crude-oil futures in New York climbed 1.5 percent to \$39.57 a barrel, the highest since October 1990.



#### **BEF**

##### Lichte winst voor Bel20

(tijd-nieuwslin) - Euronext Brussel heeft de dag afgesloten met lichte winst. De overige Europese beurzen presteerden iets beter. Met een winst van meer dan 10% was Carestel veruit de grootste winnaar. Na de verkoop van Lunch Garden lijken de problemen voor de snelrestaurantgroep eindelijk van de baan.

In de eurozone was de index die peilt naar het vertrouwen van de aankoopdirecteuren in de dienstensector licht gestegen. Bovendien werd ook een gunstig indexcijfer voor de Amerikaanse dienstensector vrijgegeven. De stijging van de olieprijs bleef echter als een donderwolk boven de markten hangen. Ook woensdag werd de olie duurder. Voor een vat Brent werd 0,16% meer betaald (USD 36,09). Bij de slotbel noteerde de Bel20 0,34% hoger op 2.458,80 punten. De index telde 14 stijgers en 6 dalers.



## EUR

### Bourses end higher in cautious trade

(FT) - European markets managed to finish Wednesday in positive territory as investors reacted cautiously to the overnight news from the US where, as expected, the Federal Reserve's open market committee left interest rates on hold, while moving to a neutral policy stance.

But activity in Europe remained relatively light ahead of the two interest rate decisions from the UK's Monetary Policy Committee and the European Central Bank, expected on Thursday.

By the close, the FTSE Eurotop 300 was up 0.5 per cent to 1,008.23, while Frankfurt's Xetra Dax added 0.8 per cent to 4,022.1. In Paris, the CAC 40 ended 0.8 per cent higher at 3,729.38 and London's FTSE 100 closed 0.5 per cent higher at 4,569.5.

The ongoing first-quarter results season generally continued to provide market bulls with plenty of ammunition, and the surprise acquisition by Royal Bank of Scotland of US bank, Chapter One, for \$10.5bn, triggered fresh hopes that Europe will be a choice hunting ground for takeover bids and mergers later in the year.

Royal's move, which is being partly financed by a £2.5bn share placing, was seen as draining European markets in the short term, however, with some funds seen as having to sell other bank stocks to take up the new Royal stock.

Much of the day's focus was on the financial areas of the market, but top spot in the FTSE Eurotop 300 winner's list went to **Ericsson**, the Swedish telecoms equipment manufacturer, whose shares jumped 4.3 per cent to SKr21.70, still responding to the bullish trading update released on Tuesday. The company said it would maintain its profitability through tight cost controls.

Also featuring prominently on the leader board was **Telenor**, Norway's biggest telecoms group, whose shares put on 3.1 per cent at NKr46, after announcing much-better-than-expected first-quarter core profits which came in up 20 per cent and a bullish forecast for its overseas mobile phone operations.

Financials, meanwhile, occupied leading positions in both the best and worst performers.

Germany's **Allianz** added 3.7 per cent to €90.89 after revealing an impressive set of results which included news that its Dresdner Bank subsidiary had returned to profit after 18 months of losses.

Allianz said its net profit for the three months came in at €650m, compared with a consensus estimate of between €400m and €600m.

Analysts at Bear Stearns advised clients to tread carefully in the stock: "While it is possible to put a positive spin on the patchy information that has been disclosed, we would caution against getting carried away".

On Allianz's heels came **Banca Antonveneta** whose shares pushed up 3.1 per cent to €16.360 in the wake of impressive first-quarter data. Goldman upped its 2004 earnings per share forecast for the full-year to €0.77 and the 2005 figure to €1.07 citing lower loan losses.

The Swiss banks gained in confidence after **CS Group** followed UBS in delivering excellent quarterly numbers which surprised the most optimistic analysts. CS shares rose 1.4 per cent to SFr46.10 as Deutsche Bank said: "The quarterly net profit was in line after the headline disclosure last week but the mix is even better than we expected; this is the highest Q1 over-delivery in the European banks sector so far".

Even more impressive was the performance of UBS shares, which were driven up 2.1 per cent to SFr95.35 as analysts re-worked their full-year estimates.

Goldman Sachs said UBS's earnings "mark a flying start to the year" and upped its 2004 earnings per share forecast by 11 per cent and that for 2005 by 10 per cent.

On the sell-side, however, came Germany's **Depfa Bank**, which loans money to local governments and whose shares fell sharply to finish 7.6 per cent down at €11.50 as news that its higher-than-expected first quarter profits were inflated by asset sales.

Norway's **Statoil** was among the strongest performers among natural resources stocks, with a 19 per cent increase in quarterly profits topping expectations and helping the shares rise 2.3 per cent to NKr90.

On the downside, **Wartsila**, the Finnish engineering group, was among the severe casualties, its shares sliding 6.4 per cent to €17.23 after revealing worse-than-expected first quarter losses.



## NLG

### Damrak sluit met winst

AMSTERDAM (DFT) - Het Damrak is woensdag duidelijk hoger gesloten. Een belangrijk deel van de winsten kwam pas tot stand na een beter dan verwachte opening van de Amerikaanse beurzen. Het aandeel Versatel schoot in de sloffase van de handel omhoog.

De AEX-index sloot de dag af met een winst van 2,54 punten of 0,74 procent op 345,63 punten, na een hoogste stand van de dag van 346,33. In de ochtend was een laagste stand bereikt van 341,82 punten. De Midkap-index won 0,43 procent op 381,56 punten.

In tegenstelling tot wat was verwacht, boekte Wall Street vanmiddag kort na de opening aardige koerswinsten. Dit zorgde voor een opleving in Amsterdam, waar de handel eerder op de dag steeds opvallend stil was.

De betere stemming was ook te danken aan goede kwartaalcijfers van enkele Europese bedrijven. Het Duitse verzekeringsconcern Allianz presenteerde vandaag betere winstcijfers dan verwacht. In Nederland leidde dat tot vraag naar de financiële waarden, die zwaar wegen in de AEX-index.

De Duitse sportartikelenfabrikant Adidas-Salamon speelde zich in eveneens in de kijker door met sterke kwartaalcijfers te komen.

In Londen trok Royal Bank of Scotland de aandacht. De bank kocht woensdag voor ruim 10 miljard dollar de Amerikaanse branchegenoot Charter One Financial.

Gisteren sloot Wall Street licht hoger. De Amerikaanse beurzen reageerden per saldo nauwelijks op de aankondiging van de Fed dat de Amerikaanse rente nu nog ongewijzigd blijft, maar binnenkort zal worden verhoogd. Een hogere rente is in principe ongunstig voor de bedrijfsleven, maar heeft een positieve oorzaak: de economie is sterker geworden.

De wisselmarkt reageerde met een verzwakking van de dollarkoers. De euro won opnieuw terrein en noteerde vandaag \$ 1,2150.

Volgens Danny Markens, beleggingsadviseur bij effectenbank Stroeve, lijkt de AEX-index ondanks de winst van vandaag voorlopig nog gevangen te zitten in een trading-range tussen de 340 en 360 punten. Beleggers zien volgens hem momenteel nauwelijks aanknopingspunten om te kiezen voor een bepaalde richting.

Een negatief punt is in ieder geval de zeer hoge prijs van ruwe olie. Dat is voor brede sectoren van het bedrijfsleven een ongunstige factor. Vandaag viel de olieprijs na een aanvankelijke verdere stijging echter terug.

Onder de AEX-fondsen was Versatel een uitschieter. Het telecom- en kabelaandeel noteerde een groot deel van de dag vrijwel onveranderd, maar boekte in het laatste uur van de handel plotseling een koerswinst van 14 procent op een slot van € 1,87. Op het slot stond er op deze prijs nog een grote kooporder voor 1 miljoen aandelen open.

De reden van de koersstijging was duister. Er was geen nieuws over Versatel bekendgemaakt. Er staken wel geruchten de kop op dat Versatel overgenomen zou worden, maar deze leken eerder het gevolg dan de oorzaak van de koersstijging van het aandeel.

Bankverzekeraar ING dankzij het Allianz-effect 1,5 procent. De andere financiële waarden leverden hun aanvankelijke winsten later echter grotendeels in of kwamen zelfs op kleine verliezen te staan.

Ahold stond in de belangstelling. Een van de aandeelhouders van de Zweedse Ahold-deelneming ICA wil van zijn belang af. Dat kan eventueel leiden tot een hogere voorziening bij Ahold voor de boekhoudfraude inzake ICA. Bestuursvoorzitter Anders Moberg sluit verder verkoop van het gehele supermarktconcern nog steeds niet uit, zei hij in een interview. Het aandeel Ahold noteerde 1,1 procent hoger.

Van de andere hoofdfondsen viel Numico in positieve zin op. Het aandeel wist 3,4 procent toe te voegen aan de winst van dinsdag, toen meevallende kwartaalcijfers werden bekendgemaakt. VNU werd 2,8 procent duurder.

Air France werd onder de nieuwe naam Air France-KLM voor het eerst aan de beurs van Amsterdam verhandeld. Er werd redelijk in gehandeld, maar de koers daalde 0,7 procent tot 14,60 euro. Het fonds is deel gaan uitmaken van de Midkap-index, terwijl het aandeel KLM naar de lokale markt is verhuisd. Dat aandeel steeg 2 procent tot € 17,45.

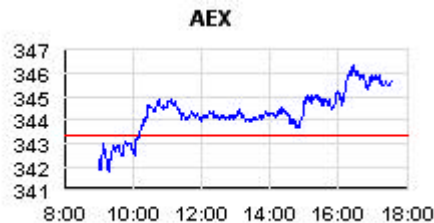
De Franse luchtvaartmaatschappij heeft een notering in de Midkap gekregen omdat het bijna 90 procent van de aandelen van KLM heeft vervangen op de index. KLM blijft genoteerd totdat 95 procent van de aandelen zijn opgegaan in Air France.

Uitzendbureau Randstad heeft in het eerste kwartaal een nettowinst gemaakt van 15,4 miljoen euro. In dezelfde periode vorig jaar draaide het bedrijf nog een verlies van 3,3 miljoen. Het aandeel daalde 0,2 procent.

Markens noemt de cijfers in lijn met de verwachtingen, met de aantekening dat de autonome omzetzijde iets beter uitkwam dan verwacht, maar de brutomarge juist iets lager dan waarop was gerekend.

Vastgoeddeel Rodamco Europe heeft zijn nettowinst in het eerste kwartaal met 10,3 procent zien dalen naar 77 miljoen euro. In dezelfde periode vorig jaar was de winst nog 86 miljoen. De winst daalde onder meer omdat het bedrijf sinds 1 januari gedwongen is meer bestuurskosten in het cijfer mee te nemen. Het aandeel noteerde een winst van 0,3 procent.

Satellietbedrijf New Skies Satellites heeft in het eerste kwartaal van dit jaar een nettowinst behaald van 140.000 dollar. Vorig jaar bedroeg de nettowinst over dezelfde periode nog 3,6 miljoen dollar. De omzet daalde van 52 miljoen dollar naar 51,9 miljoen dollar. Ondanks de afname van de winst steeg de koers van New Skies Satellites 3 procent.



## USA

### Strong data fail to move Wall Street

(FT) - US investors on Wednesday played a waiting game as they mulled the ramifications of the Federal Reserve's monetary policy statement the previous day.

Strong service-sector activity data failed to move the markets and the leading indices remained broadly flat by the close.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average closed less than 0.1 per cent lower at 10,310.95, while the broader S&P 500 index inched up 0.2 per cent to 1,121.58. The Nasdaq Composite tacked on 0.4 per cent to 1,957.26.

Art Hogan, chief US markets analyst at Jefferies & Co, said: "We're trying to decide what our footing is." He added that the economy was currently "not too hot, not too cold" but that hints of inflationary pressure could soon change that.

Shortly after the open, traders took in news that the US service-sector activity index grew at a record pace in April, confounding expectations of a dip. The index, compiled by the Institute for Supply Management, measures the pace of growth in the two-thirds of the US economy accounted for by services.

The employment component of the index also rose, fanning hopes for a pick-up in jobs growth. Economists believe this is more likely to happen in the services sector than in industry because of outsourcing.

Traders, analysts and investors alike were left debating the difference between a "patient" Federal Reserve and a "measured" one. On Tuesday the US central bank announced it would leave interest rates at their 46-year lows while saying price stability had been achieved. It added that it would be cautious in raising rates.

Having speculated frantically on the effects of the Fed's announcement, traders saw nothing to drive decisions once it appeared. The prospect of rising borrowing costs had been priced in, they said, and the moderate reaction of bond markets helped maintain the lull.

"We know how the Fed feels, we know how the earnings are, we know what the data are, we are wondering what does it all portend for stock prices," said Mr Hogan.

A few stocks moved on company-specific news about merger-and-acquisition activity and strong earnings at the tail end of the results season.

**Charter One Financial** shares surged 22 per cent to \$43.86 after it agreed to be bought by Royal Bank of Scotland for \$10.5bn in cash.

Another sharp riser was **Western Wireless**, which sells mobile telephone services in rural parts of the US. It added 16.6 per cent to \$25.18 after it announced first-quarter results well above estimates.

Among Dow components, **Coca-Cola** shares inched up 1.6 per cent to \$51.09 after the world's biggest soft drinks group said it had resolved its succession issue by appointing Neville Isdell, a former executive, as chief executive officer.

OPT CUT **Boston Scientific** shares put on 0.4 per cent to \$40.57, retreating from earlier highs after it said sales of its drug-coated vascular stent increased last month.

From the retail sector, **CVS** said first-quarter profits rose sharply thanks to improved margins and rising demand at the pharmacies it operates across the US. Shares rose 1.4 per cent to \$40.53.

Market observers said that analysts' estimates in the wake of the earnings season could be the next determining factors for equity prices.

However, Byron Wien, investment strategist at Morgan Stanley, said earnings were not the problem. He told clients that "analysts often have difficulty in accurately estimating earnings when economic growth is powerful". He added that excessively positive investor sentiment was one of the factors thwarting further advances for the market and said that a correction over a longer period would reverse that sentiment.

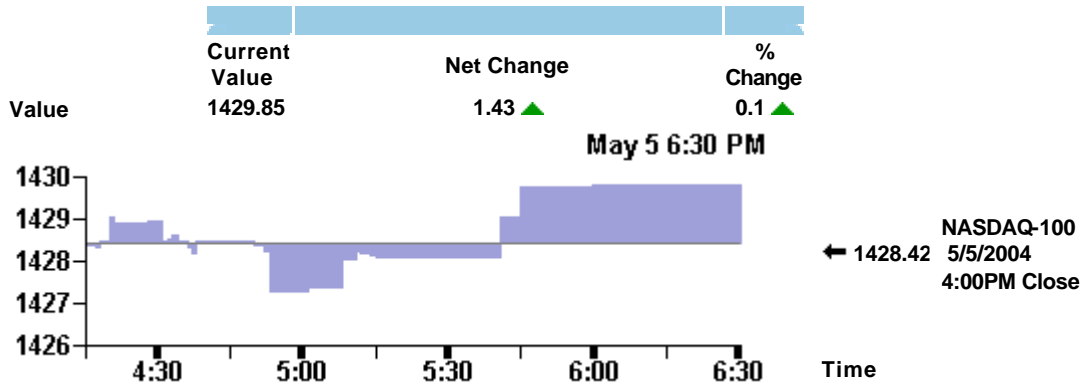
As a result, Mr Wien took the view that market performance would be subdued in the near term but will "do well in the second half".

Tobias Levkovich, chief US equity strategist at Smith Barney, agreed, saying that earnings estimate revisions were increasing at historically unsustainable rates.

Mr Levkovich said stocks could fall 12-13 per cent by the summer but might improve later in the year.



### NASDAQ-100 After Hours Indicator<sup>SM</sup>



### After market Nasdaq most active

#### Microsoft

\$26.30      \$26.29      0.04%      Volume : 2,412,243

### Exchange Rates

#### EUR

#### Euro Rises to Four-Week High; Services Industries Grow in April

May 5 (Bloomberg) -- The euro rose a fourth day in five against the dollar after European services industries expanded for a 10th month, adding to signs growth is strengthening and policy makers will refrain from lowering borrowing costs.

"I don't see any scope for a cut in interest rates," and they may go up next year, Austrian Finance Minister Karl-Heinz Grasser said in an interview. The Federal Reserve said yesterday it will adopt a "measured pace" when lifting the U.S. benchmark rate, suggesting Europe's rate advantage will be preserved.

"Better economic data from the euro area are providing some support, and it may be that some people are starting to reduce expectations of a rate cut" by the European Central Bank, said Osman Wahid, a currency strategist in London at J.P. Morgan Chase & Co.

Europe's common currency rose to \$1.2137 at 10:43 a.m. in New York from \$1.2100 late yesterday, when it rallied the most in two months, according to EBS, an electronic foreign-exchange dealing system. It earlier traded at \$1.2180, the highest since April 8. The euro has added 2.3 percent versus the dollar since the start of last week, after sliding 2.2 percent in the first quarter. The dollar fell to 108.58 yen from 109.34 yesterday.

An index based on a survey of 2,000 purchasing managers in the euro region compiled for Reuters Group Plc rose to 54.5 in April from March's 54.4. A reading above 50 indicates expansion.

The U.S. currency trimmed its losses after a report from the Institute for Supply Management showed U.S. services industries also grew last month. The ISM's index for services, the biggest part of the economy, rose to 68.4 last month from 65.8.

#### Yen Rises

The yen rose on speculation Japanese stocks will attract investors when markets reopen there tomorrow for the first time since Friday, said Enrico Caruso, chief trader at currency hedge fund Tempest Asset Management in Irvine, California.

Investors are "scaling back U.S. rate hike expectations and also taking out of the equation the likelihood of a euro-area rate cut," said Shahab Jalinoos, a currency strategist at ABN Amro Holding NV in London. "For that reason, we have seen the euro recover a lot of ground versus the dollar."

German government 2-year bonds yield 2.37 percent, about 0.08 percentage point above U.S. notes of similar maturity. In 10-year maturities, the yield advantage the dollar has benefited from in the past month may evaporate should speculation grow the ECB is unlikely to cut rates.

The Fed's key rate is 1 percent, half the ECB's, giving investors less incentive to place funds in dollars. On April 1, German 10-year notes yielded 0.07 percentage point above their U.S. equivalents. That has flipped, with U.S. 10-year yields yesterday reaching 0.40 percentage point above their German counterparts, the most since 2001.

#### Inflation

Manufacturing in Europe expanded at the fastest pace in more than three years in April, an industry report showed on Monday. At the same time, German unemployment rose for a fourth month in April, the government said today.

"If you look at the current inflation level, if you look at record oil prices, you will see that the forecast for Europe is toward 2 percent or slightly above," Grasser said in an interview in Vienna. "That's why I don't see any scope for a cut in interest rates."

The ECB probably won't trim its target rate at its policy meeting tomorrow, according to a Bloomberg survey of 34 economists. The central bank cut its benchmark rate to 2 percent in June of last year, the lowest level in any of the euro countries in almost six decades.

#### Interest-Rate Futures

Consumer prices rose 2 percent in April from a year ago, the European Union's statistics office said Friday, from 1.7 percent the previous month. The ECB aims to keep that rate under and "close to" 2 percent.

Futures trading suggests investors are scaling back bets the Fed will increase borrowing costs before the end of next quarter and the ECB will cut rates this quarter.

The yield on the September Eurodollar futures contract fell to 1.715 percent from 1.735 percent yesterday. The contract settles at the three-month London interbank offered rate, or Libor, which has averaged 0.22 point more than the Fed's target the past 10 years.

The yield on the three-month euribor interest-rate futures contract maturing in June was at 2.06 percent, close to its highest in more than two months, suggesting investors are cutting bets interest rates will fall by then.

#### Japanese Markets

Japan's markets have been closed since Bank of Japan Governor Toshihiko Fukui said in an interview on Japan's NHK television last weekend that "there is hope" the nation may overcome a six-year battle with deflation by April. The bank has been keeping its benchmark rate virtually at zero to help stem the trend toward declining prices.

Optimism Japan's economy is gaining steam has helped boost the Nikkei 225 stock average 49 percent in the past year. It closed on Friday at 11,761.8, its lowest since March 31.

"Their economy is improving; deflation is hopefully near the end," said Timothy Mazanec, senior currency strategist in Boston at Investors Bank & Trust Co., custodian for \$1.1 trillion of investor assets. "Some people may believe the Nikkei under 12,000 is a buy."

The yen's advance accelerated after it strengthened to about 108.80 per dollar, triggering pre-set orders to buy the yen, said Neil Jones, director of foreign exchange at Nomura International Plc in London.

## Raw Materials

### **Crude Oil**

#### **Crude Oil Trades Near 13-Year High After Gasoline-Led Gains**

May 5 (Bloomberg) -- Crude oil traded near 13-year highs on both sides of the Atlantic amid concern the U.S. faces a shortage of gasoline when demand peaks during the summer.

U.S. gasoline supplies fell 2.7 percent in the week ended April 23 from a year earlier. They probably rose about 1.5 million barrels last week, according to analysts polled by Bloomberg News, but that may not be enough to lower gasoline futures, which yesterday soared to a seventh consecutive record. The U.S. government issues a weekly inventory report later today.

"You'd need a build of about four or five million barrels" to lower gasoline prices, said Mike Armbruster, a broker and analyst with Altavest Worldwide Trading Inc. in San Juan Capistrano, California. "I don't see how they can do it."

Brent crude oil for June settlement was down 9 cents at \$35.84 a barrel on London's International Petroleum Exchange, at 10:40 a.m. It rose to \$36 earlier today, matching yesterday's peak, which was the highest intraday price for a contract nearest to expiration since Oct. 17, 1990.

On the New York Mercantile Exchange electronic trading, June crude oil traded at \$38.82 a barrel, 16 cents short of yesterday's 13-year closing high. It's high so far this session was \$38.95.

"Crude is going to go well through \$40," given rising demand and the perception of risk to Middle East supplies, Armbruster said. June crude gained 4.2 percent in the past two days, after five foreign oil workers were killed in Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, on Saturday.

#### Euro Gains

Crude also rose after the dollar fell against the euro, making oil cheaper for buyers outside the U.S. That raised concern OPEC's members would seek higher prices because a weaker dollar reduces the buying power of their oil revenue.

The dollar is at a four-week low after Federal Reserve policy makers signaled that it may be months before they raise U.S. interest rates, reducing the currency's attraction.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries' President Purnomo Yusgiantoro said last month the group may raise its official crude oil price target to reflect the weaker U.S. dollar. Since 2000, the group has

aimed to keep oil prices at \$22 to \$28 a barrel, based on an index of seven crude oil grades. The index hasn't been within the band since Dec. 1.

Today, Purnomo said the group may consider increasing its "quotas or production" at its next formal meeting in Beirut on June 3.

#### Gasoline Surges

Crude oil prices in New York have gained 13 percent the past month as lagging fuel stockpiles and increased demand helped push gasoline futures higher. Prices may keep rising, given the attacks on Saudi Arabia's oil industry and the inability of U.S. refiners to significantly boost gasoline production for any sustained period, traders said.

U.S. demand for gasoline peaks between the Memorial Day holiday in late May and the Labor Day holiday in early September. Demand for the fuel will average a record 9.32 million barrels a day, up 2.2 percent from last summer, the U.S. Department of Energy said last month.

The Energy Department is scheduled to release its weekly petroleum inventory report today at 10:30 a.m. in Washington. U.S. crude-oil inventories probably gained 2 million barrels in the week ended Friday, from 298.8 million barrels the week before, according to the median forecasts of 11 analysts surveyed by Bloomberg News.

Gasoline for June delivery yesterday rose 4.38 cents to \$1.3058 a gallon, the highest closing price for front-month futures since the unleaded gasoline contract began trading in 1984. Futures reflect wholesale prices. In after-hours trading, the contract was 0.23 cent lower at \$1.3035.

### Company News

#### **Allianz AG**

##### **Allianz Posts Quarterly Profit After Loss on Dresdner**

May 5 (Bloomberg) -- Allianz AG, Europe's largest financial services company, reported a profit in the first quarter after a loss as Dresdner Bank AG earned money for the first time in 1 1/2 years and business in its main insurance units improved.

Net income amounted to 650 million euros (\$788 million), compared with a loss of 546 million euros in the year-ago period, spokesman Richard Lips said. Dresdner posted an unspecified net income and contributed 170 million euros to the banking unit's operating earnings. Allianz releases final results on May 14.

Chief Executive Officer Michael Diekmann, 49 who took over a year ago, has accelerated a reorganization of Dresdner Bank and unprofitable insurance units including the U.S. Fireman's Fund division. Dresdner Bank has weighed on Allianz earnings since the insurer bought it for \$21 billion three years ago.

"The earnings are clearly better than expected," said Jochen Schmitt, an analyst at Landesbank Rheinland-Pfalz, who rates Allianz shares "outperform." "Dresdner Bank likely benefited from higher trading income and lower risk provisions."

Shares of Allianz climbed 2.24 euros, or 2.6 percent, to 89.9 euros at 9:24 a.m. in Frankfurt. Allianz stock has declined 10 percent so far this year, compared with an increase of 1.8 percent on the 26-member Bloomberg Europe 500 Insurance Index.

#### **Premiums, Costs**

Allianz hired former Deutsche Bank AG manager Herbert Walter 12 months ago to turn around Frankfurt-based Dresdner Bank, Germany's fourth-biggest bank by assets. Walter, 50, in August announced plans to cut 4,700 jobs at the lender.

The banking unit, which is made up mostly by Dresdner Bank, reduced expenses and risk provisions "significantly" in the first quarter, Allianz said without elaborating.

"We've delivered on our promises," Diekmann said in a statement distributed to journalists before the company's annual shareholders meeting today in Munich. "All segments contributed to the improvement of our profitability."

Gross premium income in the first quarter was little changed at 25 billion euros. Stripping out currency effects, premium income rose 3 percent, the company said. The combined ratio fell to below 96 percent in the quarter from 97.7 percent a year ago.

Operating profit rose to 1.1 billion euros in the first quarter from 834 million euros in the year-ago period. Its asset management unit, which includes Newport Beach, California-based Pacific Investment Management Co., recorded net inflows of 10 billion euros. Life and health premiums rose 6 percent.

#### **BNP Paribas SA**

##### **BNP Profit Rises 31%, Helped By Stock Market Recovery**

May 6 (Bloomberg) -- BNP Paribas SA, France's second-largest bank by assets, said first-quarter profit rose 31 percent as a recovery in stock markets boosted commissions at its consumer lending unit and asset management earnings.

Net income totaled 1.26 billion euros (\$1.53 billion), up from 962 million euros a year earlier, the bank said in an e-mailed statement. Analysts expected profit of 999 million euros, according to the median forecast of seven surveyed by Bloomberg News.

BNP earnings have risen for three straight quarters as the bank expands its branch-banking business, particularly in the U.S., and as a rebound in stock markets lifts asset management revenue. Since February, BNP has agreed to buy Fargo, North Dakota-based Community First Bankshares Inc. for \$1.2 billion and California-based USDB Bancorp for \$245 million.

“The beginning of the year is marked by an expansion drive,” Chief Executive Baudouin Prot, 52, said in the statement. “The acquisitions underway in the U.S. and Europe will expand the group's scope, in accordance with its growth targets.”

BNP said in February that it has about 6 billion euros to spend on acquisitions and share buybacks. Investors and analysts say the bank needs to ramp up spending before that spare cash weighs on its return on equity, a measure of profitability.

#### U.S. Expansion

After the purchase of Community First in March, Prot said the bank plans to make more takeovers in the western U.S. and Europe. BancWest Corp., BNP's California-based unit, last month reported an 11 percent increase in first-quarter profit to \$113 million.

Competitors in Europe are also looking to the U.S. for growth. Royal Bank of Scotland Group Plc's main U.S. unit, Providence, Rhode Island-based Citizens Financial Group Inc., Tuesday agreed to buy Cleveland-based Charter One Financial Inc. for \$10.5 billion. The purchase makes Edinburgh-based Royal Bank, the second-largest U.K. bank, the No. 8 bank in the U.S.

At BNP, profit before tax from consumer banking rose 7.9 percent to 697 million euros and asset management profit rose 62 percent to 224 million euros. Corporate and investment banking profit rose 27 percent to 614 million euros, as improved earnings at the financing business offset a decline in advisory and capital markets earnings.

Profit from securities trading and advising on mergers fell 22 percent as fixed-income revenue dropped from the year earlier.

#### Sanofi-Aventis

BNP bought back 10.85 million shares, or 1.2 percent of its stock, in March, according to the French stock market regulator. Based on the bank's average share price of 19.45 euros for the month, BNP may have spent about 537 million euros on the purchase, according to Bloomberg calculations. That's about one-third of the amount it has earmarked for buybacks this year.

ABN Amro Holding NV said last week that first-quarter net income rose 35 percent, as investment-banking profit benefited from improved equity markets. Deutsche Bank AG, Europe's third-biggest bank by assets reported its highest quarterly profit for three years.

BNP's investment banking profit should benefit going forward from the bank's decision to split off its European equity brokerage business by merging it with independent French stockbroker Exane SA. Last month, the bank transferred 170 employees to Exane, as it seeks to save money on trading and selling equities where falling commissions have reduced revenue.

The bank will also share fees with Merrill Lynch & Co. for advising drugmaker Sanofi-Synthelabo SA on its 53.5 billion-euro bid for rival Aventis SA, the biggest European acquisition in four years. Sanofi said in a January filing it expected to pay about 150 million euros for banking, legal and accounting advice and other expenses related to the transaction.

### **Business Objects**

#### **Business Objects inquiète à nouveau le marché**

(La Tribune) Moins d'une semaine après avoir plongé suite à des résultats décevants, l'action de l'éditeur de logiciels cède encore du terrain. Des rumeurs évoquent une enquête de la SEC.

L'action Business Objects n'en finit pas de plonger. Après avoir lâché plus de 20% vendredi dernier sur de mauvais résultats, le titre de l'éditeur de logiciels est de nouveau en queue de peloton à la Bourse de Paris ce mercredi. En milieu de journée, il accuse la plus forte baisse du SRD, avec un plongeon de 8,64%, à 17,03 euros.

Des analystes financiers interrogés dans la matinée par Reuters ont attribué ce recul à des rumeurs d'enquête de la SEC (l'autorité boursière américaine) sur les comptes du groupe qui est également coté à New York. Selon une source financière contactée par l'AFP, la SEC s'intéresserait plus précisément aux méthodes de comptabilisation du carnet de commandes.

Le groupe rejette toutefois ce terme d'"enquête". "Il s'agit d'une demande d'information informelle, c'est très différent d'une enquête de la SEC", a indiqué à l'AFP une porte-parole du groupe sans donner plus de précisions.

En tout cas cela a suffi à alerter le marché, qui avait déjà été refroidi la semaine passée par la publication des résultats trimestriels du groupe (*voir ci-contre*). Le bénéfice par action (BPA) a notamment chuté de 14 à 4 cents, alors que les analystes tablaient sur un BPA de 10 cents. Et les perspectives n'ont pas non plus été à la hauteur des espoirs. Le BPA du trimestre en cours n'atteindra pas les 24 cents visés par les analystes mais une fourchette de 16 à 19 cents.

### **Bayerische Motoren Werke AG**

#### **BMW Posts 13th Consecutive Profit on 5-Series Sedan**

May 5 (Bloomberg) -- Bayerische Motoren Werke AG, the world's second-largest maker of luxury cars, reported a 13th consecutive quarterly profit on surging sales of the revamped 5-Series and a jump in financial-services earnings.

First-quarter net income rose to 523 million euros (\$634 million), or 78 euro cents a share, from 510 million euros, or 76 cents, in the year-earlier period, Chief Executive Officer Helmut Panke said on a conference call. Sales rose 4.9 percent to 10.8 billion euros from 10.3 billion euros.

Panke, 57, is counting on new Mini models, the X3 sport-utility vehicle and Rolls-Royce Phantom to help BMW post record profit this year and eventually pass DaimlerChrysler AG as the world's largest luxury carmaker. Munich-based BMW's earnings exceeded the combined first-quarter 419 million-euro profit of DaimlerChrysler and Volkswagen AG, Europe's largest carmaker.

"BMW always has done things better than other carmakers," said Harald Hendrikse, an analyst at Credit Suisse First Boston in London who has a "neutral" rating on the stock.

Pretax profit at BMW's financial services division rose 23 percent to 132 million euros. The percentage of cars financed or leased by the financial services unit rose to 39.5 percent in the period from 36.8 percent a year ago. Cash flow in the quarter rose 11 percent to 1.15 billion euros.

"For BMW, 2004 will be the best year," said Panke on the call. Profit will also grow beyond this year, he added.

#### Daimler, Volkswagen

DaimlerChrysler, which posted net income of 393 million euros in the first quarter, has struggled with losses at Chrysler and Mitsubishi Motors Corp., while Volkswagen has suffered from aging models and rising costs. Volkswagen first-quarter profit fell 87 percent to the lowest in a decade.

BMW and other carmakers are counting on increased demand at their financial services businesses, which operate banks and lend money to customers wanting financing for cars, to maintain profit growth.

BMW's first-quarter vehicle sales rose 3.2 percent to 269,973 units and reached a monthly record of 117,804 vehicles in March. Sales of the 5-Series sedan, a full-size car that competes with the Mercedes E-Class, rose 55 percent to 53,466 in the quarter.

Sales of vehicles in April rose 9 percent compared with the year-earlier month, Panke said, without providing figures. Demand for cars is rising worldwide, while in Germany there are "signs" of an improvement.

The company expects to sell about 1,000 Rolls-Royces this year after selling 140 of the luxury models in the first quarter from one in the same quarter last year. Sales of the new X3 totaled 11,132 units. Motorcycle sales dropped 14 percent in part because of a model changeover, Panke said.

#### New Models

The company will introduce a new midsize 3-Series next year and a Mini convertible in July as well as the new compact 1-Series later this year. The company plans to sell at least 100,000 of the 1-Series annually and Panke said he's "optimistic" about sales of the X3 and 6-Series for this year. BMW-brand vehicle sales will rise under 10 percent this year.

Shares of BMW fell as much as 59 cents, or 1.6 percent, to 35.71 euros and were down 0.6 percent to 36.10 euros at 11:36 a.m. in Frankfurt. The stock has declined 1.8 percent this year, against a 0.7 percent gain in Germany's benchmark DAX index.

The stock today declined with the DAX following a report that German unemployment rose for a fourth month in April, clouding the outlook for consumer spending in Europe's largest economy, said Credit Suisse First Boston's Hendrikse.

First-quarter net income was less than the 530 million-euro median forecast of 10 analysts surveyed by Bloomberg News. Sales beat the analysts' forecast of 10.3 billion euros.

The spread on BMW's 750 million euros of debt paying a coupon of 4.625 percent and maturing in February 2013 has fallen 6 basis points since the beginning of the year, indicating investors perceive the company's debt as less risky.

The company has about 11.4 billion euros of outstanding debt, according to Bloomberg data. The debt is rated A1, or four steps below the highest rating, by Moody's Investors Service.

## **C&A**

### **C&A a progressé en 2003 dans un marché difficile**

(Echo) Malgré un marché difficile, la chaîne de magasins de vêtements C&A a enregistré, en 2003, une hausse de 2,7% de son chiffre d'affaires pour la Belgique et le Luxembourg, à 302 millions d'euros, a annoncé Mimi Lamotte, directrice générale de C&A Belux. L'année 2003 a également été marquée par la modernisation des magasins et par le passage des Marka sous enseigne C&A, a-t-on appris mercredi au cours d'une conférence de presse.

## **CVS Corp**

### **CVS 1st-Qtr Net Rises 25% as Generic Drug Sales Gain**

May 5 (Bloomberg) -- CVS Corp., the second-largest U.S. drugstore chain, said first-quarter profit rose 25 percent, helped by higher sales of generic drugs.

Net income increased to \$244.6 million, or 59 cents a share, from \$196.3 million, or 48 cents, a year earlier, the Woonsocket, Rhode Island-based company said in a statement. Sales in the period ended April 3 climbed 8 percent to \$6.82 billion.

Chief Executive Thomas Ryan, 51, pushed generic drugs, which have bigger margins, and last month agreed to buy 1,260 Eckerd stores to further expansion in states including Texas and Florida with a growing number of retirees. The company also extended hours to match No. 1 chain Walgreen Co., which CVS expects to surpass after the Eckerd purchase is completed in June.

"To be the No. 1 or No. 2 player in an inherently growing industry is a nice place to be," said David Katz, chief investment officer at Matrix Asset Advisors in New York, which holds over 1 million CVS shares. "All of the trends are working pretty well for them. They were able to translate improving sales into much-improved profitability."

CVS was expected to earn 56 cents, the average estimate of 11 analysts surveyed by Thomson Financial. Gross margin as a percentage of sales widened to 26 percent from 25.4 percent a year earlier. Shares of CVS rose 50 cents to \$39.99 in New York Stock Exchange composite trading yesterday. They have gained 57 percent the past year.

CVS last month agreed to buy Eckerd stores in the southern U.S. from J.C. Penney Corp. for \$2.15 billion. Sales at CVS outlets open at least a year rose 6.4 percent. Same-store pharmacy sales rose 8.3 percent. Same-store sales of cosmetics, snacks and other non-prescription goods increased 2 percent. Walgreen, with 4,397 stores, is the largest U.S. drugstore company by annual sales and number of locations. CVS, which has 4,187 stores, opened 29 stores, closed 21 and relocated 17 others in the quarter

## **DaimlerChrysler AG**

### **Daimler Chief Reiterates Forecast of Rising Profits, WSJ Says**

May 6 (Bloomberg) -- DaimlerChrysler AG CEO Juergen Schrempp said the company's investment in Mitsubishi Motors Corp. is paying off and reiterated a prediction that Daimler's profits will rise in 2005 and 2006, the Wall Street Journal reported.

In a telephone interview with the newspaper, Schrempp said the partnership with the unprofitable Japanese carmaker, of which Daimler owns 37 percent, has brought cost savings and truck profits that make the \$1.9 billion Daimler paid for the Mitsubishi stake worthwhile.

Two weeks ago, Daimler's management board refused to back Schrempp's plan to put more money into Mitsubishi, and Schrempp said that issue won't be reopened, even if Mitsubishi puts together a bailout plan on its own, the Journal reported.

Schrempp told the paper that Mitsubishi and Daimler's Smart car division had jointly developed a compact vehicle that Daimler couldn't have produced on its own, and Mitsubishi Fuso, a truckmaker 65 percent owned by Daimler, is profitable.

One executive who'd been vocal in opposition to the plan to invest more money in Mitsubishi was Wolfgang Bernhard, who was in line to run Daimler's Mercedes unit; it was announced after a supervisory board meeting on April 29 that that won't happen, a decision Schrempp described as "extremely difficult" but "wise," the Journal reported.

## **EasyJet Plc**

### **EasyJet Shares Fall as CEO 'Cautious' on Outlook**

May 5 (Bloomberg) -- Shares of EasyJet Plc, Europe's second-biggest low-cost airline, posted their biggest ever drop after Chief Executive Ray Webster said the full-year outlook has weakened as competitors cut prices and increase capacity.

The carrier has switched its outlook from "cautiously optimistic to cautious," Webster told journalists, citing "unprofitable and unrealistic pricing" by full-service, charter and low-cost carriers.

EasyJet, based at London Luton Airport, is expanding its European network and adding Airbus SAS A319 jetliners to its fleet as it competes with British Airways Plc, Ryanair Holdings Plc and charter airlines for passengers. Ryanair, Europe's biggest low-cost carrier, said earlier last month prices will drop as much as 20 percent this year.

"The outlook is deteriorating going into the seasonally stronger second half, which is worrying," said John Mattimoe, an analyst at Merrion Stockbrokers whose "hold" rating on EasyJet is under review. "This is a setback for management credibility, which had been recovering over the last six to 12 months" after it was hurt by the purchase of Go Fly Ltd.

Shares of EasyJet plunged as much as 26 percent to 216 pence and were 72.25 pence, or 25 percent, lower at 220 pence as of 8:49 a.m. in London. The stock is down 25 percent this year.

Ryanair shares fell 31 cents, or 6.6 percent, to 4.4 euros in Dublin.

#### Weaker Easter

"Demand softened in the second half" of April "due to continued competitive pressure and a weaker-than-expected Easter," Webster said. May passenger numbers are "slightly lower" than expectations and June bookings are "as we anticipated."

EasyJet's first-half loss narrowed after the carrier filled more seats and costs remained "stable." The net loss in the six months ended March 31 was 19.7 million pounds (\$35.4 million), or 4.97 pence a share, compared with a loss of 46.9 million pounds, or 11.94 pence, in the year-earlier period. Sales rose 18 percent to 439.7 million pounds from 372.6 million pounds.

The airline was expected to say the net loss halved to 23.7 million pounds, or 5.9 pence a share, according to the median estimate of seven analysts surveyed by Bloomberg News. Sales were expected to rise 20 percent to 446.5 million pounds.

EasyJet said its April passenger count rose 14 percent to 1.95 million from 1.71 million a year earlier. The load factor, or proportion of seats filled, dropped 3 percentage points to 82 percent, and fares were 5 percent lower.

#### Berlin Expansion

EasyJet opened a base at Berlin Schoenefeld airport, which will serve 13 routes, last week. The carrier plans to open a base at Germany's Dortmund International airport in July and will start flights between Cologne-Bonn and the U.K. in June.

Germany has the biggest population of the 25 European Union states and the second-biggest low-cost airline market in Europe after the U.K. EasyJet is competing with Deutsche Lufthansa AG, Air Berlin GmbH, TUI AG's Hapag-Lloyd Express, Germania Fluggesellschaft mbH and Lufthansa's Germanwings affiliate.

EasyJet said last week that it's renegotiating the costs of operating at 40 of the 47 airports in its European network and that it may scrap flights at Munich and Zurich.

#### Plane Financing

The airline said today that financing has been put in place for 82 of the 120 Airbus A319s it has ordered. EasyJet will provide mortgage finance for 36 planes and has agreed sale and lease-back agreements for 46 aircraft. This includes the sale of assets worth 163 million pounds in cash.

The financing has been organized with General Electric Co., Royal Bank of Scotland Group Plc, Babcock & Brown Asset Management and HSH Nordbank AG, together with Natexis Banques Populaires. It covers all deliveries in 2004, "virtually all" in 2005 and a proportion of deliveries in 2006 and 2007, EasyJet said.

### **Eurazeo – Rue Impériale**

#### **Rue Imperiale: fusion absorption par Eurazeo approuvée**

(Boursorama) Cercle Finance) - L'Assemblée Générale de Rue Impériale qui s'est tenue le 4 mai a approuvé la fusion par voie d'absorption de la Société Rue Impériale par la Société Eurazeo. Rappelons que cette opération permet de simplifier les structures de détention du groupe, dans la continuité des opérations de simplification déjà intervenues (fusion-absorption d'Azeo par Eurafiance en 2001 et fusion-absorption de Société Immobilière Marseillaise par Rue Impériale en 2002), d'améliorer la liquidité des titres Rue Impériale et Eurazeo et réduire la décote de holding affectant les titres.

Après l'approbation de ces opérations par l'assemblée générale des actionnaires d'Eurazeo le mercredi 5 mai 2004, la fusion conduit les actionnaires de Rue Impériale à recevoir 3 actions Eurazeo pour 1 action Rue Impériale, après attribution gratuite aux actionnaires d'Eurazeo d'1 action nouvelle pour 15 actions détenues. Cet échange interviendra le 11 mai 2004, après paiement du dividende 2003.

Le nouvel ensemble gardera le nom d'Eurazeo ainsi que sa forme de société à Directoire et Conseil de surveillance et son management actuel.

Le capital du nouvel ensemble sera détenu notamment à 23,5 % (34,1 % des droits de vote) par Société Civile Haussmann Percier et ses affiliés et 15,4 % (19,9 % des droits de vote) par le Crédit Agricole, qui ont conclu jusqu'en 2010 un nouvel accord d'actionnaires.

L'assemblée générale a également approuvé les comptes sociaux et consolidés de l'exercice clos le 31 décembre 2003 et décidé la distribution d'un dividende de 3,00 euros par action, assorti d'un avoir fiscal de 1,50 euros, soit un revenu global de 4,50 euros par action. Ce dividende est en progression de près de 40 % par rapport à celui versé au titre de l'exercice précédent. Il sera mis en paiement le 5 mai 2004, préalablement à l'échange des actions Rue Impériale contre les actions Eurazeo

### **Hochtief AG**

#### **Hochtief Has First-Quarter Profit on German Business, Services**

May 6 (Bloomberg) -- Hochtief AG, the world's fifth-largest construction company, had a first-quarter profit after it revived earnings in Germany by focusing on more profitable contracts and expanding its building services business.

Net income amounted to 599,000 euros (\$727,575), compared with a net loss of 16.1 million euros, Hochtief said in a statement on its Web site. Total output dropped 4.1 percent to 2.71 billion euros.

Chief Executive Hans-Peter Keitel, 56, has cut 686 jobs in Germany last year and put in place a committee to ensure the company avoids unprofitable contracts. He also expanded abroad, so that Hochtief now generates some 80 percent of its overall sales outside Germany, and expanded the services business.

Hochtief said it agreed to buy the facilities-management business of Deutsche Lufthansa AG, expanding its services unit to reduce its reliance on construction.

The company reiterated its full-year forecasts

### **MGM Mirage- Wembley Plc - Starwood Capital Group LLC**

#### **MGM Retracts Bid for Wembley, Clears Way for Starwood Capital**

May 5 (Bloomberg) -- MGM Mirage, the third-biggest U.S. casino company, pulled out of a three-month takeover battle for Wembley Plc, clearing the way for Starwood Capital Group LLC and Kerzner International Ltd. to buy the U.K. owner of dog tracks for 309 million pounds (\$555 million) in cash.

BLB Investors LLC, a company formed by financier Barry Sternlicht's Starwood, Kerzner and Waterford Group LLC, last month agreed to pay 860 pence for each Wembley share, topping Las Vegas-based MGM's 840 pence bid. Today, MGM said BLB's latest offer "is in excess" of what it's prepared to pay.

Government proposals to relax gambling laws have drawn U.S. suitors to Wembley's dog tracks in London, Birmingham and Manchester. The U.K. is considering allowing gambling venues to add more slot machines and abolishing rules that patrons must be members to wager. The changes may boost Britain's annual gambling revenue to \$2.3 billion, Lehman Brothers Inc. analysts estimate.

"We thought the auction had further to go but obviously MGM didn't think they could realize more value," said Neil Hermon, who helps manage the equivalent of \$1.26 billion at Henderson Global Investors in London.

"Still, its good value for Wembley shareholders."

Wembley shares fell as much as 34 pence, or 3.8 percent, to 858.5 pence by 10:15 a.m. in London.

British lawmakers made proposals last month to further deregulate the country's gambling industry. The Joint Committee on the Draft Gambling Bill made recommendations to overhaul 35-year-old legislation by, for

instance, allowing all casinos to offer bingo and betting and by permitting operators to install larger numbers of gaming machines.

#### Mohegan Sun

"We're pleased to have clarity," said Wembley spokesman Matthew Smallwood. "We will move forward with BLB."

Starwood Capital, a closely held real estate investor trust based in Greenwich, Connecticut, is headed by Sternlicht, 43, founder of Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide Inc., the owner of the Sheraton and Westin chains. Kerzner, based in Paradise Island the Bahamas, owns the Atlantis Resort there and also operates resorts in Mexico and Mauritius. It developed the Mohegan Sun casino in Connecticut with Waterford.

"The only offer is now the agreed one from BLB and it is recommended by the board," said BLB spokesman Andrew Honnor.

New legislation may boost the number of casinos in Britain to 185 from 129, Bear, Stearns & Co. analysts in London estimate. They expect laws to be implemented in 2006. About 80 percent of Britons gambled in the past year, according to data from Gamcare, which monitors gambling. In the U.K., 4 percent of people visit a casino each year, compared with 25 percent in the U.S.

#### The Bellagio

The government committee said it supported lifting advertising restrictions for casinos and ending a 24-hour "cooling off" period for new members. It also recommended that casinos with more than 10,000 square feet and 41 gaming tables have a higher fixed ratio of machines to tables.

MGM, which gets about two-thirds of its profit from casinos including the Bellagio, said April 19 it may build casinos in cities including Manchester and Liverpool for 650 million pounds, in a venture with Peel Holdings Plc. MGM trails Caesars Entertainment Inc. and Harrah's Entertainment Inc. in revenue.

MGM Chief Finance Officer James Murren said last month he expects growth in the gaming industry to come from overseas markets, such as the U.K. and Asia. The company said April 21 that first-half net income doubled to \$105.8 million as more travelers visited its casinos in Las Vegas.

#### Lincoln Park

Wembley also owns the Lincoln Park greyhound track in Rhode Island and three greyhound tracks and a horse racing track in Colorado. The company said in February that 2003 net income declined 14 percent as changes to Rhode Island tax rules cut the company's share of revenue from video-lottery terminals.

Starwood and Kerzner "got a U.S. business for a good price and the U.K. is a good growth story," said Roddy Campbell, chief executive of Cross Asset Management, which oversees the equivalent of about \$400 million in London. "It would have been a good price for the U.S. business alone."

Shares of Paradise Island, Bahamas-based Kerzner yesterday rose 4.5 percent to \$45.42 in New York Stock Exchange composite trading. MGM Mirage shares lost \$2.99, or 6.3 percent, to \$44.49.

Wembley is the former owner of the Wembley Stadium sports venue near London. The company sold its Wembley Arena music venue in 2002 to focus on its gambling venues. Former Chief Executive Officer Nigel Potter and the head of the company's Rhode Island dog track were indicted Sept. 10 by a U.S. grand jury for conspiring to bribe state officials.

#### London Clubs

According to an indictment, Potter and Lincoln Park Inc. CEO Daniel Bucci conspired to pay money to the law firm of former Rhode Island House speaker John Harwood, who wasn't indicted, to allow Wembley to install more video lottery terminals at the track. Potter and Lincoln Park denied the charges.

U.K. casino operators are expanding to benefit from the changes to the law. London Clubs International Plc, the owner of 11 casinos in the U.K. and abroad, in March announced plans to raise 49 million pounds by selling shares so it can fund expansion and accommodate more American-style slot machines.

Starwood's Sternlicht is best known for acquiring a money-losing hotel real estate investment trust called Hotel Investors Trust in 1995 and, through a series of acquisitions such as the Westin Hotel chain and ITT Corp., turning it into Starwood Hotels. Starwood Capital owns the biggest golf course operator in the U.S. with Goldman Sachs Group Inc.

Citigroup Inc. advised MGM, Hawkpoint Partners Ltd. is working with Wembley and J.P. Morgan Chase & Co. is acting for BLB Investors.

### **Mobistar**

#### **Mobistar table sur un bénéfice net stable en 2004**

(Echo) Mobistar prévoit un bénéfice net stable voire en léger progrès sur l'exercice 2004 où pour la première fois il devra acquitter des impôts. "Le bénéfice par action sera au même niveau du fait que nous payons des impôts pour la première fois", a dit la directrice financière Martine Verluyten, ajoutant ensuite que le BPA pourrait être "légèrement supérieur" à celui de l'an dernier. Le deuxième opérateur de téléphonie mobile de Belgique pensait jusqu'à présent que son bénéfice net n'aurait pas cette année une croissance aussi forte qu'en 2003 où il avait plus que doublé à 3,64 euros par action. Mobistar, dont Orange détient 50,8%, a confirmé son projet de verser son premier dividende l'an prochain, calculé sur les résultats de 2004. "Nous ferons tout notre possible pour payer un dividende sur 2004", a dit le président Jan Steyaert, lors de l'assemblée générale annuelle des actionnaires. La directrice financière a toutefois précisé que l'opérateur devait avant tout rembourser ses dettes et reconstituer le capital avant de songer à verser un dividende. "N'attendez rien quant à un dividende jusqu'à la fin du dernier trimestre", a-t-elle dit à la presse. Les dettes à court et long termes représentaient plus de 600 millions d'euros à la fin de 2003. Mobistar a connu une bonne année 2003, en prenant des abonnés aux concurrents Proximus de Belgacom et BASE du néerlandais KPN.

Le chiffre d'affaires a augmenté de 20%. Verluyten a confirmé la prévision d'une croissance du C.A. de 10 à 15% cette année contre 1,2 milliard d'euros en 2003.

## **Monsanto**

### **Monsanto: relève ses prévisions et son dividende**

(Cercle Finance) - Le géant américain de l'agrochimie, Monsanto, a annoncé mercredi une augmentation de 12% à 14,5 cents par action de son dividende dont le paiement interviendra le 30 juillet 2004. Le groupe a par ailleurs relevé ses prévisions de résultats pour l'exercice en cours compte tenu notamment de ses bonnes performances au Brésil et en Asie.

Monsanto table désormais sur un bénéfice par action de 1,55 dollars en 2004. Le groupe a par ailleurs confirmé son programme de rachats d'actions de 500 millions de dollars sur trois ans, Monsanto ayant d'ores et déjà racheté pour 132,6 millions de dollars de ses actions aux 26 mars 2004.

## **Provident Financial Plc**

### **Provident Financial Loses Loan Clients in U.K.; Stock Declines**

May 5 (Bloomberg) -- Provident Financial Plc, a lender to low- income households in Britain and Eastern Europe, said customers borrowed less in the U.K during the first quarter and the company lost business compared with a year earlier.

Client numbers and the amount of credit issued both fell 3 percent in the first three months of the year, Provident Financial said in a statement from the company's annual shareholder meeting. The shares declined 3.5 percent.

"At this early stage of the year, the achievement of our target of modest profit growth looks to be a considerable challenge and a small reduction in profit within U.K. home credit now looks likely," Chairman John van Kuffeler said.

Provident Financial, which is based in the northern English city of Bradford and is more than 110 years old, has expanded into emerging markets as British citizens grow more wealthy and less in need of its products. The company, which started Polish and Czech units in 1997 and last year opened a business in Mexico, has a shortlist of potential new markets.

Shares in the company were down 25 pence to 691 pence at 12:21 p.m. in London, giving Provident Financial a market value of 1.8 billion pounds. That would be the steepest drop in almost a year, according to Bloomberg data.

## **RWE AG**

### **RWE to Sell Heidelberger Stake Worth EU1.3 Billion**

May 5 (Bloomberg) -- RWE AG, Europe's third-largest utility, is shedding its 64-year-old-stake in Heidelberg Druckmaschinen AG, worth about 1.3 billion euros (\$1.57 billion), leaving the German company with only one non-energy business left to sell.

Essen, Germany-based RWE will sell the 50.02 percent holding in Heidelberg, the world's largest maker of printing machinery, by offering shares and exchangeable bonds to investors. Dresdner Kleinwort Wasserstein and J.P. Morgan Chase & Co. will manage the sale, spokesman Michael Rosen said.

In his first year in charge, Chief Executive Harry Roels has sold assets including RWE's stake in Hochtief AG, Germany's largest builder, and a holding in U.S. coalminer Consol Energy Inc. Roels also plans to sell RWE's waste disposal unit, the company's last major holding outside utilities, this year.

"Roels is steady in his divestment strategy and the market should reward that," said Ulf Moritzen, who helps manage 4.2 billion euros at Nordinvest in Hamburg. "The timing has been chosen appropriately. Heidelberg Druck is profiting from the expectations for a recovery in the world economy."

RWE and larger competitor E.ON AG have shed assets ranging from telecommunications to chemicals to help fund purchases in water and energy after European power markets opened to competition in 1998. RWE has raised more than 2 billion euros from asset sales since Roels took over. His predecessor, Dietmar Kuhnt, spent more than \$30 billion on expansion since 2000.

#### Share Performance

RWE shares rose as much as 48 cents, or 1.3 percent, to 37.23 euros and traded at 37.08 euros at 10:28 a.m. in Frankfurt. The stock has gained 16 percent this year, making it the fourth- best performer on the Bloomberg Europe Electric Index. Heidelberg Druck shares fell as much as 3.50 euros, or 12 percent, to 26.70 euros. Heidelberg shares rose 40 percent last year, the first annual gain since 2000. Roels last year brought in RWE Chief Financial Officer Klaus Sturany to head Heidelberg's supervisory board and oversee a revamp after a slump in the advertising industry crimped demand for machinery. Since then, Heidelberg has agreed to sell digital and newsprint units.

RWE inherited the Heidelberg stake in 1940, when its Rheinelektra division bought a majority in Heidelberg Druck predecessor Schnellpressen AG, a German mechanical engineering company founded in 1850. Heidelberg spokesman Thomas Fichtl said he couldn't comment on the new shareholder structure.

#### Sale Structure

The utility is shedding the Heidelberg stake in exactly the same way it chose to sell its holding in Hochtief on Feb. 25 -- with an accelerated bookbuilding and an exchangeable bond sale. UBS AG and Deutsche Bank managed the Hochtief transaction.

As many as 42.97 million shares in Heidelberger will be sold. RWE will sell about 30 million shares to institutional investors in Europe and the U.S. It will also sell as many as 525 million euros of three-year bonds exchangeable into Heidelberger Druck shares, the company said.

Both offers will end tomorrow. The pricing and further details about the exchangeable bond will be released when the transactions are completed, the company said.

"I am very confident that RWE will find buyers for the stake," said Nils Machemehl, an analyst at M.M. Warburg. "Roels was very professional when he sold Hochtief. I expect the same now." He rates the stock "hold."

#### Drupa Fair

Heidelberger Druck last month said it expects new orders worth more than 1 billion euros from the Drupa printing industry trade fair, which starts in Dusseldorf tomorrow. The company two weeks ago said full-year operating profit was 20 million euros, more than it had expected. Heidelberger's net loss widened to 690 million euros from 138 million euros.

The senior unsecured bonds, exchangeable into about 13 million Heidelberger shares when the stock price rises 35 percent above the price at which the equity is sold, don't pay interest. The company has the right to redeem them after two years if Heidelberger's stock price rises to more than 20 percent above the conversion price, Dresdner Kleinwort said.

RWE, whose creditworthiness is backing the bonds, is rated A1 at Moody's Investors Service, four steps below the top AAA rating, and an equivalent A+ at Standard & Poor's. Both rating services have a negative outlook on the company, indicating they are more inclined to cut than do nothing or upgrade.

Roels in February said the company will sell its RWE Umwelt waste-management division by the end of next year, revising his predecessor's strategy because the unit won't meet its cost of capital by 2005. RWE Umwelt's operating profit slumped about a fifth to 76 million euros last year.

#### **Swiss (ex-Swiss Air)**

##### **Swiss: perte nette réduite à 78 M FS au 1T04 contre 200 M FS au 1T03**

(Boursorama) La compagnie aérienne Swiss a annoncé jeudi une perte nette réduite à 78 millions de francs suisses (50,29 M EUR) au premier trimestre 2004, contre 200 millions de FS au premier trimestre 2003, grâce à la reprise du secteur aérien et aux effets du plan de restructuration.

"Le bénéfice complet de ces efforts se fera sentir au cours de 2004 et de 2005", a assuré la compagnie.

La perte d'exploitation (Ebit) a également été réduite à 69 M FS contre une perte de 199 M FS un an auparavant. Le chiffre d'affaires atteint 846 M FS sur le premier trimestre 2004 contre 1,044 md FS sur la même période de l'exercice précédent

#### **Vivendi Universal**

##### **Vivendi Universal: chiffre d'affaires consolidé au 1er trimestre 2004 à 5,973 milliards EUR**

(Echo) Le groupe de médias et de télécoms Vivendi Universal a publié mercredi un chiffre d'affaires de 5,973 milliards d'euros pour le premier trimestre 2004, contre 6,232 milliards EUR à la même période de l'année dernière. Le groupe n'a pas donné d'indication sur ses perspectives. Sur une base comparable, le chiffre d'affaires trimestriel ressort en hausse de 5% (+11% à taux de change constant), après prise en compte des différentes cessions effectuées par le groupe en 2003: Telepiu, Canal+ Benelux, Canal+ Belgium et Flemish au sein de Canal+; Spencer Gifts chez Vivendi Universal Entertainment, Comareg et Atica & Scipione chez Vivendi Universal Publishing. S'ajoutent les cessions de Vivendi Universal Net et de Vivendi Telecom Hungary. La base comparable prend également en compte la consolidation de Télécom Développement par le groupe SFR Cegetel.

## **Whitbread**

### **Whitbread - Hausse du bénéfice grâce aux hôtels Marriott**

LONDRES, 5 mai (Reuters) - Le groupe britannique de loisirs et d'hôtellerie Whitbread a annoncé mercredi une hausse de 13% de son bénéfice annuel et s'est dit optimiste pour l'exercice en cours, grâce au redressement de ses hôtels de luxe Marriott au Royaume-Uni.

Whitbread, également propriétaire de la chaîne d'hôtels Travel Inn et des restaurants Beefeater, a expliqué que la clientèle américaine était de retour dans ses 62 établissements Marriott.

"Marriott affiche une croissance positive, le marché américain est de retour et nous prévoyons une croissance solide pour le reste de l'année", a déclaré le futur directeur général Alan Parker, successeur de David Thomas qui prendra sa retraite en juin.

Le groupe, qui détient aussi les restaurants Pizza Hut au Royaume-Uni, a réalisé un bénéfice avant impôts et éléments exceptionnels de 240,8 millions de livres (431 millions de dollars) sur l'exercice au 4 mars, conforme aux estimations des analystes qui s'échelonnaient de 230 à 245 millions de livres.

Sur les sept premières semaines de 2004/2005, ses ventes à périmètre comparable ont augmenté de 3,5%. Pour Marriott, la croissance est de 2,3% après une baisse de 0,2% lors de l'exercice passé.

Whitbread a par ailleurs réaffirmé son intérêt pour Premier Lodge, troisième chaîne d'hôtellerie économique au Royaume-Uni, mise en vente par le groupe de pubs Spirit qui espère en tirer au moins 500 millions de livres.

Avec un peu plus de 18.000 chambres, Travel Inn est le numéro un de l'hôtellerie économique en Grande-Bretagne et l'apport des 8.500 chambres de Premier Lodge lui permettrait d'atteindre de manière anticipée son objectif de 25.000 chambres.

"Premier Lodge est une enseigne qui correspond à nos activités et à nos centres d'intérêt et nous sommes disposés à payer un prix juste pour ces actifs", a déclaré David Thomas.

A la Bourse de Londres, l'action Whitbread s'adjuge 3,10% vers 11h00 GMT, à 765 pence, signant la meilleure performance de l'indice FTSE qui est inchangé à ce stade.

Responsible Editor : Denis Vanderborght

Visite our WebSite : <http://www.leleux.be>

Customer Infoline : 0800 255 11