

what we heard

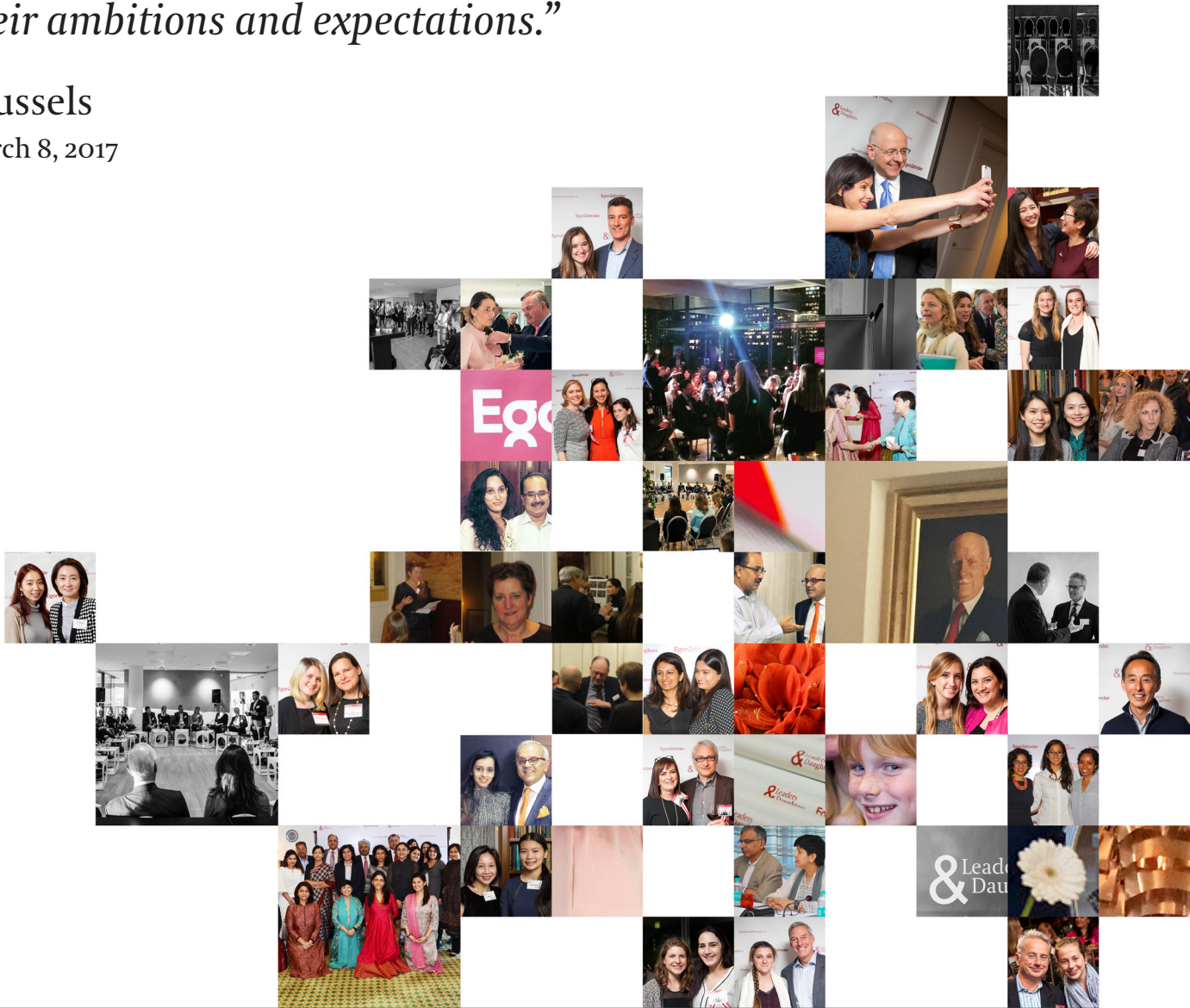
& Leaders 2017
Daughters

Leaders & Daughters

“Women need to be more transparent about their ambitions and expectations.”

Brussels

March 8, 2017



EgonZehnder



what we heard

Marleen Vaesen, the keynote speaker at Egon Zehnder's Leaders & Daughters event in Brussels, knows all about the ruses Belgian women of her generation had to adopt to get taken seriously by male colleagues. "At the start of my career, I learned the results of the football World Cup to be able to talk to them," Ms Vaesen told her audience of senior Belgian executives and their daughters at the Cercle de Lorraine business club on March 8.

Ms Vaesen has come a long way since then, as the CEO of Greenyard, a fruit and vegetable wholesale multinational based in Brussels with 8,000 employees in 25 countries worldwide. For a start, she no longer bothers to check soccer results. More to the point for the daughters at the event, Marleen – a mother herself – offered more than three decades of accumulated wisdom about how young women can fulfil their potential in Belgium's male-dominated business world.

One big takeaway: There's nothing wrong with being ambitious. "Women need to be more transparent about their ambitions and expectations," said Marleen. In her view, men often get the "wrong impression," assuming that quietly-spoken female colleagues are not interested in promotion. She added that inspiring female role models can play a crucial role in raising young women's horizons, just as their absence can reinforce the glass ceiling. She recalled how at her first company, she aimed to become a mid-tier marketing manager. "This was the highest level in business where I could see a woman."

Today, many more women fill the middle and higher ranks of Belgian businesses; women account for around a quarter of board directors at the country's largest publicly traded companies,

slightly higher than the EU average. Yet based on her experience, Ms Vaesen said it was too easy for young women at entry management level in large companies to lose their "visibility", compared with brasher male peers. Hence the importance of senior "sponsors" for younger female employees; "someone who talks about you and makes sure people give you the trust to take that extra step in your career."

"It's all about having the right mindset"

In the round-table discussion that followed, the daughters – most of them in their early twenties – had plenty to say about Marleen Vaesen's insights. One of them commented that she, too, memorized soccer results to keep up with the boys in the office – all the more dispiriting since she worked for a proudly (and loudly) liberated U.S. Silicon Valley giant. Karsten De Clerck, who heads Egon Zehnder's Brussels office in Belgium, reported that another daughter said she thought it was "already too late" for young Belgian women to achieve genuine equality at work. In her opinion, Belgium's education system has already "preconditioned" both genders to see women as second-best.

Yet this daughter's fatalism was not shared by most of the audience. Instead, by the end of the evening, the mood was "overwhelmingly positive", according to Karsten De Clerck. The participants came away convinced that Belgium's next generation of business leaders will include many more women in the mold of the inspirational Marleen Vaesen. "It's all about having the right mindset," said Isabelle Langlois-Loris, a consultant at Egon Zehnder's Brussels office.

what we heard

below

Astrid Maes,
Ann-Sophie Buyse,
Evelyn du Monceau,
Chris Buyse,
Diederik Amery

right

Keynote speaker
Marleen Vaesen



above

Sarah Miller, Axel
Miller, Françoise Masai,
Alessandra Anolli, Jules
Noten, Anouk De Smet,
Fiona de Hemptinne

above

Opening by
Karsten De Clerck

right

Jean-Edouard
Carbonnelle, Fiona de
Hemptinne, Michèle
Noten, Mathilde
Carbonnelle, Marlies
Van Doorselaere,
Ann-Sophie Buyse



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About Leaders & Daughters

To mark International Women's Day, Egon Zehnder conceived Leaders & Daughters, a global series of events that bring the world's most admired leaders and their daughters together to uncover the motivations, challenges and opportunities that face the next generation of professional women.

In 2017, we went further. In celebration of International Women's Day, we hosted Leaders & Daughters events in more than 40 cities worldwide – bringing together the voices of more than 3,500 participants to share their stories of success as well as the obstacles that are preventing progress. We share one common goal: to collectively pave a better future for the next generation of women leaders.

In addition to the events, we have also launched a campaign, “To My Daughter,” in which leaders write letters to their daughters about their hopes and dreams for the future. To participate, please visit www.leadersanddaughters.com.

Visit Leaders & Daughters at www.egonzehnder.com

Join the Leaders & Daughters LinkedIn group, follow #LeadersAndDaughters on Twitter and on Instagram at @egonzehnder

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Diederik Amery

diederik.amery@egonzehnder.com



Alessandra Anolli

alessandra.anolli@egonzehnder.com



Hosts

Karsten De Clerck

karsten.de.clerck@egonzehnder.com



Isabelle Langlois-Loris

isabelle.langlois-loris@egonzehnder.com



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