

## Foreword

As 2024 winds down, it's time to reflect on some of the most important developments of 2024, and how they laid the groundwork for **what's to come in 2025**. As outlined below, we believe the recovery trajectory remains robust and are **cautiously optimistic** about 2025, barring unforeseen political disruptions or geopolitical shocks.

During the final days of 2024, VDP successfully advised **BNP Paribas Fortis PE** and **Charles Leclef** on the sale of **Het Anker** to **Huyghe Brewery**. Het Anker is a Belgian family brewery and distillery with a strong heritage value and a history dating back to the 15th century. Its range consists of 17 beer brands, including **Gouden Carolus**, exported to over 30 countries. Brouwerij Huyghe – a leading Belgian Brewery with **Delirium** as its world-renowned flagship brand – is ideally positioned to increase Het Anker's beers worldwide presence.

We would also like to congratulate **VMRE** on the acquisition of **Flora World nv** from **E-Capital Equity Management**. Flora World has been designing and distributing a wide range of green artificial plants and trees for over 30 years. VMRE – for which VDP acted as advisor – will support management of Flora World in their continued growth story.

Finally, a few weeks ago, our team had the opportunity to participate in a guest lecture at **Katholieke Universiteit Leuven** (KU Leuven) for the Strategic Financial Management course. We were honored to join forces with Professor **Klaas Mulier** of Ghent University, sharing insights on strategic buyouts and financial decision-making. Laurent Linkens and Gilles Vanderstuyft brought a blend of practical experiences and theoretical knowledge to the session, offering students a unique perspective on leveraged buyout.

We hope you enjoy this month's reading

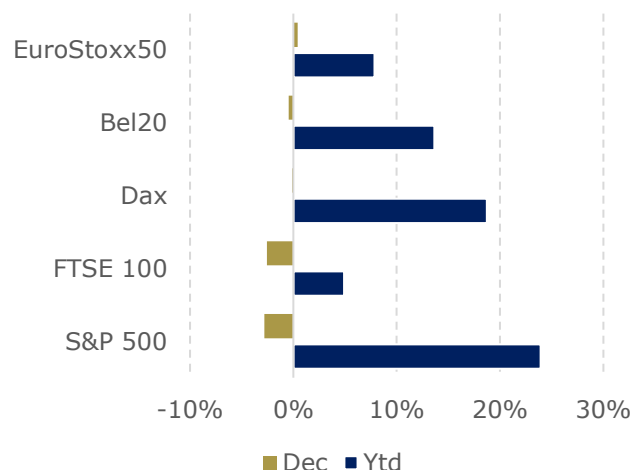
## SECTIONS

- Overview macroeconomic situation
- European M&A activity
- Belgian M&A review

### Overview Macroeconomic situation

Global **inflation** has **slowed sharply** in the last two years and is now within touching distance of 2%. However, the path to disinflation has been uneven across countries and regions, with most developed markets enduring **monetary policy-induced slowdowns** to achieve this. The **US** is a notable **exception**, experiencing accelerating economic growth and full employment with no discernible effect from restrictive monetary policy.

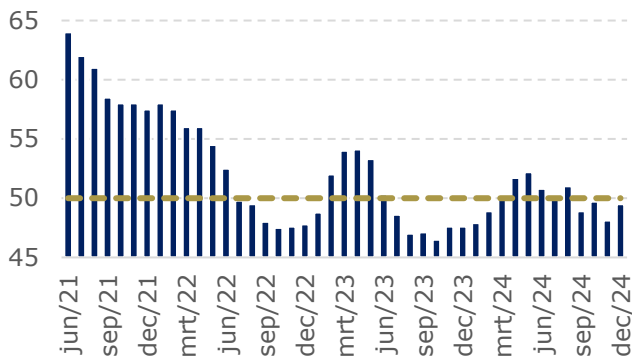
Chart 1: Performance main indices



Economies **outside the US** have been **less fortunate** on the supply side, and thus unable to achieve the same combination of strong growth and significantly reduced inflation. At the **start of 2024**, we were optimistic about Europe's recovery. Still-robust nominal wage growth and lower inflation were leading to real income gains, which we hoped would **support consumer confidence** and spending. **Manufacturing** was also expected to benefit from **lower gas prices** and a resurgence in **global demand for goods**.

To date, however, the **recovery** has proved somewhat **subdued**. Consumers remain hesitant to spend, and the manufacturing sector remains in the doldrums, facing persistent headwinds from the lingering effects of the energy crisis and weakening external demand.

Chart 2: European composite PMI index



Source: Trading Economics

Additionally, the **post-Global Financial Crisis environment** – characterized by tight fiscal policy, near-zero interest rates, and liberalized global trade – did not deliver meaningful benefits to the average person in the EU and US, fueling **support** for more **populist policies**. In this context, the rise of populist politicians on both the right and left are more a **symptom than a cause** of the prevailing political environment.

**Looking forward**, however, we do not believe the rebound is over. While the manufacturing sector continues to face structural challenges, easing inflationary pressures should prompt the European Central Bank (ECB) to implement **faster rate cuts**. Such measures could provide a cyclical boost to interest rate-sensitive eurozone corporates and encourage consumers to spend as their real incomes grow. This thesis, however, leaves aside the **potential impact of unfolding political risks**.

### European M&A activity

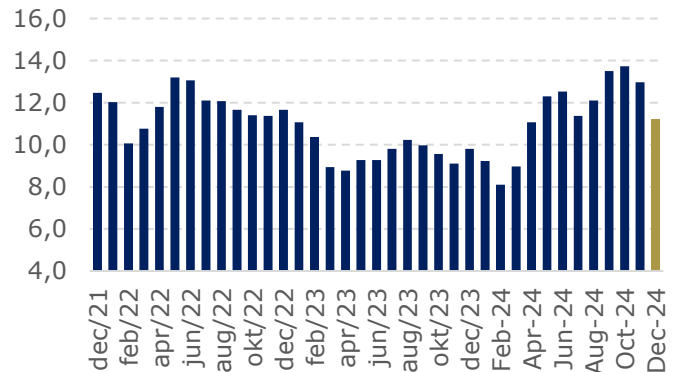
This year is ending in the same way it began – with **much anticipation**. For most of the year, there were great expectations that interest rates would fall, that private equity would get back in the game while getting out of portfolio positions, that buyers and sellers would reach a

détente on valuations, and that regulatory concerns would become merely background noise. **All of this would mean a great revival in M&A activity.**

Ultimately, none of the macroeconomic tailwinds that M&A practitioners had hoped for during 2024 **ever really happened as expected**. Dealmaking has remained consistent in Europe, with value, if not volume, showing growth.

Despite the stagnant in volumes, activity in the Europe region remains well **ahead of pre-pandemic levels**. In 2019, for example, there were 1,236 deals recorded over the first nine months of the year – around half the number seen during the first three quarters of 2024. Indeed, this year has already seen **significantly more transactions** than the whole of 2019.

Chart 4: Multiple (EV/EBITDA) EU M&A (3m moving avg)



Source: MergerMarket

And after a slow start to the year, exit activity is beginning to rise. For example, *Pitchbook* reports that the European region saw **exit values surge by 90%** in the second quarter of the year after a relatively slow start to the year. There has also been a pick-up in the number of larger transactions, with 46 deals worth more than US\$1 billion between Q1 and Q3 2024. A **more supportive economic background** also holds promise, with central bank policymakers having moved to loosen monetary policy.

As such we **anticipate a stronger M&A market** next years than 2024, but the one thing we've learned over the past few years is that politics trumps economics.

## Belgian M&A review

The Belgian M&A market so far this year has been characterized by **steady transaction volumes** but with a focus on smaller deals. 2024 figures show a total of 424 deal announcement with combined value of €17bn representing a **marginal 0,3% increase** in volumes compared to last year but a decline of 25% in value.

During the last 3 months, we've noticed a slight increase in Belgian M&A **activity** with **83 deal** announcements for a

total deal value of >€6.0bn. **PEs are still active** with 27 (33%) transactions, while **cross-border investors** represented the bulk of the deal flow – **43 (52%) deals**. As with the overall European trend, consumer together with Tech were the most active sectors (40% of deals) and are expected to remain a large contributor of the Belgian M&A landscape.

As with every month's newsletter, you may find overleaf a selection of the recent Belgian transactions.

vdp  
Your corporate  
finance

Wishing you happy holidays  
and a prosperous 2025!

It has been a marvelous year with a special thanks to our clients and partners.  
Looking forward to an exciting 2025.

 acquire  sell-side	 acquires  buy-side	 acquires  buy-side	 acquires  sell-side	 acquires  sell-side	 acquires  sell-side	 acquires  sell-side
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Selection of our 2024 mandates

Selection of recent Belgian transactions

Date	Target	Buyer	Sector	Description
03-dec	DKH BV	ABOG	Industrials	ABOG NV, the Belgium based construction company specializing in road maintenance and tunnel maintenance, has acquired a majority stake in DKH BV, that specializes in stump removal, tree pruning and felling.
04-dec	Sharp Insurance Brokers	Baltisse	Financials	Baltisse NV, the private investment firm controlled by Filip Balcaen, has acquired an undisclosed stake in Sharp Insurance Brokers, the Netherlands based provider of insurance risk management advice.
05-dec	Hermos Transport	Xwift	Industrials	Xwift, a major transport group from East Flanders, has acquired Hermos Transport in Genk to expand its presence in Limburg. The acquisition addresses a strategic gap and leverages the lack of succession at Hermos.
05-dec	Consultes	Tauw Belgium	Services	Consultes, a consultancy firm from Zwevegem specializing in energy, environment, and prevention, has been acquired by TAUW Belgium. The acquisition ensures continuity for Consultes.
06-dec	Kemetyl Group	Jodima Group	Materials	Jodima Group has accelerated its European growth by acquiring Swedish-Dutch peer Kemetyl, creating the largest European producer of functional fluids for the automotive industry.
06-dec	Dot2Dot; Schoepe Display	Van Genechten Packaging	Materials	Van Genechten Packaging has acquired Poland's Dot2Dot Group and a 70% stake in Germany's Schoepe Display, boosting its packaging and display business and supporting its VGP500 strategy and Berlin innovation plans.
06-dec	King Cuisine	Belies	Consumer	Belies, the Belgium-based supplier of Mediterranean delicacies, has acquired King Cuisine, a Netherlands-based producer of sauces and appetizers.
09-dec	Vache Bleue	Flanders Food Production	Consumer	Vache Bleue and FFP are merging to create European Dairy Company, boosting their market position. The new company will maintain operations in Belgium, France, and Germany and expand production capacity.
10-dec	NRG Fitness	Colruyt Group; JIMS	Consumer	Colruyt has strengthened its Jims fitness chain by acquiring NRG, which will double the number of Jims' locations to 80 in Belgium and Luxembourg. This move positions Jims as number two in the Belgian market, behind Basic-Fit.
11-dec	Brique House	Brouwerij Haacht	Consumer	Brouwerij Haacht has partnered with French brewery Brique House to strengthen its presence in France, combining sales efforts and offering locally brewed craft beers to meet rising demand for artisanal brews.
11-dec	Bnewable	Dovesco; RGreen Invest; Wallonie Entrepreneurs	Energy	Bnewable has raised €40 million to expand its battery solutions for industrial sites. The company aims to scale quickly, targeting 1 GWh of capacity by 2030 and expanding into two European countries next year.
12-dec	Café Vitesse	Cyclobility	Consumer	Cyclobility has partnered with Café Vitesse to expand its premium bike offerings and technical expertise in Flanders. The collaboration adds two stores, and supports its growth in the bike leasing market.
12-dec	Decube	Existing Management; Groupe IMBC;	Industrials	The management team supported by Wallonie Entrepreneurs and IMBC has acquired Decube, the Belgium-based company engaged in technical and industrial trades such as engineering, assembly and industrial painting.
13-dec	Aciturri Aeronautica	Sonaca	Industrials	Sonaca has acquired 51% of Aciturri's aircraft parts division, becoming one of the top independent players in the industry, with over 6,000 employees and €1 billion in revenue.
16-dec	Nimble	Cheops	Technology	Cheops has acquired Nimble, a provider of secure workplace solutions, to enhance its hybrid work offerings and support its growth towards 500 employees and €80 million in revenue by 2025.
16-dec	hsbcad	Maguar Capital Management	Technology	Maguar Capital Management GmbH, the private equity firm is to acquire a majority stake in hsbcad BVBA, the Belgium-based provider of offsite wood construction software.
18-dec	theMatchBox	Pixid	Technology	Borsbeek-based AI company theMatchBox, known for its recruitment solutions, has been acquired by French HR tech leader Pixid. It will continue independently while using Pixid's global reach to enhance its offerings.
18-dec	Baanheidehof	Stoffels	Consumer	Stoffels Tomaten has acquired Baanheidehof, expanding its production by 10 hectares. The company will convert the greenhouses for tomato cultivation, increasing its capacity to over 40 hectares.
18-dec	Milcobel	Koninklijke FrieslandCampina	Consumer	FrieslandCampina and Milcobel are merging to form a €14 billion dairy cooperative, aiming to boost scale and attract more farmers. Approval is pending, with finalization expected within a year.

Date	Target	Buyer	Sector	Description
18-dec	Forum Estates	Cibus Nordic Real Estate	Real estate	Cibus is acquiring Forum Estates for €508 million, taking over its 149 supermarkets in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. The deal values Forum's equity at €220 million, with 68% of shareholders agreeing.
19-dec	Flora World	VMRE capital partners	Consumer	VMRE - the family office of the Vande Moortele family - has acquired a majority stake in Flora World, a producer of high-quality artificial plants and trees.
20-dec	MijnEPB	VMRE capital partners	Services	VMRE - the family office of the Vande Moortele family - has acquired a majority stake in MijnEPB, the local provider of engineering services.
21-dec	Kwimex	Wara	Consumer	The Genk-based Wara group, led by Olivier Strauven, has acquired Kwimex, a Limburg importer of premium household appliances and products from China.
23-dec	Esteve Teijin Healthcare	Nippon Gases	Healthcare	Nippon Gases acquires Esteve Teijin Healthcare, a leader in respiratory home therapies, to boost its European presence and patient care. The deal awaits regulatory approval.
23-dec	David & Elena Fruits; Vegefruit	Fruitsnacks	Consumer	Fruitsnacks ends 2024 with two acquisitions, adding 500 new business clients from David & Elena Fruits and Vegefruit to its weekly fresh fruit delivery service.
26-dec	Het Anker	Brouwerij Huyghe	Consumer	Brouwerij Huyghe, known for Delirium Tremens, has acquired Het Anker, the brewer of Gouden Carolus beers and whiskies, aiming for international growth while preserving the unique identities of both breweries.