

Gelukkige verjaardag

The Flemish Parliament turns 40!

4

United we stand

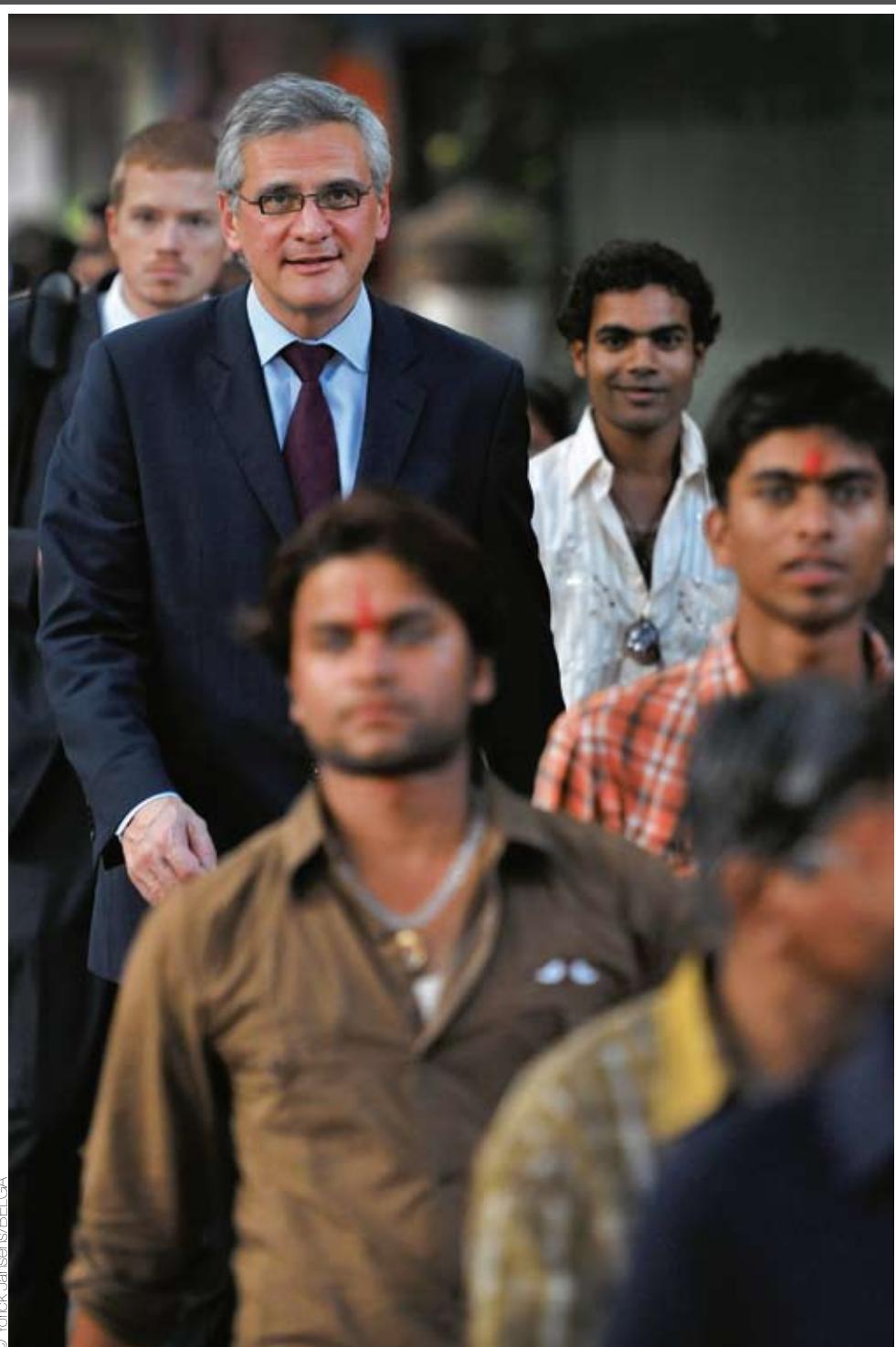
Flemish students' gruelling negotiations

7

Petal power

Antwerp hosts the next Tulip World Summit

11



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Passage to India

A Flemish mission to one of the fastest-growing economies in the world

LEO CENDROWICZ

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters has been studying history and relates a tale almost three centuries old of the first recorded trade contact between Flanders and India.

"The Ostend East India company, Oostendse Compagnie, moored its first ship in Banquibazar in 1723 on the riverside of the Hoogly, a tributary of the Ganga in Bengal," he begins. Other ships of the company followed, and Low Country merchants received concessions and settlement rights in the region from the Nawab of Murshidabad, a local governor. The trade went both ways, and by the end of the 1770s, the region was known in India for its quality glass and its iron and steel products.

"From their travels in Europe, Maharajahs [kings], merchants and settlers also used to bring back huge, impressive and sumptuous Belgian cut-glass or crystal chandeliers, as well as mirrors, to light up their palaces and houses in India," Peeters says.

The Ostend East India company has long disbanded and the Maharajahs long departed. But the ancient trade routes are being retraced today as Flanders and India rediscover one other.

And Peeters is leading the charge, spending seven days earlier this month in India raising the profile of Flanders during a trade mission across the country. The mission took him and a team of Flemish business and research leaders to four cities: Mumbai, New Delhi, Bangalore and

Chennai, putting Flanders on the map as a key trading partner and attractive investment location.

"I think we fully succeeded in our mission," Peeters says just a few days after returning to his Brussels office. "About 60 Flemish business delegates from 35 companies participated and were very satisfied about the contacts they could establish and further develop in India."

The power of India

It has become a cliché to marvel at India's resurgence: Its population has more than tripled in just 60 years, from 361 million in 1951 to 1.21 billion now, while the economy has skyrocketed since economic reforms were introduced 20 years ago. Last year it enjoyed an astonishing 10.6% growth rate. "With the European economy lagging a bit behind," says Peeters, "we have to ensure our future growth by focusing on new upcoming markets."

Flanders is already a major commercial partner, mainly due to the vibrant diamond trade between Antwerp and India. But it is the trade potential that makes India so attractive, and it was identified as a target market by Flanders Investment & Trade in its 2011-2015 strategy.

 ➤ *continued on page 5*

Nina wins *So You Think You Can Dance*

The only Flemish dancer to make it to the finals of the hit TV competition show *So You Think You Can Dance* took top honours during the live show last Sunday, 27 November. Nina Plantefèvre (photo, left) from Gooik, Flemish Brabant, was voted the best of the four finalists by the public but was also the recommended choice of three of the four jury members. The 19-year-old impressed the jury and audiences throughout the season of the Dutch-Flemish co-production with her ability to perform any kind of dance – from hip hop to modern to rumba – equally well. Plantefèvre's speciality is ballet; she attended the Royal Ballet School in Antwerp until last year and dances with the Tanzcompagie Giessen in Germany. Four of Plantefèvre's sisters also study dance.



Agreement reached on budget

Employers welcome new pact, but labour unions will protest this week

ALAN HOPE

Flanders' employers have given a qualified thumbs-up to the budget agreement reached last weekend by the six parties negotiating to form a new government. Trade unions in the region, however, criticised the accord as "unjust" and will go ahead with plans for industrial action this Friday.

"The budget agreement is balanced and can bring back peace and stability to the financial markets," commented Karel Van Eetvelt of Unizo, the organisation that represents the self-employed. He also pointed out that the money raised to fill the budget deficit will come mainly from businesses.

The budget agreement starts from the assumption of growth in 2012 of 0.8%, which would bring about a budget deficit of €11.3 billion. That figure has been raised by a combination of savings and new income – 42% from savings, 34% from new income and a further 24% from various diverse mechanisms. That's substantially different from the division initially presented by federal government *formateur* Elio Di Rupo and is opposed by the Open VLD Flemish liberals under Alexander De Croo.

 ➤ *continued on page 3*



Lindsey De Grande

Top athletes allow us to contemplate from afar a level of dedication and commitment of which most of us can't even dream. Imagine, then, a runner with the determination to make it all the way to the Olympic Games, with all the pressure and sacrifice that entails; and then give her leukaemia.

That's the case for Lindsey De Grande, who last week in a post on her blog made it clear that she's set her sights on the Games in London in 2012.

De Grande, 22, was born in Bruges and made her European debut in 2005 in Lignano in the 1,500m, finishing sixth. She became a steady presence at meets, but only really distinguished herself after she'd moved up from the juniors, winning the 1,500m at the Belgian indoor championships in Ghent in 2007, and the outdoor in 2009, having also added the 800m to her repertoire.

Middle-distance running demands not only stamina but tactical foresight – two abilities her medical situation will also require of her. She discovered she had cancer in July and announced it in a blog post titled "My World Caves In".

"I have chronic leukaemia, but

we'll come out of this stronger," she wrote. "I'll keep on going after my dreams, and I have a fantastic group of people around me who will help me through, in good and bad times."

Treatment started in Leuven days later, involving bone-marrow punctures. In September, De Grande complained of headaches, nausea and fatigue, though her training continued. By this month, however, she was on a stage in Lanzarote, Spain, together with high jumper Tia Hellebaut and the Borlée brothers, also runners. De Grande reported: "It's good to be back among athletes again. Now I can go back to feeling like an athlete instead of a sick person."

And despite a throat infection, continuing fatigue and more bone-marrow samples, not to mention press attention, she was looking forward. "My dream is still to reach the absolute top of the world, to go to the Olympic Games," she told *De Standaard*. "And if I can't place for 2012, then I'll aim for the Games in Rio de Janeiro in 2016."

→ www.lindseydegrande.be

FLANDERS TODAY

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FLANDERS TODAY
NOVEMBER 30, 2011

News in brief

Flanders should have its own **anti-discrimination centre to deal with complaints** relating to Flemish responsibilities such as De Lijn, the education system, the employment agency VDAB and the health sector, according to equal rights minister Pascal Smet. Smet was reacting to a study published by academic Elke Valgaeren of Hasselt University, which also showed that 25% of people in Flanders thought it acceptable for employers to take account of a candidate's nationality when recruiting. More than 97% of people, however, said they were in favour of equal opportunity policies.

The city of Antwerp has put in an application to create the internet domain **.antwerpen for the use of public services** and to rent addresses to private businesses. The application with the international naming agency ICANN costs \$185,000 (€138,000) to submit, and if successful, the domain will cost \$25,000 (€18,700) a year to maintain. The city of Ghent is also reported to be considering an application for the suffix .gent.

Baby food company Bambix has issued a **recall of Bambix Groeimelk** after a quality defect was discovered. The recall concerns one-litre cartons of the milk with an expiration date of 30 April 2012 and lot numbers 20:50:00 to 21:07:00, sold by Colruyt, Spar and Okay stores. The company stressed there is no health risk, though the milk should not be consumed.

The St Francis college in Destelbergen, East Flanders, which has been offering lessons in Chinese since 2006, will now receive a **subsidy for the teacher**

OFFSIDE

A trip down memory superhighway

You probably know the clip: Yves Leterme is caught on the steps of the Brussels cathedral on Belgium's national day in 2007 by journalist Christophe Deborsu and asked to sing the national anthem, "De Brabançonne". Leterme wavers a moment, then launches into a version of "La Marseillaise", the French national anthem. It was a classic moment of Gotcha journalism, and the clip travelled round the world. Classic? Not quite. One-quarter of a century before Deborsu, another reporter pulled exactly the same stunt. That clip has just been made available again for all to see on VRT television's new website EuScreen. In the segment from the programme *Terloops*, reporter Wilfried Bertels goes in search

and **class materials from the government of China**, after an agreement arranged by the Chinese ambassador to Belgium was signed last week. The extra-curricular class currently has 26 students at four different levels.

The Flemish government has no plans for the **further reduction in the number of civil servants** working in the cabinets of ministers, minister-president Kris Peeters told the parliament last week. Since its entry into office in 2009, the current government has cut the numbers of cabinet staff from about 450 to 277. "I'm not a supporter of further cuts in staff numbers," said Peeters. "We're now at a level that's sustainable."

The port of Antwerp has been ordered by a labour tribunal to scrap a directive that ruled out people with **diabetes for consideration for employment**. The case was brought by a dock worker dependent on insulin who claimed she had been discriminated against when she was declared medically unfit for promotion. The woman was awarded three months' salary in compensation.

Yves De Decker, a chef working at the kitchens of the Bruges social aid agency OCMW, has been named **mass catering chef of the year** by the industry's professional association. The award comes after a contest in which chefs had to design a three-course catering menu costing only €7.

Passengers using **Brussels public transport** are happy with ticket prices and information, but 40%

feel unsafe in metro stations at night, and a majority demand improved punctuality and more seating in vehicles, according to a study carried out by the consumer organisation Test-Aankoop. Brussels Region's mobility minister Brigitte Grouwels last week announced funding of €800 million for 2012 to improve mobility in the capital – 10% more than this year. The public transport authority MIVB receives €555 million.

A man who was **sacked for staying home from work for five years** will bring his case back to the Council of State, after his employer, the city of Antwerp, sacked him again. Dirk Martens, a theatre technician working for the city, was sent on detachment to a small theatre group in 1986. In 2000 he was told he was no longer required for that job but received no further direction and continued to receive his salary while staying home. The Council of State ruled that Antwerp had acted illegally by sacking Martens when they discovered the situation in 2005. Now the city has carried out an internal disciplinary procedure and made the same decision. According to his lawyer, the new dismissal is as illegal as the first, and the case will return to court.

A plan to erect a **monument to the late singer Wannes Van de Velde** in Antwerp has been rejected by the singer's family as "inappropriate". The plan was to build the monument to the revered local artist, who died in 2008, by the Vredesbrug at Willebroek, which he wrote a song about in 1990.

ALAN HOPE



Moments of history on EuScreen: Mark Eyskens

of the Herald of Free Enterprise off the coast of Zeebrugge; evocations of Fathers' Day from 1956 and Mothers' Day from 1982; a report from Pukkelpop in 2002 where the festival has been disrupted by "serious stormy weather".

Some things, like reporters pranking prime ministers, never change.

→ www.euscreen.eu

What's for dinner?

Environmental organisation Leefmilieu Brussel has launched a smartphone app to let consumers know which local fruit and vegetables are in season
→ www.leefmilieubrussel.be



Budget: income depends on growth figure

→ continued from page 1

Savings come in different forms: New health initiatives will be put on hold, and the expected real growth of 4.5% in health spending reined back to 2% in 2013 and 3% in 2014, bringing in €2.3 billion.

New income takes the form of a tax on investment income of 21%, or 25% for assets over €20,000. Those qualifying for the higher rate will be identified by the National Bank, after a plan to have everyone declare his or her investment income was scrapped on objections from Open VLD. The tax is expected to bring in €900 million. A further €50 million will be raised by an increase in the tax on stock market transactions, expected to hit speculators hardest. The notional interest deduction, which allows companies to invest their own capital and deduct interest repayments against tax as if the money were borrowed, is capped at 3% instead of 3.425%, which will bring in €1.6 billion.

Labour reforms

One of the main reforms of the labour market is a measure intended to get people into work earlier. At present, anyone finished with studying has to wait six to nine months before receiving unemployment benefits.

That time will now be extended to one year. Unemployment benefits will be reduced as time goes on, with a minimum reached after four years on benefits.

The minimum age for a "bridge pension", or early retirement, for individuals raises from 58 to 60 years, assuming a working lifespan of 40 years. For collective bridge pensions, the age is raised from 50 to 55, with a derogation until 2018 for companies in difficulties.

"We are relieved that there is finally an agreement to limit the budget deficit to 2.8%," said Luc De Bruyckere, chairman of Voka, the Flemish Chamber of Commerce. "Compared to one week ago, there is more being saved, and the first steps being taken towards reforms of the labour market. ... We look forward to a future government extending these measures."

The three main labour unions – the Christian-democrat ACV, the socialist ABVV and the liberal ACLVB – plan industrial action this Friday, 2 December.

"We need social unrest like we need toothache," said Rudi Thomae, director of the employers' organisation VBO. The budget agreement, he said, was a step in the direction of



© Belga

"the necessary reforms of the labour market and pensions".

Speaking on VRT radio, Rudy De Leeuw of the ABVV and Marc Leemans of the ACV called the agreement a set of "unjust measures taken at the expense of workers and the unemployed, which will only increase inequality and poverty. The ordinary man and woman in the street will pay too high a price for the rescue of wage indexation, although that is not the cause of the crisis. Meanwhile, the bankers and speculators remain out of reach."

Economist Geert Noels raised another

potential problem: The growth figure of 0.8% for 2012 is, he said, "optimistic". If growth does not reach that figure, the calculations of the negotiators will be wrong. It would have been more prudent, he said, to assume zero growth.

The agreement could also be affected by an increase in the interest rates the government has to pay to borrow money on international markets. As *Flanders Today* went to press, that rate was 5.85%. The government hopes to raise €2 billion from a bond offer issued last week. ♦

All EU languages to be offered in schools

All 23 official languages of the EU, as well as Brazilian Portuguese, Russian, Chinese and Hindi, will be offered in secondary school in years three and four from next year according to the new Language Note produced last week by education minister Pascal Smet. (Dutch, French and English are already provided from year one.)

"We took account of the number of speakers and the international importance [of the languages]," explained Smet's spokesman. "In that case, you can't ignore Chinese and Hindi."

Critics point out that Turkish and Arabic are being ignored, however, although they are spoken at home by many of the students concerned. "Smet chooses the languages that students may and may not learn, and his choice seems to be very arbitrary," said Elizabeth Meuleman, a member of the Flemish parliament for Groen!

Arabic and Turkish will still be offered in secondary schools, the education ministry said, but students will have to take those classes off-curriculum, adhering to a minimum class size of 20. ♦

Jaartallenleven protected by Unesco

A ritual involving Leuven men all born the same year who take part in a decade of activities culminating in a celebration around the statue of Abraham has been placed on the register of intangible heritage by the United Nations educational and cultural organisation Unesco. The Leuven *Jaartallenleven* applies to men who turn 40, each of whom is accompanied by an older mentor or "godfather". It joins Chinese shadow puppetry as the latest new entries on the Unesco list.

Flemish culture minister Joke Schauvliege congratulated Leuven on the decision. "Intangible cultural heritage deserves its place beside movable and monument heritage," she said. "I want to give chances, in my long term policy, to heritage communities. They are often made up of volunteers who protect and maintain our customs and hand them down. Their efforts are worth their weight in gold." ♦

Antwerp wins first fire brigade award

Antwerp is home to the country's best fire brigade, according to voters in this year's first annual FireForum Awards, given out last week. The best volunteer brigade is from Zelzate, and the best mixed brigade from Beveren. The FireForum awards were set up to honour those who have spent a lifetime involved in combating fires. The non-profit that administers the awards involves Agoria, the technology industry federation, the Flemish and Walloon fire safety federations and the Passive Fire Protection Association (PFPA). The

awards are based on the quality of projects submitted by applicants. Antwerp's brigade was praised for its project involving internal development of the corps, a public information function and aspects of hazardous and technically difficult fire fighting. The Zelzate brigade developed a public information platform aimed particularly at young people, alerting them to safety procedures at carnivals, parties and concerts.

Professor Paul Vandervelde (pictured) of Ghent University was awarded the Lifetime Achievement

award in recognition of his development of and commitment to the concept of Fire Safety Engineering (FSE). Ghent's course in FSE won an award for social importance, and Steven Verstock, also of Ghent University, won for his thesis on the origins of fire and early detection mechanisms. ♦



© FireForum

FIFTH COLUMN

ANJA OTTE

Mastering Dutch

So what will people remember from the federal budget agreement? That it was a long time in the making? That Bart De Wever does not like it?

Possibly. But more likely people will remember the way in which prime minister-to-be Elio Di Rupo (PS) presented this, in something vaguely resembling the Dutch language.

Di Rupo has long struggled with Dutch pronunciation. He obviously tries his best – he has been taking lessons for years – but his hypercorrect articulation and often bizarre intonation only make some laugh and others cringe.

That Di Rupo suffers from a hearing impediment, which makes languages so much harder for him to learn, is little known in Flanders. The socialist suffers another handicap, too: When he speaks, many Flemish hear the voice of *francophone domination*.

Di Rupo's syllables take them back to the time when French was the language of the upper classes and the bourgeoisie, who looked down on the "little Flemish". Adopting French was the way to get ahead in life. This is how Brussels, a Flemish city originally, became almost completely French speaking before it turned into the multiple-language melting pot it is today. What the Flemish spoke – a variety of dialects at the time – was not even considered a language.

After a long emancipation process, the Flemish now have the same rights as French speakers, Dutch being one of the three official languages in Belgium. This "language struggle" has left its traces, though: Language issues are still sensitive with many Flemish, who will react at any hint of condescension or unwillingness to speak it on the part of French speakers.

That Di Rupo should fall victim of this is slightly unfair. There is no reason why the Flemish, who have become so much more successful economically, should still have this chip on their shoulders. Moreover, Di Rupo is anything but a bourgeois looking down at us. He is the son of poor immigrants, who, through his own talent and perseverance, became what he is today.

Still, there are signs that things have changed. French-speaking politicians such as Didier Reynders, Charles Michel and Melchior Wathelet, who have better mastered the language,

are looked upon mildly and even admired. Flemish politicians often admit that their French is not up to scratch and take courses themselves. And frankly, the language they speak often sounds like anything but Dutch, too, but it is hard to see how any course could mend that.

448

new cases of HIV infection in Flanders in 2010, according to the annual report of the Scientific Institute for Public Health, published last week

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to be paid in fines by 400 people in Limburg province, according to the official letter they received in the post last week, due to an error in the automatic system that sends out fine notices

5,000

photos of young people to be included in a new 30-square-metre monument created to mark the end of Antwerp's year as the European Youth Capital. The completed monument will be installed in the City Park next spring

33,000

parking offences to be ticketed by Ghent police in a year, according to quotas revealed last week

€142 million

in unpaid tax recouped by authorities in the year to end October, with the year's total likely to top last year's record sum of €155 million



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Happy 40th, Flemish Parliament!

Members who've made history in Flanders' governing body recall their memorable moments – and darkest secrets

ANJA OTTE

The Culture Council of the Dutch Cultural Community. That was the first name for the Flemish Parliament, in 1971. In 1980, the name changed to Flemish Council, and then finally in 1996, it became the Flemish Parliament. These are not just idle names: They reflect the process of federalisation (or devolution) through which Belgium has gone over the decades.

The Flemish Parliament has 124 members, who are responsible for community as well as regional matters (with the exception of the six members from the Brussels region, who can only

vote on community matters). These include culture, education, welfare, planning, environment, agriculture, economy, energy, housing, science, public works, interior and international concerns.

Since 1995, the Flemish elections are held every five years, separately from the federal. Before that, Flemish MPs were appointed from representatives in the national parliament.

The imposing Flemish Parliament building on Leuvenseweg in the centre of Brussels dates back to 1905, when it was built as the central post office, and was renovated in

the '90s when parliament moved there from its original home in the federal parliament building. The Flemish Parliament building's large assembly hall is a former courtyard, which was fit with a glass ceiling, symbolising the open house policy of the parliament. Across the road are the MP offices, in an equally impressive building, which still includes the window counters of the original post office.

If you want to join the 40th birthday celebrations, check the Flemish Parliament's website, where there is a link in the left-hand column.♦

→ www.vlaamsparlement.be



Luc Van Den Brande, president of the European Comity of Regions, former Flemish minister-president (1992-1999)

Like Jean-Luc Dehaene, I realized that the 1993 state reform would not be the last. Therefore, the Flemish Parliament adopted the so called "five resolutions" in 1996, with our demands for greater autonomy, based on a note I drafted. The resolutions were the result of long parliamentary debates, which included hearings of no less than 140 people from civil society. They form the base of all state reform negotiations to this day.



Jan Peumans (N-VA), president of the Flemish Parliament

For 20 long years I stood in national elections, but it took until 2004 to get elected. Even that was unexpected, as I was only fifth on the Limburg CD&V/N-VA list. I will always remember the day I took the oath in the Flemish Parliament. In my office I wrote "I am happy" on a large blackboard. Five years later, those words were still there. How many politicians can say that?



Frank Vandenbroucke (sp.a), minister of state, former minister of education

In 2008 the Flemish Parliament voted an historic decree on the financing of schools. The "school wars" of the 1950s left one conflict unresolved: Schools within the state network still received more money. By the time education was federalised in 1988, this was no longer justifiable. Still, it took another 20 years to settle this. We decided to treat all school children equally, with extra support for schools with children from deprived backgrounds.



Marino Keulen (Open VLD), Flemish MP, former minister for the interior

The Flemish Parliament established its own house in 1996; before that we met in the Chamber. Having a place of our own physically illustrated what we stood for. I love the building. Most visitors are impressed by the dome hall and the art that can be found in and around the parliament. The opening of the new building was especially memorable to me, as I was newly elected in the first direct election of Flemish MPs.



Filip Dewinter (Vlaams Belang), speaker of the opposition since 1988

The opening of the new Flemish parliament in 1996 was a very formal occasion, which TV covered live. To liven things up, they had invited some celebrities. They placed the cartoonist GAL, one of our critics, right in the middle of our political group. When he lashed out at us, we walked out. This became quite an incident; in fact it was the only thing the media picked up from the event.



Mieke Vogels, Flemish MP, former minister of welfare

As a minister, I made an agreement that ended the so called "White Anger" (welfare workers discontent) in 2001. At 11.00, after a long night of negotiating, I shared some champagne with the union representatives, and we did a little chicken dance on the street in celebration. At 14.00, however, I had to make a declaration in front of the Flemish Parliament. By then, I was exhausted, the one glass of champagne killing me off. As I looked around from the speaker's stand, the whole place went wobbly. I could hear my own words coming back at me. No-one noticed, though, and to this day I have told no-one.

Passage to India

Flanders makes important deals on ports and dredging during economic mission

→ continued from page 1

Peeters testifies to the huge business opportunities and the effect his trade missions can have on pushing contracts. "The official character of the mission facilitates contacts on a higher level and helps to open doors in a country where prestige and standing are still very important," he says. He points to results from past missions: In 2010, seven new major Indian business projects were launched in Flanders, which puts it in seventh place in the ranking of main investing countries in the region.

India scraps tax on dredgers

During the trip, Peeters held an investment power lunch or breakfast in each of the four cities, aimed at Indian business leaders with both existing and potential investors. There were high-level networking receptions, too: in Delhi and Mumbai, they were organised with the Belgian Ambassador to India Pierre Vaesen and the Consul-General Karl Van den Bossche; in Bangalore and Chennai, they were co-organised with the Confederation of Indian Industry.

Peeters also met commerce and industry minister HE Anand Sharma and invited him to the Horasis Global India Business Meeting that the Flemish government will host in Antwerp next June.

Many of the opportunities involve shipping, and the ports of Chennai and Zeebrugge already have agreements to promote clean cargo handling. Indian Shipping Minister GK Vasan, who met Peeters in Chennai, pointed out that India has 13 major ports and 176 smaller ports along its 7,517-kilometre coastline, and there are already a number of port agreements with Flanders.

A related issue is dredging, and the Indian government has agreed to scrap a controversial 9% tax on activities by foreign dredging companies – a measure that particularly affects two Flemish dredgers, Deme and Jan De Nul, which already operate in India. Indeed, Vasan said dredging could be a major area of co-operation, as India needs to shift almost 300 million cubic metres in its major ports by the end of March 2012.

Contacts & contracts

As for trade prospects, Peeters reels off the contracts and contacts that his mission secured during their whistle-stop tour. He points to the joint venture agreements that were signed between HTMS, a producer of high-tech metal seals, and Kwality Product in Mumbai, and between Aquaplus and Ase Structure Design in Chennai.

There was the launch in Bangalore of the sales subsidiary of Flemish company Vermeiren, a producer



© Photos: Yannick Jansens/BELGA



Minister-president Kris Peeters in the streets of Chennai (top); Marc Van Gastel, head of the investment department of Flanders Investment & Trade, during the economic mission to India (above left); Peeters visits India's National Aerospace Laboratories in Bangalore (above right)

of high-quality wheelchairs and orthopaedic beds; Recticel, which specialises in the production of polyurethane foam, announced a major investment project in Mumbai; and a memorandum of understanding was signed on technology transfer and cooperation between Leuven-based nanotechnology group imec and Tower Jazz in Bangalore.

And during the mission Emrald Tyres, the Mumbai tyre maker for port equipment and heavy machinery, announced it would organise its European distribution from Zeebrugge as from 2012, while car part manufacturer Super Auto Forge said it would use Zeebrugge for its European logistics.

VITO biomass project in Bangalore

Peeters was particularly pleased with two research deals. One was by VITO, the Flemish institute for technological research with Dr Rajendra K Pachauri's world-renowned TERI institute to build a joint Vito-Teri knowledge centre and laboratory in Bangalore to

study biomass. The other involved imec and Bangalore-based IT giant WIPRO to develop an application in the health-care sector, education or civil security called Applied Research in Intelligent System Engineering (ARISE). With so much of the trade relationship dominated by the diamond sector, Peeters and his mission organised a diamond promotion event in Mumbai, in which more than 40 of the most

prominent Indian diamond companies took part. But at the same time, efforts are being made to cater for the burgeoning Indian community that has settled in Antwerp. To help meet the needs of the estimated 1,200 Indian families in the area, a new international school is being built in the suburb of Aartselaar, near Antwerp University. This will be the first European school run by the DY Patil group, which

manages more than 100 schools in India. Scheduled to open in September of next year, it will teach around 400 pupils in English and will replace the recently closed Antwerp British School. While the terms of trade and investment have changed over the centuries, it's clear that pioneering Flemish and Indian entrepreneurs are still looking for new opportunities in each other's markets.♦

→ www.flanderstrade.be

Trade ties

India is the most important Flemish trading partner in Asia after China and the second most important non-EU export destination for Flanders after the United States. Flemish exports to India were worth €6.7 billion in 2010 and are dominated by the diamond trade (86%), followed by capital goods, plastics, iron and steel products, and organic chemicals. Imports from India to Flanders totalled €3.5 billion in 2010, and are likewise mostly the gem trade, followed by textiles and clothing. India is also a major investor in Flanders, with around €1.2 billion invested in the region. More than 50 Indian companies have subsidiaries in Flanders and are active in a variety of sectors, such

as ICT, the pharmaceutical and chemical sector, logistics and automotive and capital equipment. These sectors are represented by Indian companies like Jet Airways, JBF, Crompton Greaves, State Bank of India, Global Green, Emrald Tyres, Zenobia Agro and Tata Consultancy Services. Earlier this year, India's JBF group said it would build a €140 million PET plastic production unit on the BP site in Geel, creating 160 new jobs. In the other direction, more than 100 Flemish companies already have investments in India, including McCoy Soudal, Haco Machinery, Reynders Label Printing India, Bekaert and Vitalo Packaging.

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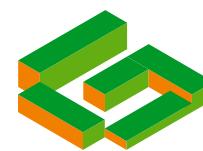
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Model behaviour

Simulation puts Flemish students to the test in United Nations diplomacy

DAAN BAUWENS

Imagine: You're 22 and trying to stay awake in the midst of nocturnal negotiations. This is New York, and you're defending your country at the United Nations Security Council.

Does that sound impossible? Well, it is. But from 1-4 December, 48 students from the universities of Ghent, Antwerp, Leuven and Brussels will get fairly close.

At the annual Model United Nations (MUN), a Security Council meeting is simulated as faithfully as possible. The students will negotiate for no less than four days, after which they have to formulate a compromise resolution. The aim of the game: putting your country's stamp on the resolution.

Ghent doctoral student Jennifer Kesteleyn is a former participant and is organising this year's event in Brussels. "At this edition, students have to discuss the security situation in Somalia," she explains. "That includes the problem of piracy in the Horn of Africa, the Islamic terrorist group al-Shabaab, the possible links between these two and the recent border conflicts with Ethiopia and Kenya."

With requirements like that, not just any student can take part in the MUN. In each participating university, students who want to get in have to go through a selection process. At the final stage, the students must defend themselves in front of a four-person jury in a setting that looks a lot like the official grand exam for diplomats.

"During the selection, we specifically look at the student's ability to stand firm in difficult situations," says Kesteleyn, who was also one of this year's jurors. "It is more important to be able to talk yourself out of an inconvenient situation than to know the exact answer to every question."

Students also have to show endurance, she says. "They will have to negotiate from nine in the morning until five in the evening. But that's not all: During the social events at night, the negotiating just continues."

And there is a fair amount of diplomatic talent required, too. "We need open-minded people who can easily relate to ideas that are fundamentally different from theirs. They need to be able to compromise to a large extent without losing track of their own aims," Kesteleyn says.

No more "me"

If you're one of the lucky ones who gets selected, you're in for quite a ride. First, you receive the name of the country you will have to defend and the subject of the meeting. Then it is up to you to find out everything there is to know about your country's point of view. You must look up tremendous amounts of information, go to the embassy and probably even talk to the ambassador to become familiar with the interests you are tasked with defending. That's not all: You will receive training at your university to know how to negotiate in the most effective way.



Flemish students prepare for negotiations at the Model United Nations

"It was fun to play a diplomat, but not always easy," says Sara Willems, a student of law in Ghent, who took part last year. The hardest part? "Sticking to your country's point of view instead of your own," she admits. "You have to drop your personal convictions. Yes, it was hard to find all the necessary information to get prepared, but that was nothing compared to keeping up my role." And that is exactly the intention. "Students have to feel what it is really like to be a diplomat," explains Frank Maes, president of the United Nations Association Flanders Belgium, which organises MUN. "Some may like it; others will have to admit they're not fit for it and choose to head in other directions. But most love it." Every year, nearly 400,000 students from 48 countries take part in such an event. MUNs have been organised since the early

1920s, when students simulated negotiations at the League of Nations, the UN's predecessor. There is also an annual World MUN, which is held in a different city every year. This year it was in Singapore.

Every year at the University of Ghent, more than 100 students apply. Only 15 are allowed to go. Both Kesteleyn and Willems have participated at the World MUN. Kesteleyn even won the diplomatic award in 2008 because of her excellent diplomatic skills. "All thanks to the extensive training I received for the edition in Flanders," she says. "And because of the award, I was able to start my doctoral studies." She is now a researcher in the team of renowned professor Rik Coolsaet, one of the country's leading experts in international affairs.♦

→ www.vvn.be/model_united_nations

Q & A

Piet Seuntjens is the project leader for the just-launched *Aqua Drone*, developed at VITO, the Flemish Institute for Technological Research

What is the *Aqua Drone* exactly?
It looks like a small catamaran, but it is an unmanned vessel for monitoring surface water. The sensors provide data to an onboard computer, which analyses measurements of the water quantity and quality in rivers, lakes, ponds, channels, harbours and along coastal areas. The vessel is equipped with batteries and an advanced GPS, so it can autonomously navigate along fixed routes.

What's so important about it?
It saves a lot of time and money. In one day, the *Aqua Drone* can do much of the work of a team of scientists on a vessel taking water samples and analysing them in a lab for weeks. The data and maps *Aqua Drone* provides are ready to use. Furthermore, the *Aqua*

Drone measures a wide array of parameters to find out the causes of phenomena – pollution, for instance. The vessel determines the temperature, acidity, concentration of algae and level of pollution at a specific location. It even measures the depth of the watercourse. Distributing fixed sensors throughout the water system is much more expensive and will not produce equally good results. It also operates in shallow waters and in other locations that are difficult to reach.

When can it be used?

Water authorities, such as the Flemish government, are interested in using the *Aqua Drone* in case of incidents such as the contamination of rivers. The *Aqua Drone* quickly establishes

the seriousness of the pollution and its source. Drinking water companies can use it to monitor water quality, and dredging companies to determine when and where dredging is required. It's a tool for port developers to improve their cost-effectiveness, and scientific institutions can profit from its precise and fast calculations. As a side note, the European Space Agency has considered applying our technology to improve the depth of the images their satellites shoot of the earth surface.

What is the state of Flemish waterways?

Because Flanders is a very urban and industrialised region, its water quality is a worry. The quality has improved in recent years, but Flanders still has a



way to go to achieve the water condition goals imposed by the European Union. To meet the ecological requirements as soon as possible, Flanders needs more intelligent monitoring systems – such as the *Aqua Drone*.

→ www.vito.be/aquadrone

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Leuven's nanotechnology institute imec presented an innovative **mobile brain monitor** at the Creativity World Forum in Hasselt. The monitor permits users to see and hear the activity of their own grey cells. A portable monitor of EEG brain signals is useful in health care; epilepsy patients can, for example, monitor themselves and receive a warning when they are likely to suffer a seizure. Meanwhile, researchers of the art school Sint-Lucas in Antwerp have developed a computer game that players control with the EEG helmet.

A team of surgeons in Hamburg has successfully implanted the **Synapse, the first "brain pacemaker"** created by biotech company 3Win in Niel, Antwerp province. 3Win is the first company in Europe to develop a deep brain stimulator. The stimulator treats movement disorders caused by Parkinson's disease, among others, by providing electrical impulses when connections between brain cells go wrong. The surgeons implanted the neurostimulator, or pacemaker, in the chest of a German man, whose movement disorders have almost completely disappeared.

The Catholic University of Leuven, known as KU Leuven, has decided to hold on to the **"K"**, which designates its Catholic identity. An official statement will be made on 22 December, following a debate that has lasted a year and a half. The "K" first came under scrutiny in 1969.

Flemish universities have agreed to postpone the extension of master studies in certain degrees, mostly human sciences, until 2015. Originally, they determined that from 2014 these degrees should take two years instead of one. But students protested against the measure, as the current first-year bachelor students were not informed at the start of the school year. Flemish minister of education Pascal Smet will make the final decision in April next year.

The Catholic education system is demanding special care for so-called **"unteachable" youth, a hardcore of problem children**, mostly living in disadvantaged city areas. Mieke Van Hecke, director-general of the Flemish League of Catholic Education, has said that such children interrupt the functioning of ordinary schools and require a specific approach through separate programmes. Flemish minister of education Pascal Smet acknowledges the problem and will evaluate the services available.

(Andy Furniere)

THE WEEK
IN BUSINESS**Autos • Alcopa**

Antwerp-based trading and car distribution group Alcopa, owned by the Moorkens family, has taken over the Hasselt-based Bruyninx, which sells vehicles from the Peugeot, Citroën, Lancia, Fiat and Nissan brands.

Biotech • Galapagos

Shares of Mechelen-based biotech firm Galapagos shot up some 30% in two days after the firm announced "results beyond expectations" for an anti-rheumatoid arthritis drug expected to reach the market in 2016. The company expects sales to reach up to €8 billion. Galapagos also recently won the Biotech Firm of the Year award at the Scrip ceremony in London.

Lobbying • Voka

The Flemish chamber of commerce Voka will move its headquarters from Antwerp to Brussels in a bid to strengthen its lobbying power with regional, federal and European authorities.

Retail • Abercrombie

Iconic retailer Abercrombie & Fitch opens its Brussels flagship store on 8 December, three months ahead of schedule. The outlet, located on Waterloolaan, has a 400-strong staff.

Software • Clear2Pay

Mechelen-based payments technology company Clear2Pay has acquired California's ISTS Worldwide, a leading supplier of payment systems for the retailing industry.

Supermarkets • Albert Heijn

Dutch supermarket chain Albert Heijn has plans to open 50 stores in Flanders over the next five years. The company operates two outlets in Brasschaat and Stabroek and had already announced the opening of up to 10 stores next year.

Tools • Stanley Black & Decker

The US tools and office supplies company will invest €40 million in a 65,000 square-metre distribution centre in Tessenderlo, Limburg province, to supply its European markets.

Transport • Delta Airlines

US carrier Delta Airlines celebrated the 20th anniversary of its Brussels-New York JFK connection by upgrading its business class with flat beds. The airline, which has carried more than four million passengers over the period, connects with 45 other US destinations from its New York hub.



The factory of the future

Flanders' inaugurates the Industry Council to help guide government policy

ALAN HOPE

Flanders' minister-president Kris Peeters last week officially opened the first session of the new Industry Council, a body tasked with putting into action the government's New Industrial Policy. Wouter De Geest, CEO of BASF chemical company in Antwerp, was installed as council chairman. The council is made up of top industrialists and industry experts. "The maintenance of a strong industrial base in Flanders is necessary for the realisation of a prosperous future, in line with the Flanders in Action and the Pact 2020 goals," Peeters said. "A transformation of industry is essential. We have to anchor and strengthen our industry to face the many challenges before it."

"We need to get off of the treadmill. It's time for action"

The new industrial policy is based on four pillars: productivity and competitiveness based on the "factory of the future"; policy for the transformation of industry through innovation; the development of competitiveness and the organisation of the workforce; and a supportive infrastructure policy.

The factory of the future is seen as "a new concept for the organisation of industry that responds to the challenges of the future," according to a statement. "Our current factories and production facilities have to be further transformed into flexible, sustainable and reliable production systems with high added value." The job of the council will be to advise the government on any policy issue that

Transformation of economy

"We have long pressed for the creation of the council," said Voka managing director Jo Libeer. "The business people who make it up are all captains of industry with their finger on the pulse of our economy. That's a positive thing, as is the Flemish government's decision to follow a coordinated and broad policy approach. The transformation of our economy will require initiative in many different areas."

The Industry Council interfaces with a ministerial committee composed of Kris Peeters, innovation minister Ingrid Lieten and labour minister Philippe Muyters. Members of the Industrial Council are: chairman De Geest; Inge Buyse of Remi Claeys Aluminium; Paul Buysse of Bekaert (steel and coatings), Chris Dewulf of Volvo and Picanol (textile machinery); Julien De Wilde of Nyrstar (mining and metals), Agfa-Gevaert (digital imaging) and Alcatel (telecom); Stephan Kroll of Evonik Degussa Antwerpen (chemicals); Johan Moyersoen of I-propeller (innovation lab); Dirk Portier of Stork



Wouter De Geest of Antwerp-based BASF chemical company is the chair of the new Industrial Council

MEC (technical services); Paul Stoffels of J&J-Tibotec (pharma research) and Janssens Pharma; Marleen Vaesen of Sara Lee/Douwe Egberts (food and beverages); and Ignace Van Doorselaere of Van de Velde (clothing). The council also includes Herman Daems of the University of Antwerp, Glenn Rayp of Ghent University and Wim Vanhaverbeke of Hasselt University, as well as experts Herman De Bode of McKinsey&Co Saudi-Arabia and MEA,

Eternit to pay damages in asbestos case



The brother of Francoise Jonckheere outside the Brussels justice palace last month for sufferers. Since its inception, the fund has paid compensation to 812 mesothelioma patients and 584 suffering from asbestos.♦

February court date for Omega

Antwerp diamond company Omega Diamonds will appear in court in February to find out if they are to face trial for fraud and money laundering, in what is being described as one of the biggest fraud cases the country has ever seen, with a value of between €2 and €3 billion.

The charges allege that Omega traded diamonds out of Angola and Congo over a period of years, avoiding tax by moving the transactions through Dubai, Switzerland and Israel. The income from the sales was then moved into the legal economy. The charges affect the company's CEO, a former shareholder, a number of executives and the company itself.

In 2008, investigators carried out several raids on Omega and confiscated diamonds worth €100 million as evidence. The whole diamond industry protested at the action, claiming that such a power of seizure could be used to put a company out of business on the basis of unproven allegations. A court partially agreed, and the prosecutor's office was ordered to hand back €60



million of the diamonds.

The news of the giant fraud case comes as the rest of the Antwerp diamond industry is awaiting the outcome of an investigation into hundreds of dealers named on a list held by the Swiss subsidiary of the British bank HSBC. At the same time, 107 traders are facing charges in the case of Antwerp-based Monstrey Worldwide Services, a courier business alleged to have misused free-transit areas to smuggle gemstones.♦

He said, she said

Karel Van Eetvelt and Marijke Persoone were the stars of a left-right debate on the cost of labour

ALAN HOPE

During an economic crisis, people fear for their jobs and their prosperity. Economic austerity seems the order of the day, and part of that includes asking the working population to make sacrifices.

The independent Flemish news site *dewereldmorgen.be*'s latest in its series of Left-Right debates was on the cost of labour, with one representative from the employer side and one from the labour side: Karel Van Eetvelt of Unizo, the Flemish organisation representing the self-employed, and Marijke Persoone, head of the Flemish white-collar union LBC.

The two-hour debate last month in Antwerp's Bourlaschouwburg ranged over many subjects, including government austerity and energy costs. Questions were posed by television journalist Dirk Barrez. Here's how the debate looked on the matter of wage costs.

Dirk Barrez: Calls for economising have come from some politicians and economists, and from the European Union, and this puts pressure on the Belgian model of free and open negotiation between the social partners – the unions and the representatives of employers. How important an issue is the cost of labour?

Karel Van Eetvelt: I think you can say that people here are reasonably well compensated for the work they provide. The question is if we understand what is included in what we think of as pay costs. Pay in this country consists of several different parts: a net part, the disposable income that is fed into the domestic economy; another part that we can regard as a postponed income, to ensure you have insurance for times when you cannot work or for retirement, but also through different forms of unemployment, and that also includes health insurance. Then, finally, there's a part of the pay that goes towards the financing of that system.

We could discuss relative shares, but my view is that the balance in Belgium in the last few years has been pulled out of shape. The difference between the situations where you can make your own decisions and the rest has become too great. The part you get to decide about for yourself is just a fraction – one-third to a half in the case of low pay, right down to a quarter of higher salaries. You have to ask yourself if the population is so badly educated that it's only capable of looking after that fraction of their pay.



Marijke Persoone: "If companies were to pay double the 12% they pay now, that would bring in €11 billion a year"



Karel Van Eetvelt: "We need to take measures that are effective but don't drive companies away"

© Kurt Desplenter / BELGA

So the difference between the costs of labour and what the worker can control is too large. How do we deal with wage cost competition from neighbour countries?

Marijke Persoone: That's obviously a problem. If you look at Germany, real wages have gone down there by 4.5%. Germany is the largest economy in Europe; it sets the tone, and it decides the policy for other member states – a policy of wage limits and tough cuts. It works out well for them because Germany is an export country. If other countries want to have a strong economy with trade surpluses, then they have to adopt that sort of wage policy. Then we find pressure from Europe for things like working longer, limiting the length of unemployment benefits, scrapping bridging pensions, getting rid of automatic indexation.

A country like ours is being punished because, according to the six rules from Europe, we're not on the right track. The member states say Europe is demanding it, and Europe says it's the financial markets that are demanding it. We've created the most undemocratic situation, where our tradition of open wage bargaining risks being completely hollowed out.

A policy of wage restraint leads to a reduction in purchasing power, and the purchasing power of one is the income of the other. So you fall into a negative spiral. According to a report by the International Labour Organisation, the fundamental cause of the crisis is the policy of wage restraint followed over the last two or three decades, because it removes the stimulus to the economy. How do you regard that?

MP: I think that's correct. If you look at the US, they saw an enormous increase in productivity – about 80% between the 1980s and now – but at the same time wages went up by only 7%. On one hand, you get a huge mountain of capital, which could be used to invest in the economy, but on the other hand that's capital that can also be used for speculation. Wages don't follow that same progression, and consumption can't keep up with production. They tried to solve it by bringing about a credit economy, and that lasted until the bubble burst. Then you get a shift from private debt to public debt because the government rushed to the aid of the banks, government debt increased, and then we pay for the second time. The wage restraint policy has had a

very deleterious effect on the whole process. The purchasing power of the working population goes into retreat, economic activity begins to shrink, and that's when you find yourself very quickly falling into that negative spiral we were talking about.

Authorities estimate about €3 billion in tax goes unpaid every year. With the power to claim unpaid tax seven years into the past, that comes to €210 billion. Isn't [going after] that a legitimate alternative to spending cuts?

KVE: It's not the case that the majority of businesses don't pay tax. What businesses want is to get something back for the tax they pay. I'm a supporter of strong social security because that gives something back. It brings stability, and that's to the benefit of business. But there's no balance right now in the tax pressure on small and large businesses. If you look at small family businesses and large multinationals, you see a difference of 10 to 15 percentage points. That's a lot, and we're in favour of creating more of a balance. But we also have to recognise that multinationals operate globally and avoid hitting them too hard because then they're going to walk away, and you'll lose a great deal of jobs and income. The

trick is to take measures that go far enough to be effective, but not so far as to drive those companies away.

MP: We always hear how you can't tax the companies too much or they'll walk away. The problem workers have is they can't walk away, and the tax-man knows what your income is down to the last cent. The figures are very clear: Companies active in Belgium in 2009 made €94 billion in profit and paid an average of 11.8% in company tax. The theoretical rate is 33.99%. There can't be many companies that pay that full rate. But if you look at the average tax paid by an employee, that's around 25%. Imagine if companies were to pay double what they now do – that would bring in exactly €11 billion a year. I think you'll find that's just the sum that [Elio] Di Rupo is looking for right at this minute. I'm getting tired of hearing how there shouldn't be any taboos when it comes to indexation or social security or working longer; it's a different story if questions turn to even the most limited wealth tax, or the taxes companies pay.♦

Watch the entire debate online:
→ www.tinyurl.com/waardevanarbeid



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Flanders in full bloom

The World Tulip Summit is coming to Antwerp, where Europe's love affair with the flower began

MARC MAES

Don't be misled by the old song – tulips have more to do with Antwerp than Amsterdam. The flower first appeared in western Europe through Antwerp's port 450 years ago, a good 30 years before it made its entrance in the Netherlands. Inspired by this, the organisers of the World Tulip Summit have chosen Antwerp to host the biennial celebration next September, alongside the Dutch town of Venlo.

It was in 1562 that the first tulip bulbs arrived in the port of Antwerp. Flemish scientist and botanist Carolus Clusius gave the flowers their name, *Tulipa*. Antwerp printer Christoffel Plantijn and painter Maarten de Vos published the first images of the flower, triggering an interest all over Europe.

While the world's largest display of tulips is at Keukenhof in Lisse, between Den Haag and Haarlem, the Antwerp district of Zandvliet played a

pioneering role in the popularisation and distribution of tulips until the mid-20th century. Designer and landscape architect Ronald van der Hilst is a tulip specialist. He has been commissioned to design a garden of 10,000 tulips for the Arboretum in Kalmthout, where he wants to recreate the atmosphere of

"Tulips have become a mass product, from haute couture to ready-to-wear"

Antwerp's 16th- and 17th-century gardens by next spring.

"Today, the tulip is somewhat respectfully regarded as a 'fast food flower,'" says van der Hilst. "But the 17th-century tulips were a status symbol of sophistication and wealth. Only the rich could afford tulip bulbs. The alternative was having tulips painted as still-lifes by master painters – paintings that have become priceless today. Peter Paul Rubens could afford to have some tulips in his garden, and when he married Hélène

Fourment, she was given three tulip bulbs as a wedding present."

For 100 years, the tulip business has been dominated by Dutch growers, notes van der Hilst, "limited to some 25 species out of the 4,000, and mainly growing for the cut-flower market and not for garden purposes. Tulips have become a mass product, from *haute couture* to ready-to-wear."

Zandvliet once a "carpet of tulips"

Mil Eestermans is a grower of bulbs and head of the Eestermans family enterprise in Zandvliet, a district of Antwerp. "The first tulips in Zandvliet were planted by Dutch farmers," he remembers. "My father, Louis, started as a tulip grower in 1934 and established the company, employing 14 workers here. With some three million tulip bulbs per year, he started exporting the flowers to France and Germany."

Eestermans, 71, looks back fondly to the spring months when the tulips bloomed. "In the tulip harvest season, the polder was an immense 150,000 square-metre flower carpet," he says. "People came from everywhere to witness the beauty of the flowers." Tulip harvest became, then, a perfect opportunity to organise fairs. "We had tents in the fields with people celebrating."

The Eestermans family suffered a major loss as a consequence of



The Eestermans family on their tulip farm circa 1951

© Eestermans

the 1953 winter flood, when all the bulbs were inundated with salt water. They were able to restore the business, but, in 1970, they decided to stop the growing of tulips.

"The combination of increasing personnel expenses, the stabilisation of the flower price and the ongoing expansion of the Antwerp port eating away fertile polder land were elements that urged us to stop," explains Eestermans. "From then on, we concentrated on cultivating and exporting bulbs all over Europe. Today, we produce up to two million bulbs per year, one-third being tulips."

2012 Year of the Tulip

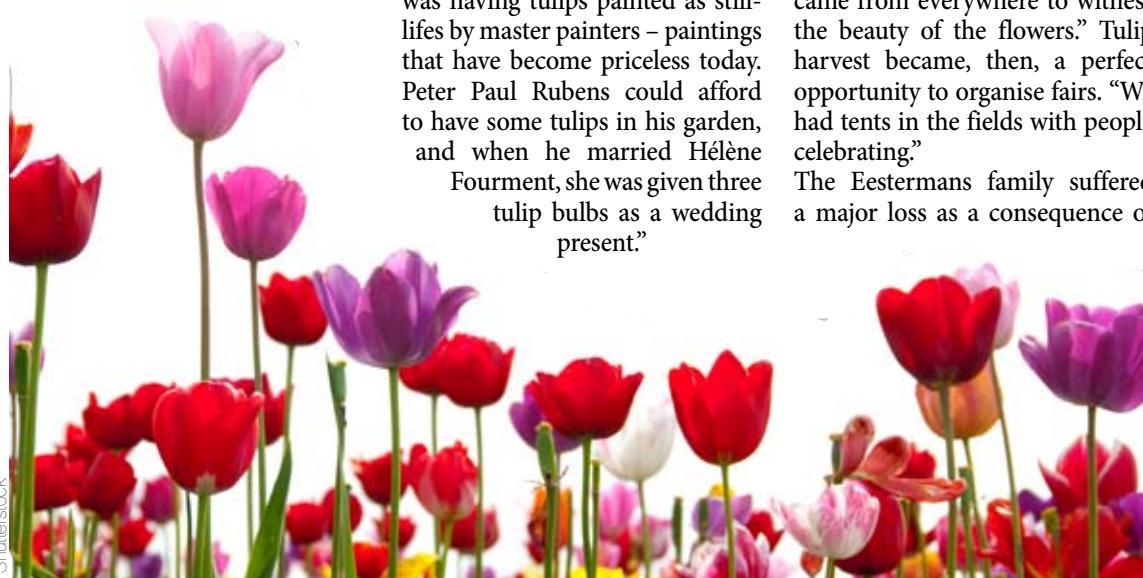
With 2012 designated as the Year of the Tulip in Flanders and the Netherlands, Antwerp city council and the Berendrecht-Zandvliet-Lillo district decided to commemorate the arrival of tulips here by planting some 160,000 bulbs in a number of different varieties and colours. In October, the district's senior citizens were invited to plant the first bulbs in

huge flower beds; the rest of the bulbs, supplied by the Eestermans, were planted by a specialised company.

The city of Antwerp's Bomenbank, or tree department, is coordinating the tulip planting and harvesting. "It's a nice showpiece and opportunity to highlight what we do," enthuses Bomenbank coordinator Dirk Janssens. "Although growing tulips is not part of our regular business, it's a unique project. All the district's green sites will be covered in tulips, replacing the traditional violets and yearlings."

The World Tulip Summit happens every two years, and will take place in 2012 in Venlo on 26 and 27 September and in Antwerp on 28 September. It is focussed on spreading knowledge, promoting tulip events and celebrating the flower as a symbol of friendship and peace. The district of Berendrecht-Zandvliet-Lillo is taking advantage of the summit to revive the flower's heritage, and will celebrate with a public fair next spring. ♦

→ www.worldtulipsummit.org



A voice from the conflict • Roving Flemish reporter tells of life on the front line at next Speakers' Corner

ALAN HOPE

The major flashpoint in world conflict has this week once again become Tahrir Square in Cairo. And, as you would expect, Rudi Vranckx is there. Vranckx is the roving correspondent for the Flemish public broadcaster VRT, and wherever there's trouble, that's where he's to be found.

An exception, it is to be hoped, will be made on 6 December at the Bolwerk cultural centre in Vilvoorde, where he'll be talking to the international crowd that shows up for Speakers' Corner, a twice-yearly event organised by De Rand. With simultaneous translation into English, French and German, Vranckx (pictured) will address the subject of his recent TV documentary series and book,

De vloek van Osama (The Curse of Osama), about how the world has changed since 9/11.

Flanders Today caught up with Vranckx in Egypt, where he's currently reporting for VRT News.

Did you intend to become a conflict reporter, or did it just happen?

I studied history and was working at the Centre for Peace Research in Leuven, so I had learned about conflict only from books. When I got the opportunity to go to Romania, I took it. I gave myself three years in journalism to do something useful. When Tiananmen Square happened, I took my holidays and went there myself. The media outlets noticed that, and that's how

they knew I was willing to go to those places.

Who's been your inspiration in the work you do?

Martha Gellhorn [American war correspondent and wife of Ernest Hemingway]. She spent 60 years doing this kind of stuff but never in a cold-blooded way. I read her memoirs, *Face of War*, and that's what inspired me. I still pick it up and read it from time to time; I suppose I've memorised all of it by now. It's still relevant today; there's something universal about her work.

You're almost 52. Do you see yourself carrying on with such a dangerous lifestyle?

Sometimes I wonder. When something new comes along, I wonder if I'm going to be afraid. You have this fear of failure, of not being able to do it well. And then you do it. You say, this is who I am, and you do it. ♦

Register for Speakers' Corner with any translation preference to info@derand.be

Speakers' Corner:

Rudi Vranckx

6 December, 20.00

Het Bolwerk
Bolwerkstraat 17, Vilvoorde

→ www.derand.be



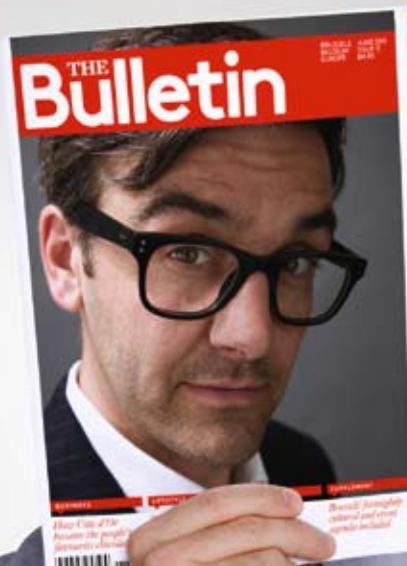


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After an extensive redesign, The Bulletin is back with a brand-new look and renewed focus on everything the international community needs to know about what is happening in the capital of Europe. Published every two weeks, The Bulletin is packed with exclusive interviews, expert analysis and your definitive guide to lifestyle & culture in Brussels and Belgium. From politics to culture, business to travel, food to fashion, if it's happening and you need to know about it, you'll find it in The Bulletin.

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THE
Bulletin

In praise of confusion

DECEMBER DANCE

MARIE DUMONT

Towards the end of every year, some of the world's finest choreographers descend on Bruges for the cutting-edge fest December Dance. Launched in 2007, the event swings, pendulum-like, between two approaches: Even years focus on the dance scene of one particular country or region (Quebec in 2008, central Europe last year), while odd ones map the private universe of a guest curator. Following local celebs Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui (2007) and Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker (2009), British superstar Akram Khan will be in charge this year. This means that we'll get the best of both approaches: While the programme will be as personal as his fingerprints, mixing some of his own creations with works by others, it will also be strongly anchored in the Indian subcontinent, with which his work is inextricably linked.

Khan, 38, is a second-generation Bangladeshi who grew up in southwest London. His work largely consists of variations on themes of place, belonging and identity. As a boy, he studied *kathak*, a traditional northern Indian dance with elaborate footwork which, he says, remains his true mother tongue. Later, as a Michael Jackson-worshipping teen, he was hired by Peter Brook to feature in his legendary adaptation of *The Mahabharata*, with which he toured the world for two years.

Khan went on to study

contemporary dance in Britain and in Brussels with De Keersmaeker, and founded his Akram Khan Company at the dawn of the new century.

While some critics are irked by what they call his narcissism, others feel that Khan represents Diaspora art at its most exhilarating. He belongs to a generation of British-Asian artists that also include the writer Hanif Kureishi, the composer Nitin Sawhney and the sculptor Anish Kapoor (he has, incidentally, collaborated with all three), who manage to put their mixed heritage to great creative use, transmuting it into striking new languages of their own. Just don't call it fusion – Khan abhors the word, preferring to describe what he does as carefully orchestrated "confusion".

December Dance is a chance to see two of Khan's more recent and successful works, which haven't yet been on stage here. The brand new solo *Desh* ("homeland" in Bengali), which opens the festivities, is by general agreement his most personal opus to date – a searching epic that struggles to make sense of his country of origin (pictured). The other is the 2009 *Confluence*, a meditation on the passing of time that features heady *tabla* riffs by Nitin Sawhney.

Khan has personally handpicked the rest of the programme, which ranges from graceful demonstrations of *kathak* and *bharata natyam* to bold



© Richard Haughton

experiments from all over the world. Watch out for *Dancing My Shiva*, a brittle and strangely sensual homage to the Hindu god by Malaysian dancer Mavin Khoo; *Play*, a tender duet between Moroccan-Flemish Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and South-Indian beauty Shantala Shivalingappa that features oversized masks and live singing; and *Dark Matter* by young Canadian choreographer Crystal Pite, which is at once swift, witty and strangely hieratic. There will also be the obligatory talks and documentaries. The late Pina Bausch is the star of Wim

Wenders' stunning film homage *Pina*, which fully deserves to be seen on a big screen. And since no event devoted to Indian culture would be complete without at least a few *bhangra* beats, children and teens will be treated to a glitzy Bollywood ball hosted by the genuine, if Flanders-based, troupe Gori KaDance.♦

1-11 December
Across Bruges

→ www.decemberdance.be

CONCERT

World Aids Day got its start in 1987 but is unfortunately still very relevant today. With recent statistics showing that 24,646 people in Belgium were diagnosed with HIV last year, including 1,196 new infections, the numbers haven't been this alarming since the peak of the epidemic in the 1980s. This Saturday, a number of initiatives will take place across the region to draw attention to the health crisis, from Brussels statues wrapped in red scarves to charity events.

Antwerp's De Roma hosts a benefit with concerts by some of Flanders' top musicians. Heading the line-up is Flip Kowlier, who will bring his special mix of heavily accented West Flemish folk-rock and hip-hop. Jef Neve will also show his support for the cause with a funky modern jazz performance showing off his amazingly tactile piano hands.

Blues legend Roland will be there as well, making it clear why his 40-year-long career is still going strong. Ghent's pop-rock pride and joy Sioen will bring a message of hope to the audience with his unique voice and upbeat lyrics.

Other performers include the more classic Helmut Lotti and the revolutionary South African singer and actress Amanda Strydom. Finally, the chance to dance into the wee hours will be provided by Flemish actor and DJ Axel Daeseleire. Tickets cost €18-€20 and all proceeds go to benefit Sprinkle, a non-profit organisation that helps to build care centres for Aids orphans in South Africa. (Robyn Boyle)

→ www.wereldaidsdag.be



World Aids Day Benefit

De Roma, Antwerp
1 December, 20.30

MORE CONCERTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Ben l'Oncle Soul: Young, hip French soul man
DEC 1 20.00 at Vorst Nationaal, Victor Rousseaalaan 208
www.greenhousetalent.be

Ghent

Michael Kiwanuka: British retro soul man
DEC 2 21.00 at Charlatan, Vlasmarkt 6
www.charlatan.be

Vilvoorde

Arid: One of Flanders' favourite pop-rock groups plays the suburbs before its big-city show in Brussels at the end of the month
DEC 8 20.30 at CC Het Bolwerk, Bolwerkstraat 17
www.arid.be

Agenda

THEATRE

Young Polish playwright Dorota Maslowska has a knack for social criticism, mostly directed at her own culture. Her latest work is a carefully orchestrated examination of the Polish sense of identity, one that pokes fun at typical characters using her trademark wit and a healthy dose of cynicism. It's the story of the fate of three generations of Poles, from the beginning of the Second World War to the present day. The language is loose and informal, like snippets of conversations overheard on the street. Although there are surtitles in both Dutch and French, you'll still feel yourself swept up by the Polish dialogue because of the emotive performances by the actors. Under the creative direction of Grzegorz Jarzyna, we can expect a whole lot of visual and auditory stimulation in the form of contemporary music, video projections and a colourful, ever-changing set. Don't miss the introduction at 19.30 (in English), when Flemish arts and culture researcher Julie Rodeyns conducts an interview with the director, one of the most creative artists working in Polish theatre today. (In Polish, with surtitles in Dutch and French) (RB)

→ www.bozar.be



No Matter How Hard We Tried

3-4 December, 20.30
Bozar, Brussels

MORE THEATRE THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Pandämonium Germanicum: 18th-century satire by young, radical Berlin theatre collective Andcompany&Co (in German with surtitles in Dutch)
DEC 2-3 20.00-22.00 at deSingel, Desguinlei 25
www.desingel.be

Brussels

Monkey: Premiere of Abattoir Fermé's latest work, directed by Stef Lernous and inspired by English Libertine poet John Wilmot and the hell-raising Hollywood actors' circle known as The Bundy Drive Boys (without dialogue)
NOV 30-DEC 3 20.30 at Beursschouwburg, A Ortsstraat 20-28
www.beursschouwburg.be

HOLIDAYS



Magical Winter Moments

Until 4 December, 10.00-18.00
Oud Sint-Jan, Bruges

Want to get creative with your decorating this holiday season? Find inspiration at this event that's all about glitz and glitter and holiday cheer. Flower arrangements by top floral designers take centre stage this year, and you'll also find candles, centrepieces, lavish table decorations, ornaments, stockings, handmade garlands, wreaths and more.

Follow one of the ongoing workshops or watch the talented designers on site as they demonstrate how to bring that warm and festive atmosphere into your home. As a bonus, the entrance ticket also gives you access to the exhibition *From Picasso to Miro* and discounts at other museums nearby. (RB)

→ www.happenings.be



MORE HOLIDAY EVENTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Christmas Market: The capital's grand holiday tradition, featuring a giant Christmas tree, light shows and some 240 chalets selling gifts and food and drink
Until JAN 1 2012 at Beurs, Grote Markt, Sint-Katelijneplein and Vismarkt
[www.winterinterpret.be](http://www.winterpret.be)

Ghent

Winter Dream: Christmas markets, winter village, fun fair and open-air ice-skating rink
Until JAN 8 2012 at Sint-Pietersplein and Sint-Baafplein
www.winterdream.be

Hasselt

Winterland Hasselt: The capital of Limburg adds another square onto its annual holiday market and ice rink. Don't forget to visit Cafe Winterland before heading home with your local specialities and handmade decorations
Until JAN 8 2012 at Molenpoort and Kolonel Dusartplein
www.winterland.be

DANCE



Urban Nomads

20 January to 31 March
Across Flanders

"Are we free or are we expelled?" is the existential question underlining this explosive performance. To Flemish choreographer Serena Wuytack, *Urban Nomads* is about the bittersweet tragedy that is modern society. Two dancers, representing two generations, explore the world in which they live – a world where families are drifting apart and individualism is becoming the norm. By seamlessly combining age-old traditional flamenco with contemporary dance, Wuytack creates a dramatic push-pull effect between the longing to belong and the untameable desire to follow a path less travelled. Get your tickets now for this unique project in Flanders and what promises to be a scorching performance by Flamenco dancer Sofia Yero. (RB)

→ urbannomads.weebly.com



MORE DANCE THIS WEEK

Brussels

Romeo and Juliet: The Moscow City Ballet performs this 1935 ballet by Sergei Prokofiev, based on the play by William Shakespeare, choreographed by Victor Smirnov-Golovanov
DEC 1 20.00 at Koninklijk Circus, Onderrichtsstraat 81
www.cirque-royal.org

Swan Lake: The Moscow City Ballet performs this 19th-century classic by Russian composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky, originally choreographed by Marius Petipa
DEC 2-5 (times vary) at Koninklijk Circus, Onderrichtsstraat 81
www.cirque-royal.org

The Nutcracker: The Moscow City Ballet performs this magical two-act ballet with music by Tchaikovsky, originally choreographed by Marius Petipa
DEC 4 15.00 at Koninklijk Circus, Onderrichtsstraat 81
www.cirque-royal.org

This unique tasting event takes place in one of Flanders' most authentic cafés, **In de Verzekering tegen de Grote Dorst** (In the Insurance Against the Big Thirst). It's for the most passionate kind of beer lovers, those who appreciate sour beers, and I mean really sour beers. Lambic may very well be the oldest beer in the world. This spontaneously fermented brew containing only wheat, barley, hops and water has become more and more difficult to find in recent years, and that has led to an almost cult following. This is a rare opportunity to taste 18 varieties, which form the basis for kriek and geuze, and come straight from the hands of the brewers who stubbornly continue to produce them. (RB)

→ www.dagvandelambik.be



The Day of the Lambic

10 December, 15.00-20.00
Eizeringen (Flemish Brabant)

MORE FOOD & DRINK THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Culinary Walk - Tasty Antwerp: Try out Antwerp's gastronomic specialities, including filet d'Anvers and Elixir d'Anvers, on this walking tour, where, between shops, you'll discover plenty you never knew about the historic city
DEC 3 15.30-17.30, begin in Groenplaats
www.vizit.be

Geel (Antwerp province)

Beer Festival: Tasting of local speciality Tripel and Christmas beers, plus "Breughel" dishes prepared with beer
DEC 2-4 at Café Drijzillenhof, Drijzillen 2
www.ondertschuim.be

Ypres

Trappist & Carbonade Fest: Tasting of Trappist-infused Flemish stew and Trappist beers
DEC 3 18.00 at JOC Ieper (Het Perron), Fochlaan 3
www.debierordevanvauban.be

EXHIBITION

En Face, a French expression meaning "facing", is the theme of this group show featuring visual interpretations of people facing the artist or viewer. Diverse works by 12 Flanders-based artists are on display, from paintings and prints to sculptures and photographs. Special mention goes to Brussels-based Lisa De Boeck of mother-daughter photography duo Memymom. Her striking Escheresque work, "Monsieur Dupuy #2" (pictured), for example, depicts "the physical confusion of man who has become desensitised by the fall of modern society." Equally attention-grabbing are the still-life portraits by Antwerp artist Cindy Wright, paintings so vivid you could easily mistake them for photographs. More eye-catching portraits include those by Stefan Martens, which have been digitally manipulated to stunning effect. (RB)

→ www.terdilft.be



DUSK 'TIL DAWN

KATRIEN LINDEMANS

Radio Modern Deluxe

9 December, from 20.00
Vooruit, Ghent

With all the end-of-year parties coming up, how about brushing up your dancing skills with a few unusual moves? A bit of tango, waltz and jive, perhaps? Mark 9 December in your agenda, and make your way to Radio Modern in Ghent's Vooruit. The Radio Modern parties are all about 1950s swing and rock 'n' roll. But did you know that tango was as "in" a thing on the dance floor back then as it is now? That's why the organisers have invited French couple Jeff and Karine – also known as Monaco Tango – to demonstrate this sensual dance. Once the heat is on the dance floor, the UK Jive Romeos will keep things swinging with their music and style. By now, your make-up and hair might need

some extra attention. No problem, as the Modernettes crew have enough blush and hairspray in their Beauty Boudoir to make everyone look flawless. Back on the dance floor, DJs Bart Baker and The Bopping Benvis Brothers continue to ask for your very best moves. Make it a night to remember, and capture your outfit with a snap shot at the Fifties Photo Corner. Say *fiftieeeeeeee*! If you can't make it the first night (or simply can't get enough), the next day, Radio Modern is throwing the same party at De Roma in Antwerp. Tickets cost €14 in advance.

→ www.radiomodern.be



MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Greek Artists Figuration: Group show featuring mixed-media works by five prominent Greek artists
Until DEC 31 at Pascal Polar Gallery, Charleroiesteenweg 108
www.pascalphar.be

Ghent

Coca-Cola: 125 years of design: The story of the famous brand through photographs, advertisements, bottles, cans, glasses, posters, marketing campaigns and more
Until FEB 26 at Design Museum, Jan Breydelstraat 5
www.designmuseumgent.be

Leuven

Ik Wou (I Wish): Powerful portraits by famed children's book illustrator Ingrid Godon
Until JAN 8 at Museum M, Vanderkelenstraat 28
www.mleuven.be

Agrea ★★★

bite

ROBYN BOYLE

If you're ever walking around Ghent and in the mood for a quick breakfast, lazy brunch or something sweet with a cup of coffee, there is one address perfect for all three. Agrea is favourably located on the square between the belfry and Sint-Baaf's Cathedral. Its interior is simple and cosy, and there's a lot of light in coming through tall windows with a lovely view of the square's fountain. There's even an open-air courtyard in the back for warmer days.

This being my third visit, I can confidently take my friend there for a late breakfast. The owners, Geert and Rita, are as friendly as I remember. Geert brings us two cappuccinos in record speed, then does the same for the dozen or so Spanish tourists who come in after us.

These are easily two of the prettiest cappuccinos we've ever seen, with three layers served in a glass: dark espresso at the bottom, followed by steamed milk and a whipped cream topping (per our request).

Rita smiles with genuine patience as my friend and I linger indecisively over the menu choices. Finally, my sweet tooth has the last say, and I order pancakes with butter, sugar and jam. Shortly the room is filled with the unmistakable aroma of pancakes on the griddle. I am pleased to find that they are proper pancakes (and not ultra-thin crêpes) with a thick and spongy resilience. Although they're already covered in a dusting of confectioners' sugar, I go ahead and add some light and dark brown varieties and skip the jam in favour of the buttery pancake flavour.

Contact Bite at flandersbite@gmail.com

My friend has the *luxe verwen ontbijt*, a most decadent breakfast of bread, ham, cheese, jam, butter, chocolate spread, fresh fruit, soft-boiled egg, fresh-squeezed orange juice and a flute of cava, plus another coffee.

The fresh, crusty bread – more than enough for one person – is a mixture of thick slices of dark multi-grain, white poppy seed rolls and a mini-croissant. The bread and rolls are most tasty slathered in butter and topped with a slice of the smoked ham and Gouda cheese. The croissant, which my friend saves for last with a dab of jam, is worthy of the best French bakery: flaky, buttery and makes that crackling noise when you bite into it. The boiled egg, in its holder, has a warm and runny yolk, perfect for sopping up with bread. All this richness is well tempered by the fresh juice, green apple slices, grapefruit and purple grapes. And the bubbly helps, too, of course. Next time I'm sure to try one of Agrea's other specialities, a waffle or an omelette.

Best part is, it all comes to under €25. What an excellent way to spend a morning.

→ www.agrea.be

 Sint-Baafsplein 44, Ghent
 Thurs-Tue, 9.00-18.00
 Breakfast: €3-€23
 Low-key eatery with friendly owners and excellent breakfast, sweet treats and coffee



TALKING SPORTS

It's cycling, but not as you know it

Flanders does, of course, punch above its weight when it comes to cycling and can rightly enjoy nostalgic memories of the world's greatest-ever rider, Eddy Merckx. But aside from the countless road races that make the traditional season, there is another sort of cycling that gets little attention: cyclo-cross.

Cyclo-cross is the bastard son of classic cycling and involves riding a light mountain bike through thick mud. When the hills become too steep and the mud too heavy, riders dismount and carry their bikes on their shoulders. A cyclo-cross racer is allowed to use up to three bicycles in a race, which can be vital (a clean bike can weigh up to 10 kilograms less than a muddy one).

Many of the world's top cyclo-cross riders are Flemish or are based in the region. After three of the eight events in the ongoing UCI Cyclocross World Cup season, the current leader is Kevin Pauwels, followed by Sven Nys, both Flemish cyclists.

Last Saturday at Koksijde (where sand also figures heavily), it was the 35-year-old Nys, the Cannibal from Baal, who took the honours: Considered one of the greatest cyclo-cross racers ever, Nys won the first of his six World Cups in 2000 and is still the one to beat. But after countless second-placed finishes, Ekeren-born Pauwels, 27, appears finally ready for a major title – if he can hold on to his current lead.

Sadly, the current title holder, Flemish cyclist Niels Albert, is not competing this time around: He was injured after being clipped by a car when out training, breaking a bone in his left wrist. The cyclo-cross season is short, held from October until January. Next month, on 22 January, the World Cup ends with a race in the Dutch town of Hoogerheide. The following weekend, the UCI Cyclo-cross World Championships, the sport's



Zdenek Stybar and Kevin Pauwels climb a hill in Ronse

top single event, will be held in Koksijde: This is again dominated by Flanders, whose riders have won 25 of the 56 editions.

Zdenek Stybar, a Czech rider based in Flanders with the Quick Step team, is also a contender: He is the current Cyclo-cross World Champion and won the World Cup in 2010. Although in third place in the rankings, he cannot be discounted. But the likelihood is that the Flemish will keep their grip on the World Cup and will wrestle the World Championship back at the Koksijde event on 29 January. Still, between now and that season, expect a lot more mud.

→ www.uci.ch

LEO CENDROWICZ

THE LAST WORD...

Highway robbery

"I realise the national debt has to be paid off, but I'm not sure this is the best method."

Flemish actor Stany Crets was fined €50 for riding a moped without gloves

Leading from the front

"It's been a while since I last bought state bonds, but I can hardly ask people to sign up to this and then not do so myself."

Prime minister Yves Leterme

Hot cuisine

"Just the shape of vegetables is exciting."

Flanders' newest three-star chef Gert De Mangeleer of Bruges restaurant Hertog Jan

Under pressure

"Ode to Freddie Mercury, who died 20 years ago today. Last year I visited his birthplace in Stone Town (Zanzibar). I also want to break free!"

Budget minister Guy Vanhengel on Twitter

NEXT WEEK IN FLANDERS TODAY #209

Cover story

Don't be alarmed – The Energy Box is not a new "wellness centre" – it's a model home in Ostend that shows residents how to install and use green energy in houses and businesses. Finally, advice on something many want to do but just don't know how

Science

Flemish environment minister Joke Schauvliege hosted a Climate Conference last week in preparation of Flanders' Climate Policy for 2013-2020. We'll tell you how they fared in setting priorities for building, transport and agriculture

Gift Guide!

Don't despair, gift-giving help is on the way from our friendly and knowledgeable correspondents, who have scoured the shops of Brussels and Flanders – so you don't have to