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A new wave

After years of steady decline, Flanders' fishing industry is earning quota increases and farming new species

Alan Hope



For as long as anyone can remember, the fishing industry has been in decline. Local fishing boats were pushed aside by giant industrial trawlers. Countries began defending their coastal waters more jealously. The seas, we were warned, were gradually being plundered of all life. Then came global warming. The Flemish fishing industry has suffered with the rest, but the industry is looking forward these days to a brighter future than anyone might have expected.

The Flemish fishing fleet has been in steady decline for more than half a century. In 1950, there were 457 boats; by the end of 2009, there were 89. The decline

of jobs has been as severe: In the seven years between 1995 and 2002, one in three jobs in the fishing industry – 315 jobs in all – disappeared, even as total employment in the coast area went up by 7%.

Over-fishing is one of the most pressing problems facing the industry worldwide, but not so much in Flanders, according to Emiel Brouckaert, director of Rederscentrale, the industry federation. "There's a lot of discussion about overfishing, but, given the species that are fished by the Flemish industry, we have next to no problem with overfishing," he says. "Not even for cod, which for us is a sort of by-catch, Flanders being mainly targeted towards flat fish."

Previously, cod had to be thrown back, but "now that problem arises much less often because we've done a lot of

work on the technical side to avoid catching cod," Brouckaert explains.

The most important species for Flemish fishers are plaice and sole. Although Belgium has quotas for about 90 species of fish, the industry prefers to trade many of those quotas with other countries to increase their own quotas of the two main species and of cod (to cover by-catch). In 2009, these swaps saw the industry catching 28% more sole, 27% more plaice and 22% more cod than the original quota allowed. The quotas are still very much lower than they once were: In 1983, when the European Commission's Common Fisheries Policy was introduced, Belgium was allowed to catch 11,080 tonnes of plaice, going up to 12,395 tonnes in 1993. The quota in 2010 (without swaps) was 4,536 tonnes. The quota for sole

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FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



Dr Izzeldin Abuelaish

The Citizenship Prize for 2012 has been awarded to Palestinian doctor Izzeldin Abuelaish for his book *I Shall Not Hate: A Gaza Doctor's Journey on the Road to Peace and Human Dignity*. Dr Abuelaish was in Brussels last week to receive the annual prize from the Brussels-based Foundation P&V.

Dr Abuelaish made international headlines in 2009 after an Israeli grenade hit his home in Gaza, killing three of his daughters and a niece. At the time, Abuelaish was working in an Israeli hospital. The incident led him to write the book, in which he pleads for an end to the cycle of violence.

Abuelaish was born in 1955 in a refugee camp in Gaza and studied medicine with a scholarship at the University of Cairo, going on to study gynaecology in Brussels, as well as London, Milan and Harvard.

In the last Gaza offensive in 2008-2009, he was living with his eight children in the region and became a local celebrity after a TV journalist began calling him every evening for an eye-witness report on the situation in the occupied

territory. One night in January 2009, his report was on the death of his own children.

"No one doesn't suffer in this world," he told the VRT's *Terzake* programme last week. "So if each of us is going to hate the one behind the suffering, we will be drowning in an ocean of hatred. People were expecting me to hate, but I said to them, if I want to bring my daughters justice, I should be strong. I should be healthy, I should see the light and the right way, and that's not with hate. With hate I am blind; I don't see the future."

Dr Abuelaish now lives in Canada and teaches at the University of Toronto. In memory of his daughters, he also runs the non-profit Daughters for Life, which gives educational scholarships to young women from the Middle East.

"Healthy educated girls and women will raise healthy, educated children," he said. "I challenge you: Name five women from history who were behind disasters. You can't find five."

► www.daughtersforlife.com

Faoud Belkacem, the leader of the extreme Islamist group **Sharia4Belgium**, has been sentenced by a court in Antwerp to six months in prison for incitement to racial hatred and violence. Belkacem posted a video to YouTube in June calling for violence against non-Muslims, after incidents in the Brussels commune of Molenbeek when youths clashed with police who had demanded a woman remove her niqab to allow them to check her identity. Belkacem is currently in prison serving time for an unrelated offence last year.

Antwerp prosecutors are investigating a case involving the sale of about

600 fake diamonds that were sold as genuine. The synthetic stones were said to be of such high quality that even experienced traders could not spot the difference, even under a microscope. The International Gemological Institute in the city warned labs worldwide that the fake stones could undermine confidence in the entire diamond industry.

The federal intelligence service has denied reports that it has begun an investigation into possible **accomplices in Belgium of the Norwegian mass murderer** Anders Behring Breivik. Breivik made references to Belgium in his many extremist writings and used a number of Dutch words in his manifesto. The security service said that Breivik, who killed 77 people in a bombing and shooting spree last year, was a "lone wolf" and that the existence of Belgian contacts had been ruled out.

Restaurants belonging to the Quick hamburger chain in Belgium will **not be introducing halal food** on the menu, after an internal study showed that the demand is not sufficient, the company said. The chain serves halal food in 23 of its French restaurants.

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Filmmaker and climate activist Nic Balthazar last week presented the final version of his video **"Sing for the Climate"** in the federal parliament. Balthazar intends to send the clip to the UN climate conference in Qatar. Filming took place in 180 municipalities across the country in September, involving 80,000 people. Children from 725 schools added their contribution in October. The film is also posted on YouTube, where it has so far been viewed more than 31,000 times.

► www.tinyurl.com/singfortheclimate

The nuclear power station **Doel 3 in East Flanders** will not return to full production until February at the earliest, according to federal interior minister Joëlle Milquet. The power station, together with Tihange 2 in Wallonia, has been closed since an inspection revealed cracks in the reactor casing last June.

The federal gaming commission has warned social network site **Facebook that some casino-style games** available via the site could be illegal in Belgium. The popularity of the games is growing, and they are now played by 13% of Facebook visitors. The commission warned that some games are "not as innocent as they appear" and are open to children who can easily evade age restrictions. The commission said a meeting with Facebook representatives on the issue had been "constructive".

A **Brussels mother accused of neglect** that led to the deaths of her

► www.voorlezen.be

FLANDERS TODAY



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VERANTWOORDELIJKE UITGEVER

Hans De Loore

OFFSIDE

May contain insects

In some parts of the world, dishes like chocolate-covered ants and deep-fried locusts are considered a delicacy. But that sort of practice is still considered aberrant in these parts, though people will happily stuff themselves with grey shrimp (the fleas of the sea).

Well, all that's about to change. The European Union, which controls food safety, is about to make up its mind on allowing bugs and sundry other unspeakable creatures onto the market. And a dedicated ecologist in Antwerp stands ready to start feeding the huge demand that will doubtless follow.

The EU includes insects in its category of "novel foods" alongside foods with a molecular or genetic structure that has been modified, and foods made from micro-organisms, fungi or algae.



The category covering bugs refers to foods "isolated from animals" unless "obtained by traditional ... breeding practices and having a history of safe food use".

It all depends what you mean by "traditional breeding practices": Whose tradition? Entomophagy

► www.peterdebatist.be

is common throughout the world (the picture shows a street-food stall in Thailand), as it was in this region in the distant past. When does the history of safe food use begin - in Neolithic times?

Whatever the decision on insect snacks, Peter De Batist will soldier on. He owns and runs Ecology-Projects in the Borgerhout district of Antwerp, where he carries out a trade in insect-based foods, entirely legally. "A new eating pattern based on insects would do away with the need for intensive animal farming," he told StampMedia. "Above all, it's very nutritious and anything but unhygienic. For many people, the consumption of insects is a logical next step."

► www.peterdebatist.be

A new wave

Introducing consumers to new species is key to supporting the local fishing industry

► continued from page 1

fell less, from 3,910 tonnes to 3,237 tonnes over the same period.

Dwindling stocks

In 2011, fishing boats under the Belgian flag landed 15,876 tonnes of fish at Ostend, Zeebrugge and Nieuwpoort. That was about 6.5% more than the year before, following a downward trend since 2007. The value of the total catch in 2011 was €64.5 million, down from about €79.4 million over the same period. But still the best total since 2007.

In response to the problem of dwindling stocks, the European Commission has introduced a proposal to ban throwing fish back in the ocean, known as discards. In that way, it hopes, fishermen will be more likely to take steps to avoid by-catch. It's opposed by fishermen and also by the Flemish government.

"A ban on throwing back perfectly good fish is not a responsible way to tackle the problem of fish stocks," says Brouckaert. "The question of stocks and the whole marine ecosystem is far more important than the obligation for every boat to land every single fish it catches."

The success of the Flemish industry in tackling the problem of overfishing is evident: While several countries, including Germany, Spain, France and the UK exceeded certain quotas and received a 50% cut the following year, Belgium respected its quotas and not only saw no reduction but was awarded a 15% increase in 2012 for both plaice and sole from the North Sea.

"Socially viable fishing industry"

For Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters, whose portfolio includes agriculture, the increased quotas were a confirmation of the worth of an agreement signed in August last year to promote the more selective fishing and more diversification of fish varieties. The agreement was signed by the government, industry representatives, Flanders' institute for agricultural and fishing research (ILVO) and conservancy organisation Natuurpunt. It included the organisation of a multilateral task force, a commitment to reduced fuel consumption and attention to new technical developments.

"The aims of the agreement are ambitious," Peeters said at the time. "The success story of the situation of plaice in the North Sea, which last year reached a record level of 500,000 tonnes, proves the value of the efforts made by the fisheries sector and its partners, which were made gradually and thoughtfully."

Natuurpunt's presence, he said, "reinforces the signal we are today sending out to consumers. Parties who previously opposed each other will in the future join forces to create a socially valued,

economic, ecological and socially viable fishing industry."

New fish for consumers

One of the most important ways to ease the pressure on existing fish stocks while helping the industry is to develop a market among consumers for fish species not currently popular. This would decrease the demand for endangered species, and fishermen would make money from fish they now have to throw away.

The Common Fisheries Policy allows for fish to be withdrawn from the market in return for financial compensation if the actual price drops below a minimum price set by the EU. In 2009, the latest year for which figures are available, that was the case for only 2.7% of all fish landed in Belgium. Among the species most affected were dogfish (75 tonnes), pouting (115 tonnes) and common dab (45 tonnes).

It's because you've likely never heard of those varieties that there's no market for them – and vice versa. The challenge facing the industry is to make more use of the fish they are able to catch, and that involves marketing lesser-known species to the consumer. In 2009, consumers in Belgium bought nearly 12 kilograms of fish per capita, spending €115. Half of that was on fresh fish, of which the favourites were cod and salmon.

Fish accounts for almost 19% of consumption of all animal products, excluding eggs and dairy, but the country is only self-sufficient for about 15% of demand, according to figures from the Flemish agro-marketing agency VLAM.

In an effort to spread the word about lesser-known species, the project Fish2Know in Zeebrugge offers courses, principally to catering students but also to anyone else in the food industry, which lay out what fish species are available and what can be done with them. The course starts with a visit to the fish market in Zeebrugge, followed by an information session and then a workshop in a kitchen installed right by the quayside.

More species through farming

Another source of lesser-known species is aquaculture, or fish farming. Last year the EU Interreg project for Flanders and the Netherlands, the University of Leuven and the Dutch Wageningen University collaborated on a test farming project of two unusual species: the yellowtail kingfish, normally found in Oceania, South Africa and Chile, and the Australian jade perch, or barcoo grunter. It was a first in Europe for farming of the species, and last month top Flemish chefs Jeroen Meus and Toon Dierickx demonstrated to colleagues different ways to cook the fish. Last May, the agro-food company Inagro, based in Rumbeke, West Flanders, unveiled



The signing of the sustainability agreement (left to right): Johan Heyman (Department of Agriculture and Fisheries), Erik Van Bockstaele (ILVO), Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters, Walter Roggeman (Naturpunt) and Urbain Wintein (Rederscentrale)



Fish2Know in Zeebrugge educates food industry students in both common and lesser-known species of fish



An Ostend fisherman and his catch. Sole and plaice are the most popular hauls from the North Sea

GLOSSARY

Some common and less-common fish species you may be encountering soon in local supermarkets or restaurants in Flanders:

Dutch name	Scientific name	English name
kabeljauw	<i>Gadus morhua</i>	cod
koolvis	<i>Pollachius virens</i>	pollock, coley
pladijs or schol	<i>Pleuronectes platessa</i>	plaice
rog	<i>Ord Batoidea</i>	skate
schar	<i>Limanda limanda</i>	common dab
steenbolk	<i>Trisopterus luscus</i>	pouting
tarbot	<i>Psetta maxima</i>	turbot
tong	<i>Solea solea</i>	sole
wijting	<i>Merlangius merlangus</i>	whiting
doornhaai	<i>Squalus acanthias</i>	spiny dogfish
haring	<i>Clupea harengus</i>	Atlantic herring
grauwe poon	<i>Eutrigla gurnardus</i>	grey gurnard (pictured)
snoekbaars	<i>Sander lucioperca</i>	zander



For recipes, visit VLAM's dedicated fish website:

► www.vlaf.info.be

(c) Jean-Jacques Sels / Pepe Photography / BELGA

“Difficult but not extreme”

First snowfall causes major traffic problems, but Flanders is ready for winter weather

Alan Hope

The Flemish roads and traffic services are ready for the winter, came the announcement last week. With 250km of tailbacks on roads in Flanders on Monday morning, preparedness was not misplaced.

Last week Flemish mobility minister Hilde Crevits announced the government's winter plan for 2012-2013. Flanders, she said, is equipped with a stock of 42,000 tonnes of road-salt – 18,000 tonnes more than was used in the relatively mild winter of 2011-2012.

The service will also be more efficient, thanks to 180 trucks equipped with automatic spreading equipment. Drivers are guided by GPS, and the quantity of salt – as well as the width of the spray – is controlled according to the road conditions. Not only is this better for the environment, it also saves salt. For cycle paths, the roads agency will



continue with a pilot project started last year that involves spraying paths with brine rather than salt: bicycle wheels are less able to ride salt into the ice and snow, which speeds up thawing. Brine – salt in

solution – will offer an alternative. In extreme weather situations, the government is ready to launch the winter action protocol (WAP), which promises to bring various partners – from weather forecasters

to motoring organisations – together in one cooperative system. The first cold snap of the season was far from extreme, but it did take many drivers by surprise. The first snow hit most of the region on Sunday. Major roads had not been pre-salted, and several accidents resulted, including one four-car pile-up in Antwerp province in which seven people were injured, one of them seriously.

The roads service sent salt-spreaders out on Sunday evening in expectation of a fresh fall on Monday morning which, when it came, led to long tailbacks on motorways, especially around main cities. According to a spokesman for the Flanders Traffic Centre, the rush-hour situation was “difficult but not extreme”. Weather forecasters said the cold spell would last two weeks, only occasionally dipping below zero.

Artist tax increase scrapped

The federal government last week scrapped a plan to increase the tax artists pay on royalties from 15% to 25% after a storm of protest from the creative sector. The increase would have generated €5.6 million a year.

Artists who make money from royalties – such as actors, musicians and writers – pay only 15% tax on that income, up to a maximum of €54,000 a year. Under the federal government's budget plans, that was to be treated in the same way as investment income from shares and the tax payable increased. The proposal was immediately met with protest from artists. Ghent musician Frederik Sioen remarked that the plan would be “a death blow for our sector”. Best-selling Flemish author Dimitri Verhulst said: “You need to sell 15,000 books a year in Belgium to make ends meet. There are very few writers who manage that, and that's the group that's already taxed more heavily.” Days after the plan became public, the government withdrew the proposal. Unizo, which groups together a number of federations representing artists, said it was “delighted” by the decision not to “discourage a growing economic sector”.

Two teenage suicides raise concerns of bullying

The prosecutor's office in Dendermonde is investigating reports that a young man who committed suicide in one of two strikingly similar incidents last week may have been bullied. On Wednesday, a 14-year-old youth died after throwing himself from a bridge over the E40 motorway in the area of Ternat. According to family and friends, the boy had been the victim of bullies who extorted money from him and sent threatening messages via Facebook. The bullying took place outside of school. The prosecutor's office said it had found no direct evidence of bullying but stressed that the investigation was only beginning.

On Friday, the E17 in Lokeren was the scene of an identical act, when a girl of 18 threw herself in front of a truck. No additional details have been released. In Brussels, the CHS Help Line operates 24-hours a day in English on 02 648 40 14. Tele-Onthaal is in Dutch on freephone 106 or www.tele-onthaal.be.

Parting payments for MPs raise questions

The issue of parting pay for members of the parliament caused controversy again last week after it was revealed that Francis Vermeiren, a departing member of the Flemish Parliament and mayor of Zaventem, will receive a parting payment of €522,500.

Vermeiren (pictured), who sits for Open VLD, served from 1981 to 2009 in the federal and Flemish parliaments and in the Senate. He received, according to procedure, the equivalent of 48 months of salary and expenses and a further €99,000 for time spent as secretary of the Flemish parliament.

Vermeiren is also paid as mayor of Zaventem, a post he has held since 1983. He was also chairman of the board of the Municipal Holding, which went broke as a result of the collapse of Dexia bank. He was at the time an ex officio director of Dexia and was paid €72,000 for the last year in 2011 – although he donated the sum to the Municipal Holding.

The issue of parliamentary pay-offs came up last year when



Sven Gatz, also a Flemish liberal, applied for one when he resigned from the Brussels parliament to take up a new job. The payments are intended to compensate members who retire or are not re-elected, critics said – not for those who leave for a new job. Gatz eventually declined the payment of around €300,000. The parliament has before it a proposal to cut the bonuses in half, limiting them to 24 months' salary.

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

8/10

awarded to Villo, the Brussels bicycle-hire system, by its users in a poll. Villo will introduce a bonus in June for users who return bikes to stations in higher parts of the city

250,000

alcohol breath tests planned for the coming holiday season, starting on 14 December and running until 24 January. The police will target areas hosting company receptions and other large parties

€40 million

in unpaid taxes and penalties ordered by a Ghent court to be paid by textiles manufacturer Beaulieu Nylon, found guilty of tax evasion via a Swiss subsidiary. The company plans to appeal

15th

place for Belgium in a list of the best countries in which to live, compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit. The unit scored 80 countries on criteria of health, work, welfare and safety. Switzerland came out on top

3,000

jobs could be created at Brussels Airport by the year 2020, thanks to a €200 million freight infrastructure investment. The new Brucargo West zone will include three new warehouses and the renovation of existing buildings

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

Nobody's wife

Sometimes images say more than words. When Gwendolyn Rotten announced her candidacy for the Open VLD party presidency, she descended the stairs in the House of Flemish MPs followed by eight party heavyweights, including former vice-prime minister Patrick Dewael, justice minister Annemie Turtelboom and former party presidents (and father/son duo) Herman and Alexander De Croo.

“I'm nobody's wife,” said Rutten, quoting a pop song. There was no ignoring her following, though, and the message was clear: The talented Rutten is the candidate of the party establishment.

So why did Rutten feel the need to stress her independence? The explanation lies in the psyche of the Open VLD membership, which votes on their next president. They admire individuals who stick their necks out – in party politics as well as other matters.

This makes any election for president of the liberals unpredictable. Even natural leaders like Guy Verhofstadt can bite the dust when the members take a liking to another challenger from the outside. In fact, this was how Alexander De Croo, the Open VLD president who has moved on to a government position, was elected, beating, amongst others... Gwendolyn Rutten. De Croo had never held a political function until he entered the race for party president (although he was of course his father's son).

These are hard times for Open VLD, the party that only a decade ago was the people's favourite and gave us the prime minister and the Flemish minister-president. It has not won an election since 2003. “In 10 years' time, we have managed to disappoint over a half a million voters”, Lorin Parys, one of Open VLD's thinkers, stated. Open VLD's biggest problem is its identification with the federal government, a “taxation government”, according to the opposition, which is unpopular among liberals. “On economic issues, Open VLD and N-VA hardly differ, but Open VLD is no longer exciting or interesting. No wonder voters look to other parties,” liberal analyst Noël Slangen says.

This is also how Egbert Lachaert feels. “Being in government with the French-speaking socialists is a suicide mission for us,” says the other Open VLD party president hopeful. The youngster from Merelbeke has never held a political function before, although his father was a Flemish MP. Now there's one more thing for Gwendolyn Rutten to worry about: an interesting challenger from the outside.

I've seen the future

Ghent's Factory of the Future is bringing people together to fight social inertia

Daan Bauwens

Fear of the future is building, and everybody's just watching. Lack of civic engagement has always been one of society's more obnoxious failings, but Ghent is leading the way in the fight against social inertia. The new project Toekomstfabriek (Factory of the Future) is a series of debates about possible future scenarios and how to realise them.

"Theories and analyses about society abound, but they are all too often very complex," says Fred Louckx, professor of sociology at the Free University of Brussels (VUB) and coordinator of the project. "It's my experience that when you pass these theories on, people start feeling helpless. They think society is so complex that they cannot do anything to change it."

Toekomstfabriek starts exactly where these lengthy theories stop: "What can we do with the knowledge?" Louckx wondered. "How can we use this knowledge to build a new future?" So he asked eight Ghent-based organisations with experience in societal change to come together and brainstorm.

These organisations include the social-artistic collective Victoria Deluxe, trade unions ABVV and ACV, non-profit cultural organisation Maserelfonds and culture centre



Hundreds of residents of Ghent came to the first debate of the Toekomstfabriek, or Future Factory

Vooruit. Each of them is sponsoring a debate about a certain question, and each debate will be held at a different location.

The future is "makeable"

"We didn't want to reinvent the wheel or start discussing themes that didn't matter. That's why we invited organisations with tangible experience in the field to raise issues," Louckx states. "We asked them:

What is the most poignant question your organisation has had to face? As there are people from completely different backgrounds sitting at the same table, when they answer these questions, you can see truly new ideas being born."

While the debates are organised by experts, everybody is invited to join the discussion. "That's one of the reasons why we are organise every debate at a different location,"

Louckx explains. "So different people from different neighbourhoods can come over and launch ideas." But most importantly, people from the eight local neighbourhoods who feel inspired by the debate will be invited to join a local workshop. "On one day, they will discuss how the scenario about the future that we discussed can be translated into real life. That

talking about "commons", an old idea that was recently revived and is gaining popularity. It refers to different kinds of resources, from land to software, that can be owned and shared between communities. Future films will deal with subjects such as participatory democracy and cooperatives.

The Toekomstfabriek's next (and

"As there are people from completely different backgrounds sitting at the same table, truly new ideas are being born"

is our main goal: Not just to talk and feel inspired, but to encourage people to start making changes here and now based on what they have discussed. We want to encourage people to take responsibility for the future; we want to show them that the future is "makeable".

Inspiration online

A small side project called Bricoleurs de Paradis can be seen on the Toekomstfabriek's website. A video series of interviews focuses on inspiring ideas. The first is online and features scholar Tine De Moor

► www.detekomstfabriek.be

The extra mile

Hasselt joins a cross-European distribution system that is easing lorry traffic in its city centre

Marcel Schoeters

For two years, Hasselt has been a forerunner in the new concept of urban distribution through a project called CityDepot. In October, the project entered a new stage of expansion through the creation of a European foundation. But Brussels, too, has chosen this path of innovation.

The reduction of "avoidable" lorry movements in city centres is the motivation behind the growing number of projects on urban logistics. In 2010, Hasselt entered the pilot CityDepot project, which, together with Binnenstadservice of the Netherlands and Denmark's Citylogistik, has now founded the European umbrella organisation Service2City. Through this, the members want to disseminate their common model, which is based on a clustering of day-to-day delivery flows for shops in historic city centres.

"Our focus is on products that are easily handled," says CityDepot manager Marc Schepens. "We offer the possibility to drop off shipments at our site outside the centre, from which we organise the 'last mile' using our dedicated lorries and vans and even, when possible, bicycles."

The concept is primarily aimed at small, often family-owned businesses and – for the time being – is not an alternative to deliveries to the larger chain stores such as Blokker and Kruidvat.

The concept propagated by Service2City should not be misunderstood as a means

to ban lorries from city centres. "It is not suitable for every type of business," explains Schepens. "The larger chains have set up their own systems."

Expansion in 2013

In just over two years, about 50 shops have subscribed to CityDepot, and, by the end of next year, the concept is expected to be implemented in Leuven, Ostend, Roeselare, Genk and Ghent.

But, in spite of Service2City's common principles, urban logistics is closely intertwined with the layout of a city. In Amsterdam, for example, PostNL has managed to make use of the city's world famous canal system, mooring a "depot barge" at a critical point from which the last mile system can be delivered by bike. That idea has also been picked up by the Port of Brussels. The port wants to develop a network of two major hubs, combined with a number of smaller drop-off and pick-up sites, all centrally located. This network will be interconnected with a "pallet shuttle", an innovative barge equipped with its own loading platform and crane.

The port intends to collaborate with Blue Line Logistics, which has planned the construction of 20 barges. The project will mainly be aimed at the transportation of building materials and small-scale urban distribution.

► www.citydepot.be

Motor Show to include bicycle exhibition

The annual Brussels Motor Show in January at Brussels Expo will include bicycles for the first time in 10 years, organisers Febiac announced last week. But bicycle manufacturers are proving less than keen.

In odd-numbered years, the Motor Show pays special attention to leisure vehicles, light commercial vehicles and two-wheelers – usually motorcycles and scooters. This year Febiac aims to bring cyclists back to the salon with a four-day exhibition called Fiets & Zo (Bikes Etc), under the patronage of cycling legend Eddy Merckx. The exhibition will highlight sports bicycles as well as themes such as leisure, lifestyle, mobility and the environment, according to Febiac.

The bicycle industry, however, is threatening to boycott the event. "The car sector wants to exploit us, whereas they've ignored us for the last 10 years," Eddy Van den Berghe of Fietsen Oxford in Sint-Niklaas told *Gazet Van Antwerpen*.

Daniel Labours, general secretary of the industry federation Federvelo,

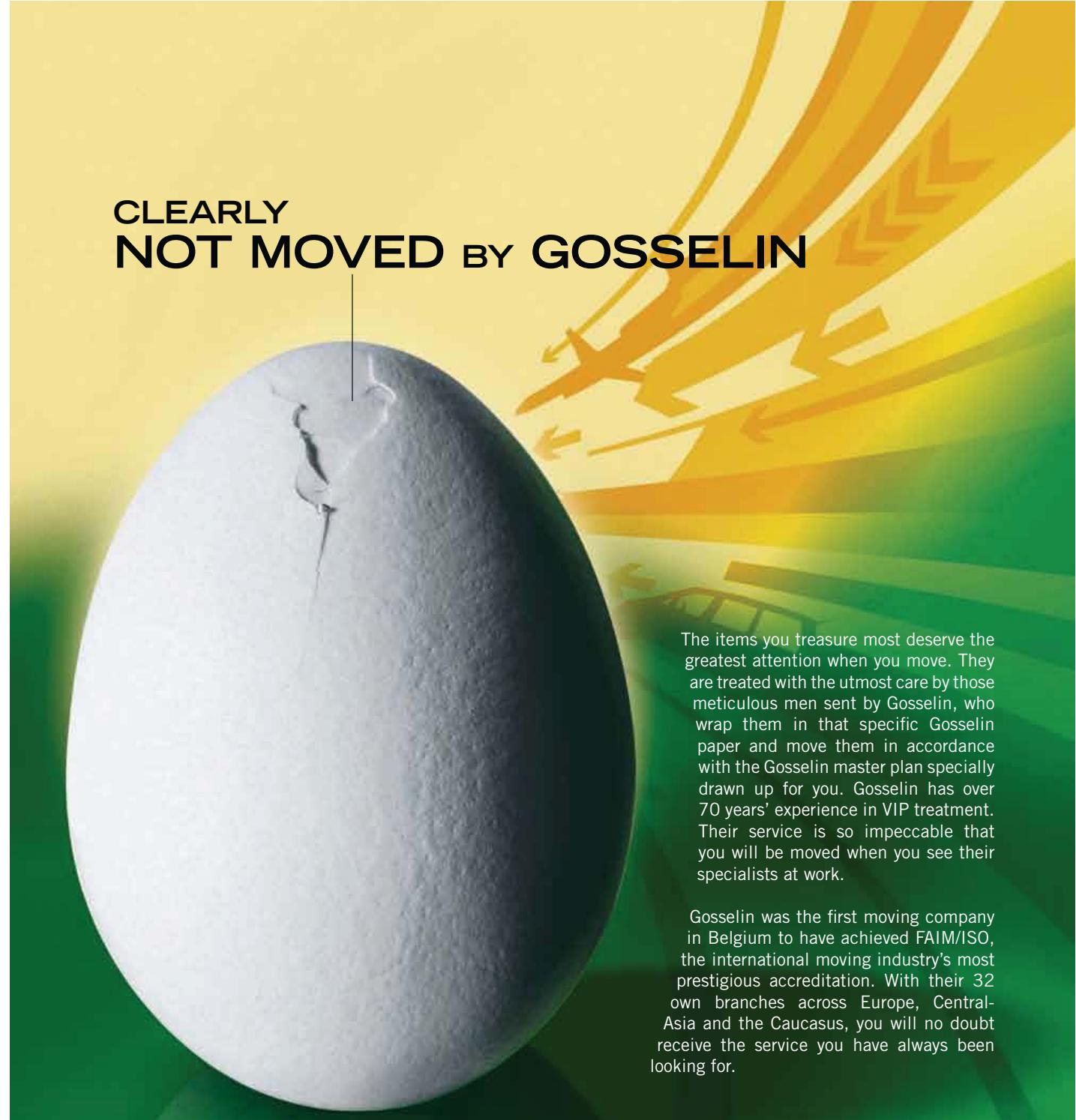


explained that the timing of the Motor Show was "extremely unfortunate" for bike makers. "They present their new models after the summer. January, when the Motor Show takes place, is too early for people to buy."

Bicycle manufacturers, however, said they would be present in numbers at the Velofoolies fair in Kortrijk, also in January. Alan Hope

► www.velofoolies.be

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Economists discuss closure of Ford Genk

As economic outlook becomes more clear, unions consider legal action

Anja Otte & Alan Hope

The closure of Ford Genk could lead to a job loss of more than 11,000, not just in Limburg but across Flanders, and a loss of more than €875 million. That is the conclusion of two economists at a press event in Hasselt last week to discuss the impact of the closure of the car manufacturer, announced in October.

"The closure of the Ford plant in Genk hit Flanders like a bomb," said Luc De Schepper, rector of the University of Hasselt. "Right after the announcement, we decided to measure the size of the crater the closure will cause."

Flemish economists Ludo Peeters and Mark Vercauteren looked into the worst-case scenario: What will happen if Ford Genk closes without any intervention to alleviate the impact? "This gives policy makers an idea of the scale of the problems that lie ahead," said Peeters.

Closing down Ford Genk will lead to unemployment not just for its work force (4,337 jobs) but also for its suppliers (2,816). Another 1,042 jobs will be lost as a result of the drop in purchasing power. In total, the closure of Ford Genk will leave



From left: Union representatives Luc Prenen, Ronny Champagne and Gert Steegmans at a works council meeting in Genk last week

more than 11,750 people without employment. Limburg province bears the brunt of this, with 8,200 jobs lost. According to Peeters' calculations, unemployment in Limburg will go from 6.8% to 8.8% – a rise of almost 30%.

Peeters and Vercauteren predict a prosperity loss of €875.1 million in Flanders – 0.43% of the GNP. For Limburg, this will amount to €644.1

million, or 2.88% of the GNP.

West vs east Limburg

The prospect of individual workers being laid off vary according to where they live. Those in Hasselt and western Limburg towns such as Lommel, Tessenderlo, Halen and Sint-Truiden have reasons for optimism as there are more jobs available (and less competition) in

the region.

In eastern Limburg, prospects are grim. Towns such as Bilzen, Lanaken and Maasmechelen are full of Ford employees facing unemployment with little chance of finding new jobs close to home. "People who live along the Dutch and Walloon border may need to move further away in order to find employment," Peeters concludes.

In related news, unions representing Ford Genk workers are considering taking legal action against the company's management for failing to comply with a collective works agreement. The agreement allowed for revisions in the event of new market conditions but obliged the company to enter into talks with unions.

"A closure announcement is not a negotiation," commented Rhonny Champagne of the socialist union ABVV. Ford Europe, meanwhile, denies breach of contract. The two sides met in Genk last week to begin talks over the conditions of the closure, as well as the blockade set up by workers to prevent cars and parts being sent from Genk to other Ford facilities in Europe.

Arco savers could lose state guarantee

As many as 800,000 people who deposited savings in accounts with Arco could lose a guarantee against losses given by the state, if an opinion handed down last week by the auditor of the Council of State is upheld by the council. According to the opinion, the guarantee on savings deposits was illegally extended to Arco deposits by the government of Yves Leterme in 2009.

Arco is the investment arm of ACW, the General Union of Christian Workers, and was a major shareholder in Dexia Bank when it collapsed in 2011. The collapse could have affected about €1.5 billion in investments made by ACW members and other members of the public, who could also invest (called "cooperants"). That danger was avoided thanks to a royal decree that extended

savings account guarantees to Arco cooperants. When Dexia collapsed, many small investors lost their money; Arco investors did not. The case was taken to the Council of State by an association of investors, claiming discrimination. The Council of State auditor said that the Arco guarantee was not implemented by a proper legal procedure and no opinion from the Council of State was sought in advance; the Leterme government was at the time a caretaker government and was not empowered to take any new initiatives; and the motivation offered for the guarantee was not sufficient to justify making an exception to the general rule, which is that savings deposits are guaranteed by the state, while other investments are not. Leterme, now deputy director-general of the OECD in Paris, said the decision to guarantee

Arco deposits was "legally justified". Federal finance minister Steven Vanackere stressed that the Council of State still has to rule definitively and may not follow the auditor's advice.

In the period 2008-2009, Vanackere said, decisions were made that may be hard to understand. "We were dealing with a financial meltdown," he told the VRT's *Terzake* programme. Vanackere was federal minister for government enterprises from December 2008 to November 2009.

A negative ruling by the Council of State would not necessarily mean the loss of all Arco deposits, however. Depending on the exact wording, it might be possible for parliament to re-do the procedure to extend a guarantee to Arco cooperants, this time in line with the Council's requirements.

Former Fortis bosses face charges

After four years of investigation, a Brussels magistrate has charged two of the former top bosses of the ill-fated Fortis in connection with the bank's collapse. They are former CEO Jean-Paul Votron (pictured) and Filip Dierckx, chairman of the banking division. They are accused of misleading shareholders.

Fortis was dismantled in October 2008, largely from the effects of the massive acquisition of ANB Amro, just as the global financial crisis was about to break in the summer of 2007. The Benelux governments were forced to bail out the bank, and it was later sold to the French bank BNP Paribas. The case against Votron and Dierckx hinges on information provided to shareholders between August 2007 and October 2008 on the true financial state of Fortis, at that

time Belgium's largest financial institution. Dierckx is now chairman of the financial industry association Febelfin as well as operation director of BNP Paribas Fortis. If convicted, both men could face prison sentences of up to five years and/or be sued for damages by the many shareholders whose savings were lost in the collapse.



© BNP Paribas Fortis

Poll reveals thoughts on age at work

Four out of 10 young people think they would have more opportunities if people aged over 55 were allowed to retire, yet more young workers than their older colleagues are against an increase in the age for the bridging pension from 58 to 60. The figures come from a survey carried out by polling bureau Ipsos for the Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight against Racism.

Three out of four of the nearly 1,000 employees polled find relations between younger (under 30) and older (over 55) staff "friendly, respectful and positive". Approximately 84% of all respondents see over-55s as people who are waiting only to retire, and both groups felt equally that older workers are in an unenviable position. Only one in 10 young people was against an increase in the early retirement age, compared to half of all older respondents.

► www.tinyurl.com/ipsosage

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Automotive ► Punch Metals

Punch Metals International, based in Sint-Martens-Latem, East Flanders, plans to invest up to €150 million in the Strasbourg-based General Motors gearbox production unit, which it is about to acquire. The move will allow the plant to launch new products from 2014 for the German ZF industrial equipment group.

Awards ► Primus

Kortrijk-based Primus, manufacturer of industrial laundry machines, has won the Golden Bridge Export Award 2012 from the Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce in Great Britain for outstanding achievements in export to the UK.

Banks ► KBC

Flanders largest financial institution is poised to sell its Russian Absolut bank to the Blagosostoyanie pension fund of the Russian railways for €350 million, half the amount it paid in 2007. The move is part of KBC's restructuring agreement with European authorities following its €7 billion rescue package.

Food ► Lotus

The biscuit manufacturer, famous for its *speculoos*, has acquired production rights in Belgium and France for the Spanish Artiach biscuits, known for its best-selling Dinosaurus brand. Lotus, based in Kaprijke, East Flanders, will invest €8 million in a new production unit and is looking at further developing Dinosaurus sales internationally in Europe and the US.

Gas ► Fluxys

The Brussels-based gas transport and pipeline operator has been shortlisted to acquire the French Total energy group's TIGF gas network in south-western France, valued at €2.5 billion. Other bidders include GDF Suez, Axa Private Equity and Spain's Enagás. Meanwhile, Fluxys has increased its capital by some €140 million, with the Belgian state contributing €50.

Pharmaceuticals ► Galapagos

The Mechelen-based bio-tech and pharmaceuticals company has discovered a new antibiotic that they claim eradicates the staphylococcus germ, which is a huge problem in hospital environments.

Property ► Artes

Artes building group, based in Kruibeke, East Flanders, has acquired the Vanhaerents up-market property developer, located in Torhout, West Flanders, for an undisclosed amount.

The Top 20

Flanders Today correspondents searched far and wide for the best holiday gifts the region has to offer. Happy shopping!

1 Eastpak tablet sleeve

While a smartphone or a tablet computer may not be in your budget as a gift this year, a cool sleeve to protect them certainly could be. This timeless leather pouch by Eastpak, for instance, is a beaut (€80)



Buy it at:

Hunting and Collecting

Brussels' hippest concept store needs very little introduction. You'll find everything you need to survive the festive season, from an on-trend outfit to the coolest gifts. This year, they have a little food corner as well, with fancy biscuits, pasta and spices (*Kartuizerstraat 17, Brussels, www.huntingandcollecting.com*)

2 Skip Hop zoo bookends

How cute is this? Not only will you be encouraging your little ones to read by placing books between these soft (but heavy) vinyl bookends, you will be brightening up their rooms. Or heck, the living room, because that's where we'd put 'em (€35/set of two)

Buy it at:

Premaman

These beautiful shops carry products from mostly small manufacturers but stay within reasonable prices. You'll find an outlet of the Brussels-based retailer in practically every shopping street across Flanders (www.premaman.com)



3 Replica perfume

These fresh scents sport pretty, simple packaging and pastel colours that will look good on any woman's dressing table. The price isn't bad, either, considering they're from Maison Martin Margiela (€80/100 ml)

Buy it at:

Obius

It's easy to find Flemish designers' flagship stores in Antwerp, but where else to get their



wares in Flanders? Step into this homage to local designers in a cobblestoned sidestreet of Ghent's Vrijdagmarkt. You'll see the work of Ann Demeulemeester, Dries Van Noten, Martin Margiela and many more (*Meerseniersstraat 4, Ghent, www.obi.us.be*)

4 Cavalier pralines

This Flemish chocolate-maker was one of the first in Europe to start using the alternative sweetener stevia in its chocolate and now it has expanded into pralines. These are perfect for diabetics or for anyone trying to limit their sugar intake this month. And they taste much better than you think (€5.50-€27.50)



Buy it at:

't lang leven

Cavalier pralines were just launched and are finding their way into health-food stores across Flanders. They are already on the shelves of this very cute shop in Lochristi, just outside of Ghent, which sells a large range of both fresh and packaged organic foods and cosmetics and puts together a mean gift basket of cheeses, jams and wines (*Dorp West 1, Lochristi, www.tlangleven.be*)

5 Randplan calendar

This 2013 calendar is full of tips for day trips in *de rand*, or the Flemish belt, around Brussels. It lists events, comes with cute stickers to help keep you organised and includes coupons worth €25 (€12.95)

Buy it at:

The Randplan calendar was published by de Rand, the organisation that introduces Flemish culture to foreigners living in the belt around Brussels. Buy it in bookstores and newsagents in *de rand* or online from Davidsfonds (www.davidsfonds.be)

6 Hasseltse Speculaasjenever

Jenever was first drunk in the 16th century in the Low Countries; by the 19th century, Hasselt was famous for its distilleries. Now jenever is available in upwards of 100 flavours, including *speculaas*, the spiced biscuit that's also a Hasselt speciality (€10)



Buy it at:

Lekker Limburgs

If you're looking for a unique gift for the gastronome on your list, this is the place to be. They carry *streekproducten* (regional products) such as artisanal jenevers, *speculaas*, fruit syrups and preserves, honey and wine (*Kuringerstraatweg 161, Hasselt, www.lekkerlimburgs.be*)

7 With a Sword in My Hand

This novel by Flemish authors Jean-Claude Van Rijckeghem and Pat van Beirs, available in English translation, is a fictional account of the real-life Marguerite of Malle, daughter of a 14th-century Count of Flanders. It's meant for young adults, but its realistic atmosphere and Marguerite's stubborn refusal to conform to ladylike expectations makes it a highly enjoyable read for the older set, too (€10)



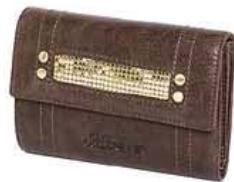
Buy it at:

Treasure Trove

The go-to place for English-language books for children, this long-standing bookshop, with its hardwood floors, comfy sofas and friendly staff, is a pleasure to visit. They carry a selection of books for adults, too. Lingering allowed (*Brusselsesteenweg 7, Tervuren, www.treasuretrove.be*)

8 Clio Goldbrenner wallet

Wallets make excellent presents. They are seriously underrated as far as accessories go, and everybody needs one. Impress a friend or relative with a classic piece by Clio Goldbrenner. This Antwerp-based designer adorns all her fine leather goods with a gold-coated band, referring to her family name (€100)



Buy it at:

Corifeo

Corifeo oozes elegant lifestyle from the affluent village of Brasschaat. The store sells an excellent selection of home decoration, tableware, fashion, jewellery and toys, with special attention to local talent (*Bredabaan 362B, Brasschaat, www.corifeo.be*)

9 X-mini speaker

When it comes to gifts, bigger is not always better. The X-mini II is an award-winning miniature speaker that produces excellent audio and can be carried around easily. A must-have for anyone who loves impromptu house parties, and it comes in multiple colours (€29.90)



Buy it at:

Fnac

Save time holiday shopping by buying everything you need in one place. At book and media chain store Fnac, you're likely to score your niece's favourite CD, that book for your uncle and X-mini capsule speakers for all your buddies. (If you link them up, the sound is even more powerful) (*Across Brussels and Flanders, www.fnac.be*)

10 Luxe cufflinks

For the man of taste who's a little bit rock'n'roll: cufflinks from Flemish designer Stijn Helsen in the shape of skulls, coiled cobras or mosquitos, in silver, gold plate and semi-precious stones (€139-€309)



Buy it at:

Stijn Helsen Concept Store

Helsen has designed costumes for Hollywood movies and red-carpet fashions for Hollywood celebrities. His flagship store in his hometown of Hasselt showcases the fashion wunderkind's edgy style (*Diesterstraat 10, Hasselt, www.stijnhelsen.com*)



11 Tamawa champagne stopper

This champagne stopper by Brussels manufacturer Tamawa is so pretty, you might be inclined to leave the bottle half full in order to use it. (Though it looks just as stylish on an empty one) (€55)

Buy it at:

Onni means good luck in Finnish, and this design shop has indeed got enough bright objects and clothes to make anybody happy. Brands include the Finnish design company Marimekko, Swedish Hasbeens and of course the Belgian Tamawa (*Vlaanderenstraat 70, Ghent, www.onnishop.be*)

12 Beer pralines

Liqueur pralines, you either love them or hate them. But how about beer pralines? This Beer Chocolate Experience box includes 16 pralines with beer-infused fillings: kriek, white beer, brown beer and a pale ale. Cheers! (€14)

Buy it at:

Corné Port-Royal

Beer praline-maker Corné Port-Royal has shops in Kortrijk, Roeselare, Brussels Airport (handy for holiday travellers) and across Brussels. Our favourite is in the capital's Koninginngalerij. It has a stunning Art Nouveau design and is open every day (www.corneportroyal.com)

13 Happy Socks

Socks are no longer the dullest presents under the tree. Swedish label Happy Socks wants to make the world a bit more gleeful with crazy designs and loud prints, from argyle with a twist to fashion-forward wildlife (€8)

Buy it at:

Moose in the City

This small stretch of Scandinavian soil in the heart of Antwerp sells designs by Marimekko, Hay and Normann, Filippa K and Won Hundred. It's Copenhagen, Helsinki and Stockholm rolled into one (*IJzerenwaag 10-12, Antwerp, www.moose-in-the-city.com*)



14 Zara scented candle

Gorgeous scented candles are good gifts for friends, co-workers, partners and hostesses of fab festive parties. These from Zara Home in white jasmine and black vanilla are stand-outs this year. Smells like 2012 (€16)

Buy it at:

Zara Home

Zara Home has a great range of interior decoration all year round, but during the holidays, they turn it up a notch. You'll find everything you



need to get in a festive mood. Outlets of the Spanish brand can be found in Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent and Bruges (www.zarahome.com)

15 Pet necklaces

Marc by Marc Jacobs, the affordable line by the popular American designer, finally has its own store in Brussels. The clothes! The shoes! But especially: the accessories! We predict these adorable doggie, kitty and bunny necklaces will make many fashionistas very happy (€95)

Buy it at:

Marc Jacobs

The Marc Jacobs store opening was delayed for more than a year, but better late than never. Fans of MBMJ goodies can now find the entire collection on Brussels' Dansaertstraat. The top floor also stocks books and will welcome a small bar in the near future (*Dansaertstraat 90, Brussels, www.marcjacobs.com*)



16 Monchhichi dolls

Remember Monchhichi? If you were a kid in the '70s, chances are you played with the little simian dolls that originated in Japan. Now they're back and available in suitably festive outfits (€20-€25)

Buy it at:

Eigenwijs

This speciality store in Hasselt caters, as its name suggests, to the individualistic child – kids who know their own minds and tend to go their own ways. Owner Pascale Wagelmans hand picks all the colourful toys, clothing and accessories (*Aldestraat 52, Hasselt, www.eigenwijs-kids.be*)



17 Onyx earrings

When in the market for jewellery, you might want to consider giving earrings: less of a grand gesture than a ring and more romantic than a bracelet. Flemish duo Katrin Wouters and Karen Hendrix design beautiful ornaments in silver and semi-precious stones. These triangles in onyx are part of their latest collection, inspired by Russian constructivism (€170)



Buy it at:

Wouters & Hendrix

The designers have their roots in Antwerp, where they both graduated from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts 28 years ago. The city houses two stores next to each other: One sells the collection of silver jewellery, the other the more expensive gold line (*Lange Gasthuisstraat 13A, Antwerp, www.wouters-hendrix.com*)

18 Sweetie-making kit

Have your kids, nieces or cousins got a sweet tooth? We bet they've never made their own sweeties. Discover the wonderful world of sugar with this "make your own" kit, available in various flavours. (There's a "make your own soap" kit, too, if you're worried about their teeth) (€20)



Buy it at:

Eurekakids

This international chain store selling mainly educational toys has just opened a first branch in Brussels, with games, jigsaws, fancy dress and much more (*Louizalaan 199A, Brussels, www.eurekakids.com*)

19 City bags

Forget GPS and Google maps, if you want to show someone the way in Brussels get them a Monsieur Madame tote bag. Each one features a map of a one of the city's communes and can be customised with lapel badges from the basic "I live here" to more personal information about where to get the best *frietjes* or a lingering kiss. There's also an Antwerp bag, covering the whole city (€18)

Buy it at:

SuperGreenMe

Perfect gifts for eco-heads, including cosy slippers, cute Ts, organic cotton coin purses and the like. You can also order the Monsieur Madame tote bag online directly from the source, a "tiny little room in Brussels" (*Van Arteveldestraat 10, Brussels, www.supergreenme.be or www.monsieur-madame.be*)

20 Papillote box with chocolate

Flemish designer Piet Stockmans' signature blue-and-white porcelain has graced the tables of royalty and is featured in international museums. His latest collaboration with Hasselt chocolatier Boon combines delicate containers with equally delicate creations in pure chocolate (€77)

Buy it at:

Boon: The Chocolate Experience

A chocolate atelier and cafe offering an extensive selection of teas, coffees and chocolate drinks, all served with handmade pralines. The Stockmans collection is available in the Boon shop and from selected Studio Pieter Stockmans dealers (*Paardsdemeerstraat 13, Hasselt, www.thechocolateexperience.be*)



This gift guide has been brought to you by Lisa Bradshaw, Diana Goodwin, Catherine Kosters, Katrien Lindemans and Ian Mundell



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A pill a day to drift away

Flanders has one of the highest rates of sleeping pill and sedative use in the world

Toon Lambrechts

Almost nowhere in the world is the use of sedatives and tranquillisers as high as in Flanders. This group of medicines, known as benzodiazepines, are prescribed for sleep problems and anxiety. You'll be familiar with many of the brand names – Xanax, Diazepam, Lorazepam, among many, many others. But these medications are not harmless, often leading to serious addictions. In Flanders, about 13% – more than one in 10 – of the population uses benzodiazepines. The number of users increases in the older age groups, and many more women than men are being prescribed the medications.

Do we have so much more problems with insomnia and anxiety than in our neighbouring countries? Probably not. Research puts the number of those who have trouble sleeping at about one-third of the adult population, comparable to other countries in Western Europe. But in the Netherlands, for example, only 2.6% of the population goes to sleep with a pill, and in Norway the use of benzodiazepines is five times less than in Flanders. Only the French figures come remotely close. So there is a much higher prevalence here for doctors to prescribe these medications, although there are serious, well-known drawbacks.

Growing dependence

Benzodiazepines, commonly known as benzos, were first prescribed in the 1960s; Valium was the first-ever prescription benzo prescribed and is still one of the most popular. Doctors prescribe them in cases of insomnia and anxiety (although for such complaints the use of antidepressants is on the rise).

Benzos have some nasty disadvantages. Although they are prescribed for insomnia, they reduce the quality of sleep. Alertness and concentration also diminish. But the biggest problem is that they are addictive.

"It is more accurate to call it



Professor Thierry Christiaens of the Department of Family Medicine at Ghent University

dependence, rather than addiction," corrects Professor Thierry Christiaens from the Department of Family Medicine at Ghent University. "It is not heroin or a drug like that. But we see that people who start with sleep medication sometimes use it for decades."

It is partly, he continues, a psychological dependence. "Taking a sleeping pill becomes something like brushing your teeth before going to bed – a ritual without which someone cannot fall asleep."

An urge to help

Considering this dependence, why do doctors prescribe benzos so often? It is due to an interplay between the role of the physician and patient expectations, explains professor Christiaens. "The patient has often waited a long time before going to the doctor, making it clear that there is a big problem and that he or she expects a quick and customised solution from the doctor. The doctor sees the seriousness of the problem and wants to help because that's just his role. Such assistance often takes the form of a pill."

There are also a number of more sociological explanations. "The pressure on people is particularly high in our society," says Christiaens. "And too often we push mental problems into a medical frame and seize the medication." But that only takes away the symptoms, not the

again, with the best intentions, turn to benzos. "Just like doctors, they see complaints about insomnia and anxiety too much as something that has to be resolved with medication," says Christiaens. "The fact that nursing homes are understaffed plays a role. The elderly in nursing homes sometimes have too little physical stimulation, so they're just not tired in the evening."

Habits die hard

Awareness is growing that benzodiazepines are not so innocent. In the training for general practitioners, more attention is being given to possible alternatives and increased communication between doctors and patients. The Flemish government is also working to educate the public about the dangers of sedatives and tranquillisers through media campaigns. For doctors and pharmacists, there is a wide range of information and training, both on avoiding the prescription of benzos and supporting patients who want to stop taking them.

"Some of these alternatives are quite simple; improving your

"People who start with sleep medication sometimes use it for decades"

cause. "There is still a big taboo around mental health care and therapy."

What is most striking about the figures on benzodiazepines are their use among the elderly, particularly in nursing homes. This is due to a combination of factors," says Christiaens. "It is often underestimated, but going into a home for the elderly is a mourning process. People leave their whole lives behind. And there is less physical independence in a nursing home."

And nursing home medical staff,

sleeping habits can help a lot," explains Christiaens. "Sometimes a more profound approach is needed, especially with persistent feelings of anxiety. In those cases patients benefit more from therapy, which attempts to discover the 'why' of anxiety. But for a lot of people, going to a therapist is too big of a step to take. Still, it is better to avoid starting with benzodiazepines because the willingness to stop in long-term users is very small."

► www.gezondheid.be



Q&A

Marc Justaert is the chair of the Christian Mutuality (CM). He recently rang the alarm bell about a "diabetes epidemic" in Belgium

Why do you call it an epidemic?

Between 2001 and 2011, the number of diabetic patients in Belgium increased from 319,000 to 542,000 – a 70% increase. That means one in 20 Belgians suffer today from the disease. Within 20 years, this number could double because each year the number of diabetic patients increases by more than 5%. If we don't make a switch right now to a healthier lifestyle, diabetes will really become an epidemic.

Which age group witnessed the biggest increase in diabetes?

The biggest increase is in children between seven and 12: the number of children with diabetes has doubled in the last 10 years. More

than 10,000 children and young people up to age 25 are suffering from the disease. However, diabetes is still a disease that hits mainly older people: 91% of patients are older than 45.

What's the impact of diabetes on daily life?

If you don't take care of it, you open the door for complications: Heart disease, kidney problems, eye problems and ulceration of the feet are possible complications later in life. Also, diabetes is the leading cause of blindness.

So how can we prevent diabetes?

Science points to a number of risk factors for diabetes that are uncontrollable, such as heredity

and age. But there are also a number of factors we are able to do something about, such as obesity, fat around the abdomen and too little exercise.

That's clear advice, and yet...

Indeed. Today's statistics show

that 44% of Flemish adults are obese. We need more exercise and healthier eating. The government has to encourage this; for every euro they invest in prevention, they save two euros later.

So what does CM do?

Our members receive a €40 reimbursement for nutritional and dietary advice from a dietician. That provides a solid boost to a structurally healthier diet. Last month on World Diabetes Day, all our members received a free issue of the magazine of the Flemish Diabetes Association. And on our website, they can download the brochure *How to Avoid Getting Diabetes*. Interview by Senne Starckx

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

About 65% of people in Flanders sleep **no more than seven hours per night**, according to a survey of 3,840 people by Leuven's university hospital. And more than half of those polled (55%) use a mobile phone or computer up to an hour before going to bed, something that sleep experts advise against. About 15% show signs of chronic insomnia and 8% take sedatives at least once a week.

The Flemish expertise centre for sexual health, Sensoa, launched a **website for people with HIV** just prior to World Aids Day on 1 December. The website offers advice on how to deal with HIV in daily life, covering areas such as work, travel, leisure time and insurance. Another section focuses on healthy food, exercise, tranquility, mental health and ageing, and Sensoa also suggests ways to respond to discrimination. The website wants to help people who are HIV-positive and hopes to increase knowledge about HIV among the public.

Researchers at the Free University of Brussels (VUB) have found that the concentration of hormone-disrupting substances is 20 times **higher in pre-schools with plastic furniture** and toys than in classrooms with only natural materials, such as wood. Researchers examined the air quality in classrooms at 12 Flemish pre-schools. The substances don't pose an immediate toxic danger but do increase the risk of diabetes, infertility and prostate and breast cancer in the long term. The quality of the plastic is also an important factor.

There are more researchers **leaving Belgium to work at foreign universities** (22%) than foreign researchers coming here to work (18%), according to the American National Bureau of Economic Research. To stop this brain drain, Flanders has invested €22 million in the Odysseus Programme, which attracts distinguished researchers by offering start-up financing for a research programme. This year, 18 scientists accepted the proposal.

The two university colleges in Leuven, Group T and KH Leuven, have **merged with Limburg Catholic University College**. Toon Martens, the manager of KH Leuven, has been suggested as the general manager for the merged school. The university colleges are due to unite by 2016 at the latest, but the changes are unlikely to affect students. **Andy Furniere**

BSDS 2012

Brussels Sustainable Development Summit

VITO (Flemish Research and Technology Organisation) and **TERI** (The Indian Energy and Resources Institute) organise the first edition of the Brussels Sustainable Development Summit. At the heart of the capital of Europe, BSDS 2012 wants to initiate a movement to develop concrete measures towards sustainable development, this together with stakeholders, policy-makers and business representatives from all over the world.

Starting now: We invite you to participate in the *online BSDS Dialogues* to identify best practices and policy recommendations. Some of the participants to the platforms will be selected to present their views during the workshops that will be organised as part of BSDS on 17 December. All recommendations and case-studies will be analysed by a panel of experts and compiled in a report that will be handed out and discussed during a plenary session with political leaders on 18 December.

Throughout 2013 the BSDS Dialogues co-organisers will follow up the project and ensure that the BSDS Dialogues outcomes feed policy decisions at the European and international levels.

Monday, December 17, 2012: thematic workshops introduced by:

- » *Manuel Barroso*, President of the European Commission
- » *RK Pachauri*, Director-General of TERI and Chairman of the IPCC
- » *Kris Peeters*, Flemish Minister-President
- » *Henri Proglio*, CEO of EDF



Manuel Barroso



R.K. Pachauri



Connie Hedegaard



Jeffrey Sachs



Alain Hubert

Tuesday, December 18, 2012 (free of charge): dialogues between stakeholders, political leaders and personalities **in presence of**

H. R. H. Prince Philippe

- » *Connie Hedegaard*, European Commissioner for Climate Action
- » *Elizabeth Thompson and Brice Lalonde*, Executive Coordinators, UN Conference on Sustainable Development
- » *Jeffrey Sachs*, Director, Earth Institute, Columbia University
- » *Yvo De Boer*, Special Global Advisor, Climate Change and Sustainability, KPMG
- » *Alain Hubert*, President, International Polar Foundation



Venue: SQUARE Conference Centre

near Brussels Central Station, the medieval city and numerous hotels.

The deadline to register to the event is 10 December 2012.

BSDS website: <http://bsds.vito.be>

BSDS Secretariat: Tel. + 32 3 286 74 31, bsds@vito.be



FLANDERS TODAY

Tell us what you think.



We want to know how you feel about us. Do you read *Flanders Today* every week? Which articles do you read? What do you want to see more of – or less of? We'd like to know your level of satisfaction with *Flanders Today* so that we can continue to provide content that suits your needs.

At the same time, we'd like to know a bit about you: Where you come from, what you like to do and what else you're reading.

So we are conducting a readership survey to find out all of these things and more, and you can take this survey at www.flanderstoday.eu/survey. It will take about 15 minutes of your time, and, because we know how valuable your time is, we are giving away prizes to make it worth your while.



Everyone who fills in the survey has the chance to win:

- one of three vouchers from Vlaanderen Vakantieland (€100 value)
- one of 10 Bongo gift boxes (€50 value)
- one of 10 art books on Flanders (€35 value)

You can't win if you don't play – complete the Flanders Today survey right now!

www.flanderstoday.eu/survey

Northern lights

December means dance in Bruges, and this year our Nordic neighbours take centre stage

Katy Desmond

There are few places in the world that will get you more in the holiday spirit than that sparkling medieval gem, Bruges. But if promises of mulled wine and fairytale streets aren't enough of a draw, during the first two weeks of December, Bruges hosts December Dance, its annual international dance festival.

This sixth edition will once again bring some of the world's finest contemporary dance companies and choreographers to twist, crawl and spin across the city's stages in Flanders' largest festival dedicated to dance. A joint initiative between CC Brugge and the Concertgebouw, December Dance 12 takes place in four venues over 10 days.

Each year the festival's formula changes. In odd-numbered years, they invite one world-renowned choreographer to curate the entire festival. Past years have seen Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker grace the marquee. In even years, the festival is organised around a single theme. This year the theme is Nordic Waves, zooming in on the dance world of our neighbours to the north: Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Denmark.

What is "Nordic dance"?

Festival coordinator Samme Raeymaekers warns against trying to group these performances into cultural clichés. "We're talking about five countries, so the theme is pretty diverse," he explains. A quick look at the programme reveals he is right. From the sensual to the humorous to the poetic to the grandiose, each of the festival's 14 performances brings something unique to the table.

December Dance is also a mixture of big names, experimental works and giving new talent a chance to show off. Up-and-coming artists to look out for include Iceland's Margrét Sara Gudjónsdóttir (*Soft Target*) and Swedish choreographer Robin Jonsson (*Simulations*).

Of course, what is dance without music? The festival does its best, says Raeymaekers, to bring live music into the programme as much as possible. The music is as varied as the performances, ranging from folk to classical to rock – with a little bit of death metal thrown in for good measure. You'll find Paris-based Ensemble Intercontemporain and the soloists of Sweden's NorrlandsOperan on the programme, along with several DJs.

Top picks

The impressive line-up makes choosing what to see no easy task. Raeymaekers offers his advice on what not to miss.

Westward ho! / Scheme of Things / Vox Balaenae
by Tero Saarinen Company (Finland) & Ensemble Intercontemporain · 6

December 20.00, Concertgebouw

Kicking off the festival is a powerful and emotionally charged triple bill from Finnish choreographer Tero Saarinen. In *Westward ho! / Scheme of Things / Vox Balaenae*, Saarinen, one of Finland's top names in dance, presents a dynamic, three-part spectacle accompanied live by French contemporary music troupe Ensemble Intercontemporain and including a composition by American composer George Crumb. Look out for the gorgeous lighting design. "It's like you see the aurora borealis on stage," says Raeymaekers.

Corps de Walk

by Carte Blanche / Sharon Eyal & Gai Bachar (Norway) · 8 December 20.00, Concertgebouw

Every year, Carte Blanche, Norway's biggest dance company, invites two or three international choreographers to create works for them. This month they bring us *Corps de Walk* by Israeli choreographer Sharon Eyal from the Batsheva Dance Company. This hypnotic performance is a study in ways of walking, accompanied by a DJ. Raeymaekers promises that its enchanting, androgynous rawness will have you leaving the theatre with a kick in your step.

We Saw Monsters

by Erna Ómarsdóttir (Iceland) · 14 December 20.00, MaZ

Back by popular demand, Erna Ómarsdóttir will again bless the stage of December Dance with her latest work, *We Saw Monsters*, an original score written by her husband. It's a mixture of theatre, dance, horror and visual arts, accompanied by what Raeymaekers calls "some wonderful death metal music. It really reflects the artistic reality of Iceland. Iceland is crazy – in a very good way."

All Nordic

by Göteborg Ballet (Sweden) · 15 December 20.00, Concertgebouw

December Dance 12's final evening performance is a grand-scale production by three of Sweden's top choreographers (Kenneth Kvärnström, Örjan Andersson and Johan Inger), appropriately named *All Nordic*. This triple bill will be performed by the Göteborg Ballet, northern Europe's largest dance company, with 40 dancers from 15 countries. Formerly a classical ballet company, in the last 10 years Göteborg has transformed itself, blending its classically trained dancers with more contemporary choreographers.

Keiju (Elf)

by Jyrki Karttunen (Finland) · 16 December 15.00, Stadsschouwburg

It's a December Dance tradition to close the festival with a family-friendly offering, and this year is no different. *Keiju* (Finnish for "elf") is a magical dance performance



From top: the "hypnotic, androgynous, raw" *Corps de Walk*; the family-friendly *Elf* by Finland's Jyrki Karttunen; Sweden's Culberg Ballet gets its inspiration from the work of Janis Joplin for *JJ's Voices*

cum-fairytale that dance lovers from the small to the tall will enjoy. Choreographed and performed by

Finland's Jyrki Karttunen, it tells the story of an elf flitting through a world of fantasy, poetry and reality.

**6-16 DECEMBER
Across Bruges**

► www.decemberdance.be

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Flemish film *Hasta la vista* won the People's Choice Award at the 25th annual European Film Awards, held last week in Malta. People could vote online for one of the 12 films nominated, with nominations based on audience response both inside and outside the film's country of origin. *Hasta la vista*, written by Pierre De Clercq and based on a true story, follows three disabled young men on a road trip to Spain in search of their first sexual encounter.

In other film news, Flemish short filmmaker Tom Van Avermaet's *Dood van een schaduw* (*Death of a Shadow*) has been shortlisted for an Academy Award nomination. The 20-minute fantasy-drama stars Matthias Schoenaerts as a soldier who dies in the First World War but is resurrected by a shadow-collector and goes in search of his lost love. The shortlist contains nine titles; the final five to receive Oscar nominations will be announced next month.

Flemish actor-of-the-moment Matthias Schoenaerts is in talks with Hollywood's Universal Studios to star alongside Michelle Williams (*My Week with Marilyn*) in *Suite Française*, an adaptation of the novel by French-Ukrainian writer Irène Némirovsky. Schoenaerts would play a German soldier in France during the Second World War. Brit Saul Dibb (*The Duchess*) is on board to direct the film.

Capilla Flamenca's Willaert's Vespers CD has been named a **Choc of the Year** by the prestigious French magazine *Classica*. Conducted by Dirk Snellings, the CD reconstructs a Venetian Vesper service from 1550. The album also recently won a Diapason d'Or from the critics of the French *Diapason* magazine.

► www.capilla.be

Flemish choreographer Wim Vandekeybus' Ultima Vez celebrates the **official opening of its new studio space** in the Brussels commune of Sint-Jans-Molenbeek on 8 December in a day of activities open to the public. There will be guided walks of the area, concerts for children and open rehearsals of *What the Body Does Not Remember*, Vandekeybus' first production, which premiered exactly 25 years ago.

► www.ultimavez.com

Attend the **avant-première of new Flemish film *Brasserie Romantiek***, followed by a ride on the big wheel at Ghent's Winterdroom festival and cap it off with a glass of bubbly for a mere €14 on the evening of 13 December. Proceeds from the event go to Care to Share, a programme of Ghent's Festival of Flanders that allows blind people, the elderly and hospital patients to enjoy live classical and contemporary music.

► www.gentfestival.be

Ice rinks, electric trees, mulled wine and a visit to Santa's grotto

Christmas markets

Katrien Lindemans

Everywhere you go in Flanders at the moment, there's a hint of cinnamon in the air. It's Christmas market season, whether you like it or not, and for the jolliest ho ho hos and hee hee hees, visit one from our list of the best markets in the region.

Winter Wonders ► Brussels

The Brussels Christmas market has been talked about a lot this year. Why? Electrabel chose not to erect its traditional Christmas tree on the Grote Markt this year, but opted instead for a 25-metre-high illuminated electric one. Besides the look of it, the biggest difference is that you can climb up it and enjoy the view from the top. The €4 admission fee goes to Samusocial, a non-profit organisation helping homeless people in the city.

Other than the tree, nothing much has changed about this largest Christmas market in the country, visited even by those from outside Belgium's borders. Winter Wonders takes over the city centre until 6 January, with hundreds of booths selling crafts, mulled wine, pancakes, etc. Plus there's the big wheel and ice rink. This year,



Balkan Trafik (Bozar's multicultural festival) will provide music, food and drinks near the Zwarre Toren.

► www.winterwonders.be

Antwerp

Antwerp's Christmas market (pictured) starts on 8 December and takes place on and around the city's biggest squares: from Groenplaats to Handschoenmarkt, Grote Markt

to Steenplein (where you'll find the ice rink and the big wheel). Should you be too cold outside, join the crowd in the mirror palace on Groenplaats, where you can warm up with a drink and a bite to eat. On 16 and 23 December, shops in the neighbouring streets will be open all day for last-minute Christmas shopping.

► www.apen.be/kerstmarkt-2012



FAMILY

Bruges Ice Sculpture Festival

The holiday season is not short on family events, but some are more enchanting than others. The Bruges Ice Sculpture Festival captivates the wide-eyed child in all of us more than your average Christmas market. Dozens of ice sculptures are showcased in a climate-controlled tent on Bruges' Stationsplein. Each one begins as a two-ton block of ice then transformed by some strange alchemy into eye candy. It's a magical process, so we are not surprised that this year's sculptures are inspired by the wizards and Middle Earth magicians of the Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings franchises. Dress warmly because the tent's steady sub-zero temperature can make the Flemish winter outside feel balmy. Though certain refreshments at the ice bar can help keep you warm, not to mention the deer skins you'll be sleeping under if you book an overnight stay surrounded by the icy fantasy figures. **Georgio Valentino**

Until 6 January | Stationsplein, Bruges | ► www.icesculpture.be

MORE FAMILY EVENTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Delphine en haar vriend: A girl's special relationship with a giraffe helps her get through the challenge of caring for her sick mother in this play by Het Gevolg that continues on tour to Schoten, Turnhout and Menen

DEC 5 15.00 at De Studio, Maarschalk Gérardstraat 4

► www.hetgevolg.be

Avelgem (West Flanders)

Accordion Festival 2012: Concerts covering all the diverse music genres that feature the accordion, plus Christmas market, food stands and other entertainment

DEC 7-13 at GC Spikkerelle, Scheldelaan 6A

► www.avelgem.be/accordeonfestival

Winterdroom ► Ghent

Ghent's traditional Christmas market is in the historical centre in Sint-Baafsplaat in the shadow of the cathedral. From 7 to 30 December, shops in the neighbouring streets will be open all day for last-minute Christmas shopping.

► www.apen.be/kerstmarkt-2012

PERFORMANCE

Good Mourning

Florence Minder's *Good Mourning* was first conceived as a short sketch presented in the context of last year's XS Festival. The solo performance in English was such a success that the festival's host, Théâtre National, invited the Brussels-based actress to develop it into a full-length production. There is no stage set and only a bare minimum of props, among them an old rifle. Like a good stand-up routine, the pace is brisk and peppered with levity. But there's more to *Good Mourning* than just laughs. The piece is an explicit meditation on the structure of language and thought, subjects only implied by characters like Carrot Top and Larry the Cable Guy. The performance is part of Nouvelles Vagues, a mobile festival dedicated to showcasing emerging talent. (In English, with bilingual subtitles.) **ev**

Until 22 December | Théâtre National, Brussels | ► www.thetrenational.be

MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Bits and Pieces Between Life and Death: More than 1,000 personal objects that soldiers the world over carried during war

Until SEP 15 at Royal Museum of the Armed Forces, Jubelpark 3

► www.klm-mra.be

Ghent

Ford Maddox Brown: Pre-Raphaelite Pioneer: Works by one of the most eccentric English Pre-Raphaelite painters, who studied at academies across Flanders before becoming famous in his native land

Until JUN 3 at Fine Arts Museum, Fernand Scribedreef 1

► www.mskgent.be

Nedko Solakov: All in Order, with Exceptions: The first-ever retrospective in Flanders of Bulgaria's best-known contemporary artist

Until JUN 3 at SMAK, Citadelpark

► www.smak.be



CLASSICAL

Serata Musicale

Bruges' Prinsenhof was constructed back in the 15th century as a palace for the ruling Dukes of Burgundy. The building has lost none of its regal character in the past six centuries, though today, as the five-star Kempinski Dukes' Palace Hotel, it accommodates a different kind of royalty. Some tastes endure, however, and our present-day elites enjoy a bit of classical music as much as the next Duke. So the palace chapel has been meticulously restored with an eye (and an ear) toward conserving the stunning, all-natural acoustics of the space. And the hotel had a concert hall. The 2012 concert season ends on a high note with Serata Musicale, performed by Flemish soprano Anne Cambier (pictured) and Belgian harpist Sophie Hallynck. **GV**



7 December, 19.30

Dukes' Palace Hotel, Bruges | www.kempinski.com/bruges

MORE CLASSICAL THIS WEEK

Antwerp

La Virginella: French soprano Claire Lefilliâtre, the signature voice behind *Le Poème Harmonique*, brings Italian madrigals by Marenzio, Lassus and more, accompanied by four violas da gamba and harp (Italian dinner available before the concert)

DEC 7 20.15 at AMUZ, Kamenstraat 81

► www.amuz.be

Ghent

Christmas in Europe: Theatre of Voices, one of Europe's foremost vocal ensembles, conducted by founder Paul Hiller, tells the story of the arrival and birth of Christ with Gregorian chants and English polyphonic works by William Byrd

DEC 7 20.00 at De Bijloke, Jozef Kluyvensstraat 2

► www.debijloke.be

Stabroek (Antwerp province)

Arte Amanti Trio: Flemish musicians Reinilde Leyers (violin), David Poskin (cello) and Peter Oerlemans (piano) perform works by Beethoven, Brahms and Prokofiev

DEC 8 20.00-22.30 at Kasteel Ravenhof, Oud Broek 2

► www.kasteelconcerten.be

EXHIBITION

4x4

The North-South Junction linking Brussels' major railway stations has been at the centre of an unresolved controversy since it was dug in the last century. Its champions hailed it as a technical marvel and a crucial transport conduit for an expanding population; its critics panned it as an urban wound that scarred the face of the capital. The connection has become the most travelled point in the entire Belgian rail network and is rapidly approaching saturation. Some kind of consensus will be required to adapt it to the realities of a fast-growing European metropolis. Several architects and urban planners present some possible solutions here, informed by a variety of practices and philosophies. The exhibition is free. **GV**



7 December to 27 January | Bozar, Brussels | ► www.bozar.be

MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

Bruges

Joost Colpaert: Beyond Landscapes and Maps: Water is the main source of inspiration for the Flemish artist's videos, landscapes and maps, the composition of which make them more reminiscent of abstract paintings

Until JAN 6 at Galerie PinsArt, Genthof 21

► www.pinsart.be

Genk

Moments Before the Flood: Flemish photographer Carl De Keyzer presents a selection of his work depicting the ever-encroaching sea and European coastlines

Until JAN 6 2013 at C-mine, C-mine 10

► www.c-minecultuurcentrum.be

Kruishoutem (East Flanders)

Mondévidences: Works by the Cuban-born Mexican cartoonist Angel Boligan, including critical drawings about society, relationships, the environment and technology

Until DEC 23 at European Cartoon Centre, Brugstraat

► www.ecc-kruishoutem.be

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Katy Desmond

De Groote Witte Arend

Reyndersstraat 18, Antwerp

Uncertainly winding my way through the old, narrow streets of Antwerp's historic centre, just a few streets off of the main market square, I hesitate before dipping into a doorway. Passing through the unassuming façade, I know I've found it again: De Groote Witte Arend, my respite of peace and good beer away from the bustle of tourists, students and hen parties outside.

Of course, from the über-trendy to the beer-hall brown cafés, Antwerp, as a rule, is rarely short on places to stop for a drink. But whenever I find myself with some time to kill in the city's centre, I always end up at the same spot.

And here I am again, settling into a corner table of a boisterous dining room, awaiting the arrival of a cold Rodenbach Grand Cru and some house-made cheese croquettes.

What is it that keeps bringing me back to this otherwise typical Flemish cafe-restaurant? Is it its picturesque colonnade that flanks a cloistered courtyard filled with tables and benches poised and ready for the last warm afternoons of the year? Or the warm parlour room glowing inside the 15th-century patrician house that

is busy serving up steaming plates of *stoemp* and *stoofvlees*? Or is it the tiny chapel charmingly tucked away in a lonely corner outside? Most likely, it is all of this put together. (The list of some 100 Belgian beers does not hurt, either.)

While De Arend is not exactly an "undiscovered gem" (the menu is written in no less than five languages), I find that most of its clientele are speaking Dutch, giving it a local flavour that is missing in some other establishments in this tourist-

heavy neighbourhood.

In the evenings, the inside is more restaurant than bar, and the courtyard is relegated to drinkers. But the space is big and the staff friendly, so, from my experience, they will find a way to accommodate you on these now cold nights, even if you just want a drink. Also, private rooms in the main house and off the courtyard make it a perfect place for large groups.

► www.degrootewittearend.be



BITE

Dolma ★★☆☆

I may be one of the biggest meat lovers there is. Nonetheless, the past couple of years have seen me making a conscious effort to eat less of it, for health, environmental and emotional reasons. And while I'll still splurge on a big, juicy steak from time to time, I now do so with full awareness of and appreciation for the animal, the farmer and the impact of that piece of meat.

In order to compensate for my dwindling meat consumption, I've been exploring the strange, new world of health food stores and vegetarian restaurants. And I'm quite enjoying the journey. My most recent endeavour takes me to Dolma, often referred to as Brussels' best veggie restaurant.

I enter the cosy, Tibetan-inspired interior with three friends to find that our table is located closest to the buffet. Yes, Dolma is a buffet-style restaurant. While that may put off some, in this case, it makes a lot of sense. There are several dishes available, which change daily, and the idea is to eat as much as you can/want.

We order a big bottle of sparkling water to share, and I select a pot of tea off the lengthy tea menu. They are mostly Ayurvedic or listed according to how they make you feel: relaxing, purifying, invigorating, etc.

Next, we all head to the buffet and start filling our plates with sumptuous-looking dishes like honey-caramelised *witloof*, pumpkin and squash sprinkled with southern spices, tofu topped with onions in red wine sauce, spinach



feta pie (everyone's favourite), mousse of green peas with mint, beans and rice, leeks and sprouts, vegetable soup and assorted salads. There's a little "v" next to some dishes to indicate that they are vegan, meaning without dairy or any other animal-derived products.

After three trips to the buffet, we're as stuffed as can be. But when the server informs us that dessert is also included, we reluctantly shuffle back to have a look at our choices: fluffy mocha ganache cake, blueberry pie, chewy chocolate-chestnut tart and a strawberry yoghurt parfait. One slice of ganache, one slice of chocolate and two slices of blueberry later, we truly cannot manage another bite.

The bill comes to about €25 a head, which I find to be a bit costly for a meatless meal with only tea and water to drink. The dishes and products used are fresh and seasonal, but none of them manage to surprise me or leave a lasting impression.

► www.dolma.be

→ Elsenesteenweg 329, Brussels; 02.649.89.81

🕒 Tues-Sat 12.00-14.00 & 19.00-21.30

€ Buffet: €22

ⓘ Cosy and lively spot for fans of all-you-can-eat vegetarian food

TALKING DUTCH

Philip Ebels



Don't be OOTL

Has it been 20 years? It seems like only yesterday that I wrote my very first text message, or sms, as Dutch-speakers say (and pronounce just like the English-speakers do). It must have gone something like: "Ja mam, ik kom niet te laat thuis." Yes mum, I won't be home late.

The short message service, news agency Belga reported last week, is celebrating its 20th birthday. But, it added, "hoeveel verjaardagen zal [het] nog vieren?" How many more birthdays will there be to celebrate?

New, internet-based applications offer the same service for free, pushing the still hugely popular sms to the fringe of mobile messaging. But the iconic language it has helped to bring about – fast-paced and resource-efficient – seems here to stay.

WS ff. Today's teenagers need only five characters (including the space) to tell each other to wait a minute. It's a fascinating little mixture of English and Dutch.

The digit 8 is being pronounced in English. Add the letter "w", and you get "wait". The second part is more tricky. The letter "f" in Dutch is pronounced just like in English. Two "f's", however, is *twee effen*. And that sounds like *even*, meaning a minute, when pronounced in a street-slang kind of way. *Wacht even!* Wait a minute!

Another beauty is w817. Just say the numbers one after the other. *W-acht-één-zeven*. Or: *Wacht eens even*, a different, more eloquent way of saying hold up. Some may find it easy. Others may have g1 id, or *geen idee*, no idea.

The reason behind sms shorthand is not just that it's fun but also because an sms only allows for 160 characters – *een overblífsel van de toenmalige technologie*, according to Belga, a relic from the technology at the time, the 1980s, when the service was first developed.

It is a prime example of how limits may foster creativity. Last year, it even inspired Ghent University to organise a contest of sms poetry.

The winner, chosen by our Flanders' very own EU president Herman van Rompuy (himself an avid poet), was second year political science student Lore Christiaens, who wrote:

*Ik benijd je
Hoe jij huppelt over de regels,
hier en daar een pauze, inlast
en daarna weer verdergaat.
Hoe jij [denken] tussen haakjes
denkt te zetten.
Denkt.*

Bearing in mind that translating poetry is a tricky business, it means something like:

I envy you
The way you hop over the lines,
insert a pause here and there
and then continue.
The way you think you can put (to
think) between brackets.
Think.

Now you. Suc6!

► talkingdutch@hotmail.com

The last word...

Let there be light

"The power will not go out here during this winter."

Federal energy secretary Melchior Wathelet gives a hostage to fortune

Past and present

"I was always a very good girl. My letter for Sinterklaas was always written in plenty of time, and my shoe was standing ready a week in advance."

Flemish minister Ingrid Lieten demonstrates that her managerial talents are inborn

Driving force

"If I had to go everywhere by bike I'd be sick as a dog 20 times a year. I always took the bike or the bus everywhere until I was 35, so I have some car credit coming to me."

Antwerp-based actor Axel Daeseleire explains why he's in favour of traffic in the city

New direction

"We have to be less grim and a little bit funnier."

Gerolf Annemans, new president of Vlaams Belang, has plans for his party's future

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

Unmanned aircraft can either strike fear into our hearts (little helicopters that can fly up to the windows and record your every move) or warm our hearts (heat-sensing fliers that can find earthquake survivors under rubble). However they are used, they are fascinating devices that are becoming more the norm in surveying, chemical sensing and firefighting

Science

Later this month, the Flemish Institute for Technological Research (Vito) hosts the first-ever BSDS, or Brussels Sustainable Development Summit. The summit will see two days of dialogue between stakeholders and politicians and have a special event open to the public. We'll tell you all about it

Living

Have you ever noticed that there are some things you only buy at Christmas markets? That's either because it's an impulse buy or because that's the only place you ever find it. The latter is often the case for De Klokk, an East Flanders company that specialises in creamy jenever and beautifully packaged chocolates. We visit their headquarters during the most bustling time of the year