

## Have diploma, will work

Most graduates of Flemish educational institutions are working within one year

► 4

## Mmm mmm, good

If agriculture is to remain sustainable, Europeans need to learn to eat bugs



► 7

## Comrade Anja

Flanders is one of a trio of co-producers in a history-making film shot in North Korea

► 11



# A quiet shift

**Small-scale community and institutional projects could add up to big changes in Flanders**

Toon Lambrechts

It might have escaped your notice, but there's something growing in Flanders. Ecological and social initiatives are popping up everywhere – sometimes small and not very visible, sometimes large and ambitious. The common denominator is the desire for change to consumerism and to reshape the future into a sustainable one.

The idea of transition to a more sustainable way of living dates back to the turn of the century. People like the English activist Rob Hopkins began to look for answers to the question of how local communities could ready themselves to combat threats such as climate change and peak oil. An important principle in their thinking is resilience, which refers to the degree to which a system – such as a community – can withstand external influences. And the west doesn't come out of it well: If there was no fuel for trucks on the roads, for instance,

we would run out of food within a few days.

Greet Pipijn is active in Transition Flanders, a group that wants to inspire others to take steps towards transitioning. "Resilience is the starting point," she says. "With that concept in mind, people can start to work on local and small-scale ideas. Transition is acting; that's its appeal. People love to contribute to something. Transition is not a clear-cut concept. Setting up initiatives yourself, away from politics – that's what it is about. And people are ready for it. The public support is there."

Small-scale, local ... That sounds like the classic environmental movement. Yet there are significant differences, according to Pipijn. "The environmental organisations often paint a very sombre picture. Even though they are right, people are overwhelmed by it. Transition starts from a positive vision of the future, based on the idea that we can do something about it. Maybe something small in the scheme of things, but many small initiatives can lead to a big shift, a movement that's a lot bigger

than you might think. And if it goes wrong, we are least prepared to cope with the shock."

### In the bike kitchen

It's Thursday evening in Ghent's Brugsepoort neighbourhood. In the back of a former furniture factory, a handful of people tinker around with bicycles. The workshop is spacious and well equipped, with all kinds of tools, a small bar, a lot of books about cycling and a pile of old bikes for spare parts. The Fietskeuken (Bicycle Kitchen) is in full swing.

"Every Thursday, anyone can come here to repair their bicycle," says Fietskeuken volunteer Sander Vandenberghe. "There is equipment available, and you can ask for advice. Some of us have followed bicycle repair training. The location here suits us perfectly, and, with the money from fundraising parties, we've bought some decent equipment."

It's an open workshop (*pictured above*) but also more, he stresses.

## FACE OF FLANDERS

## Veerle Baetens



Alan Hope

In yet another award associated with the Flemish film *The Broken Circle Breakdown*, co-star Veerle Baetens was last week awarded the Best Actress Award at the Tribeca Film Festival in New York. "This is really fantastic," she said. "I'm very happy that I was chosen for this role ... I also hope to be in the US soon to support the film." The film also won Best Screenplay at the prestigious festival.

Baetens, 35, was born in Brasschaat, Antwerp province. She studied at the Higher Institute for Dramatic Arts in Brussels; though she specialised in music, she made her early career in the theatre. In 2000, she began appearing in films and eventually landed a role on the two-year soap *Wittekerke*.

She then got the lead in the stage musical *Pippi Langkous* (Pippi Longstocking), for which she won a Flemish Music Prize and the John Kraaijkamp Musical Award in the Netherlands. She later became a household name in Flanders when she landed the lead role in *Sara*, a short series based on the *Ugly Betty* phenomenon.

For that role she won both the jury prize and the public prize at the Flemish Television Stars awards. Her celebrity was solidified with the lead role in the TV cop drama

*Code 37* and the smash-hit movie *Loft*. She also launched the singing duo Dallas, together with Sandrine Collard.

*The Broken Circle Breakdown*, directed by Felix Van Groeningen, is an adaptation of the musical stage play by Johan Heldenbergh and Mieke Dobbels. On stage, the lead roles were played by the two authors. For the film version, Heldenbergh again played Didier, but Van Groeningen chose to cast Baetens instead of Dobbels. "My world caved in, I won't pretend otherwise," Dobbels said in an interview.

The decision clearly worked for the film, though, which also won two awards at the Berlin International Film Festival this year and was the top-grossing Flemish film in Belgium last year. The soundtrack also broke sales records, mostly due to Baetens' songbird take on bluegrass and gospel numbers. Baetens is currently filming *Het vonnis* (The Verdict), a courtroom drama directed by Jan Verheyen. She also has an English-speaking role in the BBC period drama *The White Queen*, which was partly filmed in Flanders and will air later this year. She plays Margaret of Anjou, wife of the mad king Henry VI.

## News in brief

The rectors of the five Flemish universities have complained that their institutions have been forced to suspend or **abandon international aid programmes**, including research into food and water provision, because funding of €35 million from the federal government has not been paid. "The federal government agreed to this commitment and must fulfil it," the rectors wrote in a joint statement.

A controversial field trial of genetically modified potatoes in Wetteren, East Flanders, has proved a success in **developing resistance to Phytophthora**, or potato blight. The trial is organised by Ghent University, the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) and the institute for agricultural and fisheries research. They said the results could mean 80% less pesticide use by potato farmers. The trial was the scene of clashes in 2011 between police and activists.

A 54-year-old man from Asse, Flemish Brabant, went on trial last week in Brussels charged with **possession, creation and distribution of child pornography**. In possession of about 10 million images, he is the first person in Belgium to be charged with human trafficking in connection with child pornography. The new charges come after a change in the trafficking laws, which forbid any abuse of the vulnerable position of children. "This is an important precedent," commented Heidi De Pauw, director of Child Focus, which will in future join each case of child pornography as a civil party.

Passers-by in Leuven's Mechelsestraat were surprised last week to find a beaver taking shelter in the entrance to a shop. The animal is thought to have come up from the Dijle river, which flows under the street at one point. It

was taken to an animal shelter for examination before being released back into the Dijle. The first beaver in Flanders for 150 years was spotted in the Dijle valley south of Leuven in 2000, since when numbers have increased.

Audi Brussels, the Belgian Red Cross and the University of Leuven have been voted **Employer of the Year** in the categories profit, social profit and non-profit respectively. The titles were awarded after a nationwide poll organised by *Vacature* magazine, HR consultants Acerta and Vlerick Business School.

The second edition of the **Belgian Homeless Cup** has been won by Kortrijk, in a final against Genk that ended 4-4 and was decided on penalties. Fourteen teams of homeless people, refugees and recovering addicts took part in the football tournament, and the cup was handed over by federal integration minister Maggie De Block.

The **Belgian and Dutch governments** have signed an agreement allowing them access to each other's databases to search for the identity of drivers who commit traffic offences on the other's territory. Last year a similar treaty was signed with France.

Amateur cyclist Bart Gregoor from Kortessem, Limburg province, will cycle each stage of the Tour de France one day before the professionals in order to **raise money for the Ronald McDonald House** in Arnhem, the Netherlands, which provides respite care for severely ill children and their families.

► [www.degrotedroom.com](http://www.degrotedroom.com)

A protest in which members of the topless feminist activist

group Femen **sprayed water over Archbishop André Léonard** during a public lecture has been condemned as "totally unacceptable" by the Belgian Bishops' Conference. The action took place in the Free University of Brussels (ULB) last week.

Police will now be able to use mobile cameras to tell if **drivers have valid insurance and environmental testing certificates**, federal transport minister Melchior Wathelet said. The advance comes thanks to new joint access to databases of the certification authority and the insurance federation Assuralia. Some 100,000 cars on the roads in Belgium are uninsured, and 750,000 have no test certificate.

Employers who provide staff with a **work-related mobile phone** are adding to their stress levels, according to a study by the socialist trade union ABVV. Some 60% of those responding said they had been contacted for work reasons outside of working hours, while half said they felt under pressure to keep track of work-related emails and messages even when off duty.

All uniformed members of the federal police must in future keep **name and rank badges visible** at all times, wear uniform headgear and refrain from wearing signs and symbols that breach the principle of impartiality, under a new dress code introduced by police chief Catherine De Bolle.

Brussels City is **increasing the fines for fly-tipping** – dumping rubbish without authorisation – and urinating in public. Fines for dumping go up from €100 to €250, and for urinating from €50 to €100.

## FLANDERS TODAY

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## OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

## Pennies from heaven

It's everybody's secret dream: Banknotes come billowing out of the sky toward you like so many man-made snowflakes. For the mayor of Zedelgem in West Flanders, however, it's very much a reality – and also a nightmare for the image of his town.

Last week, several tens of thousands of euros came floating into Zedelgem. And most of the money is still missing.

The recipient of this unlikely bounty was the Ruddervoordsestraat. According to a witness, the ground over a stretch of 100 metres was littered with €50, €100 and €200 banknotes. "It was as if it had rained money," resident José Maertens told *De Standaard*.

The money, it seems, was the loot from a burglary of a house in nearby Torhout. The suspects had thrown a safe from their car during a police chase.

Later, only two local residents showed up at the police station to hand anything in. These honest citizens returned some €11,000, described by police as "a fraction of the total amount stolen".

Mayor Patrick Arnou has issued a call for Zedelgem's residents to return the cash. "It bothers me that so many people have taken something that is not theirs," he said. "Apart from anything else, it's against the law



to pick up money with the intention of holding on to it. We'll be opening an investigation." To make matters simpler for the penitents – should there be any – Arnou will collect the money personally and "guarantee anonymity," he said. But residents have to act fast. "The idea is not for people to hold on to this money for weeks."

# A quiet shift

## UGent consider the practicalities but also the philosophy of transitioning its research priorities

► continued from page 1

"We organise information evenings about travelling by bike where people can share their experiences. Bringing people together through cycling, that's pretty much the idea behind the Fietskeuken."

### The Repair Cafe

Meanwhile, on the terrace of De Kroon community centre in the Brussels commune of Sint-Agatha-Berchem, a dozen people wait their turn. Down the hall are several tables where others are working on clothes, furniture and electrical appliances. Bicycle repairs are done outside in the sun. It's the commune's first Repair Cafe, and the turnout is high. "The table with electronics is pretty busy," laughs Christina Brunnenkamp, one of the organisers. "They are also the hardest stuff to find experienced repairers for." The idea behind a Repair Cafe is that you bring broken stuff for small repairs. You can do it yourself with the tools available, or you can get some help from volunteers with more experience.

"Repair Cafes are popping up like mushrooms out of the ground," says Brunnenkamp. "It's a hype, but I hope it will become more than that. It is a signal, a sign that people want their stuff to last longer than six months. There is a growing preference to repair things rather than replace them. Also, a Repair Cafe does the trick when it comes to social cohesion: It's a great way to get to know your neighbours."

### The transition of UGent

Many transition initiatives are practical in nature. That seems logical, but it does not necessarily have to be like that. A few weeks ago, the University of Ghent (UGent) presented a transition plan based on the thoughts of 150 staff and students. In addition to practical issues such as mobility, the document proposes transitions in the fields of research and education. It's a remarkable and daring plan because it goes straight to the heart of questioning what a university is for.

The people behind the study are professor Thomas Block and his colleague Erik Paredis of UGent's Centre for Sustainable Development. "It is a daring reflection, but the time is ripe," says Block. "The major challenges of the future, such as climate change and social inequality, are becoming increasingly clear. In addition, internationally high-ranked universities are already working on these themes, so there is pressure from outside to work on transition." Research and teaching are at the core of any university. It boils down to the question of what kind of research is conducted and with what kind of vision students graduate. This is the first time that this has been explicitly considered in a Flemish university, and it's a delicate exercise, says Block. "It touches almost all aspects of academic life. Now, most research is done within tightly defined disciplines and faculties. That's a historical development, but



Clockwise from top: Free repair cafes, where you can get help repairing old appliances and electronics, are popping up across Flanders; Greet Heylen at the garden started by Transitie Deurne; Teaching at universities should take precedence over getting published, says UGent's Centre for Sustainable Development

foreign examples show that it can be different. We aim to break the boundaries between disciplines to create new possibilities. Transition requires that we value research in a different way. Now there is a strong emphasis on prestigious publications."

Block believes this has to change: "The social importance of research must be taken into account when distributing funding. Co-operation with governments and civil society is too often an exception, and that also reflects how we treat higher education in general. Teaching gets too little weight in a university career, while it has a great social importance."

What is an exception, he continues, "should become the norm. UGent produces excellent research and educational work. We can do that in the field of sustainability. There is no

intent to affect academic freedom or fundamental research, but the university cannot afford to ignore the major issues of our time. It's a question of relevance."

### Seeds of change

It looks like a plot of land like many others, somewhere on the outskirts of the city, forgotten and fallen into disuse. But this land near Deurne is different. At the front, stands a small caravan, behind it some vegetable beds. And although the weather so far hasn't quite been co-operative, the first seedlings are finally popping up.

Greet Heylen looks with enthusiasm at the first plants in the garden. Along with others in Transitie Deurne, she took the initiative last year to create a community garden called Samentuin on this piece of land, abandoned many years previously.

"Our transition group has existed since 2010, but the garden has given it a new twist. The time was ripe to roll up our sleeves."

The garden in Deurne differs from traditional allotments: There's no division into separate plots, rather the whole is a common project. "It was a deliberate choice," explains Heylen. "Gardening together is not something individuals often consider, but it creates a different dynamic. It encourages people to share both knowledge and material. And it's just more fun. The neighbourhood had an urgent need for a meeting space like this."

Like many other transition initiatives, the Samentuin (literally "together garden") is the work of a group of average citizens. "For a garden, you don't need a lot of resources," says Heylen. "Apart from a soil analysis and some compost, we asked for nothing

from the municipality. That makes us independent. Not everything should be over-organised, and self-reliance stimulates creativity."

A community garden, a bicycle repair place ... They look like tiny sparks in the light of the problems of our time and those of tomorrow. But change is brought about by large groups of people altering their ideas, not by great events. The Dutch poet Remco Campert once wrote: "Resistance does not start with big words but with small acts, like a storm with soft rustling in the garden."

So perhaps a more social and ecological future begins somewhere in a garden on a forgotten piece of land. Time will tell.

► [www.fietskeuken.org](http://www.fietskeuken.org)

► [www.repaircafe.be](http://www.repaircafe.be)

► [www.transitiedeurne.be](http://www.transitiedeurne.be)

# Syria appeal a “success”, say organisers

Celebrities and citizens joined together to raise funds for Syria 12-12

Alan Hope

An appeal for funds for the people affected by the civil war in Syria held last weekend has been declared a success by the Belgian Consortium for Emergency Aid Situations, commonly known as 12-12. The consortium is made up of several aid organisations, including Doctors of the World, Handicap International and Oxfam Solidarity. In its first week of campaigning, 12-12 managed to raise barely €100,000, as potential donors were distracted by the news about radical Islamist youths leaving Belgium to fight in Syria. But the National Action Day last Friday managed to mobilise people – including a number of famous faces – for 70 fundraising actions across the country.

While a final figure had not yet been announced as *Flanders Today*



A family sells cookies at Jubelpark last weekend to raise money as part of Syria 12-12

went to press, Friday's pledges alone topped the half-million mark, with more money flowing in over the

weekend. Among those taking part were crooner Helmut Lotti, who made

a video explaining why donations were required and hosted a tea party. Drinking tea was the theme of the event, as the offering of tea to guests in Syria is an important ritual. Ghent city council also organised a tea party and made a donation of €18,000.

The federal government announced it had approved the sum of €6.5 million for humanitarian help for Syria this year. According to the 12-12 organisers, as many as 4.2 million people have been affected by the fighting in the country.

Some actions are still going on, and donations can be made to the Belgisch Consortium voor Noodhulp situaties, account number 000-0000012-12.

► [www.1212.be](http://www.1212.be)

## Most graduates find jobs in first year

Despite the economic crisis, young people graduating from secondary and higher education institutions are able to find jobs, according to the graduates study 2011-2012 issued by the Flemish employment and training agency VDAB.

The study looked at 72,128 former students one year after leaving full-time education. At that time, 11.7% were still looking for work, fewer than in the previous study in 2009, when the figure was 14.6%. “We were surprised,” commented André Van Hauwermeiren of VDAB’s research department. “The explanation can be found in the high number of workers who are retiring and being replaced by young people.”

The better educated you are, the more chance of finding a job. Four in 10 of those who left school with the minimum qualification were still unemployed after a



year. However, young people with a professional Bachelor’s degree did better than an academic degree, even a Master’s.

The best employment options were personal and health care at all levels. Degrees in dentistry and medicine saw 0% and 0.3% of students out of work a year after graduating.

## Education reform proposal by end May

The government of Flanders will present its long-awaited proposals for a radical reform of the secondary school system before the end of May, education minister Pascal Smet promised last week. Following disagreements over the extent of the reforms between Smet and coalition partner N-VA, concerns have been growing that the government may no longer have the time to present and implement the reforms before the end of the legislature in May 2014.

The main issue of Smet’s platform is a proposal to delay the study track of secondary school students from 12 to 14 years old. The aim is to avoid the situation where students follow a humanities-based stream, for instance, only to find they are better suited to a technical or professional stream. Opposition comes from Groen, Open VLD and N-VA.

Smet’s deadline of end May could still mean the proposal is doomed to run out of time, which suggests that the government may present the package in the form of a “master plan” rather than a legislative decree. That would allow the

proposals contained in the plan to be picked up again in the next legislature.

### Abuse investigation

Welfare minister Jo Vandeurzen, meanwhile, has said he will put together a panel of experts at the request of child psychiatrist Peter Adriaenssens to study allegations of widespread physical abuse of children in Catholic schools and other institutions from the 1950s to the 1990s. Among the allegations were claims that nuns used whips on children in a home in Haasrode, Flemish Brabant, and that children were lifted by their hair in a summer camp in Koksijde. Many adults who have recently come forward with the allegations complain of continued stress and panic attacks because of the incidents.

“I find it is the job of the government to make this the subject of a call for university research ... to understand how often physical and mental abuse took place,” said Adriaenssens. Victims of physical abuse are invited to contact the free-phone number 1712.

## New laws from 1 May

A number of legislative changes come into force on 1 May.

The fares of Brussels taxis go up by 14 cents/km within the 19 municipalities of the capital, while other rates

such as night supplement and pick-up charge remain unchanged.

Public transport in Brussels is no longer free for the over-65s using the MIVB. A annual ticket now

costs €60.

The Belgian motorcycle driving licence is replaced by a European licence, covering four categories of motorcycle. For the largest, there is now a minimum

age of 22.

On 2 May, a new €5 banknote comes into circulation, the first of a series of new bills which contain improved security features.



## THE WEEK IN FIGURES

6.2%

of people appearing on public broadcaster VRT in 2012 were “new Flemings”, above the quota of 5% in the government’s diversity policy. At 33.8%, women also narrowly exceeded the 33% quota

One-half

of a sample of 110 pita snack bars tested by food safety inspectors across the country had problems with the microbiological quality of the bread. The agency handed out fines in 16 cases

€499,760

total savings achieved by 182 companies that took part in a group purchase of electricity and gas organised by the provinces of Antwerp, East Flanders and Limburg

5.4%

increase in export beer sales last year to 11.7 million hectolitres, the brewing federation said. Demand on the home market fell by 4% over the same period

774

bus and tram shelters damaged in 2012 by vandalism or traffic accidents, up from 425 in 2011, mobility minister Hilde Crevits told the Flemish parliament

## FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

### Achilles’ heel

Every now and then, parties feel the need to “re-invent” themselves, with a new take on their old ideologies. The socialist SPA is in the middle of such a transformation. At a party congress in June, it will present a new manifesto for the years to come. Social equality and diversity will be important parts of this.

SPA hopes to highlight the differences between itself and N-VA, the party that attracts the most attention. This is easier for SPA than for other mainstream parties, as it is clearly left-wing, while N-VA believes in rather right-wing policies. However, over the years SPA has come to be seen as an establishment party – a death knell for any party in Flanders.

Some of the new communal coalitions sit uneasy with SPA’s ambitions. How can it confront N-VA head-on when the two parties join forces in some city governments (as indeed they do in the government of Flanders)? In Antwerp, the socialists opted out of a coalition dominated by N-VA; in Ghent, N-VA was left out of a coalition dominated by socialists. But in other communes, the uncomfortable situation remains.

It is especially poignant in Aalst, where SPA is in a coalition with an N-VA mayor and an alderman who was once a member of Vlaams Belang. Karim Overmeire is even believed to be a co-author of the racist “70-puntenplan”, which he has since distanced himself from. From the start, the SPA leadership warned its local representatives to stay out of this pickle – in vain.

Last week saw a new confrontation between the socialist leadership and the Aalst contingent of SPA, as a secret coalition agreement was leaked. Flemish minister Freya Vanden Bossche, among others, took objection at some parts, which are indeed far removed from anything SPA stands for. For one, Aalst plans a separate administrative window desk for foreigners – sensitive enough, as it reeks of Apartheid and past discriminations of the Flemish in Schaarbeek – manned, moreover, by a police officer.

The Aalst city government has a reasonable explanation for this – the officer will only perform administrative tasks – but the damage is done.

“This is not about Aalst, this is about national politics,” the socialist Dylan Casier complained. He may be right, but that does not make the differences go away. Last week’s confrontation demonstrated that Aalst will remain an Achilles’ heel for SPA for quite some time.

# Something in the water

## Flanders works to meet EU wastewater rules as Belgium awaits court judgment

Angela Chambers

The European Commission is taking Belgium to court for failing to properly treat its urban wastewater. An advanced case for large agglomerations, including Brussels, is currently before the EU Court of Justice for the second time. There was a hearing by the court in mid-April, and the judgment is expected in a few months.

In 2004, the first court proceedings found agglomerations (cities or towns and their extended service areas) in Belgium of more than 10,000 people, including Brussels and 114 areas in Flanders, failed to meet the first deadline (1998) for the EU's Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (UWTD). By 2010, Brussels, seven Flemish agglomerations and several agglomerations in Wallonia still weren't compliant, so the EU decided to take Belgium to court.

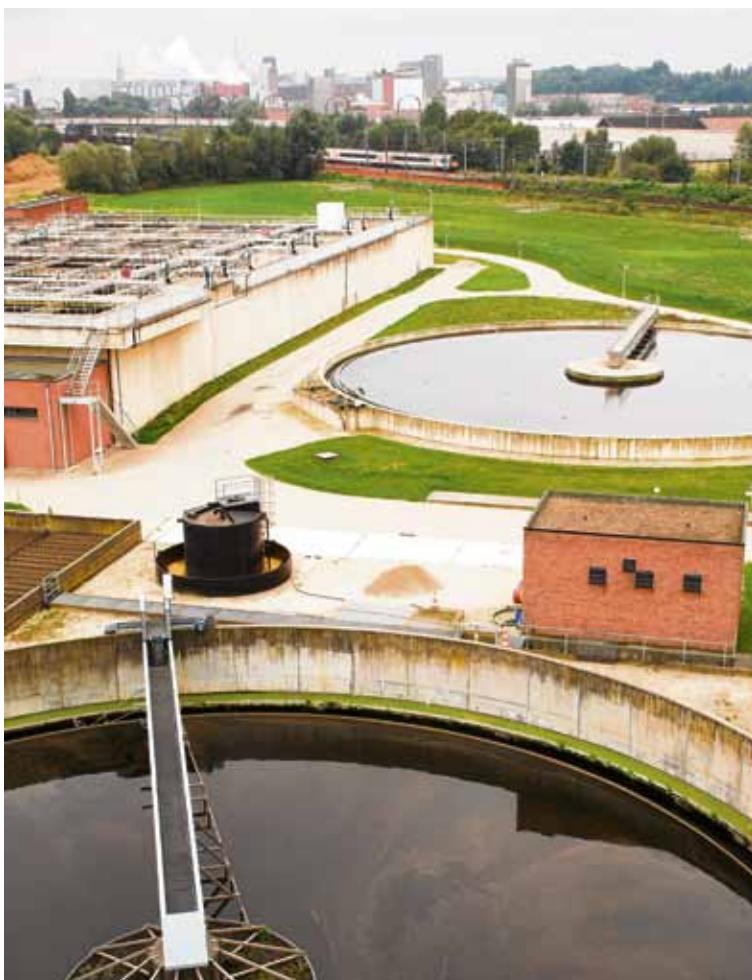
Jean-Pol Rosière, general manager of Brussels Society for Water (SBGE), was at the hearing. He says the judge agreed that Brussels had complied with the EU's directive since 2011 and had installed treatment facilities to clean the river Senne. Flanders' large agglomerations are also now compliant in this ruling.

### Fines possible

The next decision will determine whether all three of Belgium's regions will have to pay up to €20 million for missing the previous deadline to comply with this directive. "It's really good news that Brussels is compliant now, but we'll see if we have to pay for the past," says Rosière.

Bart Van Besien of the Flemish Environment Agency (VMM) says if the court rules that Belgium must pay a fine, the next step will be an internal decision of "who is going to pay what".

Along with large agglomerations, smaller areas in Belgium are being considered for a separate court case. Janez Potočnik, the EU's environment commissioner,



released his recommendation in March after multiple small towns failed to fulfil the UWTD, despite reminders.

Untreated wastewater, which can carry harmful bacteria and viruses, is a risk to the environment and human health. It can include nitrogen and phosphorus that helps algae rapidly grow, which harms other important life in freshwater and marine environments in a process called eutrophication. Drinking water in Belgium generally isn't affected by wastewater and is safe to consume.

Belgium as a whole is considered a "sensitive area", or one that

could experience eutrophication unless properly treated, so the measures that need to be taken are more stringent here than in other countries.

The UWTD, which became law in 1991, notes that member states from the EU-15 (those that joined before May 2004) were required by 2005 to create a system for collecting urban wastewater in small agglomerations with between 2,000 and 15,000 residents. This includes implementing secondary treatment facilities to prevent pollutants from going into the sea or water. The newest member states have various deadlines for meeting

this directive, with most extended to 2015.

The Commission first contacted Belgium in 2007 about its compliance in small areas. By 2011, the Commission found seven small towns in Flanders didn't have suitable sewage systems, while 116 small towns across Flanders and Wallonia weren't equipped with secondary treatment facilities.

The situation has improved;

the Commission's latest available information notes that only four areas in Flanders weren't complying.

However, full compliance in all of

Belgium is not expected until 2015,

a decade after the deadline.

However, Flemish authorities say the four towns – Bazel, part of Kruibeke in East Flanders; Berendrecht, Antwerp province; Melsbroek, part of Steenokkerzeel in Flemish Brabant; and Sint-Lievens-Houtem in East Flanders – have met the directive's requirements since last year. This means Flanders may be removed from the court case, and the region recently provided updated monitoring data to the Commission.

"We are pretty confident that these towns won't have any consequences," says Van Besien.

The Commission also is taking note of the effort Flanders is making to meet the directive's requirements. "Flanders made the necessary investments, a bit late in some cases, but they're taking it seriously and taking the additional steps," says EU environment spokesperson Joseph Hennion. "I'd say by the end of the year, Flanders most likely would be OK."

### Huge challenge

Flanders wasn't able to meet the EU's first deadline for various reasons, says Van Besien. "Since Flanders is a largely urbanised area, the challenge was huge," he says. "Moreover, the large degree of urban spread in Flanders also makes water

treatment quite expensive." There was a significant gap to fill when the UWTD was created. In the 1990s, 30% of wastewater was treated, while it's now about 80%. Van Besien also notes the slow compliance was because of "complex procedures for acquiring land, licences and permits".

Flanders has a robust industry, much agriculture and a dense population, and the VMM believes this combination places stress on the water system as it does in other highly developed areas. "Europe's environmentally sustainable goals are still hard to reach, although the water quality has risen dramatically in the last 20 years," says Van Besien. Along with improved wastewater management, better agricultural policies and more stringent industrial permits have helped improve Flanders' water systems.

### EU developments

Belgium isn't the only country with difficulties following the directive. Hennion says that multiple EU-15 states struggled to fully comply with the requirements, with some currently in the court stage. However, "significant" progress has been made in most states. The directive has helped decrease nitrogen and phosphorus emissions. The states with some of the best water infrastructure include Austria, Denmark and the Netherlands and Sweden. But each country or region has its own unique circumstances to consider.

The EU Water Framework Directive, implemented in 2000, sets ambitious goals to be reached by 2027, including cleaner river basins and co-operation between member states since water flow goes beyond borders. It also notes the need for more public participation to reduce pollution and limit water usage.

► [www.tinyurl.com/euwwtd](http://www.tinyurl.com/euwwtd)

# Study calls attention to poverty in rural areas

While policies to fight poverty are concentrated on the situation in Belgium's cities, the problem of poverty in rural areas is in danger of being overlooked, according to a new study carried out by the University of Leuven and the Free University of Brussels (ULB) and commissioned by the Anti-Poverty Support Unit and the federal government's science department.

The study reviews existing information on the concentration of poverty across the country. In Flanders, the most disadvantaged areas are in Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent, covering a population of roughly 750,000 people. However, the study also draws attention to pockets of poverty across the region in more rural areas, from West Flanders all the way across to south Limburg.

In those areas, in fact, life may even be

tougher for certain categories of poor: the elderly, single people and one-parent families. One of the major differences between the urban and the rural contexts, the study's authors write, is that rural poverty tends to be spread more thinly on the ground and therefore more difficult to keep track of.

The poor in rural areas also suffer more from a number of common phenomena: The rural population is older and ageing faster; the relative lack of employment opportunities is a disadvantage to any thrown out of work; housing is either of low quality or is priced out of the range of low-income locals; and the mobility and social opportunities of poorer people are more limited. **Alan Hope**

► [www.armoedebestrijding.be](http://www.armoedebestrijding.be)



THE WEEK  
IN BUSINESSAir  
► Brussels Airlines

Air carrier Brussels Airlines launches its five-flights-a-week service to Washington on 18 June.

## Brewing ► AB Inbev

Leuven-based AB InBev has received the green light from US competition authorities to acquire Mexico's Grupo Modelo, producer of Corona, for \$20 billion (€15.4 billion). The deal includes AB InBev's agreement to sell its stake in the Crown brand and the Piedras Negras brewery to the Constellation company.

Energy  
► Electrawinds

Flanders-based green energy producer Electrawinds is seeking a quotation on the Brussels stock market to help finance its development. The company operates wind and solar farms in Belgium and several other European countries and has an installed capacity of 265 megawatts.

## Energy ► FlanSea

The Flanders Electricity From the Sea project was launched in Ostend last week as part of a research programme to use wave power to produce electricity.

## Food ► Puratos

The food and bakery additives and ingredients producer has received a €45 million loan from the European Investment Bank to finance research in bakery, pastry and chocolate products. Based in Groot-Bijgaarden, the company operates 40 research facilities worldwide and has sales in more than 100 countries.

## IT ► Econocom

The Brussels-based computer services group is to acquire the French Osiatis networks servicing company for up to €175 million. Econocom has operations in 20 countries and employs more than 8,000 workers.

## Metals ► Nyrstar

The Brussels-based producer of non-ferrous metals and zinc has confirmed its plans to invest up to AU\$250 million (€197 million) to develop its recycling and advanced-metals production capacity in its Port Pirie unit in Australia.

Office space  
► Regus

The Luxembourg-based operator of Business Centres opened its fifth workspace facility in Brussels last month. Regus also has centres in Antwerp and Ghent and plans further properties in Ghent and Hasselt.

## Waterways back open

## Barge operators sign an agreement with the government of Flanders

Alan Hope

**S**hipping on Flanders' inland waterways was last week getting slowly back to normal after an agreement signed by the Flemish government with the Federation of Belgian Inland Shippers (FBB) brought an end to protest actions that had blocked ports for more than a week.

According to the FBB, three out of four barge operators in Flanders is in financial difficulties, made worse by the pressure from Dutch competitors, who, they say, receive more support from their government.

The agreement includes various provisions, including a request from the Flemish government to the European Commission over a structural disturbance of the market in respect of the Dutch barges. In the meantime, a law will be passed to tackle dumping – prices lower than the true market value – by imposing various sanctions up to a ban on operating within Flanders. A study will be carried out to get a clear picture of the true position of the industry in comparison to



neighbouring countries. And an expert committee will be convened to examine the technical requirements of boats, as well as the social status of barge operators.

The agreement was unanimously accepted by the barge workers, something FBB chairman Marc De Decker described as "historic". It brought an end to more than a week of blockades at several major locks across Flanders, which had crippled

waterways traffic.

The Construction Confederation, meanwhile, has also complained about dumping by Dutch competitors. According to reports, the Dutch now outnumber Polish and Portuguese workers on Flanders' building sites. A Dutch construction worker, they say, costs on average three times less than a Flemish worker.

At the same time, Dutch workers

have no language problems when working in Flanders, and the areas hardest-hit – in Limburg and the border region of Antwerp province – are close enough for Dutch workers to commute from home.

Another cause of the increase in Dutch workers is the crisis in the construction industry in the Netherlands, where workers have dropped their prices by 20% in an effort to compete for the few jobs available. For those who come to Flanders, a cut of only 5% is enough to undercut local workers, the confederation said.

In Flanders, housing minister Freya Van den Bossche revealed last week that the number of payments of large renovation subsidies in 2012 was nearly 20% down on the previous year, while premiums available for carrying out small-scale renovations dropped by nearly 35% over the same period. However, although the number of applications was lower, the total sum paid out was slightly more: €12.7 million compared to €11.5 million in 2011.

## “Bad timing” is reason given for Ford Genk closure

The closure of the Ford factory in Genk, with the loss of some 4,500 jobs – and up to 10,000 jobs, including suppliers affected – was a result of unfortunate timing, unions heard last week. The Limburg factory was chosen for the axe because planned investments for three new Ford models had not yet been implemented.

Union representatives were taking part in a meeting of the works council at Ford – in keeping with the Belgian law on mass redundancies – to inform them about the details of the decision to close Ford Genk. "We were told that the market collapsed in on itself completely in 2012 and that Ford Europe received instructions from the US to come up with a savings plan," said Eddie Martens of the Christian union ACV after the meeting.

Ford Europe, he said, "went looking for plants where no new models were in production. And, despite the agreement

to build three new models in Genk, none of the planned new investments in our plant had yet taken place. It looks as if we were simply unlucky."

In terms of employment costs, notoriously high in Belgium, he said: "According to Ford, that is not the reason for the decision."

Last September, Ford announced Genk would begin producing the new Mondeo this autumn and the Galaxy and S-Max from the end of 2014. They also described fears over the future of the plant as "whipped-up nonsense". The closure announcement came barely a month later.

The final meeting of the works council was due to take place as *Flanders Today* went to press. The agreement on the conditions of the closure, including details of timing and pay-outs to workers made redundant, will be signed later in May.

## Companies develop new electric car drive

A consortium of 12 companies, working together with Flanders Drive, the region's research programme for the vehicle manufacturing industry, have developed a new drive system for electric cars. The new drive was unveiled last week in Flanders Drive's headquarters in Lommel, Limburg province. The consortium includes companies like LMS (test and mechatronic simulation), Umicore (materials), Punch Powertrain (powertrains) and imec (ICT and nanotechnology). Flanders Drive is funded by the Flemish government, the Limburg Fund and the European regional development fund. The project took three years to complete.

The result, according to Flanders Drive, is a technology that has the potential to provide a breakthrough for the world market in electric vehicles.

According to Flemish innovation minister Ingrid Lieten, present for the unveiling, "the success of this co-operative development of expertise and innovative technology for the green vehicles of the future will allow the companies involved to grow further into world players ... Flanders Drive has once again proven its leading role in the transformation of our classic Flemish vehicle manufacturing industry into a smart and green mobility industry."

► [www.flandersdrive.be](http://www.flandersdrive.be)

## Q&amp;A

Frank Aernout is the CEO of Edegem-based career website Krow, which scans your CV and suggests jobs that match

## How does Krow differ from other online job platforms?

It's a response to frustrations we saw in the market. We know that for people trying to find a job, the only way you can search is by your job title and the region. We thought that was a bit poor. Let's invent something else, we thought, that's not restricting someone to a couple of key words but instead all the experience they have, like education, languages, achievements and more. Let's find you a job based on all of that information. Other websites also ask for a CV, and you have to rewrite it, and it's not the way you want your CV to look. With Krow, you can upload your CV in whatever form you want to present it to the companies.

## How do recruiters benefit from this system?

There used to only be a few places to find a candidate, but today, people post their CVs all over the place. That actually makes it more difficult for a recruiter to find someone who fits. We try to make it more efficient by not offering thousands of candidates but maybe 50 or 100 based on our rich matching system.

## What has been the response since your mid-March social media launch?

It's only been a month; we now have thousands of CVs, and we're pushing for 10,000 and more with time. Some big companies have shown interest, which surprised me because

I thought it would start with the smaller companies.

## Do you have plans to expand Krow in the future?

Right now, we're solely based in Belgium, but we're thinking about launching somewhere like France or the UK by October. Users can now upload their CVs with our Facebook app, but we want to expand to Google+ and create a mobile application.

## What advice would you give to app developers?

Make it easy and visually attractive. I don't understand why sites like monster.com created apps that look just like their old websites. If an app



doesn't add anything new, then it's not going to be a success. Interview by Angela Chambers

► [www.beworkhappy.com](http://www.beworkhappy.com)

# Grub's up

## If agricultural experts have their way, insects could appear on dinner tables in Flanders

Alan Hope

The presence of horsemeat in supermarket food caused less fuss in Flanders than in other places. But would the Flemish consumer be just as willing to eat, say, crickets, grubs or worms? There are those who say they ought to be; however, the prospects for widespread acceptance of insects for human consumption look to be tentative, to put it mildly, for the time being.

Undaunted, the province of Flemish Brabant last month organised a study day on the subject. "We wanted to get a clear picture of how realistic it was to imagine we might have insects on our plate by 2020, how far along the research is and what the possibilities are for business," explains Ine Vervaeke, the province's head of agriculture and horticulture. "We brought together a range of stakeholders – researchers, agricultural interests, the catering industry. As a province, our role is as a facilitator, bringing those different interests together and getting the discussion going."

The idea of eating insects – entomophagy – is not a strange

one to a large majority of people in the world. According to some estimates, there are about 1,400 species considered edible by someone somewhere, and they include caterpillars, beetles, ants, bees, termites, butterflies and moths. Some are eaten in their adult state; others as larvae or grubs. They lend themselves to all styles of cooking, including no cooking at all. The taste is generally described as "nutty".

### Insect aversion

"Insects have been eaten by humans since time immemorial; clear evidence of this has been found in fossilised faeces," says Dr Mik Van Der Borght of the industrial engineering faculty of the University of Leuven. "Right now, about 80% of the world's population eats insects on a regular basis."

But in Europe a distaste for insects developed over time. "That aversion could be overcome by a smart approach and some education," he continues. "A good example is the

success of sushi in Europe in recent years. Increased environmental

awareness and attention to animal welfare will play an increasing role in convincing the wider public."

They're already a lot closer in the Netherlands than here: Our northern neighbours have about 20 companies operating in the field as well as a sector association.

At present, there is only one business in Flanders producing insects for human consumption: Ecology Projects in Antwerp. Unfortunately, *Flanders Today* received no response to repeated requests to be interviewed for this article.

Another company, Eirogado in Knokke-Heist, East Flanders, commissioned a feasibility study last year to examine the viability of switching from egg and chicken production to cultivating insects. However, the results of the study, a spokesperson said, were not positive. "We're not open to the consumption of insects here in Europe," he said. The company has since gone out of business.

According to Vervaeke, uncertainty is putting as much of a brake on developments as disgust. "The regulations here in Flanders are perhaps less well-adapted to the possibilities of today," she said. "There's a certain amount of uncertainty over what's allowed and what's not as far as food safety is concerned."

The study day, then, "was an



These chapulín grasshoppers are just one of the 1,400 species of insect enjoyed by people around the world

or pigs – is a useful alternative."

However, European laws on BSE, commonly known as mad cow disease, present a problem. According to the law, insect meal cannot be fed to agricultural animals because it comes under the heading of processed animal protein. The EU has agreed to introduce some flexibility into its plan as BSE

attempt to get a picture of what's happening," she continues. "Now we're looking into how much of a problem there is, and how we might

is now virtually eradicated from the bovine population. In July, a first step will be taken which will allow insect meal to be used in feed in fish

**"Right now, about 80% of the world's population eats insects on a regular basis"**

do something about it. The first point would be: Are there actually companies that want to start up in this area?"

A more popular avenue of exploration, on the other hand, is the use of insect material in animal feed. "Insects can contribute directly or indirectly to human nutrition," Van Der Borght says. "An aversion to insects is indeed an obstacle standing in the way of entomophagy. Then the indirect route – adding insect protein to the feed of animals that are already

entomophages, like fish, poultry

farms. But what is the point of pursuing this line of research, given the widespread public distaste? "Insects are able to transform plant material that is not suitable for human consumption into high-value products such as proteins, fats, vitamins and other bioactive materials," responds Van Der Borght. "Also, particular insects produce virtually no greenhouse gases and require very little water and space. And above all, they're really tasty."



Convincing kids to eat insects: These lollies are available to buy online

## Telenet advises broadcasters to target ads to viewers

TV broadcasters on commercial channels could find a new revenue model via ads targeted at individual customers, to help avoid the problem of viewers who skip through ad breaks, Telenet suggested last week.

The Mechelen-based telecommunications company, which supplies cable and digital TV to a majority of homes in Flanders, was holding talks with commercial broadcasters on an issue that has been the source of some rancour recently.

Broadcasters complain that more and more customers are recording programmes and then making use of the ability to fast-forward through advertisements. For the commercial stations, that means a loss of income, as

advertisers apply downward pressure on ad rates, in the knowledge that their ads are not being seen in a growing number of homes.

Until now the digital TV companies – Telenet and to a lesser extent Belgacom – have argued that VHS allowed viewers to skip ads 20 years ago, and that today's media-savvy viewer is less interested than ever in traditional TV ads.

Last week's meeting was intended to allow Telenet to offer broadcasters an alternative to their current advertising model: instead of broadcasting one ad to all TV sets, implement narrow-casting of "segmented and targeted ads" depending on the profile of the viewer.

"We can see who the client is, and which programmes he is watching,"

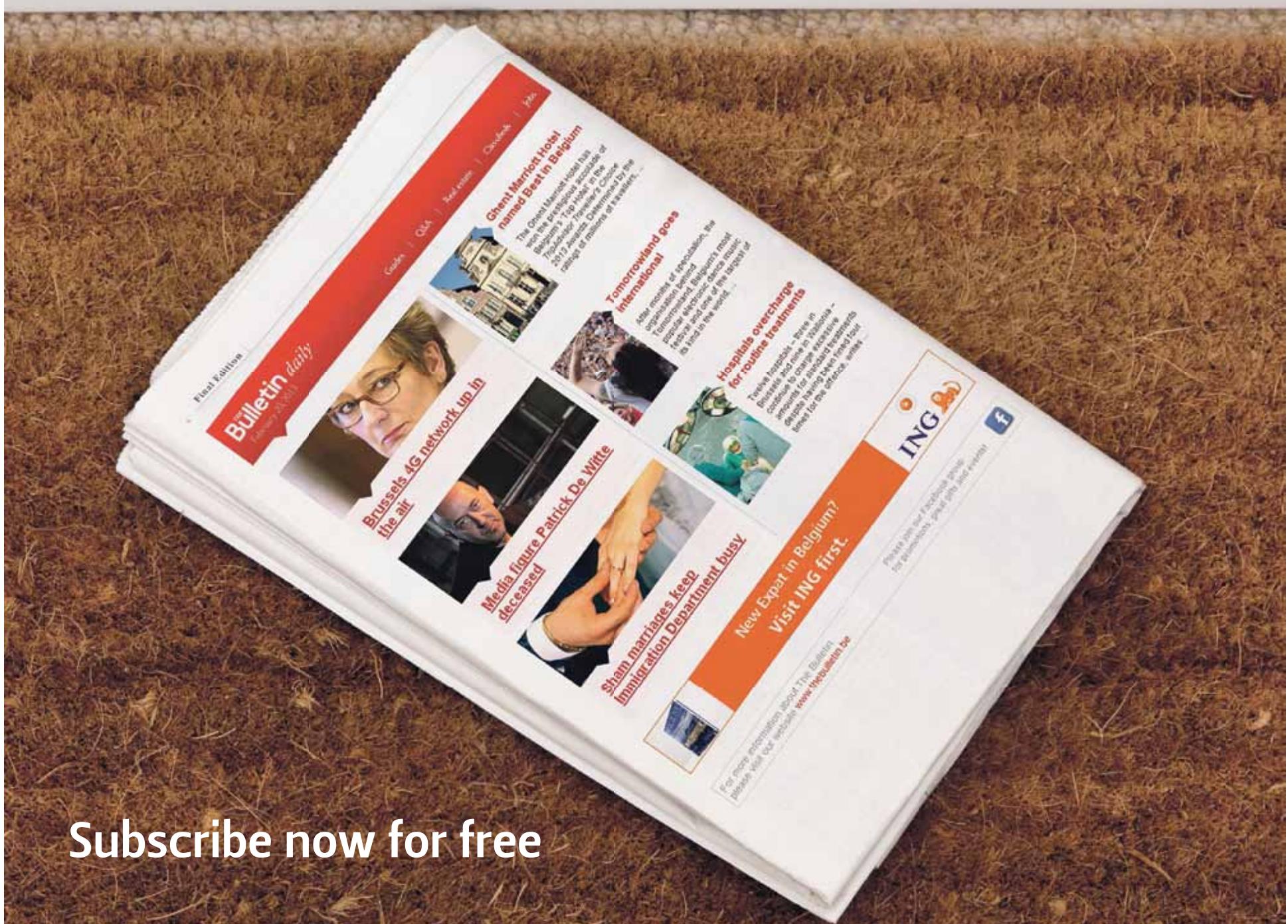
said Vincent Bruyneel, Telenet's head of strategy. "In that way we can tell which ads are relevant for him." The technique of targeting ads is familiar to anyone using Google search or (less successfully for now) Facebook, and Telenet stressed that it would be careful to operate within the limits of privacy legislation.

Telenet hopes with its new proposal to head off the threat of legislation that would force digital TV providers to get permission from broadcasters for any function offered by their devices, including the ability to fast-forward through ads. The broadcasters have also suggested bringing two digicorders on to the market – one that cannot skip ads and one that can, the latter of which would cost more. AH



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# Pay it forward

The “suspended coffee” phenomenon has spread from the streets of Naples to Flanders

Catherine Kosters

An Italian walks into a coffee shop and up to the counter. He orders two coffees. The barista pours him one. The man pays for two and leaves. Several hours later, a homeless person enters the same coffee shop. He asks if there are any “suspended coffees” available and gets the extra one for which the first man paid.

The story may sound like a poorly translated Italian joke, but it's actually the latest charity hype to sweep Europe. The idea of the suspended coffee is reported to have started in Naples. Customers order a *caffè sospeso*, an extra cup paid in advance for someone who can't afford it. When someone next enquires about suspended coffee, he or she is served the cup for free.

The modern-day equivalent of alms has apparently been around for decades in Italy, but it only achieved widespread popularity in recent years. Then it hit the internet, most notably Facebook, and now the concept has spread to coffee shops from Ukraine to the UK, all advocating this grassroots take on social solidarity.

## More givers than takers

In Flanders, suspended coffee first popped up in the Berchem district of Antwerp, where eatery Caravan on the central Damplein adopted the initiative. The owner of the shop read about the initiative online “and ran the idea by the rest of our team,” explains barista Isabelle Peulinckx. “Everyone immediately liked it. It fits



Isabelle Peulinckx of Caravan in Antwerp, pioneers of suspended coffee in Flanders

right in with our concept of world cuisine and a homely atmosphere, and there is quite some poverty in the 2060 region of Antwerp. The problem is that you rarely meet these people.”

Caravan has now been selling charitable coffee for several weeks and has already encountered some

of the difficulties of reaching out. “More people tend to buy suspended coffee than ask for one,” Peulinckx says. “I think they must be afraid or embarrassed. That's why we decided to donate the remaining balance in the form of coffee beans to the social workers who distribute food on the square every Thursday.”

Once word of the concept gets out to the public, the coffee at Caravan will likely find its way to thirsty throats more directly. Since Caravan launched the initiative a few weeks ago, more coffee shops have joined in, and their number is increasing rapidly. A new website lists places in Belgium offering suspended coffee

► [www.uitgesteldekoffie.be](http://www.uitgesteldekoffie.be)

and calls on more establishments to do the same.

## Suspended fries

As unexpected as this small wave of charity was, the real surprise came when Fritkot Bompa in the Brussels' district of Elsene jumped on the bandwagon with suspended *frietjes*. Owner Eric Duhamel decided to let patrons sponsor fries rather than coffee, as the poor have to eat as well.

Duhamel has even developed a novel method of getting the word out about his service. “Letting people in need know the service is out there is not easy, as they often don't have access to newspapers or a computer,” he says. “When you order suspended fries, you get a certificate – an invitation you can give to a homeless person or someone you think needs it. It has a map, which makes it easy for the recipient to find us and claim the free meal.”

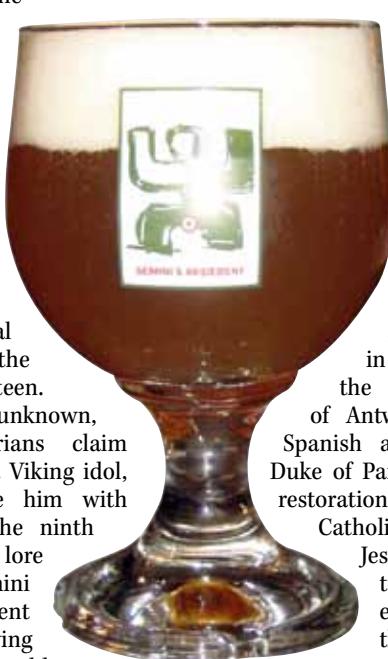
The charity scheme at Fritkot Bompa is now into its third week, and Duhamel has already welcomed several happy diners, benefitting from this appropriated take on the Italian tradition. He is convincing several of his peers throughout the country to give the initiative a try and works with Flemish company La William to provide free sauces. The project has its own Facebook page, called De uitgestelde friet. Charity seems to have a future in Belgium.

# A beer befitting a god

Ancient fertility symbol lives on in relaunched Antwerp brew

Marcel Schoeters

On 23 March, the first Saturday of what was supposed to be spring, a new beer was officially launched in Antwerp. It takes its name, Semini's Aksiedent, from an age-old fertility god who can be seen in a primitive-looking relief over the only original entrance gate to the medieval fortress Het Steen. Semini's origins are unknown, though some historians claim that he goes back to a Viking idol, which would provide him with origins as early as the ninth century. As the local lore in Antwerp goes, Semini had a very prominent penis; women having difficulty conceiving would pass underneath his organ so he



could bless them with a child. Over the centuries, Semini was allowed to perform this particular miracle at will. But in 1587, after the surrender of Antwerp to the Spanish army of the Duke of Parma and the restoration of Roman-Catholicism, the Jesuits decided to call an end to these pagan practices and had Semini's

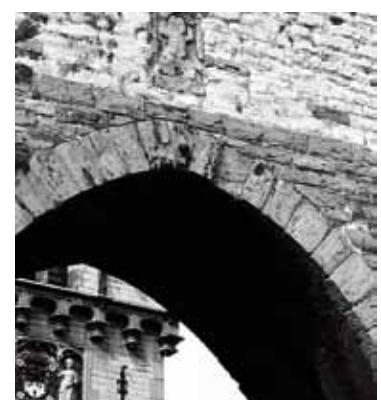
prominent instrument chopped off. Oh my. In 1959, the god's name was adopted by students of the Sint-Jan Berchmanscollege in Antwerp for their new student club. To mark the occasion of the club's 50th anniversary in 2009, a local brewery was asked to brew a special triple. It was called Semini's Aksiedent to commemorate the “operation” performed by the Jesuits. At the time, production was limited, as both distribution and consumption were kept within the club's inner circle.

## Resurrection

The club was not, however, the only institution to keep Antwerp's oldest idol and his name alive. In 1987, four centuries after the castration, another society was set up to promote Semini as the symbol of the vitality and creativity of the citizens of Antwerp – and to help preserve

what was left of the weather-beaten little figure in the wall of the Steen. It was this Antwerps Komitee Semini in Ere that started the tradition to dedicate the first Saturday of spring to Semini. The venue of the ceremony is, of course, the space under the gothic arch over which Semini presides. Within Semini – the club, not the god – the idea had been growing to relaunch the beer, with the additional intention to commercialise it. This time, production was trusted to Brouwerij Boelens in Belsele, East Flanders.

Semini's Aksiedent has a golden blond colour and a not-too-light foam. It has a very distinctive tripel aroma, and the blending of different types of hops has added a fiery liquorice taste, leading to a slightly bitter aftertaste. According to Flemish beer specialist Ariël Meeusen, Semini's Aksiedent is an excellent companion to meat



A primitive relief of fertility god Semini hangs above the entrance to Het Steen fortress on Antwerp's waterfront

and fish, including sole, cod, shrimp, fish stew, shellfish, foie gras, pork tenderloin, sweetbread, duck, rabbit and spicy Asian or Mediterranean dishes. And it happily supports goat's cheese and other slightly matured and creamy cheeses.

► [www.seminisaksiedent.com](http://www.seminisaksiedent.com)



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# A revolutionary spirit

## Flemish director Anja Daelemans makes film history in a co-production with North Korea

Lisa Bradshaw

There is a saying in Korean: Over the mountains are mountains. Essentially, one hardship follows another. As proverbs go, it's not exactly plucky. But when it comes to co-operating with a country like North Korea, it's most definitely apt. This is why the movie *Comrade Kim Goes Flying* is so remarkable. Not only is it being released worldwide – nearly unheard of for a film shot in North Korea – but it is the very first feature film made within the borders of the infamous dictatorship with an entirely local cast in co-production with the west.

Flemish director Anja Daelemans made the film with British director Nicholas Bonner and North Korean director Kim Gwang Hun. Daelemans, the producer of two Oscar-nominated shorts, ran into Bonner at a film festival in 2006. Over "a little too much whisky," she says, they hatched the idea of making a feature film in North Korea. (The only other westerner to have that distinction was an Italian director of exploitation films in the 1980s, who brought in several Italian actors.)

### Who you know

But Bonner had the experience and contacts to make it a project that seemed within the realm of possibility. Based in Beijing, he is well known to North Korean authorities as he has long organised tours of the country – a country nearly impossible to get into without a connection like him. He has also produced a few interesting documentaries about North Korea, which were (some would say miraculously) approved by their government censors and widely released.

So Daelemans, who runs the production company Another Dimension of an Idea in Lubbeek, Flemish Brabant, and Bonner sketched out an idea for a feel-good story about a clever and headstrong young woman who dreams of abandoning her life as a miner to become a trapeze artist in the big



A young miner follows her heart all the way to the North Korean circus in *Comrade Kim Goes Flying*

city. They made contact with Kim, a prolific North Korean filmmaker, and formed a directorial trio. It took six years, but the film was finished in 2012, has screened at a handful of festivals and opens across Flanders and Brussels this week. And it is exactly the film that Daelemans wanted to make. "I'm interested in politics, of course, but I'm not interested in making movies about political situations," she says. "I want to entertain people. When I go to the movies, I want to be entertained; I do not want to come out depressed." In *Comrade Kim*, 20-something Kim Yong-Mi (played by real-life trapeze artist Han Jong Sim) works in a coal mine in rural North Korea. But she's also a talented gymnast, entertaining the other mine workers with her handstands and backflips. Yong-Mi has always dreamed of flying like the birds in the sky, as we see from the opening scenes when she is still

a child and her mother is still alive – a mother who encouraged her to follow her dreams.

So when Yong-Mi travels to the capital Pyongyang to expand her skills with other young workers on a construction site, she immediately heads to the state circus. One thing leads to another, and eventually the determined Yong-Mi gets her own shot at trapeze stardom. *Comrade Kim* is a "taboo breaker" in North Korea, says Daelemans. The country in fact has an active film industry, but all the scripts are subject to state censorship, which insists on propaganda messages of an ever-victorious and morally pure North Korea. Some of their films have been known to rewrite history. Aside from these movies, North Koreans see very little cinema. Once a week, a foreign film is shown on the state-run television channel, usually a Chinese or Russian drama. Foreign films

are not shown in cinemas, with the exception of the annual Pyongyang International Film Festival, which screens movies from around the world. The films are carefully chosen, avoiding, for instance, any sex, but the locals still flock to the festival to get a glimpse of the outside world.

### Keeping it real

*Comrade Kim*, though, is one of theirs – and yet different. "The main character is a woman, and there is no strong man next to her," explains Daelemans. "She does her own thing and follows her own dream. And the men she works with support her in that. In North Korea, that kind of film doesn't exist."

For westerners, it's a different kind of film, too, a kind of throwback to 1960s Disney movies in which charmingly naive young people solve crimes or get mixed up in other adventures. It feels like a movie for

children: I have no doubt that if *Comrade Kim* was dubbed in Dutch, it would be a sure-fire hit in Flanders. And yet it's a strangely fascinating movie for adults, too, intercut with creative animation sequences, carried out in Belgium, and oddly nationalistic lines like: "The working class can do anything if we believe in ourselves!" or "Everything can be achieved with a revolutionary spirit" or "You are the daughter of our coal mine and of Korea".

According to Daelemans, this kind of dialogue makes the movie authentically North Korean, which was very important to them. "If you take out those lines, then it becomes something the North Korean people would not understand, and it would remove all the local colour," Daelemans explains. "As much as possible, we took away the kind of ideology that you always find in North Korean movies, but you cannot take away everything because then the North Koreans wouldn't recognise it as their own. But we do not consider it a propaganda film at all."

Neither does South Korea, which made an exception to its policy of never screening North Korean films and included *Comrade Kim* in its Busan Film Festival last autumn. "People came up to us afterwards and thanked us for making a non-propaganda film in North Korea," notes Daelemans. The North Koreans are equally enthusiastic; 50,000 there have so far seen the film. Daelemans is hesitant to say that this success will open up North Korea to more co-operations with the west. But she also thinks that the west doesn't try very hard. "Through the whole process, there was respect and trust, and we tried to find common ground to overcome cultural differences," she says. "There were no hidden agendas. We did not go in there and play the leaders. If you respect and trust one another, you can get very far."

► [www.comradekimgoesflying.com](http://www.comradekimgoesflying.com)

# Docville film festival returns to Leuven

Avid viewers of documentaries realise that the greatest films in the genre are as edge-of-your-seat exciting as any crime-drama. They can take a subject you've never considered or cared about in your entire life and convince you that there has never been a better story than this. (This is, after all, from where reality TV got all its ideas.)

Many of the best documentaries released over the last year are to be found in Leuven this week at the annual festival Docville. Often these movies begin when filmmakers hear stories that they just can't forget.

Take the opening film, *The Imposter* by British director Bart Layton, his feature debut. He had read an article in the *New Yorker* that he couldn't get out of his head. You won't get his documentary out of your head, either. It is the story of a Texas family, whose 13-year-old son disappeared in the mid-1990s. Three years later, a young man was found in Spain who claimed to be that son. The family took him in, and what follows is a mind-bending journey strewn with denial, secrets

and allegations that, as they unfold, become more and more bewildering.

Altogether different, though no less a must-see, is *The Gatekeepers*. Filmmaker Dror Moreh manages to do interviews with the previous six heads of Shin Bet, Israel's renowned intelligence agency. What he gets them to admit about how they feel about their previous actions and their own country is pure political thriller area.

The festival files films under several themes. In the Shift-Ctrl section, you won't be disappointed by American director Brian Knappenberger's *We Are Legion*, a look at the early online network Anonymous and the hackers who dwelled there. In the National section, check out *The Circle* by Flemish director Bram Conjaerts, who hovers on the border between Switzerland and France in search of citizens with opinions about the Large Hadron Collider lying 100 metres below their feet. LB



The unreliable narrator of *The Imposter*



ARRIVING AT ELLIS ISLAND

# RED STAR LINE MUSEUM GRAND OPENING

ANTWERP, SEPT. 27<sup>TH</sup> 2013

Between 1873 and 1935 more than 2 million passengers boarded the Red Star Line in search of a better life on the other side of the ocean. On the historical site where the ships left the continent behind, the city of Antwerp is restoring the original buildings that will tell the story of those courageous emigrants. Help us keep alive the memory of the Red Star Line and its passengers.

**HELP US BUILD A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE USA AND EUROPE.  
BECOME A PARTNER OF THE RED STAR LINE MUSEUM.**

More information: [www.redstarline.org](http://www.redstarline.org)



STAD ANTWERPEN



[www.redstarline.org](http://www.redstarline.org)

# Meeting of minds and bodies

**Visit extinct animals, check out a living library book or sit in on courtroom drama at Kunstenfestivaldesarts**

Jacqueline Fletcher

It's been a long, cold, grey winter, but one sure sign that spring is here is the opening of Kunstenfestivaldesarts (KFDA). The festival kicks off this Friday for three weeks of performance, dance, theatre, film and installations. It's a veritable feast for the senses and the mind to drive away the hibernal blues.

During KFDA, Brussels will be abuzz with 33 productions in 20 theatres and arts centres as well as unusual venues: Prepare to be surprised by performances and interventions in shops, libraries, offices and the street. Accompanying the programme are talks, book presentations and educational events as well as a central meeting point with food and late-night entertainment. You can see a show, get into discussions with the artists and generally indulge yourself in the conviviality of the capital's most international annual festival. Approaching its 20th birthday, the KFDA was originally conceived as a bilingual, local festival bridging the artistic divide between the north and south of Belgium. For more than a decade now the festival has been largely tri-lingual (Dutch, French and English) and has been treating the multicultural communities rubbing shoulders in Brussels to works from across the globe as well as the latest work by home-grown talent.

## 16 countries

This year, there will be new works from world-renowned Flemish choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, filmmaker Sarah Vanagt, interdisciplinary artist and theatremaker Kris Verdonck, as well as a new play by infinitely inventive Claude Schmitz and a new choreography by the very original Pierre Droulers.

The internationally acclaimed giant of music-theatre, German composer Heiner Goebbels, returns



Visit the Royal Library to check out a "living book"

with his latest co-production with Vocal Theatre Carmina Slovenica. Performers from 16 countries are arriving in Brussels, including Mexico, Japan, Argentina, Brazil, Russia and Portugal. Many of the performances are English, and all works will have surtitles in Dutch and French.

While the KFDA's programme is not grouped around a theme, festival director Christophe Slagmuylder mentions fear in his foreword to the festival brochure this year: the fear that is generated by times of uncertainty and fragility, turning individuals and societies in on themselves and straining democratic processes.

How apt then is an international festival that stimulates the imagination and prompts thought and debate through our interactions with artists and each other? In trying times, we need creativity and the imagination to seek a way forward, to investigate our common humanity together through the arts and to confront the failings of the mass media.

This year the festival takes a broad

and challenging approach. Antonia Baehr from Berlin and Jozef Wouters from Antwerp cast a daring eye on our relationship with nature. Sanja Mitrović (Amsterdam), Tiago Rodrigues (Lisbon), Sarah Vanhee (Ghent) and Markus Öhrn (Berlin) deal with communication, what is left unsaid, what is censored, what is manipulated through oratory and the possibility of a collective dialogue itself in the age of mass media and advertising. Festival stalwart Mariano Pensotti translates cinematographic codes to the stage, and Toshiki Okada returns with another of his hilarious takes on the embarrassment and paralysis inherent in Japanese social conformism.

## "Living book"

If you are of a literary persuasion, you can order a "living book", an actor who has memorised a book and is waiting in the Royal Belgian Library to give you your own personal recital. If you are a dance aficionado, choreographer Bouchra Ouizguen's company of "loose women" from Marrakech blends the Aitus cabaret tradition with Sufi music to confound

marginalisation.

Marcelo Evelin returns to the festival from the fringes of Brazil with his new, exotic and very unique choreography inspired by Elias Canetti's essay "Crowds and Power". If you fancy something with political pith, Milo Rau (Berlin/Moscow) has staged a court room drama exploring Russia in the aftermath of the Pussy Riot trial of 2012.

Lagartijas tiradas al sol, meanwhile, scrutinise Mexican politics by intertwining personal and collective histories over three generations. In her film *Dust Breeding*, the Brussels-based Vanagt turns her sharp gaze on the images of war, the fact and the fiction they represent in the documentation collected for the International Criminal Tribunal of the former Yugoslavia in The Hague.

She She Pop use autobiographical materials to engage their audiences with a profoundly moving and personal account of the reunification of Germany 20 years on.

The festival centre this year is in the Beursschouwburg, where Öhrn's *Magic Bullet*, a 49-hour-and-13-minute loop of all the footage cut from Swedish films by the censors since 1934, will be running (admission is free).

So, to return to the idea of a festival without a theme, one can nonetheless discern certain ideas conjoining around what is going on in the world today: the domestication of bodies and ideas, the resistance to that domestication, and the role of art in fiction and reality. As Flemish dramaturge Lars Kwakkenbos writes in the afterword to the programme: "Living presupposes an inside and an outside ... How great can the discrepancy be between a story and an image and the surrounding world?"

So, cancel all your appointments for the next three weeks and find some answers at the Kunstenfestivaldesarts.

► [www.kfda.be](http://www.kfda.be)

## WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Flemish films won 298 prizes in festivals in 2012, more than twice the 113 won the year before, the Flanders Audiovisual Fund announced last week at the presentation of its annual report. There were 100,000 less tickets sold to Flemish films and co-productions within Belgium in 2012 compared to the year before, which, the organisation said, had to do with more art house cinema than family or more popular genres being produced. The top-grossing Flemish film was *The Broken Circle Breakdown*, which logged just over 355,300 viewers. The film also won Best Script and Best Actress for *Veerle Baetens* last week at the influential Tribeca Film Festival in New York.

Flemish singer and pianist Lien De Greef, better known as Lady Linn, has scored an international dance hit with her cover of E.S.P.'s "It's You". It's being played in clubs the world over, and this spring De Greef will head to both London and Ibiza for club appearances. De Greef is best known in Flanders for her big band sound, with hits like "I Don't Wanna Dance" and "Here We Go Again". "Whether it's jazz, pop, soul or dance, it doesn't matter. To me, it's all music," says the 31-year-old. "My taste is all over the place." Next year will see the release of the third album by Lady Linn and the Magnificent Seven. "And it will sound completely different than what my fans are used to," she confirms.

► [www.ladylinn.be](http://www.ladylinn.be)

Three Flemish TV series and one co-production were screened during Séries Mania, a television series festival in Paris that came to a close last weekend. The festival is in its fourth year and programmes the most creative series from around the world. *Clan*, *Quiz Me Quick* and *Deadline 14/10* were on the programme, as well as the Flemish-British co-production *Parade's End*. Bozar in Brussels, meanwhile, launches Belgium's first ever TV series festival next month.

► [www.series-mania.fr](http://www.series-mania.fr)

Ten finalists have been chosen from the nearly 200 local and international composers who entered the Music for Carparks competition, a co-operation between Interparking and Bruges' Concertgebouw. The winner will have his or her music heard in hundreds of parking garages across Europe. Six of the finalists are Flemish and the other four are from the Netherlands. The winner will be announced on 7 May.

► [www.musicforcarparks.com](http://www.musicforcarparks.com)

## RECOMMENDED AT KFDA

### Dance:

Anna-Teresa de Keersmaeker/Boris Charmatz

*Partita 2*

World premiere of two extraordinarily talented dancer/choreographers, performing on a bare stage save for one violinist playing Bach's *Partita for violin No 2*

**Selma and Sofiane Ouissi Laaroussa**

The brother-and-sister Tunisian dancer/choreographers' intimate new production is based on the repetitive gestures of a group of pottery makers

### Installation:

Jozef Wouters Zoological Institute for Recently Extinct Species

The Flemish installation artist has added a temporary wing onto Brussels Museum of Natural Sciences to display his archive of extinct animal species and critical moments in natural history

### Film:

Sarah Vanagt *Dust Breeding*

The fact and the fiction represented by images of war in the documentation collected for the International Criminal Tribunal of the former Yugoslavia in The Hague

### Music theatre:

Kris Verdonck/A Two Dogs Company *H, An Incident*

The Flemish performance artist summons the spirit of 20th-century Russian writer and dissident Daniil Harms for this opera featuring robotic musical instruments and a choir of Icelandic singers

**Heiner Goebbels** *When the Mountain Changed its Clothing*

The brilliant German composer plunges 35 young singers from the Carmina Slovenica vocal ensemble into a diverse musical and

literary forest that explores childhood rites of passage

### Theatre:

**She She Pop** *Schubladen (Drawers)*

Six women born on either side of the Berlin Wall take memories out of their drawers: letters, diaries, photos, records... weaving a profoundly human story that exposes the ideological divide between the two Germanies

**Mariano Pensotti** *Cineastas*

One of the most sought-after multi-media directors in the world today premieres his latest, which follows four film directors and the cities in which their new movies take place

**Toshiki Okada** *Ground and Floor*

One of Japan's leading voices in art, his new production questions the possibility of thinking differently in a society paralysed by conformism

*The renaissance in print*

# Hieronymus Cock

Tom Peeters

How do you think citizens living in Flanders centuries ago were introduced to the finest of paintings? How did they get acquainted with the monumental frescoes of Raphael in the Vatican, Bruegel's series of *The Seven Virtues* and *The Seven Deadly Sins*, or Rogier van der Weyden's "Descent from the Cross", hanging somewhere in a private castle owned by Philip II of Spain?

Of course, there were already fakes entering the market, but an answer far closer to the truth is print, now also the subject of an exhibition at Museum M in Leuven. It focusses on *Antwerpnaar* Hieronymus Cock, the most important printmaker of the 16th century. Together with his wife, he was one of the first in northern Europe to establish a publishing company for prints.

More than 200 rare and fragile works on paper offer a broad overview of the output of Aux Quatre Vents (At the Sign of the Four Winds), the publishing house Cock founded in 1548. "He had chosen the right time and the right

place," says curator Joris Van Grieken, a conservator at the Royal Library of Belgium's print gallery.

"Antwerp was, with its 100,000 inhabitants, the largest and wealthiest city in north-western Europe – meaning a big market for local and international trade," he continues. "It was also a magnet for artistic talent, with about 300 professional painters and a good choice of engravers and etchers to turn paintings into prints." Furthermore, Cock convinced the Italian master engraver Georgio Ghisi to settle in Antwerp for several years in the 1550s, a blessing for junior engravers who could study with him. All this aside, we wouldn't speak of Hieronymus Cock today if it weren't for his commercial brilliance. "He knew how to target an audience, small or big, rich or poor," explains Van Grieken. "He had many wealthy clients but also produced large amounts of cheap devotional print, for a broad public. Also, the vulgar scenes of Hieronymus Bosch were in large demand. For mass production, he kept the price low: You could buy



"Big Fish Eat Little Fish" (1557), engraving by Pieter van der Heyden after Pieter Bruegel the Elder

an individual print for a price equal to the daily wage of an unschooled labourer."

Cock asked the soon-to-be-famous Pieter Bruegel the Elder to sign his drawings with "Bosch" because

he knew they would sell better. Commissioned by the publisher, Bruegel would design dozens of prints, spreading both their reputations across Europe. "Their long-term partnership was a win-win situation,"

says Van Grieken.

Bruegel took advantage of Cock's large artistic, political and business network. It included, for instance, Antwerp printer-publisher Christopher Plantin and cardinal Granvelle, not only one of the most influential politicians under the reign of Charles V but also a big admirer of the fine arts and a prime investor in Cock's prints.

The pioneering way in which Cock defined and exploited the public image of artists is only one of the seven central themes of the exhibition, which gives the visitor a clearer perspective on a world that slowly opened itself up, thanks to these new printing methods, which could reproduce images of faraway landscapes, historical battles, architectural monuments, country maps and so on.

Even the impressive funeral procession held in Brussels in 1558 in honour of Charles V comes to life: The prestigious 12 metre-long etching was designed by Cock and coloured entirely by hand.

Until 9 June | M Museum, Vanderkelenstraat 28, Leuven

► [www.mleuven.be](http://www.mleuven.be)

## SPECIAL EVENT

### European Institutions Open Day

This weekend all of Brussels will be humming with activity during the annual Iris Festival. But if you listen closely, you'll also hear a buzz coming from the European Quarter as all the buildings open their doors to the public during the annual Open Day. A free miniature train will act as a shuttle throughout the day, stopping at the various buildings, including the Parliament, Council and Commission, among others. Come and see where the heads of state and governments of the 27 EU countries make critical decisions that affect us all. On the Esplanade, everyone is welcome to take part in a debate on the European Year of Citizens, to discover how Parliament works and to learn about your rights as a European citizen. There are also plenty of concerts and other fun activities for all ages. **Robyn Boyle**



4 May, 10.00-18.00 | Across European Quarter, Brussels

► [www.europa.eu/opendoors](http://www.europa.eu/opendoors)

## MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

### Brussels

**Tok Toc Knock III:** Flanders' royal theatre KVS presents works by performing artists in surprising locations, including Thomas Bellinck's new museum devoted to Europe and Benjamin Verdonck's very unusual meeting place on the Friche Eggevoort site. The programme also includes a debate, music, walks and comedy

**MAY 3-25 across the European Quarter**

► [www.kvs.be](http://www.kvs.be)

### Poperinge

**Trappist Beer Tasting:** Come and taste six of the eight officially recognised (and highly sought after) Trappist brews for just €12

**MAY 3 20.00-23.00 at Hopmuseum, Gasthuisstraat 71**

► [www.hopmuseum.be](http://www.hopmuseum.be)

## FESTIVAL

### De Bom in Gent

Don't let the name scare you: De Bom (The Bomb) is a freewheeling arts festival near the Brugsepoort in Ghent, set up by social artistic group Bij De Vieze Gasten. This seventh edition follows the same simple concept as usual: a slew of young, talented artists occupy the neighbourhood for four days, taking over more than 50 original locations and gracing them with various forms of artistic expression. Many locals even put their houses at the artists' disposal for the occasion, so expect to pop into a few living rooms, gardens, attics, and basements, as well as shops, squares, streets ... Numerous disciplines are represented at De Bom, including theatre, comedy, circus, music and photography. Never have there been so many fine examples of contemporary art concentrated in this one surprising area of Ghent. Every art-filled day ends with a lively concert at 22.30 at Bij De Vieze Gasten (Haspelstraat 31). **RB**



8-11 May | Brugsepoort, Ghent

► [www.debom.be](http://www.debom.be)

## MORE FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

### Brussels

**Iris Festival:** Brussels annual outdoor music and street theatre festival, featuring Hooverphonic (with orchestra) and activities for children

**MAY 4-5 across Brussels**

► [www.irisfeest.be](http://www.irisfeest.be)

**Les Nuits Botanique:** Annual 10-day music fest featuring long concert-filled days and even longer after-party nights with genres ranging from rock to world to soul

**MAY 2-13 at Botanique and Koninklijk Circus**

► [www.botanique.be](http://www.botanique.be)

### Ostend

**Kleur 2013:** Free world music festival on the beach featuring reggae, hip hop, gipsy and world music, plus stands serving up world cuisine, including Jamaican, Indian and Cameroonian

**MAY 3-4 at Strandplein, Namenstraat 1**

► [www.bigrhythms.org](http://www.bigrhythms.org)

## CLASSICAL

### Wichelen Festival

It has a pretty enough church and flat fields stretching as far as the eye can see, but the main reason to visit the East Flemish town of Wichelen this month is its tiny classical music festival, which proudly celebrates its fifth edition. It still only has three concerts – even Glyndebourne started small – but the young musicians lined up are as promising as they come. These include the horn player Jeroen Billiet, who's played with Marc Minkowski and Jos van Immerseel; the cellist Sarah Dupriez, who's had a cello in her hands from as far back as she can remember; an intriguing vocal quartet called R.E.V.E; and the Suys String Quartet, made up of four members of the same family. The programme this year revolves around Beethoven, whose great-grandfather came from nearby Mechelen. A homecoming of sorts. **Marie Dumont**



9-11 May | Kloosterkapel St Vincentius

► [www.wichelenfestival.be](http://www.wichelenfestival.be)

### MORE CLASSICAL MUSIC THIS WEEK

#### Brussels

**Anima Eterna Brugge:** The ensemble delve into Mozart, with Sandrine Piau singing the composer's much-loved concert arias while Jos Van Immerseel joins Japanese pianist Yoko Kaneko for a double piano concerto

**MAY 6 20.00 at Royal Brussels Conservatory, Regentstraat 30**

► [www.bozar.be](http://www.bozar.be)

#### Duffel (Antwerp province)

**If Music Be the Food of Love, Play On!:** Annual old music concert by the Kunstfabriek, this time from 17th- and 18th-century England

**MAY 5 15.00 at Sint-Martinus Church, Kerkstraat**

► [www.tinyurl.com/ifmusicduffel](http://www.tinyurl.com/ifmusicduffel)

#### Ghent

**Brahms and Mendelssohn:** Choirs Schola Cantorum and Canta Ludens bring a selection of works by Brahms and Mendelssohn, performed inside Ghent's stunning St-Baaf's Cathedral

**MAY 3 20.00 at Sint-Baafspllein 4**

► [www.scholacantorum.be/jaarconcert](http://www.scholacantorum.be/jaarconcert)

## CONCERT

### Pink Martini

Pink Martini may describe itself as a "little orchestra", but there's nothing little about it. Formed by pianist and composer Thomas Lauderdale of Portland, Oregon, in 1994, the 13-member group got its start making big political statements. Drawing inspiration from world music and combining elements of classical, jazz and pop, Lauderdale's goal was to provide soundtracks for political fundraisers focusing on causes important to him, such as civil rights and public broadcasting. He got fellow Harvard student China Forbes to provide vocals, and "Sympathique", the first song they wrote together, was an instant success in France. In fact, the song's lyrics "Je ne veux pas travailler" (I don't want to work) remain a mantra for striking French workers to this day. Pink Martini's musicians represent a colourful array of musical influences, while Forbes sings fluently in no less than 15 languages. **RB**



10 May, 20.00 | Bozar, Brussels | ► [www.bozar.be](http://www.bozar.be)

### MORE CONCERTS THIS WEEK

#### Antwerp

**Red Bull Bedroom Jam:** The finale of the rock competition finds 10 bands competing for your vote to get the chance to play at Graspop or Dour this summer

**MAY 5 14.00 at Trix, Noordersingel 28**

► [www.trixonline.be](http://www.trixonline.be)

#### Ghent

**Bent van Looy:** Solo performance by the multi-talented Flemish musician, Das Pop frontman, Soulwax drummer, fashion designer and painter, to promote his new album. If you miss it, get tickets now to the Brussels show in October at AB

**MAY 9 19.00 at Minardschouwburg, Walpoortstraat 15, Ghent**

► [www.minard.be](http://www.minard.be)

#### Hasselt

**Daan:** The Flemish musician performs his unique blend of indie, electro, rock and classical music from new album *Le Franc Belge*, a shout out to the sounds of his 1970s childhood

**MAY 4 20.00 at Muziekodroom, Bootstraat 9**

► [www.muziekodroom.be](http://www.muziekodroom.be)

### DUSK TIL DAWN

Katrien Lindemans

### Fade In Festival

8 May, from 20.00  
Tour & Taxis, Brussels

During the month of May, most of us get treated to a few official holidays. There's May Day on the 1st, Ascension Day on the 9th and Pentecost Monday on the 20th. A mid-week day off allows for a mid-week party, don't you agree? If you're into electronic music, you'll love the new Fade In Festival at Tour & Taxis in Brussels.

For the electronic music festival, German techno festival Time Warp teamed up with Brussels best-loved club Fuse for a night "focusing on the essence of underground electronic music". Time Warp has been hosting such parties for nearly 20 years now, with festivals across the border in Italy and The Netherlands.

With the Fade In Festival, they're looking for some Belgian attention, too. One glance at the line-up, and it's more than clear that they're trying their very best to make a good first impression.

The night will take place in three different rooms, each with its own character and sound ... "waiting for you to fade in". In Fade Room 1, you'll meet Richie Hawtin (UK), one of the most famous names in electronic music worldwide. Germany's top DJ Sven Väth will be there also; he's got more than two decades of experience behind the decks and is one of Time Warp's favourite headliners.

In Fade Room 2, pounding techno beats by, amongst others, Chris Liebing (Germany) and the unique sound of the Scotsman Gary Bakk will see you through the night. Finally, in Fade Room 3, you'll be in the good

company of Ben UFO (UK) and his funk, dubstep, techno and house beats as well as our very own Locked Groove (Antwerp, *pictured*).

Tickets are €48 in advance at Fnac, Free Record Shop and online.

► [www.fade-in-festival.com](http://www.fade-in-festival.com)



## BITE

## Lotus Root ★★★★

As soon as I hear the voice on the other line, I realise we are two Americans speaking Dutch to each other. "Ah, we might as well speak English," I say, laughing. And with that, Caroline Buensalido, Californian foodie and sommelier, kindly takes down our weekday lunch reservation for four.

My friends and I arrive at noon and are seated in the cheery dining room. Caroline is with us straight away to introduce the concept of California-inspired cuisine and tell us about this unique restaurant in rural East Flanders, which she and her chef husband started 10 years ago.

After completing culinary school, Flemish chef Jan Verhelst moved to California to broaden his horizons. You could say "mission accomplished", for not only did he meet his wife, he also came into contact with a whole new array of exotic products and cooking techniques in Californian cuisine, which is intertwined with south-east Asian and Japanese cooking. He returned to Flanders with his own signature style, one that perfectly combines the French tradition with light, colourful and healthy innovations.

The five-course lunch starts with a Gillardeau oyster from the west coast of France, garnished with soy sauce, ginger oil, *sriracha* (a Vietnamese chilli sauce), a touch of calamansi *gelée* (a south-east Asian citrus fruit) and nutty tahoon cress. Fresh, tart, briny and spicy – this single oyster packs a lot of flavour.

The first course is a crunchy apple and fennel salad topped with gel of pomelo (another south-east Asian citrus fruit) and a sprig of red *shiso*, or Japanese mint. Everyone at our table is thrilled to be introduced to so many new and interesting ingredients.

Next up is a long strip of mackerel with miso sauce, roe and a slice of avocado. A few leaves of chili cress look like decoration, but their taste is powerful and peppery. It matches well with

the strong-flavoured, oily mackerel. We're already rather in awe when the next course makes another good impression: a hunk of *skrei*, or Norwegian cod, rests upon a bed of wokked garlic-ginger rapini leaves and *beurre blanc* made from young carrots and coconut milk. The presentation of the dish is made even more beautiful with a circle of flan and dash of white corn powder.

The main course is an ample slab of lamb from Scotland cooked *sous vide* (in a warm water bath) for a minimum of three hours. The meat is incredibly tender, but its Moroccan-style *jus* with cumin is the dominant flavour. The dish comes with buttermilk puree, eggplant caviar and prawn crackers tossed in Moroccan spices.

Chef Jan does well by making the next dish light and refreshing. A scoop of blackberry sorbet comes served in a deep, colourful bowl surrounded by foam of ginger and lush Greek yoghurt. By now we're ready for a more bold dessert, and it comes in the form of a dark chocolate twist with a crispy cacao crumble, a dot of avocado, a touch of tangy lemon curd and astina cress for a little anise kick.

Coffee comes with a slate of all-homemade, all-delicious *mignardises*, including frozen calamansi jellies, Grand Marnier truffles, wine gums made from Lustau East India Sherry and gooey chocolate marshmallows rolled in sesame seeds and sea salt or grated coconut.

Just when we think we're finished, the finale arrives: fluffy, fresh-baked financier cakes made from matcha green tea and almonds. They're still warm.

This flavour expedition lasts three whole hours and comes to just €60 apiece. We all agree to come back one evening to relive the experience and enhance it with pairings of California wine.

► [www.lotusroot.net](http://www.lotusroot.net)



Restaurateurs Jan Verhelst and Caroline Buensalido bring a little California to East Flanders

► Stationsstraat 33, Nazareth (East Flanders); 09.280.07.77

⌚ Wed-Fri & Sun 12.00-14.00 & 19.00-21.00; Sat 19.00-21.00

€ Menus: €45-€90

ℹ Intricate fusion cuisine by a knowledgeable and passionate Flemish-Californian couple

## TALKING SPORTS

### A word for the unknowns

Leo Cendrowicz

It's been a miserable year so far for Flemish fans of two of their most bankable sports in recent years.

In cycling, where Flanders hosts many of the top races and where Eddy Merckx is still revered as a demi-god, it has been a barren harvest. In the key one-day classics – the Tour of Flanders, Liège-Bastogne-Liège, La Flèche Wallonne, the Amstel Gold Race, Paris-Roubaix, the E3 Harelbeke and Gent-Wevelgem – not a single Flemish name has topped the podium. This comes after two years in which Tom Boonen and Philippe Gilbert seemed to carve up those prizes between them.

Nor is tennis faring any better. Kim Clijsters is a distant memory now that Belgium – beaten 4-1 by Poland two weekends ago – has just been relegated to the third tier of the Fed Cup, the Group One Euro-African zone.

Are there hopes elsewhere? In boxing, Ghent's Jean-Pierre Bauwens is a promising talent, overcoming a rough background, with a father shot dead at his home where he lived with his six brothers and sisters. But Bauwens has just missed his tilt at the European super-featherweight title, recently losing against the Spaniard Ruben Nieto. Knocked down in the early rounds, he fought back but ultimately lost on a points decision.

Can football offer some solace?



Zulte Waregem captain Davy De Fauw (left) up against Standard Liege's Kensuke Nagai in a Jupiler Pro League play-off match last month

As the season draws to a close, the Jupiler Pro League is offering perhaps the year's best underdog story. After six games in the play-offs, tiny Zulte Waregem top the table, showing a verve and vim that more established rivals seem to have forgotten. Victories over Anderlecht and Club Brugge helped the so-called Essevee rise to the top of the play-offs with four games remaining. This is, after all, a West Flanders side from a town of 36,000 people, and their Regenboogstadion, or Rainbow

## The last word...

### Golden oldies

"We're happy to see those people arriving. They've got money, and they're very active. They bring some atmosphere to the place."

Marc Vanden Bussche, mayor of Koksijde, on news that the coastal resorts are ageing twice as fast as the rest of Flanders

### Show business

"Rihanna gets to appear naked on her CD cover, but if I show up in a swimsuit, it's a scandal. People who don't like it can just shut their eyes."

Flemish singer Natalia on her new CD cover

### Tax declaration

"What I'm saying might cost me a lot of money, and other CEOs won't appreciate it. But I simply want a fair system where everyone who can pays a fair amount." Marc Coucke, CEO of Omega Pharma, is happy to pay more tax

## NEXT WEEK IN FLANDERS TODAY

### Cover story

Are you constantly harangued by the noise of a busy city? People who live in the centre of Brussels have the best and worst that city life has to offer – both of which are hustle and bustle. Sometimes you just want a little peace and quiet, and we found an organisation – and even a festival – that will show you where to find it

### News

Academia is buzzing with predictions of who might become the next rector of the University of Leuven. Will it be former politician and canon law professor Rik Torfs, who some consider a shoo-in? Or will there, as some hope, be an upset? We talk to all four candidates to see what changes they would implement should they be chosen to lead Flanders' oldest university

### Living

Cooking shows continue to dominate the TV landscape. (Would you believe me if I told you my colleagues are talking about *Master Chef* right this very second?) It may not have been televised, but tensions were still high at the first BE European Cooking Contest, a competition specifically for expats. We'll tell you what was on the menu, who won and if we can expect this fun event every year