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# Ahead of the curve

## Flanders is bucking a European trend with lucrative returns from its biotech industry

Senne Starckx

Flanders has become a real hub for biotechnology, with half the biotech shares traded these days on the Euronext stock exchange belonging to companies based here. So what exactly is biotech, and what's the secret of the region's success?

Last month, more than 16,000 visitors from 65 countries gathered in Chicago for the annual Bio International Convention, the world's largest event for the biotech industry. It's a little like the World's Fair, with a Belgian pavilion that gathers the country's participating companies. There, visitors to the convention – not tourists, but businessmen representing other biotech firms – were

introduced to, apart from waffles, fries and beer, another of our prestigious exports: biotechnology.

That's what biotech has become in recent years – and it's one of Flanders' fastest-growing economic sectors. Last year, Flemish biotech experienced its *annus mirabilis* and the sector was able to reap the harvest, thanks to lucrative deals with major pharmaceutical companies. ThromboGenics in Leuven, for example, received the green light from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to launch on the American market its drug Jetrea, which cures a particular eye disease.

"Last year, each of the six Flemish biotech firms listed on the stock exchange were able to double their market value," says Ann De Beuckelaer, managing director of FlandersBio

(see sidebar, page 3). "For these companies, raising money from the market has proved to be a very useful instrument to finance new activities."

In biotechnology, existing living systems or organisms are used to develop useful products. It is often associated with genetic engineering and DNA manipulation – like in genetically modified organisms and gene therapy. But actually, biotechnology is as old as humankind itself. Thousands of years ago, early farmers collected seeds from plants with the most desirable traits for planting the following year. And the same selective breeding practices were used to improve livestock.

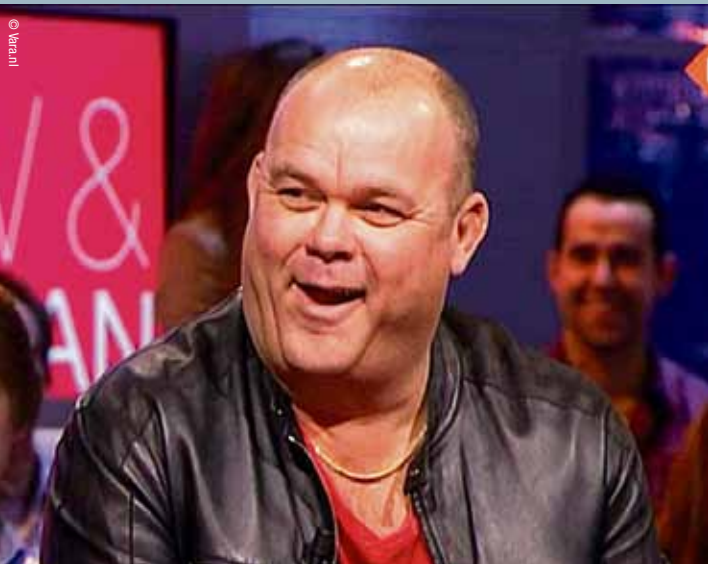
The current success of Flemish biotech is a real anomaly in the wider European perspective. Since 2005, Flanders



FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope

Paul De Leeuw



When TV presenter Paul De Leeuw arranged for two men to smoke a joint on last week's edition of his VTM show *Manneke Paul*, it raised hackles all over and led to threats of legal action against VTM. It was the latest in a long line of outrages for a man who has made it his business to *épater les bourgeois* – and a very successful business it is, too. De Leeuw is not Flemish: He's Dutch through and through, though year after year Flemish television viewers vote him their favourite foreign presenter. In March he was awarded a Flemish Television Star award for his VTM show, a version of his Dutch show with mainly Flemish guests. Paul Henri De Leeuw was born in Rotterdam in 1962 and studied in Delft to become a teacher. There he discovered a hankering to be an artist and applied unsuccessfully to switch to the theatre academy in Maastricht. Undaunted, he took part in the Cameretten cabaret festival in Delft, won the personality prize, and was asked back as host the following year. Since then he's done just about everything in showbiz: radio, TV presenter, singer, game-show

host, recording artist, scriptwriter, producer and film actor. He's also a crusader for gay rights, one of the highest-paid media figures in the Netherlands, and came in 86th place in a poll to find the greatest Dutch person of all time (won by the late Pim Fortuyn after William of Orange was disqualified for being German). Whatever his many talents, it's the constant sense of danger surrounding him which has ensured his continued success. He broke barriers when in 1990 his friend René Klijn, then dying of Aids, came on his show to talk openly and duet with him. He had one series pulled when he portrayed singer Anneke Grönloh as a drunk. He ripped a man's thong off on live television and won a lawsuit on the grounds that anyone ought to have foreseen his unpredictability. VTM will have to wait and see if the dope-smoking incident (which was never broadcast) will lead to another legal complaint. In the meantime they can enjoy the upside: De Leeuw was doing what his audience expects, and his audiences can only grow as a result.

News in brief

The Flemish government will not be introducing guidelines on the **wearing of religious or ideological symbols** by civil servants, administrative affairs minister Geert Bourgeois told the Flemish parliament. Last week, a group of academics, business leaders and politicians issued a joint letter calling for rules on the neutrality of civil servants. Bourgeois pointed out that the government's municipal decree places the responsibility for such codes of dress or conduct in the hands of the municipalities. At the Flemish government level, the responsibility is with the senior official involved. "I see no need to introduce new rules," he said.

QinetiQ Space in Kruibeke, East Flanders, **built the Proba-V satellite**, which the European Space Agency launched last week from its launch base in French Guyana. The 160kg satellite, measuring one cubic metre, will be used to map the world's vegetation twice a day. It's the third that the company has put into space.

Flemish sports minister Philippe Muyters has been unanimously approved by the 27 member states of the EU as an **expert on anti-doping policy** and will spend the next three years helping to form a global policy with the World Anti-Doping Agency. The EU has three representatives at the agency.

The administrators handling the break-up of the bankrupt **media services company Alfacam** have gathered the names of some 40 parties potentially interested in taking over parts of the business, with bids open until 20 May. They also announced redundancies for 30 of the company's 96 employees.

A black market in **cheap tickets for the Thalys train** in Brussels South Station has been uncovered. The sellers buy up tickets online when there are promotions, and then sell them for €40 apiece in the station. However, using a ticket issued in someone else's name can lead to fines and being refused permission to board.

Senate members Sabine de Bethune and Cindy Franssen, both CD&V, have proposed a bill that would ban the sale of food **products containing more than 2% trans-fat** as a proportion of total fat. They have based it on advice from the High Council for Health, which blames trans-fats for causing heart and vascular illnesses and increasing the risk of diabetes and thrombosis. Trans-fats are oils that have been processed into solid masses, like margarine.

The Dutch rail authority NS has asked the country's competition authorities to investigate plans by the city of **The Hague to launch a train service** linking the Dutch capital with Brussels. The NS wants to ensure its own competitive position is not under threat. The city began planning the new service after the existing Brussels-Amsterdam route, which passed through The Hague, was scrapped and replaced by the ill-fated Fyra line.

Anglers fishing in the moat of the Fort of Walem in Mechelen last week caught more than they bargained for – **a red-bellied piranha** measuring 14cm. The fish is native to the Amazon rain forest in Brazil and Paraguay and has never been seen in Flanders before, according to conservancy organisation Natuurpunt, which owns the fort and its grounds. The fish is likely to have been bought in a pet shop and

later released.

Flemish public transport authority De Lijn has **adapted its system of buying tickets via SMS** to include random 60-second delays between requesting and receiving the ticket. The change is an attempt to stop fare-dodgers who only send an SMS ticket request when they see controllers board the vehicle. In checks carried out using the new system last week, one in five SMS ticket buyers had attempted to avoid payment.

The Instituut Spijker in Hoogstraten, Antwerp province, has been voted the **Cooldest School in Flanders** for 2013 by listeners to the radio station MNM. The award is given to schools that "inspire and engage both inside and outside the school gates". The secondary school was rewarded with a live broadcast of the Planeet De Cock show and a concert featuring Brahim, Kato and *The Voice van Vlaanderen* winner Paulien.

Motor and cycle traffic in the area of Antwerp Airport in Deurne will be diverted for the next two years, after public works minister Hilde Crevits last week broke ground on a project to **build a tunnel under the airport**. The construction of the tunnel, which costs €54 million, is part of the plan to increase the Runway End Safety Area and will solve the problem of road traffic having to stop when an aircraft takes off or lands.

The Flemish government has **no intention of scrapping the rule** which gives priority for social buying property in certain areas to people with a demonstrable link to the local area, despite a ruling last week by the European Court of Justice which said the rule – the so-called Wooncode – was against EU law, housing minister Freya Van den Bossche said.

FLANDERS TODAY

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OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

You've got mail

Nobody likes unsolicited mail, so have a thought for Prince Filip last week, after *Knack* magazine asked five party chairpersons – all the main parties except Vlaams Belang, but including Jean-Marie Dedecker of LDD – to write to the crown prince in the aftermath of the enthronement of Willem-Alexander in the Netherlands and speculation on our own king's abdication. Bart De Wever (N-VA) sympathises with Filip over the weight of duty that hangs over him. "My first preference would be to relieve you of that duty," he writes. "That we require a fundamentally undemocratic institution like the monarchy to ensure political stability in this country – which I doubt, by the way – says more about this country than about the monarchy." Wouter Beke (CD&V) reminds Filip



of the divisions in the country, in perfect courtier's euphemism: "In recent decades, Flemish people often had the feeling that the royal house was not truly something of their own. I know that, just like the king, you are meticulous about bilingualism in all of your function, and objectively there is nothing with which to reproach you. But the perception is persistent, and

will therefore require an additional effort." Gwendolyn Rutten (Open VLD) advises: "Go on patrol with the police. Buy your own tickets online for Rock Werchter and join the traffic jams (without a motorcycle escort) on Monday morning. Ask Jeroen Meus to teach you how to make a tajine, and bake your own cupcakes for your children's birthday." Groen's Wouter Van Besien believes Filip must be bored with politics: "I think, in fact, if I may be so bold, that you shouldn't have anything to do with politics, not even when you shortly become king," he writes. Dedecker is without mercy. "I would not wish the unbearable lightness of your princely existence on anyone," he begins, before hammering him over "the princes and princesses of a royal puppet-show". "I feel for you, I really do."



# Ahead of the curve

## Flemish company's eye treatment profiting from green light in US and EU

► continued from page 1

has seen six new listings on the stock exchange, while the rest of the EU saw only five. "The market capitalisation of the Flemish biotech sector amounts to €3 billion. That's more than in each of the German, British and Swedish biotech sectors," says De Beuckelaer.

"We are also experiencing increased interest from the financial sector, especially from the US, to invest in our biotech companies. Of all the biotech shares traded on the international Euronext biotech index, more than 50% belong to Flemish companies." So what's the secret behind Flanders' success? De Beuckelaer: "Several factors are important. First, a start-up company needs excellent results from scientific research – preferably results under patent protection. A single patent is often not enough; you need a large portfolio, with several patents that allow you to broaden your field of application.

"Apart from professional management and a good business plan, the Flemish biotech companies also benefit from their membership of a tight knowledge and research and development (R&D) network. The research institutions and universities in Flanders all have professional 'tech transfer' teams that assist start-up biotech firms with patent demands, with their business plan and with the recruitment of their management team.

"Finally, there's the Flemish Agency for Innovation by Science and Technology (IWT), which is also a very important partner: Companies get financial support and case-specific guidance for their R&D. Without the IWT, Flemish biotech wouldn't have gained such a prominent position."

### Lucrative moves

Galapagos, a biotech company based in Mechelen, is a classic example of how a clever market introduction can trigger success. Galapagos specialises in the discovery and development of small molecule therapies, but when the company went to the Euronext stock market in May 2005, it hadn't produced a single approved drug that it could present to investors. "We only had a capability to identify and validate novel drug targets and were only starting to discover and develop new drugs that worked on those targets," says Elizabeth Goodwin, Galapagos director of investor relations. "The idea was to identify particular proteins that go out of balance and cause chronic diseases like rheumatism and cystic fibrosis. Our research was based on human cells, from patients with the disease for which we were looking to find new drug targets.

"New therapies that are developed based on drug targets identified in relevant patient cells could have better odds of yielding a working



Clockwise from top left: Cells need a medium with nutrients so they can grow. In this photo, the medium is being replaced; Researchers at Galapagos carry out light-sensitive experiment; Synthesizing compounds in the Galapagos lab

drug in the long run, by comparison with the traditional quest for drug targets using other approaches. Our approach met with approval from investors, resulting in €150 million in financing to date. With a public listing, we used our shares to do some all-share acquisitions, starting with the takeover of the British biotech company BioFocus. Without the listing, we would have had to find other ways to turn our ideas into drugs."

Last year, Galapagos signed a lucrative deal with pharmaceutical giant AbbVie to develop and commercialise the drug currently known as GLPG0634 (it will get a proper name in time), a new kind of drug that combats autoimmune diseases like rheumatism. "We are setting up a large-scale clinical trial to test the drug among 885 patients," Goodwin explains.

According to Goodwin, the success of companies like Galapagos is also because "big pharma" companies are desperately looking for new (patented) drugs: "The patents of a lot of big-selling drugs are coming to an end – and cheap, generic drugs will take over. So they have to discover new medicines to find new revenues. Their approach now is to outsource drug discovery

more and more to highly innovative biotech companies."

"It's all about bringing true innovation to the market," says Wouter Piepers, head of corporate communications at ThromboGenics, a biotech firm based in Leuven that specialises in the development of innovative drugs and therapies against eye diseases. "Once you've found a gap in the market, it's your mission to widen the possible field of applications, to increase the chances of commercial success."

### To the market

ThromboGenics was founded as Thromb-X in 1991 by professor Désiré Collen and the University of Leuven to develop drugs based on a protein called Plasminogen Activator (tPA). They discovered tPA in 1979 and found that it dissolved blood clots in patients experiencing a heart attack, significantly increasing their chances of survival.

After licensing tPA to the US biotech corporation Genentech in 1980, the company began years of research to optimise a biological substance called ocriplasmin. In 2010, it decided to commercialise it in the US, when approved, for

the treatment of the eye disease known as vitreomacular adhesion (VMA). This occurs when the

vitreous (a jelly-like substance in the eye) persistently sticks to the macula, the area at the back of the eye that converts light into images and provides central vision. Ocriplasmin targets key components of the area where the vitreous and retina meet to liquefy the vitreous and separate it from the retina.

Last year, ThromboGenics signed a deal with eyecare specialist Alcon (part of pharmaceutical corporation Novartis) to commercialise ocriplasmin outside the US. The resulting drug, Jetrea, was approved by the FDA last October and was launched in the US in January. It was approved by the European Medicines Agency in March and launched in the UK and then Germany.

The current treatment model is "watch and wait". As the disease progresses, patients typically undergo a costly and not entirely risk-free eye operation. With Jetrea, clinicians can treat symptomatic VMA without surgery as soon as it is detected.

"We estimate that 250,000 patients are suffering from this disease in the US," says Piepers. "And in the EU, there are 250,000 more." After the FDA's approval of Jetrea, ThromboGenics saw a doubling of its market value. Piepers: "The stock market has been instrumental for both funding and visibility."

Drug discovery is, for a relatively small company like ThromboGenics, a costly enterprise. And clinical trials are expensive, with no guarantee that you'll end up with a commercial product. It remains a bit of a gamble, and maybe that's why the stock market is such an ideal partner.

## A HELPING HAND

FlandersBio is the networking organisation for the life-science sector in Flanders, with more than 260 members. About half of its members are life science companies, of which 90% are active in health care. Not all are concerned with drug discovery, like ThromboGenics and Galapagos: Others specialise in medical technology, like cochlear implants for improved hearing or diagnostic tools for improved medical imaging. The remaining 10% are active in agricultural and industrial biotechnology.

On 30 May, FlandersBio holds its annual convention, called Knowledge for Growth, in Ghent. It's similar to the Chicago event, and is the largest regional biotech convention in Europe with more than 1,000 participants expected.

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



ThromboGenics' stand at last year's Knowledge for Growth event, organised by FlandersBio



# Train carriages hauled away from Wetteren

## School reopens, and most residents have returned home in aftermath of crash

Alan Hope

The town of Wetteren in East Flanders was gradually returning to normal this week, following the rail accident two weekends ago that led to a fire, toxic chemicals entering the sewer system and chaos for the rail network in the area. One elderly man died in his home from exposure to the fumes. This Monday saw the start of the operation to remove the damaged tanks from the scene of the accident, 10 days after the derailment of the train carrying the chemical acrylonitrile. The six rearmost carriages, which were not derailed, were hosed down and attached to a locomotive to be towed to Dendermonde, about 15km away.

Another seven derailed carriages, including those that contained the toxic chemical, will remain in place to be cut up and the pieces hauled away. Five empty carriages intended for a shipment of steel will be taken to Schaarbeek station in Brussels, where they will remain in case they are required by the crash investigators. A last undamaged carriage containing aluminium



couplings will go to Dendermonde, where its cargo will be transferred. The next job will be clean-up works on the ground at the scene of the accident. Water used to control the fire which followed the derailment has been pumped aboard two ships, containing a total of 2,800 cubic metres of contaminated water. According to reports, that water was due to be taken to Ghent to be

sanitised. Finally, work to repair the tracks and overhead cables will begin.

### Home again

Depending on the state of the ground at the scene, 47 residents who live within 250 metres of the accident will be able to return home sometime after 18 May. Last weekend police canvassed a number

of houses in Wetteren whose occupants had not been heard from since the accident. "There may be someone who has died, but we just don't know it yet," said East Flanders governor Jan Briers. As *Flanders Today* went to press, however, no casualties had been found. Three people remain in hospital as a result of toxic fumes.

On Monday this week the schools in Wetteren reopened, and Briers informed residents there was no longer any danger in eating fruit and vegetables grown in local gardens outside the 250m perimeter. Residents were advised not to use rainwater for plants or animals if it was collected prior to the accident. Rail infrastructure company Infrabel said it would reimburse the expenses incurred by local residents who had to leave their homes as a result of the accident. The offer was not to be construed as an admission of liability, a spokesman said. It has been reported that the train was travelling at excessive speeds, but the investigation into the exact cause of the accident is ongoing.

## Schauvliege considers noise levels in cinemas

The government will work with the cinema industry to ensure the protection of the hearing of patrons, especially children, from excessive noise levels, culture minister Joke Schauvliege said last week. It is not clear yet whether noise limits will have to be imposed.

Schauvliege last week released the results of an acoustic study carried out last year in five cinemas in Flanders, measuring noise levels in different parts of the cinema and under a variety of conditions. The cinemas selected represented the range in Flanders, from a multiplex to a small, independent cinema. They were: Cinema Albert in Dendermonde, Siniscoop in Sint-Niklaas, Kinepolis in Antwerp, Buda Arts Centre in Kortrijk and Utopolis in Turnhout.

The study measured noise levels during trailers, advertising and two movies: the animated film *Ice Age 4* and the action movie *The Expendables 2*. According to measurements taken, noise levels were on average fairly low and never at a dangerous level, even at peak moments.

It was also found that the sound levels of trailers and advertisements – the most common cause of complaints – were significantly less loud on average than scenes in the two films tested. At



present no general noise level applies to cinemas in Flanders, unlike concerts and music festivals, where new limits introduced last year were the cause of some controversy in the music industry. In this case, the industry is "pleased to be working in co-operation with the government on measures concerning noise levels," said Thierry Laermans of the Belgian Cinema Federation. "That will ensure a more enjoyable cinema experience."

## Seven held in airport diamond robbery

The masterminds behind the huge diamond robbery at Brussels Airport in February made a colossal blunder, according to investigators. Last week 31 men were detained after a police search operation involving 250 police at 40 locations. Seven men remain in custody.

However, the robbers – armed men dressed in police uniforms who drove on to the tarmac and held up the Swiss Airlines flight – were not out for diamonds, but for cash. It was revealed last week that one week prior to the raid at Zaventem, the same aircraft had carried a large sum of cash on board. Police assume the robbers were expecting the same to happen again.

"If they had found cash, there's every chance we'd still be looking for them today," unidentified detectives told *Het Nieuwsblad*. "But what they got as a haul they didn't know what to do with. Their attempt to find buyers for such a large quantity of diamonds made a lot of waves in criminal circles, and that's what did them in."

The seven men in custody have been charged with membership of a criminal organisation and possession of stolen goods. Their precise role in the robbery is still being investigated.

## FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

### Looking back

Reconstructions are a popular genre in political reporting. Sometimes, the past may be relevant in the present, as a recent documentary by VRT journalist Ivan De Vadder shows.

De Vadder looked back on events in 2006. Former judo coach Jean-Marie Dedecker had just been kicked out of his party (Open) VLD. His political career seemed over, until N-VA welcomed him into their midst. Back then, N-VA was not the powerful force it is today; in fact it was fighting for dear life. For this reason, it had entered a cartel with the much larger Christian-democrat CD&V.

Although both remained independent parties, CD&V was not happy to see Dedecker coming. The Christian-democrats found him too loud and too liberal and were worried about his reputation as a troublemaker. "My party is not a Spanish inn, where anyone can just walk in," Yves Leterme said. Within days, the cartel had ended.

This left N-VA president Bart De Wever with a tough choice. He either had to ensure N-VA's survival and mend the cartel, or go it alone, with Dedecker and an uncertain future ahead. De Wever chose the first option, but it left him heartbroken as he had to break his word with Dedecker, who once again found himself without a party. The images of Dedecker refusing to shake hands with De Wever in a TV make-up room have been shown time and time again.

At the time, De Wever feared the episode would mean the end of his career. In fact, it became a turning point. Whereas before few people had heard of him, De Wever became known for his honesty and for putting a human face on the rough trade that politics can be. Dedecker too benefitted, as he started his own, relatively successful party. The rest is history. In 2008, the CD&V/N-VA cartel split up after all, upon which N-VA became Flanders' number one party. De Wever, now mayor of Antwerp, is the most popular politician. After all these years, though, he still feels uncomfortable about the way he treated Dedecker.

The story may not be over just yet. Last week, there was a talk of a new rapprochement between Dedecker and N-VA. The senator – still very much his own man – has denied reports of him joining N-VA after all. It is the type of denial that always comes just before the actual events.

## THE WEEK IN FIGURES

**€270,000**

fine for supermarket chain Colruyt for breaching the laws forbidding tobacco advertising by offering discounts on cigarettes

**13%**

increase in enrolments in nursing courses since the start of a campaign to encourage young people to pursue a career in health care, welfare minister Jo Vandeurzen said

**25.1 tonnes**

of drugs seized last year at the country's airports and seaports, federal interior minister Joëlle Milquet told parliament. Antwerp saw the most: 23.7 tonnes compared to 10.5 tonnes in 2011

**82nd**

place for the University of Leuven in the latest QS World University Ranking, published last week – the highest Belgian university in the list

**€86 million**

to be invested in the port of Brussels over the coming five years, under a management agreement signed by the Brussels regional government last week



# Let it rain

## Underground water resources in Flanders are in surprisingly poor condition

Toon Lambrechts

Water shortage. It evokes images of the Middle East or Africa; arid regions where little or nothing grows. Not exactly an image that fits Flanders, especially now that springtime has coloured everything fresh and green again. But appearances are deceiving: All is not well with the Flemish water supply, and in particular, the deep subsurface layers are under pressure.

For every Fleming, there is about 1,500m<sup>3</sup> of water available each year. That seems a lot, but it's less than the European average and isn't that different to the figures of, say, Ethiopia or Pakistan. "In the qualification of the European Union, we are just outside the category of areas with severe water shortages. Flanders is considered one of the regions with very little available water," says Kristine Walraevens, professor of hydrogeology at the department of soil science at Ghent University. "Flanders is suffering from water stress."

Under normal circumstances, it's hardly noticeable that Flanders has only just enough water. But during dry summers, measures are needed. During the summer of 2005, for example, there was a temporary ban on watering your lawn and washing your car, and in some places water was handed out because the taps had run dry.

### Beneath our feet

The main source of fresh water lies beneath our feet. Underground, water-permeable layers known as aquifers alternate with impermeable layers. Rainwater that slowly seeps into the soil enters these aquifers to form a groundwater system. There are six of these systems in Flanders at different depths. Water from rivers and canals is also used, but to



Despite the rain, water is in short supply in as Flanders and Brussels become increasingly built up

a lesser extent; aquifers remain our main source of drinkable water, and they are not currently doing well.

In the shallow aquifers, the primary problem is water quality, explains Walraevens. "Nitrate pollution due to over-fertilisation remains a big concern, just like pesticides and other residues from agriculture. Deeper underground, pollution is less of a problem; surface water seeps through extremely slowly and is filtered by the soil itself. But the amount of water we pump out is untenable."

There are large regional differences, though. Limburg is doing very well, with 10,000m<sup>3</sup> of water per capita. That has to do with the region's specific geological characteristics

and a massive influx of water from France via the river Maas.

"On the other hand, in East Flanders and southern West Flanders, the situation has become dramatic," says Walraevens. "There is hardly 1,000m<sup>3</sup> of water available per capita. That is very little, and the evolution of recent years hasn't been positive. The two groundwater systems in the region are heavily overexploited."

Pumping too much water also threatens the quality of it, she explains. "Air bubbles may form at the top of the aquifer if the water level drops, as has been happening in the region around Waregem, in West Flanders. The chemical compounds in the water will react with the air,

which affects the quality.

"Another problem is salination. By pumping too much fresh water, older underlying saline aquifers rise up. If the salt water mixes with fresh water it becomes unusable. In the coastal areas and the polders, salination is a serious threat."

### A man-made rock

The problem with the deep aquifers is not new. The Flemish Environment Agency (VMM) is monitoring the situation and working on a recovery policy, but that's no easy task, says Walraevens. "To restore the level of groundwater it is necessary to hand out fewer exploitation licences. In East Flanders and southern West Flanders, the number of licences

has to reduce by 75% in order to keep the groundwater level stable. That will not happen overnight, as many permits are used for industrial applications."

The VMM is working on pilot projects where groundwater is replaced with rainwater for these kinds of applications. That's a necessity, according to Walraevens. "The use of groundwater for low-value applications should absolutely be avoided. It is just too valuable."

Using less water is one thing, but the aquifers should also be given the chance to recover. And there is a big problem: It is becoming increasingly difficult for rainwater to penetrate the surface. The reason is simple.

Buildings, car parks and roads all create barriers where the rainwater cannot pass through. Figures show that Flanders is the region with the most paved soil in Europe. About 13% of the surface is hardened, a percentage that increases every day. Flanders is slowly being petrified.

As a result, not only is groundwater insufficiently replenished, the risk of flooding also increases. During heavy rain, the water cannot seep into the ground and flows toward streams and rivers. These waterways are unable to take in all that extra water, which results in flooding.

The problems are known, and so are the solutions. We need to start pumping and consuming less water and look for alternatives. The hardening of the surface also needs to be addressed. Time is short, because climate change will not improve the situation, with increasingly wet winters and dry summers predicted. A more uneven distribution of rainfall will make it even more vital that we have a healthy, natural water storage underground.

## Government debates taxing interest on savings

Tax relief on savings accounts could be reduced or even removed altogether, federal finance minister Koen Geens (*pictured*) has suggested. Flemings are among the world's most fervent savers, and €240 billion is currently sitting in savings accounts across Belgium, despite a record low interest rate. Part of the reason is the tax relief: the first €1,880 of interest in any year is tax-free.

However, the government is concerned that this mountain of cash is doing nothing to stimulate the economy. Geens' theory is that if interest were taxed, the attraction of savings would diminish and savers might be more likely to spend their money, injecting it into the economy.

"Savings currently sitting in accounts are fiscally over-subsidised," Geens said last week. He later said the idea



of taxing interest came from National Bank governor Luc Coene. The National Bank is expected to produce a report on a proposed reform of the financial sector within the next few weeks, but whether the savings tax will be included remains to be seen. "This is a very delicate issue," Geens admitted.

His party's coalition allies are not keen to see savings taxed. "The finance minister is scaremongering among the wrong people," commented Bruno Tobback, president of the socialist SPA, referring to the government's unwillingness to contemplate a wealth tax. His party had made its position clear 18 months ago during negotiations to form a government, he said.

"Restrict tax advantages for savers? Out of the question," said Open-VLD chair Gwendolyn Rutten on Twitter. "The problem is an unstable fiscal climate, not savers."

They were joined by opposition party N-VA, whose Jan Jambon commented that "the government is once more looking for creative ways to raise taxes. Anyone who works, saves or does business is once more forced to pay up."

Alan Hope

## European award nomination for ex-PM Verhofstadt

Former prime minister Guy Verhofstadt, now a member of the European Parliament, has been nominated for a European Leader of the Year award, five years after he left the PM's office in Wetstraat 16. Verhofstadt, who turned 60 last month, is one of six nominees, and was selected for his "solid engagement with the European project, his capacity to bring people together and make positive changes in Europe". Verhofstadt currently leads the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) group in the European

Parliament, where he has served since 2009. There he has continued to build a reputation as a fervent supporter of the creation of a federal Europe, a cause he has pursued since before he was awarded the Vision for Europe Award in 2002 while he was prime minister.

Other nominees include European Central Bank president Mario Draghi, Luxembourg prime minister Jean-Claude Juncker and EU commissioner Viviane Reding. The award will be announced in June. **AH**



# Europe's green heart

Ecological improvements and citizens' ideas should make Brussels the Green Capital of Europe

Andy Furniere

Brussels is entering the last stretch of the race to become Green Capital of Europe in 2015. Analysis by the Economist Intelligence Unit international research bureau highlights the capital's ecological improvements since 2009, but the study has also drawn criticism. During an event on the Kunstberg in the city centre, Brussels residents had the chance to present their vision of the future of the capital at the "ideas tree". Brussels also had a visit from the airship *Aéroflorale II* (pictured), the symbol of Green Capital of Europe 2013 Nantes.

Brussels is already the political capital of Europe, but it's also one of four finalists hoping to win the title of European Green Capital 2015, as awarded by the European Commission. The annual award promotes and rewards the efforts of city governments as they battle ecological challenges. At the end of May, the Brussels team will try to convince a jury of members from various European institutions that it should win, and on 14 June, Brussels will know whether it has prevailed over its rivals: Bristol (England), Glasgow (Scotland) and Ljubljana (Slovenia). Last year, the Brussels-Capital Region also participated, but finished in fifth place.

Brussels' progress towards sustainability is emphasised by the Economist Intelligence Unit's study, sponsored by technology multinational Siemens. The research bureau updated Brussels' results from its 2009 European Green City Index, which rated the environmental performance of 30 major cities in 30 European countries. Brussels is now in third place, behind Copenhagen and Stockholm, in the index of 2013, compared with ninth in the original



The airship *Aéroflorale II* touched down in Brussels at the start of May as part of the build-up to the vote on Green Capital of Europe 2015 next month

2009 rating. However, Brussels was the only city whose performance was reassessed; the competitor cities are judged according to their prior performance.

## Exemplary buildings

The study notes that Brussels' largest gains were in transport, especially through the expansion of its cycle path network. However, the senior editor of the Economist Intelligence Unit, Brian Gardner, added that "Brussels still has some way to go to reach the level of Copenhagen and Amsterdam."

The government also received good marks in the environmental governance category, thanks, for example, to its plan for durable regional development, the framework for implementing many of Brussels' environmental commitments.

Equally positive are the measures that caused a significant reduction of inhabitants' water consumption.

Although the city's consumption of energy also declined, Brussels actually scored better in 2009 in terms of the energy consumption of residential buildings. Evelyne Huytebroeck, Brussels minister for energy and environment, pointed out that the government was tackling this problem through various initiatives including the Exemplary Buildings programme. This programme stimulates eco-friendly construction or renovation of buildings through financial help, technical assistance and public visibility for the buildings and their designers.

With a subsidy programme, the government furthermore encourages the conversion of buildings to the low-energy passive standard.

Huytebroeck emphasised that new or renovated public buildings have had to comply with this energy-efficient standard since 2010 and that passive-energy construction will become mandatory for private buildings in 2015.

## Greenwashing?

The conclusions of the Green City Index were criticised by the socialist party SPA, which is an opposition party in the Brussels-Capital Region. Brussels MP Jef Van Damme feels that Siemens is "greenwashing" Brussels, referring to deceptive green marketing practices. He also questions the neutrality of Siemens, because it is involved in the installation of traffic-light technology in Brussels, and the validity of a study that does not include the evolution in other countries.

Van Damme especially disputes the progress on the issue of mobility. "The government has announced new cycling plans and networks, but the creation of cycling paths has stagnated since 2009," he says in a statement. He adds that Brussels every year exceeds the fine dust standards and that road congestion in Brussels is among the worst in Europe.

## Tree of ideas

To involve the general public in its bid for Green European Capital, the Brussels government placed an "ideas tree" on the Albertinaplein across from the Kunstberg, close to Central station. *Brusselaars* were encouraged to share their wishes, remarks, dreams, ideals and visions on a green capital. The ideas were collected beforehand via social networks and printed on large ribbons hanging from trees. You could also listen to testimonies via headphones. The results of this brainstorming process will be a source of inspiration for future political action.

Huytebroeck has announced that, if Brussels wins the competition, citizens' ideas will similarly be collected in other European cities. During a large closing ceremony, the ideas would form the basis of a citizens' debate directed towards European policy-makers. Another attraction was the *Aéroflorale II*, an artistic airship inspired by Leonardo da Vinci's drawings of flying machines. The fantastic structure represents a mobile garden on a botanical expedition across the world – collecting plant life to develop sustainable sources of energy. It is the symbol of the current Green Capital of Europe, the French city of Nantes.

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

# Bicycle spring

Government inaugurates capital's first cycle street, but activist group starts its own campaign

Andy Furniere

To get more people in the saddle instead of behind the wheel, Brussels minister for transport and public works Brigitte Grouwels and Brussels secretary of state for mobility Bruno De Lille have launched a trial project of cycle streets. In these cycle streets, cyclists are allowed to use the whole width of the road, as if it is a spacious bicycle path. Motorists are still permitted on the road, but they are prohibited from overtaking cyclists and from going faster than 30kph.

The first cycle street lies alongside the busy Louizalaan and takes you from Dalstraat to Stefaniaplein. During a six-month trial phase, the Belgian Institute for Road Safety will monitor the behaviour of the different road users. The institute will, for example, examine whether it has an impact on drivers' average speeds and on the number of cyclists and

motorists. At the end of the year, the results will be evaluated and the Brussels government will decide whether additional measures are necessary.

Grouwels declared that this initiative was part of the "spring of the bicycle" in Brussels. She expressed the intention of "accelerating the process of improving cycle facilities, so that cyclists are more visible in the streets". De Lille said that "cycle streets are a symbol of the mobility of the future, with cycling as a safe, efficient and comfortable mode of transport". With the project, Brussels is following in the footsteps of international cycle havens such as Copenhagen, but also those of Ghent. In the summer of 2011, the City of Ghent launched Belgium's first cycle street, in the Visserij quarter. In March last year, about a third more cyclists passed through the quarter, while the

number of motorists during morning rush hour fell from 259 to 192.

The inhabitants of the capital are, however, also taking matters into their own hands. The activist group *Cyclo Guerilla Bxl* has declared that it will "battle, in a non-violent but disobedient way, the unwillingness of the Brussels government and municipalities to deal with the overriding car problem". Alongside locals, activists have already painted their own cycle path at Poincarélaan, as a reaction to the political discussion revolving around cycling facilities on this busy road. The activists also promised more protest initiatives this spring and summer, at various locations in Brussels. To stay tuned, visit their Facebook page.

► [tinyurl.com/cycloguerilla](http://tinyurl.com/cycloguerilla)



Brussels minister for transport and public works Brigitte Grouwels and secretary of state for mobility Bruno De Lille try out the cycle-friendly stretch of Louizalaan



# Charge automobilists in Brussels, reports suggests

## OECD report also proposes increasing the cost of public transport

Alan Hope

Brussels and Antwerp need to introduce a London-style congestion charge to combat the losses caused by urban traffic, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has suggested. In its bi-annual country report on Belgium issued last week, the OECD also suggests increasing public transport fares at peak hours to encourage more flexible commuting.

Congestion, the report says, is a nationwide problem but is particularly bad around Brussels and Antwerp, with unusually long commuting times overall. Resulting economic effects include environmental costs, low labour mobility and lost business productivity. The cost of congestion, the report suggests, is in the order of 1-2% of GDP, or about €3.85 billion annually.

The report points out that congestion in London has fallen by 30% since the charge was introduced. That measure was unpopular at the time, but the report says several surveys have shown that strong opposition to such schemes before introduction frequently turns into strong support



afterwards, as people – not least motorists – see the positive effects of the measure.

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters said the OECD's proposals on road pricing were in line with his government's own vision, based on the principle that those who use the roads ought to pay for them. The three regions have agreed in principle on the introduction of road charges for lorries from 2016.

Peeters also pointed out that Flanders'

cities are not the only problem: The region is very much a transit point, with half of all private cars on the motorway of foreign origin, and 60% of trucks. "The problem of congestion on the motorways is at least as serious as urban congestion," he said.

### Peak-time increase

The rail network, too, suffers from congestion, with a generally reliable and low-cost service leading to an increase in the number of trains,

and congestion being aggravated by a physical bottleneck in the system on the North-South connection in central Brussels. One solution proposed by the OECD is to use differential fares to tackle the problem of peak-time congestion – making it more expensive and therefore less attractive to travel at peak hours.

For other public transport, the report points out that providing services to remote areas with low demand contributes to a low level of cost recovery in Flanders, where De Lijn only takes in 14% of its services costs in the form of fares. The report suggests shifting the cost of services to those areas to the local municipality rather than allowing them to be subsidised by users in higher-demand areas.

The OECD also noted that more flexibility in Belgium's housing market would encourage people to live closer to their work, while improved competition in the telecommunications market would open up the possibility of more teleworking.

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

## Agreement on costs for rare drug treatment

Federal health minister Laurette Onkelinx last week announced an agreement with the manufacturers of a drug prescribed for a rare and serious illness but said she felt "blackmailed" by the company's methods.

As reported last week, the US-based pharmaceuticals company Alexion used PR executives posing as patient representatives to put pressure on the Belgian government to agree to reimburse the cost of Soliris, an experimental treatment for the immune system disorder atypical haemolytic-uraemic syndrome. The company centred its PR campaign on a seven-year-old boy named Viktor from Erembodegem in East Flanders.

The campaign had the desired effect, with widespread public outrage that Viktor's life could be subject to budgetary constraints. Onkelinx was forced to sit at the negotiating table to find a solution.

Soliris, an infusion delivered twice a month at a cost of €9,000 per treatment to Viktor and 24 other patients in Belgium, will be reimbursed from 1 July, with Alexion bearing the costs of all treatments between now



© Michel Hendryckx/Wikimedia Commons

and then.

According to the latest figures, the price of reimbursing the cost of all medicines in 2011 came to €4 billion, of which €210 million was accounted for by drugs for rare conditions – defined as any serious condition affecting fewer than five people in 100,000 in the European Union.

"I'm happy, for Viktor's sake as well as for the other patients who were waiting on this agreement," Onkelinx said. But "I condemn the using of children through their parents," practised by Alexion. "That cannot be accepted."

Viktor's parents were of course happy with the outcome. "Obviously we're extremely pleased that the minister and Alexion got back around the table and reached this agreement," said Viktor's father, Geert Ameys.

## Criticism over diamond dealer tax settlement

A settlement between Omega Diamonds and the special tax investigation unit of the finance ministry in which the company paid to avoid prosecution has come in for severe criticism. The Antwerp-based diamond trading company agreed to pay €160 million in fines to avoid being prosecuted for tax evasion and money laundering.

Omega was suspected of using money laundering circuits in Switzerland and Dubai to keep income from diamonds from Angola and Congo – allegedly including banned "blood diamonds" – from the tax authorities' attention. The total value of the laundered income is thought to be about €2 billion.

Nevertheless, under a

recent arrangement introduced by the Di Rupo government to avoid long drawn-out fraud trials, companies or individuals suspected of tax evasion are now able to come to a settlement with the authorities. Costly legal procedures are avoided, and the public purse receives the money it was missing. The tax owed is paid, which is an important consideration in times of economic difficulties.

But the companies escape prosecution. Michel Maus, lecturer in tax law at the Free University of Brussels (VUB), said the agreement "looks like class-based justice. I'm not against the system of settlements, but the policy has to be just and fair for everyone.

Small-time tax dodgers who have evaded for small sums have to pay a fine and are prosecuted in court, with a criminal record as a fraudster as a result. Meanwhile, larger companies strike a deal, there's no prosecution, and those involved walk away without a mark against their name."

John Crombez, the government's secretary of state in charge of the fight against fraud, said he was happy a settlement had been reached but hoped the system of settlements would soon come to an end. "I hope the courts will be able to take hard and fast action against these major cases in the near future," he told VRT radio. "We cannot keep going on with this system."

## Interns exploited, says Vacature

Young people are being exploited by companies and other organisations that are employing them illegally as unpaid interns, according to an investigation by human resources website Vacature. Among those guilty of breaking the law, Vacature alleges, are UN offices in Brussels and the federal finance ministry.

Unpaid internships, commonly known by their French name *stages*, are not permitted in Belgium by law. For graduates aged 21 or over, the legal minimum monthly wage is €771. Yet one in three interns working in the EU quarter of Brussels is not paid at all. Adding to the problem is that 45% of interns take on a succession of three

or more *stages* before they find a job.

However, Vacature said, not all breaches of the law are deliberate: According to its own enquiries, staff at the government services responsible for unemployment insurance and benefits were unable to give a clear statement regarding the legal situation.

## THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

### Autos ► Sales up

New car sales rose almost 10% in April, taking the year-to-year increase for the first four months of 2013 to 2.8%, for a total of 202,196 vehicles. Market leader Volkswagen was up 3.8%, while followers Renault and Peugeot dropped 0.5% and 2.4% respectively over the period.

### Chemicals ► Solvay

The Brussels-based chemicals and plastics group is merging its PVC activities in a joint venture with Ineos, headquartered in Rolle, Switzerland, to create the world's second largest PVC producer with up to 5,650 employees in nine countries. Seventeen units are affected by the move, two of them in Belgium. The decision is part of a larger plan that includes Ineos acquiring Solvay's 50% stake in the joint venture within six years. Solvay shares rose 6% on the news.

### Chemicals

#### ► Tessenderlo

The speciality chemicals group has sold its Italian production activities to the International Chemical Investors group. The move is part of the wide restructuring of the company's activities to concentrate its resources on developing products for the food, agricultural and water treatment sectors.

### Legal ► Dacheng

China's largest law firm has opened an office in Brussels in partnership with the local Dugardyn & Partners.

### Savings

#### ► New record

Belgian savings accounts have topped €242.3 billion, a new record. Deposits have increased by some €100 billion since the beginning of the crisis in 2008 despite low interest rates.

### Supermarkets

#### ► Colruyt

The Halle-based discount supermarket is regrouping its multiple own-brand labels under a single one called the Boni Selection. The move will make it easier for consumers to identify Colruyt products, which now go under 70 names including Eldorado, Galaxi, Belsy, Graindor and Kelvin.

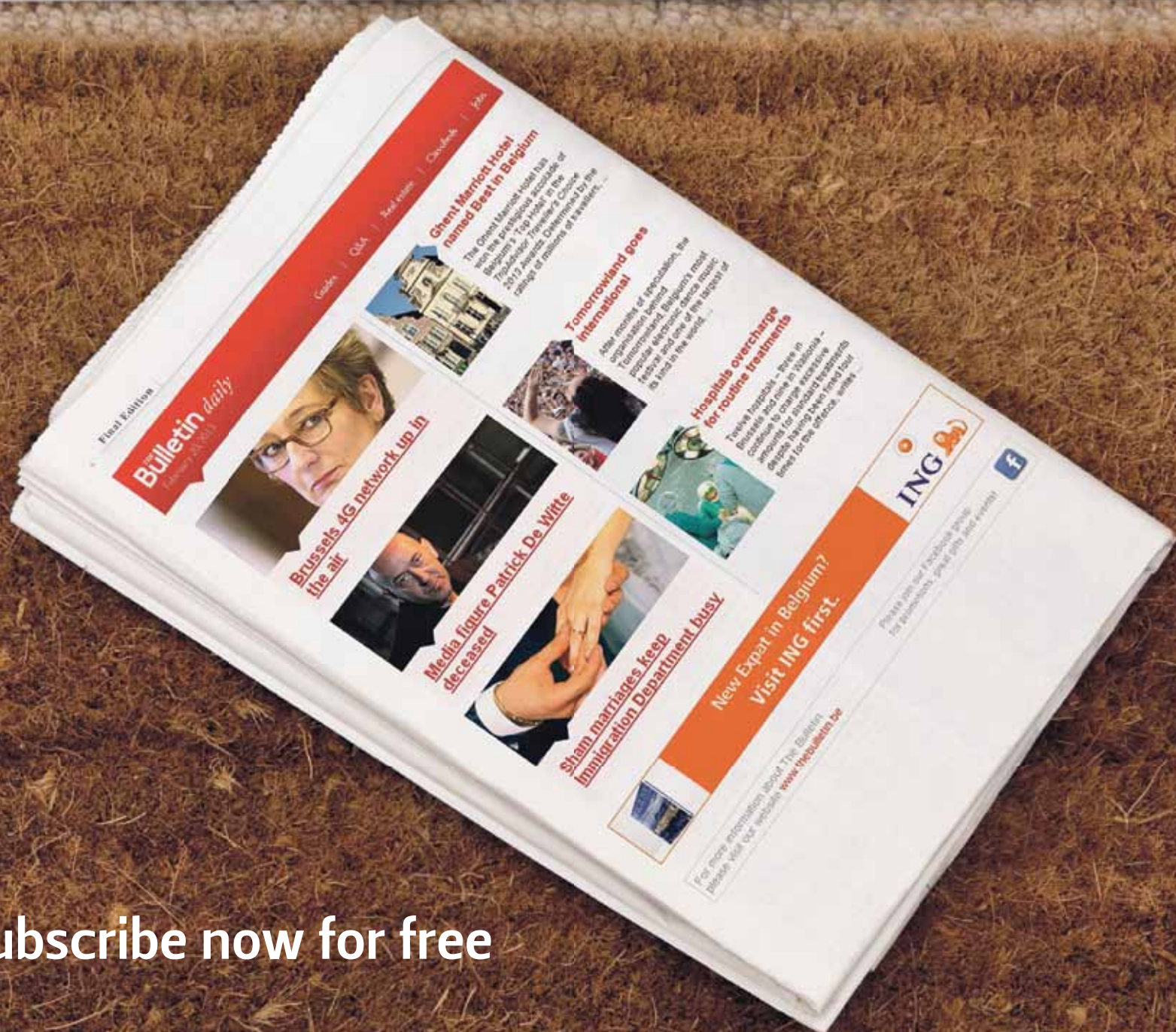
### Textiles ► Domo

The Ghent-based chemicals and textiles group is negotiating the acquisition of the Italian Aquafil Engineering Plastics company, with production units in China and the US. If successful, the deal will push Domo's worldwide sales above the €1 billion mark.



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# What's up, docks?

## Free bus tours of port of Antwerp have proved an unexpected hit

Alan Hope

It sounds like the nerdiest day out you could imagine: four hours on a bus touring the container terminals and dry docks of the port of Antwerp. But that's exactly the attraction the city is offering this year, three days a week from now until the end of September. Is it as dull as it sounds? Well, last year 3,500 people didn't think so. I was one of them, and I'll be signing up again for this year's edition.

The city of Antwerp goes to great lengths to publicise its port, and with good reason: It's Europe's second-largest port, and one of the world's most important for container traffic. It's also a crucial factor in the economic life of Flanders; the region's gateway to the whole wide world, and vice versa. And not just Flanders: Freight entering the port of Antwerp goes on to make its way to the whole of the continent.

So it must have seemed like a bright idea when someone thought of laying on a free bus tour around the port area for anyone interested. Nobody, though, can have imagined the response.

"Last year all of our buses were sold out, and that means we carried about 3,500 people," explains Annik Dirkx, spokeswoman for the port of Antwerp authority. "We had to extend the planned service quite a lot to cope with the demand, including laying on extra buses at times." Sure enough, on the Wednesday afternoon in August when I turned up for my reserved spot (reservations are absolutely



Lillo is one of the port tour's more picturesque stops

necessary) the one bus that had been planned had been multiplied by three, so great was the demand. This year, the programme has been extended, so that the tours started earlier this month instead of in July as last year, and will go on to the end of September (last year they ended in August). "In comparison with last year, we've increased capacity quite considerably," said port alderman Marc Van Peel. "We wanted to give even more people the chance to discover all the well-known and not

so well-known aspects of the port. With its 146,500 jobs, the port is made up of a lot of people, but it's also there for many more people who may be curious to find out what an international world our port is."

### Free for all

The programme can't be cheap – though I couldn't find anyone willing to put an actual price on the promotion – since it costs money to lay on luxury coaches three days a week in the middle of

summer, and not charge a penny in fares.

"Yes, it costs us quite something," Dirkx says. "But ultimately we think it's important to make it as accessible as possible for people who want to know more about the port, and that's why we decided, despite the huge interest and demand, to carry on offering the tours for free." The guides on each bus – in our case last year an impressively knowledgeable man who had spent 30 years working

in the docks as a customs officer – don't cost anything. "Nothing has changed as far as the guides are concerned, because it was such a success," Dirkx says. "Once more they're volunteers, people who work here at the port pavilion. So the concept remains the same."

There's a new offering on the programme: a slightly shorter tour for families with children (minimum age six), which includes some entertainment along the way in Lillo, one of the more picturesque stops along the way. There, in the tiny vestige of what used to be a fort to hold the entrance to the Scheldt against a Spanish invasion (the Spanish invaded anyway but the resistance, like Asterix's village, never gave up), story-tellers Kris Dockx – the unofficial mayor of Lillo – and Veerle Ernalstein will keep the kids amused before it's time to climb aboard the bus once more.

"The contrast between the hyper-modern port and the picturesque village of Lillo is the inspiration for the stories I'll be telling," Ernalstein said. "If I can bring the children along with my fantasy to a place where they look at the port in a new way, my story will have been a success."

The port of Antwerp bus tour takes place on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday until 28 September except on 30 and 31 August and 21 September. The guides' commentary is in Dutch only. Reservation required.

► [www.portofantwerp.com/nl/de-haven-bustour](http://www.portofantwerp.com/nl/de-haven-bustour)



A new addition this year is a shorter tour for families with kids over six



Luxury buses are laid on but the increasingly popular tours remain free

## MORE FROM THE PORT

The bus tour is not the only way to discover the port. If you prefer the freedom of the open road, and aren't too afraid of the lorry traffic, the port offers a free cycle map with routes from 10km to 60km, and information on the various things you'll see along the way. It's not the same as having an expert guide along, but it does allow you to make your own itinerary. The map can be downloaded online ([www.portofantwerp.com/nl/fietsen-de-haven](http://www.portofantwerp.com/nl/fietsen-de-haven)) or picked up for free from the Havenhuis, which overlooks the Willemdok by the MAS museum.

- One of the best ways to see the port is from the water, and there are various operators who run tours on the river, with or without food and drink or other special themes. The website [www.visitantwerpen.be](http://www.visitantwerpen.be) has links to operators and other information, also in English.

- Ship spotters are also catered for, with a map ([www.portofantwerp.com/en/ship-spotting](http://www.portofantwerp.com/en/ship-spotting)) showing some of the best spots in the port area for seeing and snapping ships entering and leaving Antwerp. And of course the movements

of all sea traffic in and out of the city can be monitored at [www.marinetraffic.com/ais](http://www.marinetraffic.com/ais) or [www.vesseltracker.com/app](http://www.vesseltracker.com/app)

- Finally, if you want something to take away to remember your trip by, it might as well be a fish. Angling is permitted from land only at various places in the port area, but you'll need a Flemish permit (available from any post office or from [www.visverlof.be](http://www.visverlof.be)) and a municipal one ([www.antwerpen.be](http://www.antwerpen.be)). For a list of fishing spots, go to [www.portofantwerp.com/en/fishing-port](http://www.portofantwerp.com/en/fishing-port)



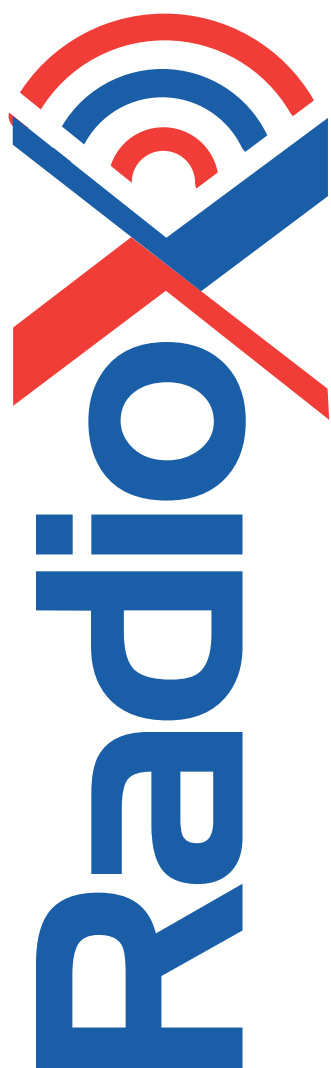
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# An open book

## The Wonderkamer shows us what drives contemporary children's authors and illustrators

Rebecca Benoot

The Literary Museum in Hasselt, which focuses mainly on children's literature and illustration, has recently reinvented one of its permanent exhibitions, a room filled with little cabinets full of objects that selected authors hold dear. After some redesigning, and the addition of several new artefacts and authors, the entire room has been revamped and named the Wonderkamer (the Wonder Room).

The Wonderkamer contains 18 wooden cabinets in which children's authors and illustrators such as René Swartenbroekx, Bettie Elias, Lieve Baeten and Kolet Janseen were able to show what inspires and motivates them, as well as some personal tidbits that are essential to their way of writing.

All the cabinets essentially deal with writing for children, each depicting the author's personal style. They are accompanied by a beautiful headshot by photographer Malou Swinnen and have been turned into mini-museums, filled with objects that have a special meaning to the writers and preceded by a selection of photographs chronicling the author's lives. It all allows us to sneak a peek at the inner workings of the creators of some of Flanders' best-loved children's books.

Illustrator Debbie Lavreys is a newcomer to the exhibition. "I love the initiative and think it's very important for children's authors and illustrators to be given a voice and to show what we're capable of," she says. Her cabinet is filled with drawings of nature, especially birds, trees and the sea.

"I love nature," she explains, "which is why it is such an important part of my cabinet, as well as fragments from my first and last book to symbolise the beginning of my career and the point where I am now. For me, writing is like a bird that sings or a tree that loses its leaves: because it has to. It's just the way it is."

There is a striking difference, however, between the cabinets of the authors and those of the illustrators, who prefer to feature their own works instead of personal items, such as Leo Timmers whose mini-museum is filled with characters from his books. "As a kid I was only good at drawing," he says, "and once you realise that, there's no turning back. It's a way of life."

### Voyages in your head

Noëlla Elpers, who has written historical novels for young people, has some interesting objects in her



Flemish writer Bettie Elias with her inspiration at the Wonderkamer

cabinet: a ship, as she is fascinated by the sea; shells and stones because nature inspires her; cats, which have featured in several of her stories; and a figurine of Angelo, a boy who modelled for the painter Titian and who will star in the third part of her historic trilogy set in Western Europe at the end of the 15th century.

"You make real voyages in your head," she explains, "that's what I have always loved about reading, that you go on adventures in different worlds or periods. When I was younger I tried to depict these journeys by drawing or painting but it was never really clear to people what I wanted to say, so I started writing instead. I love history, which is why I've written several historical novels; history to me isn't the facts but also the stories of the people of that time."

One of the featured authors recently won the Flemish Community Prize for Children's Literature, a prestigious prize awarded to a person or organisation that has made a remarkable contribution to cultural life in Flanders, in this case through literature. Els Beerten received the award, a statue by Antwerp sculptor Philip Aguirre y Otegui, for her book *Allemaal willen we de hemel* (We All Want the Sky), about three young adults during the Second World War. This intoxicating coming-of-age novel that deals with love, betrayal and the deceptively fine line between good and evil became an instant

classic and has already earned Beerten several prizes.

### Special characters

Beerten is honoured by the award: "It is a novel that has always been dear to me," she says, "because it contains such special characters and it's a great to know that they have touched so many readers." *Allemaal willen we de hemel* is set during such turbulent times that it raises some crucial questions as well as confronting its protagonists with harrowing choices. "I wanted to write a book about someone full of good intentions but who makes certain choices that influence those around him, for better or worse. I tried to explore how someone like that deals with such guilt."

Her cabinet in the Wonderkamer on the other hand, deals with another pressing matter: What stimulates her to write? The items she selected are, to name but a few, her first notebook from the first grade,

full of text and drawings about missionary work; a running badge from school because running gives her energy, which is important while writing; and a braid of her red hair. "I was an energetic child that loved to tell stories," she explains, "and this braid represents that young and wild child. I've always had curls so I had to wear my hair in braids in order to tame it."

The cabinets in the Wonderkamer aren't just fun to look at, they give readers a fascinating look behind the scenes of some contemporary classics. It's intriguing to finally find out what inspires your favourite writers, and leads the way to intriguing connections between the books piled behind the cabinets and the life of the author. The Wonderkamer invites you to explore the boundaries between fact and fiction.

► [www.toerisme.hasselt.be](http://www.toerisme.hasselt.be)

## SO, WHY DO YOU WRITE?

When asked the quintessential question, here's what some of the writers had to say:

**Ed Franck** I'm in love with language and what you can do with it.

**Hilde Schuurmans** It's a way of organising the world.

**René Swartenbroekx** I had a teacher in elementary school who read us exciting tales and led the way to the library. I loved books, but I loved theatre more. Sadly, the doctor forbade me from speaking for three months when I was young because I had strained my voice. So I started writing out of sheer misery.

## WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Flemish composer and sound artist **George De Decker** has won **Music for Car Parks**, a competition sponsored by Interparking and Bruges's Concertgebouw. His composition can be heard in 600 Interparking garages across Europe and on the competition's website, and he wins €2,500, a year's free parking and tickets to events in Concertgebouw. "The jury was surprised and intrigued by George De Decker's intimate sound landscape," read a statement. "The fantastical soundscape avoids clichés and fits perfectly in the feeling of a car park as a space between the inside and outside worlds." The public prize-winner was Flemish composer Jan Dertaelen, who wins a year's tickets to cultural events.

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

Although he is supported by the Flanders Audiovisual Fund and producer Potemkino, Antwerp director **Jonas Govaerts** is turning to crowdfunding to fill out the budget for his feature debut *Werf (Cub)*, the story of a scout troop being hunted in the forest by two murderous poachers. Production begins this summer but Govaerts needs €34,567 more "for the development, testing and building of booby traps".

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

The Flemish Fund for Letters (VFL) will this year pay **€1 million in bursaries to 119 writers** for new projects, it announced. The funding is also available to illustrators and comic-strip authors. This year, 148 authors applied for funding of an average of €9,100. Among recent books which came about partly as a result of VFL funding are *Post mortem* by Peter Terrin and *Wij en ik* by Saskia De Coster.

Last week saw the opening of what its organisers have claimed is the **smallest contemporary art museum in the world**, in Tessenderlo, Limburg province. The Lomak – Loois Museum for Contemporary Art – has only one exhibition room, in which a single artwork will be displayed. The work is also visible from the exterior, so the museum can be visited 24 hours a day. It is the idea of Kiwanis Tessenderlo Alchemia, to mark the club's 20th anniversary. The first work is a custom-made installation by Koen Van Mechelen of Limburg.

This year's Ostend Film Festival, in September, will include an **international competition for the first time**, it was announced last week by jury chairman Johan Heldenbergh. The focus of the competition will be on the visual aspects of the films, organisers said. The festival will culminate with the award of the Ensors, the Flemish film prize.

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





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# THE Bulletin

Education Guide

## Education Guide

THE BULLETIN'S GUIDE TO SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES IN BELGIUM

## THE GUIDE TO SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES IN BELGIUM



- PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION TO SUIT ALL NEEDS AND BUDGETS
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# Fate will do the rest

## Antwerp's MAS museum explores Napoleon's contribution to the development of the city

Marcel Schoeters

This year is the bicentennial of the Willemdok, which set off the development of the port of Antwerp away from the river. The exhibition *Bonaparte at the Scheldt* celebrates the inauguration of the Willemdok; it's the second temporary exhibition at the MAS museum, which overlooks the dock and its counterpart, the Bonapartedok.

Antwerp fell to the French in 1794. Overnight, *Antwerpenaars* became new citizens of France, a country perpetually at war. These never-ending campaigns had to be financed, so monasteries were dissolved and churches closed or demolished and their furnishings sold off.

The greater part of the population was not amused. But the commercial industry most certainly was. By 1795, international navigation was restored on the Scheldt, ending a blockade which had been installed de facto in 1585 and was made official in the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648.

A year later, the first seagoing vessel under a foreign flag was able to moor on the river berths.

The favourable business climate drew many new investors to Antwerp's port, which seemed to wake up after three centuries of economic hibernation. Most of them were of German extraction, and their names have survived within the economic network of the city until today. Karlsruhe-born Georg Kreglinger, to name but one, opened a company at the Grote Markt, together with his brother Christian. He was one of the founding fathers of the Chamber of Commerce. The company is still headquartered at the Grote Markt and is listed as number 1 in the trade register.

### The consul

In July of 1803, Consul Napoleon Bonaparte paid a visit to Antwerp as a part of an inspection trip in the North Sea ports. He was accompanied by his then-wife Joséphine de Beauharnais.

Bonaparte did not like what he saw: a medieval city, yearning to be transformed into a modern 19th-century metropolis. Shortly after his visit, the consul ordered the digging of two docks near the 16th-century Hansa House, which stood on the present site of the MAS.

The "Grand Bassin" (Willemdok) and the "Petit Bassin" (Bonapartedok) were inaugurated,



British cartoonist James Gillray's famous 1805 print of British prime minister William Pitt and Napoleon Bonaparte slicing up the world between them (above); a detail from a work by 16th-century Antwerp painter Abel Grimmer showing the Hanse House to the left, where the MAS museum now stands (below); one of the emperor's famous hats, manufactured in Paris from beaver hide (below left)

It was to be designed as a fortified city, for the defence of the old city. It, too, was never built. Aside from the building projects, France's rule had other lasting effects: The Code Napoléon, itself indebted to Roman law, laid the foundation for the Belgian legal system. The French were also the first to come up with the numbering of houses. The newly developed metric system replaced the weights and measures of the Ancien Régime.

### Naval shipyards

It was, however, not so much the commercial but the military value of Antwerp on which Bonaparte wanted to capitalise. Between 1803 and 1814, the largest naval shipyards

as a turning point in Bonaparte's ambition. From then on, Antwerp was to be developed as a first line of defence against an English invasion.

### Twenty crucial years

Through paintings, prints, cartoons, maps, models and records, *Bonaparte at the Scheldt* recreates 20 years in the history of Antwerp, which would turn out to be crucial for its further development as a port city.

A great deal of the material was borrowed from renowned Parisian institutions, including the Louvre, the Carnavalet museum of history, the Army Museum and the Napoléon Foundation. The other side of the story is told with pieces originating from London's Victoria & Albert Museum and Greenwich Maritime Museum as well as from Brussels' Army Museum and Royal Library. The MAS, too, has brought together a lot of hidden treasures from Antwerp institutions, some of which are exhibited for the first time ever.

One of these is the semaphore (also known as the Napoleonic semaphore), a precursor to the telegraph and about every present-day item of mass communication right up to the internet. It acted as an optical telegraph, allowing its user to pass on messages by



adjusting pivotal shutters, conveying a message to the next semaphore down the line. In the early 1800s, it took about a quarter of an hour for a message to cover a distance of 200 kilometres. The one shown at the MAS was part of a chain set up along the Westerschelde.

One piece in the exhibition is more recognisable, though, than all the rest: one of Bonaparte's famous cocked hats.

The exhibition also proved to be an excellent opportunity for Antwerp to join the European Federation of Napoleonic Cities. The federation is chaired by Prince Charles Napoléon, head of the House of Bonaparte and a direct descendant of the emperor's brother Jérôme.

"The emperor wanted to turn Antwerp into a pistol pointing at the heart of England"

and plans were drawn up to provide the city with elegant squares, wide avenues and new public buildings and monuments.

Due to the reluctance within the city council, only a handful of them were finalised. Place Bonaparte was laid out on the site of the old Groenkerkhof cemetery. It is now the Groenplaats, but it will be renamed Place Bonaparte for the duration of the exhibition.

Bonaparte visited Antwerp four times. In 1809, he announced plans to build a completely new town, Louiseville (after his second wife Louise) on the left bank.



© Collection Palais Princier, Monaco

of the French Empire were constructed on the grounds of the former Sint-Michiels Abbey. Quaysides and docks filled up with ships of the line and frigates. The consul, now emperor, wanted to turn Antwerp into a pistol pointing at the heart of England.

The emperor's initial plan was indeed to launch the invasion of Britain from Antwerp.

He had known since 1799 that it was possible, when the hydraulic engineer Charles François Beautemps-Beaupré drew a map of the Scheldt estuary to be used by the French navy.

The 1804 Battle of Trafalgar, which is also highlighted in the exhibition, is seen

UNTIL 30 JUNE

### Bonaparte at the Scheldt

MAS Museum, Hanzestedenplaats 1, Antwerp

► [www.mas.be](http://www.mas.be)



## Promises of power

Under power:  
100 years of electricity

Andy Furniere

A century after the World's Fair in Ghent, the city's Museum of Industrial Archaeology and Textile (MIAT) has set up the exhibition *Under Power: 100 Years of Electricity*. In 1913, electricity wasn't yet a regular force in everyone's daily life, but the boundless belief in its future applications was clearly visible at the World's Fair. The MIAT examines to what extent this promise has been fulfilled.

That the future of electricity was bright in 1913 was made especially clear at the World's Fair's Light Palace, where thousands of lamps dazzled visitors. The MIAT presents photo material of the palace but also an exceptional range of arc lights – a type that soon disappeared because

of the high maintenance costs.

Also on display is an icon of the World's Fair – a painting four metres high and eight metres long, by artist Joseph Cornelis, which was hung up at the railway station to announce the event. The impressive artwork depicts symbols from the city's coat of arms, such as the Virgin and the lion of Ghent.

A few years after the fair, Russian engineer Léon Theremin invented an extraordinary electronic music instrument that he named after himself. To play the instrument, you don't touch it, but move your hands between a horizontal and vertical antenna. Its eerie sound was used to create the theme tune of the well-known detective series *Midsomer*

*Murders*. Only a few people are still able to play the instrument – one of them is the Russian musician Lydia Kavina, who performed during the expo's opening. Visitors can get their hands on a modern version of the theremin.

## Electric slippers

The exhibition shows how electrical appliances gradually entered all spheres of daily life, in the form of devices such as the first telephones and radios. Household appliances made domestic life more comfortable, though not all innovations proved useful. You might wonder about the practicality of an electric butter heater, or a vacuum cleaner that doubled as a hair dryer. The MIAT

also exhibits bizarre contemporary devices, like electric heated slippers and a fly swatter.

The technology created new recreation possibilities as well. At the MIAT, you can go back in time to have a go at *Pong*. This tennis game was one of the earliest arcade video games, released at the beginning of the 1970s.

The museum has furthermore involved students at the local technical school KTA GITO Groenkouter, which has developed interactive experiments. Via the "trembling game", you can follow the evolution of electricity, an electro game tests your knowledge on the subject and you can discover a new range of colours through optical illusions.



Until 29 September

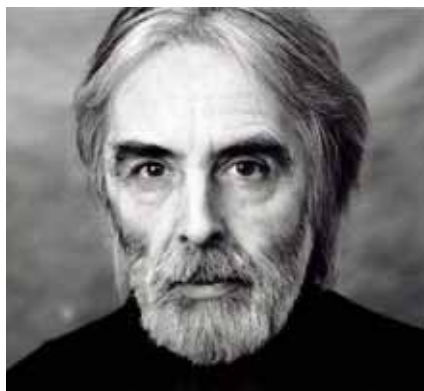
MIAT, Minnemeers 9, Ghent

► [www.miat.gent.be](http://www.miat.gent.be)

## PERFORMANCE

## Così fan tutte

Mozart's *Così fan tutte* is usually considered a comic opera, combining desire and deception to farcical effect in the tale of two army officers testing their fiancées' fidelity. Not so for Michael Haneke (*pictured*), the celebrated director of films such as *The White Ribbon* and *Amour*. His version of the opera turns light-hearted seduction into a stark reflection on the meaning of love, with no certainty of a happy ending. Scenes from the premiere in Madrid, however, show a visually striking production, combining modern and period detail, suggesting that Haneke's visual flair has survived the transition to opera along with his cold view of humanity. **Ian Mundell**



May 23 to June 23

De Munt, Brussels

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

## MORE PERFORMANCES THIS WEEK

## Brussels

**Tweekerkenstraat 81:** Artist Simon Allemeersch and a team of artists and residents in a performance that depicts the machinery of everyday life, in a street that connects the historic Sint-Joost-ten-Noode neighbourhood with the modern EU district (in Dutch and French)

MAY 15-25 at Tweekerkenstraat 81

► [www.kvs.be](http://www.kvs.be)

## Ghent

**Video Art Attack:** Mashup of works by big names in video art, including Bill Viola, Paul McCarthy, Nicolas Provost and Jonas Mekas, followed by a live screening of *Belching*, a radical improvisation performance on film

MAY 23 14.00 at CAMPO Victoria, Fratersplein 7

► [www.campo.nu](http://www.campo.nu)

## Kortrijk

**Fenestra Ovalis:** Contemporary dance performance by Louise Chardon inspired by the sculptural work of Ghent artist Berlinde De Bruyckere, a hypnotising duet between two bone-white figures

MAY 25 20.15 at Budascoop, Kapucijnenstraat 10

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

## ACTIVITY

## Haspengouwse Gordel

Every day should be lived to the fullest, of course. And every holiday should probably be lived well beyond. On Whit Monday athletes and nature-lovers alike are invited to discover the rich agrarian belt stretching across Limburg province: the Haspengouw. The previous two editions of this all-day touring event have seen 25,000 cyclists, hikers and joggers of all ages and experience levels converge on the region's trails. Sportspeople can choose between three cycling routes (30, 40 and 55km) and two hiking trails (5 and 13km). Sightseers are welcome too. There's plenty to see; the Haspengouw is all rolling landscapes, fragrant orchards, picturesque Flemish villages and historical landmarks. The early morning rendez-vous point is in the commune of Mielen-boven-Aalst, where a hearty breakfast is available to start the day. **Georgio Valentino**



20 May, 8.00

Mielen-boven-Aalst

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

## MORE ACTIVITIES THIS WEEK

## Gaasbeek (Flemish Brabant)

**HemelVAART (Ascension):** Literary-artistic bike parcours connecting two exhibitions, *Moments of Writing* by Alexandra Cool at CC Westrand in Dilbeek and *Authors* by painter Sam Dillemans at Gaasbeek Castle

Until MAY 20 at Kasteel van Gaasbeek, Kasteelstraat 40

► [www.hemelvaart2013.be](http://www.hemelvaart2013.be)

## Kinrooi (Limburg)

**Asparagus Tour:** Every Friday afternoon during asparagus season, a bus brings visitors on a tour through asparagus fields to an asparagus farmer, followed by a chocolate workshop and stop by a working windmill, followed by a three-course asparagus dinner at a local restaurant

Until JUN 14 at Toerisme Kinrooi, Maasstraat 82

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

## Mariekerke (Antwerp province)

**Eel Festival:** 41st annual culinary eel festival and charitable event with tastings of the local speciality, plus boat and steam train rides

MAY 18-20 at Kouterplein 1

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



CONCERT

Planet Pawlowski

Flemish alternative rock musician Mauro Pawlowski has done a little bit of everything in his long career. The esteemed guitarist got his first break decades ago as a hired gun for Flemish avant-rock outfit X-Legged Sally but he didn't really arrive until he assembled and fronted his own band, Evil Superstars, in the mid-90s. From there he pursued all manner of group and solo projects, branching out as far as literature, film, contemporary drama and dance. Theatre-goers may recognise him from several Wim Vandekeybus/Ultima Vez productions. He even joined dEUS for a New York minute. This special programme revisits no less than nine of Pawlowski's past, present and future projects, including the acclaimed powerpop band Hitsville Drunks. **GV**



18 May, 19.30 | Vooruit, Ghent | [www.vooruit.be](http://www.vooruit.be)

MORE CONCERTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

**Nick Waterhouse, Jeff Hershey & The Heartbeats:** American Nick Waterhouse looks like a modern version of 1950s rock'n'roll icon Buddy Holly, and his own songs are strongly influenced by this golden period  
**MAY 16 19.30 at Trix, Noordersingel 28-30**  
[www.trixonline.be](http://www.trixonline.be)

Brussels

**Roger Hodgson & His Band:** The voice of the progressive 1970s British rock band Supertramp  
**MAY 17 20.00 at Koninklijk Circus, Onderrichtsstraat 81**  
[www.cirque-royal.org](http://www.cirque-royal.org)

VISUAL ARTS

Mines, treacherous weapons

Few weapons of war cause as much "collateral damage" as antipersonnel mines. Compact and concealed, these nasty devices tend to remain armed long after the shooting stops and soldiers are demobilised. The 1997 Ottawa Treaty, which prohibits the production and use of mine ordnance, has been signed by 161 countries to date, among them Belgium. In addition to imposing a global ban, the convention calls for treatment and rehabilitation programmes for victims as well as increased outreach to the public. So Belgium's Royal Military Museum has collaborated with the United Nations Program against Mines and the NGO Handicap International to present this photographic exhibition, depicting both the damage done by these weapons and the international efforts to neutralise them. The Belgian experience is highlighted. It turns out that, after honing their mine-sweeping skills in the aftermaths of two world wars fought on (and below) their soil, the Belgians have proven themselves among the UN's finest deminers. **GV**



Until 26 June | Royal Museum of the Armed Forces, Brussels | [www.klm-mra.be](http://www.klm-mra.be)

MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK

Bruges

**Fabienne Verdier – A Tribute to the Flemish Masters:** Works by the French artist who spent the last four years studying Jan van Eyck, Hans Memling, Rogier van der Weyden, Hugo van der Goes and Simon Marmion in her quest to figure out why these 15th- and 16th-century painters are still relevant today  
**Until AUG 25 at Groeningemuseum, Dijver 12**  
[www.museabrugge.be](http://www.museabrugge.be)

Brussels

**Shadows Past:** Recent paintings by American artist Pieter Schoolwerth, his first solo exhibition in Brussels  
**Until JUN 1 at Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Charles Decosterstraat 8**  
[www.galerie-obadia.com](http://www.galerie-obadia.com)

Deurle (East Flanders)

**Art & Language:** An evolving collaboration of various conceptual artists which was initiated in the UK around 1967 and is still relevant today, with a special focus on art theory and the importance of language in the arts  
**Until JUN 16 at Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Museumlaan 14**  
[www.museumdd.be](http://www.museumdd.be)

DUSK TIL DAWN

Katrien Lindemans

Closer

17 May, from 23.00  
The Wood, Brussels

On hot days, it's important to drink plenty of fluids and find a nice spot in the shade. Parks and forests are great for some daytime fun. But if you're in Brussels' famous Ter Kamerenbos, you can spend the night in the woods as well: The Wood is a bar/restaurant/club located amidst the trees. From Wednesday to Saturday, the bar is open from 23.00 all the way until 6.00. And on regular occasions, DJs are invited for parties. As the venue isn't terribly large, the DJ booth and the dance floor are basically one and the same. That's what the Closer parties are all about, too; they aim to bring local rising stars in electronic music together with an eager party crowd. This Friday, Closer invites Martin Landsky, the Berlin-based DJ who's been playing at the best clubs for the last decade. From pounding techno to more minimal tunes, this DJ knows what he's doing. He's the headliner behind the decks, followed by local talent DC Salas (real name Diego Cortes Salas), known to Brussels party people for his vast selection of electronica. Last but not least, Felix Cage will spin into the wee hours, too. If you're often out and about in Brussels, you've probably already seen him play. The bar serves plenty of cocktails and other drinks, and

when you decide to leave, you'll be in the woods for a (morning) walk to your car, tram or home. (Although I do advise you to check a map, as the place isn't super easy to find. Here's the address: Floralaan 3-4, 1000 Brussels). Tickets are €9 at the door.

[www.thewood.be](http://www.thewood.be)





BITE

Robyn Boyle

Faja Lobi ★★☆☆

There's a spot along Ghent's Vlaanderenstraat where everything comes together: the Brabantdam shopping street, the gothic Castle of Gerard the Devil and a stunning view of the cathedral. Just about any business would fare well at this prime location, but Faja Lobi has the added advantage of being truly good.

Owner Jurgen Heytens started the bed and breakfast, restaurant and cafe six years ago. He gave it an exotic Surinamese character in honour of his then-wife. The business is a resounding success for a number of reasons. In addition to its location, Faja Lobi has its generously un-Flemish opening times (every day from 8.00 until 1.00), its spacious front terrace (great for people-watching) and an international appeal (every time I visit, I hear conversations in English, French, Spanish...).

For an inn, restaurant, coffee house and bar rolled into one, you might expect the food to be mediocre, but that couldn't be further from the truth. The breakfast menu lists bacon and eggs, fruit juice and croissants. For lunch, you can choose from a range of fresh sandwich creations, including massala chicken, spicy tuna and egg and avocado. There are also snacks like fried banana or Surinamese soup. The mains range from Creole chicken and Cajun beef to white fish in curry coconut sauce and vegetarian dishes with Quorn.

My partner and I stop in for a weekday lunch and have a seat under an umbrella on the terrace. We start off with sparkling water and ginger beer. In the mood for something



warm to eat, we order the lime and garlic scampi and the chicken satays with peanut sauce. Both dishes are bright and colourful and come with a scoop of curried rice, green beans in coconut milk and a crisp green salad with tasty toppings like corn and pickled beets.

The seven large scampi are tender but still firm to the bite and covered in tangy lime juice and loads of garlic. They're some of the best I've ever tasted. My satays, meanwhile, are crispy on the outside and succulent in the middle. They come with some incredibly tasty salty glazing and a sweet peanut and chilli sauce for dipping. All the right flavour and texture contrasts are in place.

We happily finish off this satisfying meal with coffee and a hot chocolate with whipped cream. The bill comes to €36.

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

- 📍 Vlaanderenstraat 2, Ghent; 09.223.55.33
- 🕒 Daily, 8.00-1.00
- 💶 Mains: €10-14
- 📖 One and only Flemish-Surinamese cafe serving up everything from breakfast and sandwiches to dinner and cocktails

TALKING SPORTS

Leo Cendrowicz

Genk's little miracle

How do Genk do it? The tiny Limburg outfit have just added another trophy to their impressive haul, winning the Belgian Cup last week with a 2-0 victory against Cercle Brugge. And they still have a mathematical, if remote, chance of winning the league as the play-offs creep into their final two days. Koninklijke Racing Club Genk are on the western fringes of the country, and their meagre 25,000 capacity Cristal Arena is two-fifths the size of Genk itself. Their founding – in 1988 after local sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei merged – did not suggest a top-flight challenger. And yet in the past 15 years, they've won four cups and three league titles. History scholars might point to Genk's industrial past as a factor

in their footballing excellence. Nearby coal seams helped the city boom after the First World War, and it was an ideal halfway point for the Albert Canal, built between Antwerp and Liège. Ford Genk is set to close, but it helped maintain the working-class tradition and the immigrant mix (15,000 Italians and 6,000 Turks are thought to live in the area) that often fuel local football. While they clearly have a smaller supporter base than their rivals, they have shrewder management, developing a youth academy that is the envy of Belgium and beyond. Captain Jelle Vossen and 18-year-old winger Anthony Limbombe are both from nearby Bilzen, while 19-year-old defender Jordy Croux is from Hasselt. Recent alumni include Steven Defour (now at

FC Porto), Christian Benteke (Aston Villa) and Kevin De Bruyne (Chelsea). This is combined with smart signings from overseas, often from outside Europe, with the likes of South African Anele Ngcongca, Nigerian Kim Ojo, Trinidad's Khaleem Hyland, Senegal's Kara Mbodj and Israel's Elyaniv Barda all part of this season's squad. It made Genk the most profitable club in Belgium last year as they made a net gain of €28 million. Last week's cup win was clinched with goals by Vossen and Ghanaian midfielder Bennard Yao Kumordzi, both in the final five minutes of the game. "It's not every bloke who takes up football as a career and reach this milestone," Kumordzi said afterwards. The same could be said about Genk themselves.



© François Lenoir/Reuters/Corbis

The last word...

Top of the world

"I was risking a jail sentence, but it was worth it." Brussels-based extreme sportsman Cedric Dumont flew over the mysterious Nazca Lines in Peru in a wingsuit last week

World's worst babysitter

"For another work I even threw babies in the air. With their mothers' permission." Artist Jan Fabre courts further controversy following the outrage over throwing cats up in the air at Antwerp town hall

Corps diplomatique

"Normally I don't do this sort of thing, but this is more than a fashion show. The winner has to go on after the election as ambassador of the community in Flanders." Equal opportunities minister Pascal Smet will chair the jury of the *Mister Gay Vlaanderen* in Antwerp next month

Doctor's orders

"We waited too long. The financial crisis is like a heart attack: You have to start changing your lifestyle right away." Finance minister Koen Geens, interviewed in *De Standaard* (see also page 5)

NEXT WEEK  
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

There's been much talk of youth and jobs over the last year, but some of it seems almost contradictory. We hear about the massive youth unemployment rate but also that school graduates are easily finding jobs within 12 months. This suggests that the problems are with untrained young people – right? We look into the subject of youth and unemployment in the next issue

News

For expats, job contracts in Belgium can seem a bit strange at first, particularly if you don't speak either of the official languages. Recently, a Dutch man filed a complaint that he couldn't be fired – because his job contract was in English and therefore invalid. Was it? And is there ever a chance to get a job contract in your native language?

Business

E-readers have never been more popular, and they might just be your only option to read a book (or, ahem, a newspaper) in a couple of decades. We talk to industry specialists and bookstore owners to see how Flemish e-books are selling and if they think retail outlets are becoming obsolete