

## Flaxtastic

New uses for the grain from West Flanders is reviving the market

► 7



## In Flanders Fields

Flemish schoolchildren dig soil to send to London for a new memorial garden

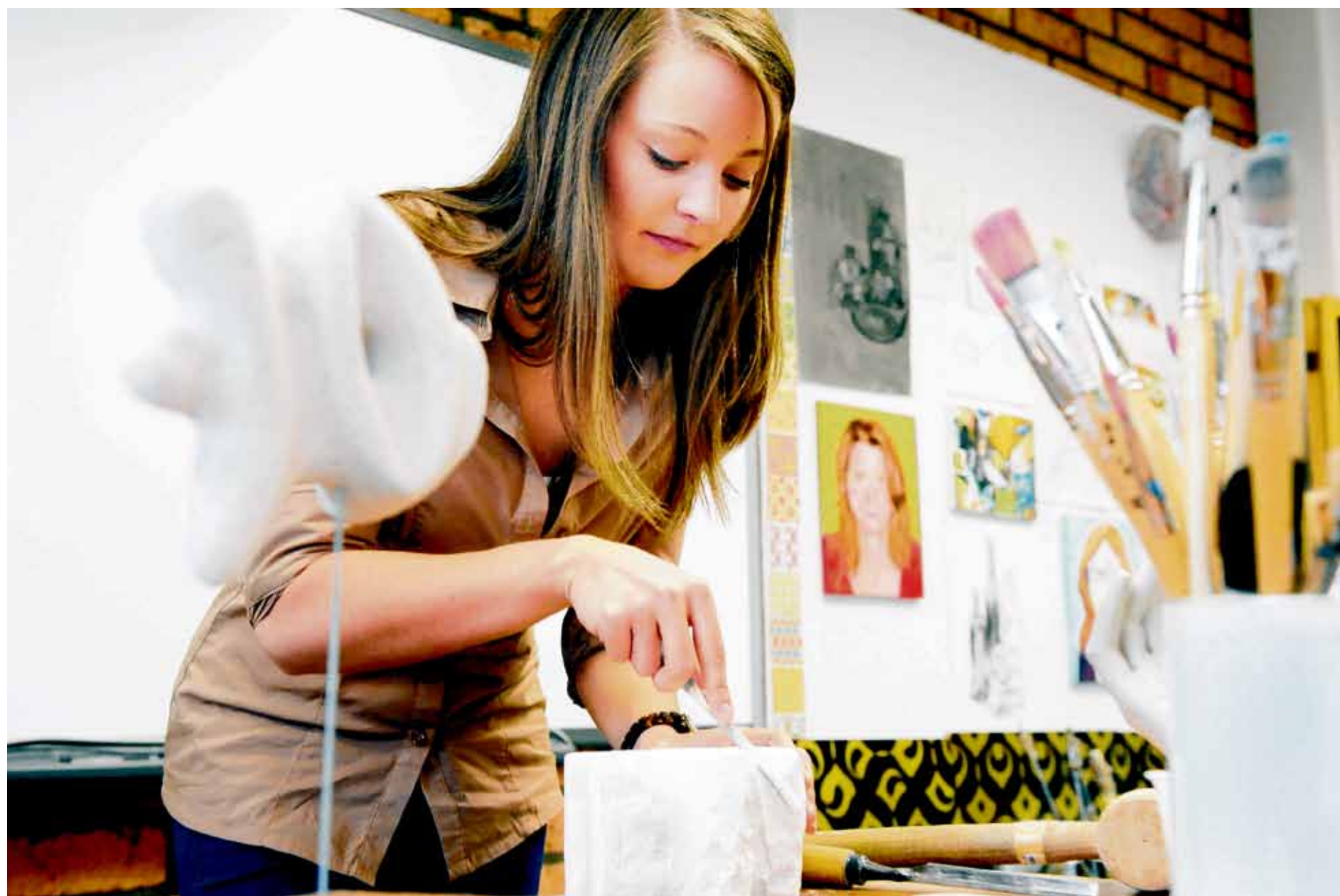
► 10



## Art is life

Compagnie Cecilia's Arne Sierens on his fascinating approach to writing plays

► 12



# Second-class teachers

## Plight of young educators is pushing Flanders' turnover crisis to new heights

Linda A Thompson

"They graduate with such high expectations and eagerness, but when they're out there on their own, they awake to a brutal reality." As alarming numbers of young teachers find themselves forced to leave the industry, we look at the reasons behind this growing crisis in Flanders' schools.

Last October, Laurien Stuyvers learned that the school she had been teaching at for six months wouldn't be hiring her full-time. For Stuyvers, the news came as the final straw. Since graduating from the Provincial Hogeschool

Limburg's teaching programme a year earlier, she had sent dozens of application letters, done short stints at two schools and sat home unemployed for a combined total of five months. Worried that she would soon have no income or job, she began applying for non-education positions. In May, Stuyvers took up her current position as an administrative faculty staff member at the University of Hasselt. She says she misses teaching, but is convinced she did what was right for her. "When you're young, it's important to have something steady, to have a salary you can count on," she explains. "In education, you sometimes live in insecurity for two to three months and you never

know what's coming next. I wanted security." Stuyvers' story is by no means unique. Young teachers across Flanders are checking out of the education system at alarmingly high rates, crushed by a system that urgently needs more educators but is failing to retain them. According to the education department's 2011 job report, 20% of Flemish secondary-school teachers under 30 leave the profession after less than five years. In Brussels, that number increases to 50%. Marc Hermans, head of the education department at PXL University College in Hasselt, has seen countless alumni crash and burn. "They graduate with such high expectations



# Belgium clinch place at World Cup

## Fans go wild as the Red Devils qualify for the first cup in 12 years

Leo Cendrowicz

It has been 12 long years since Belgium last qualified for a major football tournament, but they did so in style last Friday, with victory over Croatia clinching their place at next year's World Cup finals in Brazil.

By beating their nearest qualifying rivals 2-1 in Zagreb, the Red Devils became the third European side to qualify for Brazil. Two first-half goals from Everton's on-loan Chelsea striker Romelu Lukaku had Belgian fans dancing on the half-empty terraces at the Maksimir stadium. Although Niko Kranjcar pulled one back for the hosts with a late goal, Belgium held on for the victory that ensures their place in the finals.

Coach Marc Wilmots said that the team have been "given back their fans and their soul." Wilmots captained the Red Devils to the last 16 at the World Cup in Japan and South Korea in 2002 and has moulded a talented squad brimming with potential into a dangerous attacking unit that has drawn admiring glances during their qualifying campaign. "We were very



mature in our play," he said. "Today you could see how we have developed as a team. We did not give away any space and hit them when we could."

The game was seen on television by 1.7 million people in Flanders, and a further one million in the rest of the country, representing one-quarter of the Belgian population. Many fans saw the game on big screens erected in town squares, and the victory triggered raucous celebrations across the country.

Bookmakers now put Belgium as the fifth favourites to win the World Cup, after hosts Brazil, holders Spain, three-time winner Germany and twice winners Argentina. Already ranked sixth in the world by FIFA, a Red Devils victory in their final group match at home to Wales should propel them to a vertigo-inducing fourth place. It would also secure Belgium one of eight valuable World Cup seeded spots, which will be awarded to Brazil and the additional top seven qualified teams in the FIFA World Ranking.

## Red Cross needs more blood donors

The Flemish Red Cross has approached 308 municipalities in the region seeking their help in finding new blood donors. "We are convinced that municipal authorities are the perfect route to residents, local businesses, schools, associations and sports clubs," said Nele de Vos, manager of donor relations. "There's no doubt the number of blood donors in each municipality will increase with their support."

At present, only 3% of people in Flanders between the ages of 18 and 70 give blood. At the same time, about 70% of the population will need to receive blood at some time in their lives. The organisation is asking local authorities to arrange donation campaigns, in return for the Red Cross seal of approval – the title "Municipality with a Heart". The Red Cross' appeal has already



© Waldszenen/Wikimedia Commons

won the approval of the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities.

## Call for "grooming" to be made illegal

A man accused of sexually abusing 11 underage girls in the Netherlands also contacted at least 30 girls in Flanders, Dutch investigators said. The man, identified as Frank R, is a 48-year-old Belgian living in the Dutch town of Cuijk and is thought to have contacted hundreds of girls over the internet, encouraging them to meet him and have sex in a process known as "grooming". His plan worked in 11 cases that are known to police. The project came to light when a 12-year-old girl disappeared in Groningen, in the north of the Netherlands, and was found a day later with the man who had abused her. A check of the man's computer turned up many more victims and potential victims, as well as 144,000 pornographic photos and 26,000 videos.

Grooming is already a crime in the Netherlands, and Flemish party CD&V this



week repeated a call to outlaw the practice in Belgium. Last year the party's senator, Cindy Franssen, presented a bill that would punish anyone who approached a child with a view to committing illegal acts; the penalty would be greater if the internet was used to arrange a meeting where sexual abuse took place.

## Family seeks witnesses in Antwerp stabbing

A court in Antwerp has officially detained for one month a 49-year-old man accused of stabbing an 18-year-old to death last week in the city. Rudy F was involved in a fight in a bar where local student Gregory Bluj was celebrating a birthday with friends. The man left but later returned, still bleeding from a head wound.

According to witnesses, Bluj offered the man a handkerchief, but the

man stabbed him in the abdomen and left. Bluj later died of his injuries. The family of the victim issued a public appeal for witnesses to the incident to come forward to help clear up exactly what took place on the night in question. Both incidents took place in De Oude Vaart on Oude Vaartplaats on the evening of 6 October.

Bluj's funeral takes place on 16 October in the city's Sint-Paulus church.



© Jonas Roosens / BELGA

## Crevits approves two new tram projects

Flemish transport minister Hilde Crevits last week gave the green light to two new tram projects in Flanders that will add a total of 40 kilometres of track to the region's network by 2017.

The main project involves laying 32km of new track in Limburg province to create a high-speed tram link between Hasselt and Maastricht. A second more modest project is the construction of 8km of tramline in Antwerp to provide a link to the fashionable new Eilandje district and the northern suburbs. The projects together have a budget of more than €600 million.

The Limburg project, called Spartacus1, will create a high-



speed tram link between the Flemish and Dutch cities by late 2017, with a total journey time of 38 minutes, Crevits said. The project involves the laying of lines, a new tram depot in Hasselt and 12 new trams. The work is due to begin in the spring of 2015.

Despite being a shorter route, the Antwerp tram project, named Brabo 2, requires a bigger budget. The cost of €400 million will be shared between

the Flemish region and the city of Antwerp. The project includes major improvements to Operaplein at the southern end of the route and the boulevards in the north of the city. Construction on Brabo 2 is due to begin in the autumn of 2014.

It is still being discussed whether the tram will go out as far as the district of Ekeren, where there is some local opposition. If the Ekeren extension is scrapped, the tram will terminate at the Havana site, where a large new Park & Ride is due to be built. The first stretch of the route is expected to be in operation by 2016.

## THE WEEK IN FIGURES

14.4%

of trains arrived at their destination more than five minutes late, according to figures from the rail authority NMBS, meaning 2013 is on course to become the worst year ever for rail punctuality

37,066

people in Flanders applied for training cheques in the first half of this year for a value of €6.5 million. The cheques allow holders to follow a training programme for half price

7,400

cubic metres of taxus hedge trimmings collected by an anti-cancer campaign, enough to prepare 7,400 doses of chemotherapy from the baccatine in the plant

€2.89 billion

in arrears owed by Belgians on loans and other forms of credit, according to the National Bank, an increase of 9.4% in a year. The average arrears is €5,840

€6.7 million

in Lottery winnings unclaimed in Belgium in 2012, up slightly from €6.6 million in 2011. EuroMillions alone accounts for €3.4 million of the total



WEEK IN BRIEF

Frederik Van Lierde of West Flanders **won the Ironman World Championship** in Hawaii last weekend, arguably the most punishing athletic competition in the world. The 34-year-old from Menen finished the gruelling 3.86km ocean swim, 180km bike ride through lava fields and 42km marathon run in 8 hours, 12 minutes, 29 seconds. The first Flemish Ironman winner, in 1996, was his coach, Luc Van Lierde (unrelated), who won again three years later. Another Fleming, 29-year-old Bart Aernouts, from Antwerp, finished eighth in the race last Saturday.

The security detail at Brussels’ justice palace are continuing a **strike this week over alleged intimidation** and harassment. The staff, who belong to the prison authority, walked out last week after a member was arrested after a complaint from a lawyer that he had touched her inappropriately during a search. The security detail is responsible for transporting defendants from prison to court; two men accused in a major drugs trial were unable to attend court as a result of the strike.

Anyone selling a house in Belgium must now provide information on whether the **property lies in a flood-sensitive area**. According to estate agents’ industry federation CIB, as many as 10,000 homeowners in Flanders are affected, as their homes are regularly flooded.

Maria Natividad Jauregui Espina, an alleged member of the Basque terrorist organisation ETA, has been **arrested in Ghent** after being on the run on murder charges since 1979. Espina is accused of taking part in attacks against Spanish security services, as a result of which four police officers and two soldiers died.

Motoring organisation Touring has called for an **end to demonstrations that disrupt city traffic**, after a major protest by fire service personnel on 7 October blocked traffic in the city centre. Firefighters were demanding more pay and sprayed police with firefighting foam, closed off roads and set fires in the street. “Demonstrating is a freedom guaranteed by the constitution,” Touring said. “But that freedom ends when the freedom of others is taken away.”

Dutch celebrity chef Sergio Herman will call his **new restaurant in Antwerp The Jane**. A food and cocktail bar will be named The Upper Room Bar, and both will be housed in the chapel of the city’s former military hospital. The project, previously known under the working title La Chapelle, has been two years in preparation; the restaurant will open in January.

Police personnel working in a station in the centre of Antwerp were **exposed to carbon monoxide fumes** for five years, the police trade union NSPV discovered. An investigation took place after staff complained repeatedly of headaches and nausea. It was discovered that a ventilation system was coupled to the underground garage, where police vehicles regularly stood with their engines running. A contract for the replacement of the ventilation system is being negotiated.

The study centre for nuclear energy in Mol will carry out a five-year research programme costing €12.5 million to look at the **safety aspects of possible corrosion in reactor chambers**. It has been ordered by electricity producer GDF Suez-Electrabel, two of whose reactors in Belgium – Doel in East Flanders and Tihange in Wallonia – had to be closed amid security

concerns after microscopic fissures were discovered in the concrete reactor chamber.

Bodies of a couple found in their home in Verrebroek, East Flanders, had been **dead for at least two weeks**, police said. The couple, in their 60s, were missed by neighbours, who informed the social aid agency OCMW, but no action was taken. A friend raised the alarm when the woman failed to answer her phone. According to police, no signs of violence were found at the scene.

Achel, one of the world’s eight genuine Trappist beers, is in **danger of losing its Trappist label**, as the city of Hamont-Achel, Limburg province, prepares to take over the management of the brewery in the abbey of Sint-Benedict. The abbey is home to only five monks, one of whom, Brother Jules, is the master brewer. He is leaving the abbey, and if the brewery is taken over, it will lose its right to the Trappist label, which requires a beer to be brewed by monks.

A couple from Koekelare, West Flanders, who were among neighbourhood residents who gathered up thousands of euros thrown from a getaway car last April, are to **appear in court charged with theft**. Thieves had robbed a safe of €1 million in nearby Zedelgem. As they were being pursued by police, they threw the safe out of the car, and it broke open, releasing the cash into the streets. Residents scooped up handfuls, and police have been looking for the missing money since. A tip from witnesses led to the couple, who admitted taking €100. “€100 is not a lot of money,” said a spokesperson for the Bruges prosecutor. “But it’s a question of principle.” Nearly €500,000 is still unaccounted for.

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



Donald Muylle

For 30 years Donald Muylle has been making kitchens to measure from his West Flanders base in Roeselare. In that time he has opened showrooms all over Flanders, from Zuienkerke to Hasselt, from one end of the region to the other. He’s even strayed into Wallonia, opening a branch of his business, Dovy Keukens, in Tournai in February this year. If you watch a lot of commercial television, you’ll be familiar with his message: “I’m Donald Muylle. For 30 years I’ve been making kitchens as if they were for myself.” It’s a powerful message, and it seems to work: As well as his 15 branch showrooms he has an award from Unizo: the most customer-friendly small business of 2012. As if to prove them right, he attracted 11,000 visitors to his premises on this month’s Open Business Day, the single biggest attraction of the event. What his fellow kitchen-makers make of him, however, is not so laudatory. The problem is his latest advertisement, in which he sings the praises of his own laminated surfaces, which he reasonably points out repel water and resist discoloration. If you

have a fitted kitchen, you’ll know only too well what he’s on about. The trouble is, in praising his own product, he indulges in a little knocking copy regarding his competitors, and this has created some ill-feeling in the business. Competitors rushed into the public prints with accusations of lying, exaggerating and not telling the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Muylle responded in politic fashion: “We do not wish to respond to this.” It’s no surprise, then, to discover barely a day after that storm had lain down that Donald Muylle is to bring his considerable PR skills to bear to the advantage of the federal police. He’ll be employed giving communications training to senior officers in the West Flanders area. “It’s remarkable how Donald Muylle is able to reach the wider public with a simple message. That’s an art,” said Dirk Van Nuffel, chief of police in Bruges, speaking on VRT radio. “His ads are short, simple, clear and authentic. Any senior police officer who could come across that way to his own men and the public would be very convincing. That’s the plan.”

OFFSIDE

Hands off St Nick

You may think it’s a little early for Saint Nicholas to be appearing in the news, and you’d be right, but whatever the season, a little bit of respect is always called for. And the lack of such is just what has landed a young man from Sint-Niklaas, of all places, in hot water with the justice system. The town, as you might expect, gives pride of place in front of the town hall to a statue of Saint Nicholas, or Sinterklaas in Dutch, which shows the saint – a fourth-century Greek bishop in what is now Turkey – in one of the many episodes attached to his legend. In this case, he’s rescuing three children caught by an evil butcher and destined to end up in his pies. The saint holds his episcopal crook in his left hand and bestows a benediction with his right – or he would, had his right hand not been broken off by the offending 19-year-old. We must suspect youthful high jinks rather than real malice, however. The young man, aware there are only eight weeks until the saint comes to cart off those who have been naughty in a sack to Spain, turned himself in to police. The prosecutor is now considering whether to send him to trial. In the meantime, Sinterklaas is being attacked on another front, by businesses ignoring the 13-year-old code of conduct agreed between the retail sector, manufacturers and family organisations, designed to



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limit the use of the saint in commercial advertising. Thus, the saint may not appear in physical form before 1 November, nor may his image be used before that date in promotions or advertising. According to the retail organisation Unizo-Winkelraad (Shops Council) the rules are generally observed, but there are always some who go their own way. The council promises eternal vigilance.

FLANDERS TODAY



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## 5TH COLUMN

Anja Otte

### Splendid isolation

A poll is just that, a poll, not an election result. Still, politicians prefer good polls to bad ones. With that in mind, last weekend must have been rather unpleasant for the N-VA.

According to a new poll by VRT/*De Standaard*, published on Friday, N-VA would get a result of 27.4% if elections were held today. That is more than 4% less than the nationalists' results last May. Not only is N-VA dipping in popularity, the trust in the federal government, which N-VA tirelessly attacks as being a "taxation government", has never been any higher.

N-VA's shrinking attraction of late can be explained by the party's appalling record in the town of Turnhout, where it lost city hall due to internal dissent, and the confusion Siegfried Bracke created about what the next federal government's priority should be: the economy or yet another state reform.

And it's not just the poll N-VA leadership had to worry about; the other parties' reactions were swift and similar. A cartoon in *De Standaard* showed a large sign saying: "It's the economy, stupid". The sign was held by just about every politician in the country, except for N-VA president Bart De Wever (positioned right underneath the word "stupid").

"Parliament will vote the sixth state reform this autumn," said Gwendolyn Rutten, president of Open VLD. "As far as we're concerned, we are done reforming the state for now. The focus should be on the social-economic situation." CD&V, Flanders' second party after N-VA, holds the same view, as do French-speaking politicians Paul Maignette (socialists) and Didier Reynders (liberals).

This leaves N-VA in splendid isolation, as the party makes entering the federal government conditional of another state reform. So far, N-VA could play tough, as it is impossible to leave it out of a federal coalition if it pulls in 30% or more of the votes. Any lesser outcome, however, makes it much harder to make absolute demands.

Maybe that's why N-VA, too, has shifted its focus to the economy – speaking of the need for a "recovery government", a term reminiscent of the 1980s. Still, the isolation remains.

All of this would make 27% what is known as a "defeat in victory". It is a pretty good result – one that any other Flemish party can only dream of. But where does it lead to?

# Former prime minister Wilfried Martens dies

## The East Flanders politician headed a record nine coalition governments

Derek Blyth

The former Belgian prime minister Wilfried Martens died at his home in Lokeren, East Flanders, last week at the age of 77. One of the grand old men of Belgian and European politics, Martens served as prime minister for an almost unbroken period of 13 years, from 1979 to 1992. He then served in the European Parliament and ended his career as president of the European People's Party.

Born in Sleidinge, near Ghent, Martens (*pictured*) was involved in Flemish protests during Expo 58. He went on to join the Christian People's Party (now the Christian Democrat Party, CD&V) and in 1979 became prime minister without any previous ministerial experience. He served as prime minister in a record nine coalition governments (numbered Martens I to Martens IX) and steered the country during a decisive period in its history as it moved inexorably

to a federal structure.

After leaving the official residence at 16 Wetstraat for the last time in 1992, Martens immediately turned his attention to European politics. He stood as a candidate for the European People's Party (which he helped found) and in 1994 took a seat in the European Parliament.

He also served as president of the EPP, transforming the centre-right party into the largest political group in the European Parliament. Martens remained president until a few days ago when he announced his resignation due to ill health.

Martens had a troubled private life and made the headlines in 2008 after he married his third wife, Miet Smet, a former minister with whom he had worked closely since his early days in politics. He had five children from his first two marriages.

Many Belgian and European leaders reacted to Martens' death. "Today



© Babciakorekta

Belgium has lost one of its leading politicians and a great statesman," said prime minister Elio Di Rupo. "He will be remembered as one of the founding fathers of a federal Belgium." Di Rupo also praised Martens as

a great European statesman. "He worked until the very end of his life to realise the European ideal." Martens' funeral takes place in Ghent's Sint-Baaf's Cathedral on 19 October.

## More than 8,000 hectares of new forest

Flanders has increased its woodland by 8,262 hectares – the equivalent of about 16,500 football pitches – in the last two years, announced environment minister Joke Schauvliege. Flanders now counts 185,686 hectares of woods.

The figures are based on information from the Boswijzer (Woodland Indicator), which was introduced in 2011. It uses aerial photos that measure the amount of green and height of flora to provide a reading of the extent of Flanders' woodland. Every Flemish province saw an increase, but none more than East Flanders, where woodland went up by 10.3% or 2,333 hectares.

"The results are proof that the Flemish government is making efforts to

create more woodland in Flanders," Schauvliege said.

Two independent environmental organisations, Bos+ and Bond Beter Leefmilieu contested the ministry's figures, calling for the maps and figures used to be made public. "Minister Schauvliege appears to have succeeded, after only two years and without any extra budgetary resources, in creating 10 times as much new woodland as the Netherlands did," said Bert De Somviele, director of Bos+. "That would be the biggest turn-around in woodland policy in recent decades. All previous analyses suggest that things have not been going so well for woodland areas in recent years."

## Flanders gets high literacy, numeracy marks from OECD

Adults in Flanders have high literacy and numeracy skills compared to other regions, according to a new report by OECD. The Survey of Adult Skills found that young adults in Flanders (aged 16 to 24) have above-average proficiency in literacy, numeracy and problem-solving compared to other countries, but that a relatively large number of older adults have poor proficiency when it comes to "accessing, analysing and communicating information using common computer applications". The aim of the OECD survey was to discover levels of literacy, numeracy and digital skills in 24 advanced economies. Some 5,463 people were surveyed in Flanders, which scored third in the world for numeracy and ninth for literacy, but dropped to 14th place out of 24 countries for problem-solving skills.

Flanders performs particularly badly in terms of immigrants' language skills. "The average literacy proficiency of foreign-language immigrants in Flanders is among the lowest across all participating countries," the report said.

The OECD used the findings to come up with recommendations to boost employment. Its main suggestion was that policies should be developed to improve the skills required by the job market. "These recommendations fit almost exactly with the policy that I am pursuing today," said Flemish employment minister Philippe Muyters in response to the report. "I am pleased to see that a respected international organisation like OECD has endorsed our approach."

## New coalition appointed in Turnhout

An agreement has been reached to form a new governing coalition in Turnhout, Antwerp province, which excludes the Flemish nationalist party N-VA. The deal was reached last week after Geert Bourgeois, the Flemish minister for administrative affairs and a member of N-VA, declared the city "ungovernable" because of turmoil within the local N-VA party.

Bourgeois made the announcement following a failed attempt by the governor of Antwerp province, Cathy Berx, to resolve the crisis in the municipal government. The inability to broker an agreement meant that Bourgeois was forced to rule that the existing coalition – N-VA, CD&V and SPA – was no longer able to run the city. "This is a failure,"

Bourgeois admitted. "As minister of administrative affairs, you want to have good government everywhere, and this was a departure from good government."

After the old coalition was dissolved, a new team was formed that unites CD&V, SPA, Groen and the local party TIM (Turnhout Iedereen Mee, which aims to make Turnhout "more beautiful, better and personable").

The decision on Monday meant that the city's N-VA mayor, Erwin Brentjens, had to give up his post. The new mayor, Eric Vos, represents the small TIM party. "We have put our disagreements to one side," he told the press. "We want to restore the public's confidence in the city government"

## Public invited to this weekend's festival of Flemish politics

Voters will soon have the chance to speed date a politician or ask a question in the Flemish parliament. The parliament is holding a Festival of Politics on 19 and 20 October in an attempt to bring politicians closer to residents.

This will be the second time the Flemish parliament has opened its doors to the public – not just to let people wander around the interiors but also to have their say in the way the region is governed. The first festival was held in 2008. The two-day event involves a wide range of debates and encounters, not all of them to do with politics. There will be Flemish beer tasting and children's activities, as well as serious debates with leading Flemish thinkers.

The main debate will be led by two well-known TV journalists, Lieven Verstraete and Cathérine Moerkerke. They will confront politicians with 40 questions that have been sent in by 40 members of the public.

In another session, author David Van Reybrouck will discuss digital democracy in the 21st century with the academic Marc Hooghe. Other debates will focus on the future of Flanders in the light of Belgian state reforms and the relationship between Flanders and the EU. The parliament is also organising an exhibition of Flemish design, a walking tour of the Brussels government district and a series of concerts.

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



# Second-class teachers

## Young educators forced to leave profession in hope of finding job security

► continued from page 1

and eagerness, but when they're out there on their own, they awake to a brutal reality," he says. "It's tragic." For Dimokritos Kavadias, a professor in political sciences at the Free University of Brussels (VUB), the turnover comes at not only a human but also an economic one. "Good teachers are crucial to our entire society," he says. "If we really care about our children, if we really care about the future of our society, our first priority should be to attract motivated teachers." Experts point to a lack of coaching and job security for newcomers as the root causes of the high turnover, and say that finding ways to retain new teachers will be essential to addressing the shortage in Flanders, which is expected to grow to 20,000 across the region by 2020, according to estimates from the education department. "We're going to see a teacher shortage everywhere in Flanders if we don't do something," says Hermans. "Make no mistake about that."

### Repeating patterns

The high turnover in education is hardly a new or exclusively Flemish problem, but the tough job market has pushed the crisis to new heights. Every year, the same pattern more or less repeats itself: Between October and February, school administrators, school associations and Flemish employment and training agency VDAB sound the alarm that they can't find qualified teachers to fill their open vacancies. Encouraged by news reports about the need for qualified teachers, scores of young people enrol in teacher-training programmes in September, confident that a stable, recession-proof job will await them on graduation. Instead, they encounter a starkly different reality. Many of them, for starters, won't find jobs. The VDAB still considers teaching a *knelpuntberoep*, a profession for which employers struggle to find qualified candidates. But that doesn't mean that any teacher anywhere in Flanders can expect to be hired



Students at PXL University College in Hasselt prepare for what they hope will be a long and fulfilling career in teaching

straight out of college like, for instance, IT specialists, technicians or engineers. The picture is a lot muddier in the education job market, with a deep mismatch between the skills new teachers typically offer and what schools actually need.

"We have a surplus of teachers with certain profiles – language teachers, for instance – and a shortage of teachers certified in maths and science," explains Kavadias. "Second, we're seeing an enormous teacher shortage in cities like Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent, and a surplus of teachers in residential areas." This helps explain why last year the VDAB reported a 1,500-teacher shortage and in the same breath pointed out that 11,000 teachers were still without jobs at the start of the school year. For the lucky graduates who do find jobs, the picture isn't pretty, either. "There's this image of the teaching profession – you've got your holidays and tenure," explains Kavadias. "But that's just not true for the first three to five years." Newcomers are typically assigned

the toughest classes, work on temporary contracts and often juggle substitute jobs at different schools to arrive at something approaching a full-time schedule.

Hermans says it's a shambles. "You have to wait for a temp job. Fine; you go clean someone else's mess for three weeks. Then you're out. Again, you wait. Then you *maybe* get a three-month assignment, but it won't be a full-time contract, more like 80%," he says. "How in God's name is this possible?" The irony is that the job security that newcomers crave and that the education sector has traditionally offered is one of the root causes of principals' inability to offer newcomers more job security. Tenured teachers benefit from flexible leave systems and can be fired only under stringent circumstances.

"Once you're permanently appointed, it's very difficult for the school to send you away," says Kavadias. In this zero-sum game, newcomers become second-class teachers who often see their temporary assignments abruptly

end when tenured teachers return from a long absence. That's what happened to Stuvvers. One minute, she had a full-time year-long

“There's this image of teaching – your holidays and tenure – but that's just not true for the first three to five years

contract, the next the person she was substituting for returned from what was supposed to be a year-

long leave after just two weeks – leaving her with no option but to accept the 14 hours the school offered by way of compromise.

Hermans says he has seen many of his graduates pursue other career options once they realise how slim their chances at full-time employment in education are. "We are losing our best students," he says, "the ones who see there are other options out there and decide to go work at a bank."

If the situation is dire for new teachers, schools are also greatly affected, and urban schools with large populations of minority children in particular have been on the receiving end. Lieven Lemmens, principal of the small Sint-Karel primary school in the low-income Brussels neighbourhood of Molenbeek, can attest to that.

At one time last year, five of its 12 teachers were on sick leave. At first, members of the school's care team (a psychologist, speech therapist and pedagogue) jumped in. When that didn't suffice, Lemmens divided the teacherless kids among the remaining classes, with class sizes in some cases going up from 22 to 27 children.

### Wrong degrees

"The number of applications I see coming in at my school is very limited, quite frankly – especially for the temp assignments," he says. The few responses he did get were from people with the wrong degrees or none at all.

For Lemmens, the high turnover is detrimental to the fundamental quality of teaching on an administration level. The school has to start from scratch with every new teacher – getting them up to speed with everything from the school vision and policies to the schoolwide approach to spelling or language proficiency.

The children, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds, are perhaps the biggest victims. "It's frustrating," he says. "Children need structure." Explaining that some of the children had four different teachers last year, he says: "The kids no longer know to what extent they can trust the person in front of them to help them, and to see them through the end of the school year." Situations like that at Sint-Karel will only become more frequent as Flemish cities begin to feel the effects of a looming population boom for which their schools lack the resources, infrastructure and, of course, staff. But Kavadias says that higher retention rates aren't the silver bullet. Even if schools find ways of reducing the high turnover rate, there will still be a shortage, he says. "It won't set off the retirement wave and the population growth," he says. Resolving the teacher shortage is just the beginning of addressing the problem.

## IN SEARCH OF TEACHING TALENT

Some cities have taken matters into their own hands and have launched a campaign to make teaching in urban environments more appealing. In Brussels, the Flemish Community Commission and student services agency Br(ik) launched a promotion campaign featuring famous Brusselsers and their children to draw more teachers to Dutch-speaking schools in the city.

In Antwerp, education services agency AgODi, the city of Antwerp and the VDAB joined forces to launch the Onderwijstalent ("education talent") project after reports revealed that

the city would face a 3,500 teacher shortage at just primary-school level by 2020. Project co-ordinator Koen Rutten (pictured with colleagues) says it functions as an education clearing house, liaising between job-seekers and schools and pointing potential applicants to vacancies. Their *loopbaantraject*, or career track, was specifically designed to assist new teachers in the first few years in the job. "We make sure that the periods between assignments are as short as possible so that teachers continue working as long as possible," says Rutten.





WEEK IN  
BUSINESS**Banks ▶ KBC**

Flanders' largest financial institution has sold its Indian ICT affiliate Value Source to the American Cognizant group. The bank will continue to use the company's development and maintenance services for five years.

**Chemicals ▶ Solvay**

The Brussels-based chemicals and plastics group is investing €1 billion to acquire the US Chemlogics company, which specialises in the oil and gas market for stimulation of production and the cementing and water management of drilling operations. The move is particularly connected to the fast-developing shale gas and oil industry worldwide.

**Energy ▶ Myrrha**

The Mol-based nuclear study centre has signed the first technical design contracts for the future Myrrha research reactor for €24 million. Winners of the bid include France's Areva, Italy's Ansaldo Nucleare and Spain's Empresarios Agrupados. The facility is expected to be in operation from 2025 at the earliest.

**Engineering  
▶ Tractebel**

The Brussels-based Tractebel Engineering, an affiliate of France's GDF Suez energy group, has signed a contract to advise and support the building of the Bangpa-In Cogeneration power station in Thailand.

**Food ▶ Uncle Ben's**

The Olen unit of Uncle Ben's rice products is investing €20 million to increase capacity by 25% to 115,000 tonnes a year. The company, an affiliate of the US Mars food group, exports 95% of its production.

**Property ▶ Provostel**

Antwerp-based industrial property developer Provostel has acquired from Redevco seven commercial buildings operating under the Carrefour, Brico and C&A brands for €45 million.

**Retail ▶ Ikea**

Swedish home furnishings group Ikea is to open its fifth store in Flanders next year, in Hasselt. In addition the company has planned a new outlet in the Antwerp area for 2016.

**Telecoms ▶ Alcatel**

The Antwerp affiliate of ailing telecommunications group Alcatel will lose only 30 jobs out of a total of 1,500 in the company's sweeping restructuring aimed at reducing its workforce by 10,000 worldwide. The Antwerp facility is earmarked to become one of Alcatel's research and development hubs.

Maastricht hosts second  
Flemish-Dutch Summit

## Flanders and the Netherlands work toward closer ties

Alan Hope

Minister-president Kris Peeters held a second Flemish-Dutch summit last week with the Dutch prime minister, Mark Rutte, this time in the city of Maastricht. The leaders and their delegations met to discuss economic co-operation. The first such meeting took place in Bornem, Antwerp province, in 2011. Peeters was accompanied by Ingrid Lieten, minister for innovation, and Hilde Crevits, minister for transport. The Flemish delegation met with Rutte, transport minister Melanie Schultz van Haegen and economic affairs minister Henk Kamp. Among the areas covered in this round of talks were a co-operation agreement between the chemical



Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters (right) met with Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte

industries in Flanders and the Netherlands, involving energy, the effect on the climate, exchange of information and know-how and, most controversially, the extraction of shale oil.

The two governments pledged to maintain and reinforce co-operation on innovation and to develop deeper links on cultural matters, beginning with a joint presence at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2016.

The Netherlands exports for a value of €52 billion to Flanders every year, more than to the US and the growth economies of Brazil, India and China put together. Flanders exports about €27 billion worth of goods to the Netherlands.

## Brussels 4G agreement could collapse

A potential breakthrough in the impasse between mobile phone operators and the government of the Brussels-Capital Region could be at risk, after the region's environment minister, Evelyne Huytebroeck, altered the draft regulation for the agreement, which was reached in July. Operators have been unable to roll out the latest mobile internet service, known as LTE or 4G, because the Brussels region enforces a much stricter limit on GSM radiation than other parts of Belgium. So while Grimbergen and Roeselare are able to surf on smartphones up to 10 times the speed of the previous 3G service, users in the capital are blocked. Some experts have gone as far as to suggest

that this could cause some businesses to move out of the capital. In July, Huytebroeck and the operators – Proximus and Base are ready for 4G – reached an agreement that would have seen radiation from each mast measured separately according to the technology: three volts each for 2G (telephone), 3G and 4G, instead of three volts per mast as it is now. According to a new draft, however, Huytebroeck increased the limit to a total of six volts for all technologies together – not as generous as July's agreement. For the telecoms operators, it's still too restrictive to allow the level of coverage the capital requires.

## Kestens raises \$4.5 million in Silicon Valley

Davy Kestens, the 25-year-old entrepreneur who left Herk-De-Stad in Limburg for San Francisco to start his own company offering Twitter management to corporations, has raised another \$4.5 million (€3.3 million) in venture capital to finance expansion of his business. Kestens studied computer programming in Kortrijk but dropped out to start his own business. Two business attempts later, he had come up with TwitSpark, which allows companies to monitor a massive number of social media threads, keeping track

of mentions of their own name and allowing them to respond rapidly. Last year Kestens raised €1.1 million in Flanders to allow him to move to Silicon Valley. In the meantime, TwitSpark, now renamed Sparkcentral, has gathered clients of the stature of Electrabel, Brussels Airlines and the US airline Delta. "We have big plans in the world of call centres and customer service units; we're not just a Twitter tool any more", Kestens told *De Tijd*, explaining the name-change. "Our ambitions are far bigger, and we needed a name that gets that across."

## Sludge dumping suspended to protect fishing

A pilot project to dump sludge in the North Sea has been temporarily suspended following protests from the local shrimp fishermen. Hilde Crevits, Flemish transport and public works minister, launched the project to dump sludge in a zone to the west of Zeebrugge harbour at the beginning of October. Fishermen complained that the sludge being dumped from dredgers was endangering the rich fishing grounds off the Flemish coast. "The shrimps are being driven away," said fisherman Kurt Deman. Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters suspended the project yesterday. But the pilot scheme will be resumed on 21 October, according to a press statement issued by Crevits. The fishermen appear to be pleased with the outcome so far.



"Discussions between the Flemish government and the representatives of the coastal fisheries have been constructive," said Urbain Wintein, president of the fishing organisation Rederscentrale. "The fishermen can continue fishing over the coming two weeks. During the pilot phase that follows, the concerns of the fishermen will be taken into account to ensure that fishing can continue safely."

## Bellens cleared of suspect property deal

The board of Belgacom has found CEO Didier Bellens not guilty of a conflict of interests in relation to the sale by Belgacom of a building in central Brussels to a company in which Bellens is a partner. New company chair Stefaan De Clerck, former federal justice minister, said the board would be tightening up its rules on corporate governance following the investigation. Bellens sits on the board of

Immobel, the company to which Belgacom was planning to sell the Stro building. That gave rise to questions about the deal, but an internal inquiry found that Bellens had not only declared his directorship clearly and early but also kept an appropriate distance from any real estate matters, which were handled within the company by subsidiary ConnectImmo.

## Willemen named Enterprise of the Year

The Mechelen-based construction group Willemen has been voted Enterprise of the Year by a jury of business experts appointed by financial services group Ernst & Young (EY). The jury, chaired by Baron Paul Buysse and including experts such as economist Geert Noels and VOKA director-general Jo Libeer, praised Willemen for its growth and its continued success. The

family business, led by father Johan and son Tom Willemen, has grown both organically and by acquisition, having taken over road construction specialist Aswebo and infrastructure contractor Franki. Among the notable buildings in Willemen's portfolio are the MAS museum in Antwerp, company headquarters for Telenet and Woestijnvis and renovations to the royal palace in Laken. Willemen

has 2,000 employees and an annual turnover of €600 million. The company has operations in Poland and Romania, but Johan Willemen has his eyes set on Africa. "It's the continent of the future," he told *De Tijd* newspaper, which sponsors the award. "But if you only get there as everyone else realises that, you're too late." Willemen recently landed a joint venture in Senegal with a local

developer, for the construction of €65 million worth of villas and luxury apartments. The Aalst-based Medec, meanwhile was awarded the Prize of the Flemish Government by the same jury. The company, which develops and produces anaesthetic equipment, was set up in 1994 and now employs 40 people with an annual turnover of €10 million.



# Optimal fibre

## Scientists research how to get best value out of Flemish flax

Alan Hope

A linen bed sheet and a tennis racket – what do they have in common? Answer: They’re both made using flax fibres and both are likely to be remembered as Flemish products. At one time the area now covered by West and East Flanders was part of the European centre of production of flax, a plant much prized for the manufacture of textiles before the growth in the 19th century of cotton imports from the New World. Flax plants also produce oil-bearing seeds, and the fibres of the stem, used in the making of linen cloth, are straight and strong – up to three times as strong as cotton. It’s that strength that is now being researched by scientists in the Composite Materials Group (CMG) at the University of Leuven, headed by Professor Ignaas Verpoest. “Flax is an extremely interesting fibre as it has almost the same properties as, for example, the glass fibre often used in composite materials,” says Verpoest. “The flax fibre is not only just as strong, it also has the additional advantage that it absorbs vibrations very well, which means that a tennis racket is better able to dampen shocks and help avoid injuries. As well as all that, it’s a sustainable material.” Flax grown in Flanders was for centuries used to make textiles, including sheets and lace, with coarser grades used to make string and rope. Now the flax is exported to China to be separated into fibres by processes with the Chaucerian-sounding names of retting, scutching and heckling.



Leuven professor Ignaas Verpoest and a Samsonite suitcase developed with the strong flax fibre  
© Rob Stevens/KULeuven

The CMG wants to make that practice a thing of the past. “We are developing new techniques, with the flax industry, to enable them to deliver

fibres direct to the composite industry,” Verpoest says. “There are already products on the market, but further research is needed to make the fibres better and cheaper.” Products already available are car parts and sports equipment such as a bicycle frame and skis, all of them benefiting from the shock-absorbing qualities of flax fibres. Work is also being carried out on a safety seat for racecars, which can be moulded in a minute to the body-hugging contours of individual drivers, using a material made of plastic and flax. The CMG previously developed a shock-absorbing suitcase for Samsonite. The potential for the use of flax in composite materials is of great interest to growers, flax producer Pascal Warlop explained to VRT news. “Textiles are very trend-conscious, so some years we’re riding on a fashion wave while other years linen just isn’t in the picture,” he said. “Composite production is a much more stable market with a much steadier level of demand.” For the Flemish industry, meanwhile, the race is on. Flanders produces 15% of the world’s flax crop, compared to 75% from France. “For the time being, France has the lead in the development of flax as a composite material,” Verpoest says. “We have to ensure that the Flemish industry isn’t left behind, and that’s why we’re asking the Flemish government for support.”

## WEEK IN INNOVATION

### Flemish bioethicists spark debate on “designer babies”

Bioethicists of Ghent University and the University of Leuven have created a stir in the US with their article in the journal *Genetics in Medicine* on the patent for a method to develop so-called designer babies. The company 23andMe last week received the patent for their technique to determine, for example, the eye colour and personality characteristics of a child. Although the firm cannot guarantee future parents that their child has these desired characteristics, they can select the egg cell and sperm that increase the probability. Professor Sigrid Sterckx of the Bioethics Institute Ghent says that 23andMe and the US Patent and Trademark Office have not sufficiently considered the ethical implications.

### ExaScience Life Lab for Leuven’s imec

At nanotech research centre imec in Leuven, researchers of the new ExaScience Life Lab will generate breakthroughs in life sciences and biotechnology with supercomputers. The new lab is an extension of the ExaScience Lab for High Performance Computing, opened at imec in 2010 by technology company Intel, which is again a partner for the new project. The five Flemish universities are also co-operating, and Janssen Pharmaceuticals will join the collaboration later. Initially, the lab team will examine how supercomputers can accelerate the processing of genome sequences, which now takes about two days. A second goal of the ExaScience Life Lab is research on computer simulations of cells and tissues.

### Nobel Physics Prize for Belgian scientist

Brussels scientist François Englert, has won the 2013 Nobel Prize for Physics with the British physicist Peter Higgs. With his theory on the origin of the mass of subatomic particles in 1964, Englert was the first to lay the foundations for the discovery of the famous Higgs particle last year at Cern – the European laboratory for high-energy physics in Switzerland. In collaboration with his late colleague Robert Brout at the French-speaking Free Brussels University (ULB), Englert unveiled how certain elementary particles acquire mass. The theory also provides crucial insights into how matter was created after the Big Bang, the start of the universe. AF

# New nursing academy opens in Genk

Last month, Flemish welfare minister Jo Vandeurzen laid the first stone of the new Limburg Nursing Academy building. The project will offer more than just a brand-new campus with extensive facilities for Limburg healthcare and nursing students: By physically bringing education spaces closer to the actual working space, the academy hopes to bridge the gap between the training and the on-the-job realities of the care sector. The training centre, designed by Hasselt-based architects’ bureau A<sup>2</sup>O, is being constructed at the East Limburg Hospital (ZOL) site in Genk. From 2015, this is where students of

the healthcare department at the Limburg Catholic College (KHLim) and the higher vocational education (HBO) in nursing at Genk will complete their training. The new building will be in front of the main entrance to the hospital and will cover about 8,500 square metres. The two schools will provide several common spaces like a skills labs, a competence lab, an open learning centre and several auditoriums. The academy will be an open campus for the entire care sector’s regional initiatives, like seminars and extra training sessions, with the aim of optimising both the education of students as

well as the continued training of health-care professionals. The KHLim healthcare department, which houses about 900 students, will move from its Hasselt campus to the new location in Genk in 2015. Around 500 students from the HBO Nursing Genk, part of the Catholic Secondary Education Genk, will also receive their training at the new academy. The new campus should offer answers to challenges like the increasing demand for care caused by the ageing population and the retirement wave of many current health-care workers. The academy also recognises the need for

increased staff diversity and will focus on attracting more students of foreign origin. Erwin Bormans, ZOL’s general director, told *Het Nieuwsblad* that the academy’s integration was the next step in the development of a variety of care-related services. The hospital also includes children’s daycare and a psychiatric centre. The construction is expected to take about 600 days and will require a €14.7 million investment. The project is backed by the city of Genk and its welfare office. Andy Furniere  
▶ [www.limburgsezorgacademie.be](http://www.limburgsezorgacademie.be)

# New centre will sort ICT data

Six faculties of the Dutch- and French-speaking universities of Brussels are joining forces in the new Interuniversity Institute of Bio-informatics, (IB)<sup>2</sup>. Scientists from VUB and ULB will develop innovative technology at the centre to analyse the growing amount of complex ICT data – so-called “big data” – gathered in medical research. Technical advances today allow researchers to for instance acquire genetic data of complex

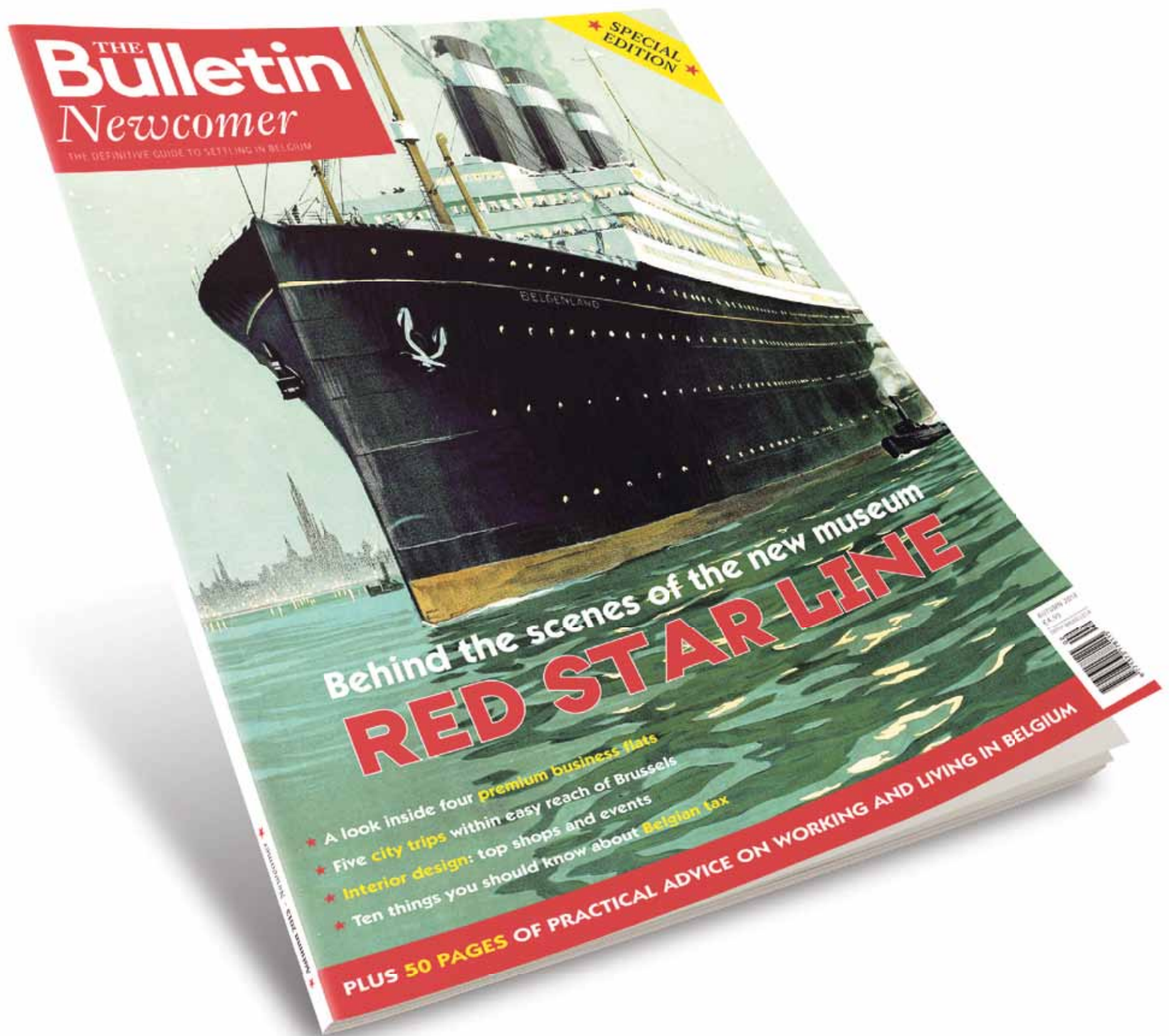
microbial interactions and the human genome’s approximately 20,000 genes. But collecting research data is just the first step. To attain relevant conclusions, scientists also need to organise and analyse these gigantic amounts of information. Located at the ULB’s Etterbeek campus, the centre houses experts in ICT, statistics, medicine, biology and chemistry. The sciences, applied sciences and medicine faculties of both

Brussels universities are the founding partners of this project. In addition to research facilities, such as high-performance computer technology, the centre also provides meeting and seminar spaces. In time, (IB)<sup>2</sup> hopes to become an international science centre through training, education, innovation and collaborations. The researchers at (IB)<sup>2</sup> are currently working on five research projects. They’re looking into the

evolution of our nerve system, examining predictive bio markers in the area of metagenomics, and figuring out the role of genetic polymorphisms in causing diseases. Two other projects have the scientists processing DNA sequences data to improve patient diagnoses, and devising a model for the dynamics of the human microbiome – the sum of all the microorganisms in our bodies. AF  
▶ [www.ibsquare.be](http://www.ibsquare.be)



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# Playing God

## Students from Leuven and Ghent are hoping to win one of the world's weirdest talent contests

Senne Starckx

The most attractive and mind-boggling applications in science are very often the result of a multidisciplinary approach – combining the best of two or more disciplines. A good example is the marriage between engineering and biology, merged in what we call “synthetic biology”. This is a field where scientists play around with individual amino acids, with small pieces of DNA and RNA, with proteins and other fundamental building blocks of life. It's a thoroughly bottom-up approach, and the ultimate goal is nothing less than to create new, artificial life.

Forget human cloning, designer babies and all those other practices in the forefront of science that are often loaded with ethical concerns. Synthetic biology starts from ordinary, “dead” matter. Artificial DNA or proteins are created in the lab by riveting thousands of amino acids to each other –not by taking existing materials from biological systems.

By doing this, synthetic biologists are able to create biological mini-factories – like bacteria or other micro-organisms; bacteria that can help humankind in a number of surprising ways, from producing new drugs and replacing insecticides in agriculture to helping clean up waste water.

So synthetic biology often gets confused with genetic manipulation, and hence it's sometimes regarded with a frown. “Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) arise when an extra gene or an extra function is inserted into an existing organism,” says Sabine Thieren, a biology student at the University of Leuven (KU Leuven). “In synthetic biology, we go much further than that. We give organisms and bacteria extra functions by which they receive entirely new features – which they didn't receive from Mother Nature.”

Thieren is one of 16 KU Leuven students who chose not to go on holiday this summer, preferring to stay in the biology lab. They're participating in iGEM, an international contest in which teams



Set for another victory? The iGEM team from KU Leuven

from all over the world try to come up with the best “genetically engineered machine”. The competition arose from a summer course at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston 10 years ago.

In the meantime, iGEM has become one of the weirdest talent contests in the world. Here, the winner is usually not the best-looking one (although even among bacteria there are beauty queens), but the one who is extraordinary good at something no one else can do. The final this year is due to take place from 1 to 4 November in Boston.

The range of applications of synthetic biology is

utterly diverse. Thieren: “Artificially created living systems can contribute to medicine, agriculture, industry, environment... The underlying thought is that we can make natural systems more efficient.” Thieren quotes the development of a new kind of yeast as an example. “This new yeast produces drugs in a very efficient way. More specifically, it produces artemisine, a substance that is used in the fight against malaria.”

KU Leuven has done extraordinary well in past editions of iGEM. Every time a team from Leuven has participated (three times so far: in 2008, 2009 and 2011) they have gone home with gold. This year, the Leuven team's project is called “E. coligy: Plants with Banaphids”. Thieren's team was able to create a bacteria that could become a key insecticide (biological, of course) in future agriculture.

As usual, the Leuven students have given their self-created bacteria a proper scientific name: *E. coligy*. There's a lot of information in that name. *E. coli* is a well-known gut bacteria, and it was used by the Leuven team as a template to build their new bacteria. Their bacteria's new feature is important in the field of ecology, because it produces fragrant substances called pheromones that keep aphids away from plants and entice ladybirds, who are among aphids' worst enemies. The “unbeatable” Leuven team has to compete this year with another Flemish team: For the first time, students from Ghent University will participate in iGEM. The Ghent team has optimised an existing technique used to raise the yield of biochemical products. This technique makes use of bacteria that produce biochemical substances. However, because during the production process these bacteria become resistant to antibiotics, it's becoming a real problem for biochemistry. The Ghent team has come up with an alternative way to incorporate bacteria in the production process – preventing this resistance developing.

# Learning Silicon-Valley style

## Leuven students get a sneak peek at the class of the future

Andy Furniere

A dozen students at the Miniemeninstituut in Leuven have had a taste of the classroom of the future. The secondary-school students were the first in Flanders to get a sneak peek at a high-tech classroom fitted like a modern Silicon-Valley style office space. Students work on their laptops and tablets independently or in groups. This experience should ready the students – all in the final two years of the school's office and secretary option – for similar environments in their future workplaces.

“We also included a lounge area,” explains Patrick Vancauwelaert, who's responsible for financial and logistic matters at the Miniemeninstituut. “If they want to relax or talk in small groups, students can sit back in these seats at any time.” Students are let loose in other ways too: They're allowed to surf the web or visit social



networking sites at all times.

Functioning as a coach of sorts, the teacher assists the students with interactive presentations on a smart board – a digital, touch-sensitive whiteboard. The teacher wears a headset in class and presentations and explanations are recorded and later uploaded to a digital platform, which students can access at all times.

The classroom will function as an open space where students can move around at leisure, and

other educators can pop round to offer additional assistance. Co-teaching, still rare in Flanders, is already a common sight in several Scandinavian and British schools. Vancauwelaert is a firm believer in the “New Way of Working”, which holds that ICT advances enable positive flexibility in the workplace. With the online presentations and explanations, the school currently already ensures that absent students can catch up from home. This type of online platform is also in place at

many other universities and colleges across Flanders.

The Miniemeninstituut is providing all the equipment and infrastructure, at no additional cost to the students. Software multinational Microsoft is providing the necessary software through a partnership and the school is collaborating with internet provider Telenet, which will install internet free of charge at the homes of students without internet access. For Vancauwelaert, the next frontier is getting the Flemish education system to allow students to complete their internships from home. “The number of people working from home is increasing,” Vancauwelaert says. “Instead of forcing students to gain experience in a company's actual workspace, it would be good to familiarise them with the advantages and difficulties of working from home.”

## WEEK IN EDUCATION

### Drugs prevention kit for nursery schools

The drugs help centre De Sleutel in Ghent has developed a prevention kit, called Het gat in de haag (The Hole in the Hedge) for nursery school teachers to use in their lessons. The goal is to equip toddlers with more social skills, leading to a lower risk of drug addiction later on. The kit contains a book for each year at nursery school, with stories about walking, talking vegetables who experience difficult situations. The books include hundreds of activities to encourage social development. Nursery school teachers will devote special attention to teaching empathy, good communication and the expression of feelings. The purpose is not to talk about drugs specifically; the word itself doesn't feature in the kit.

### India House opens at KUL

For the arts and culture festival Europalia India, the university and city of Leuven have inaugurated the India House. With several partners from different sectors, including the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, they want to unite several existing initiatives to form a general port of call for anyone interested in the Asian country. During the opening of India House, the university also signed an agreement for the new chair of Contemporary Indian Studies, which will begin in the 2014-15 academic year. Associations in Leuven are offering a varied programme for Europalia, such as a weekend revolving around Indian religions. In the course of this month and November, 12 Indian authors will visit Leuven to present their work.

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

### First stone of new campus laid

At Park Spoor Noord, a green area in the north of Antwerp, AP university college has started building a new campus for its science and technics department. The approximately 1,300 students in electromechanics, integralsafety, energy management, graphic and digital media, electronics and property will move to the site in 2015. Their campuses are now spread over Mechelen, Boom and the Paardenmarkt in Antwerp. At the new campus, the students can practise with, for example, a modern industrial pump installation, while future surveyors have an ideal space nearby to take measurements. The proximity of the port is an asset as well, since many port companies are in need of maintenance technicians and other specialists. AF



WEEK IN  
ACTIVITIES

## Mestizo Arts Festival

An interdisciplinary arts festival with a focus on the urban experience, MAF aims to diversify the cultural landscape in Flanders by giving artists on the periphery a forum to create and network. The festival kicks off on 19 October with Blaxploitation Night, including a poetry slam inspired by Muhammad Ali's legendary 1974 fight against George Foreman. The show will be followed by live music and a DJ set. Opening night tickets are €5/€7.

19-31 October, Antwerp

► [mestizoartsfestival.be](http://mestizoartsfestival.be)

Culture Weekend  
at Horst Castle

Bring the kids for a magical three-day festival inspired by fairy tales. There will be creative activities, contests and storytelling for young ladies and budding knights. Kids who come in costume will receive a gift. For their parents, there's a group art show, live music, a fashion show and chocolate tastings. Free admission.

18-20 October, Holsbeek

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

Krachtvoer  
(Power Food)

Two-day festival organised around the theme of "soil": Documentaries, panels and lectures will tackle issues of sustainability, creativity and ecology. Participants include top chefs, journalists and food bloggers. Of course, there will also be plenty of good food, with tastings, demos and a market of local specialties and unique products. Admission from €10.

19-20 October, Antwerp

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

Brussels  
Fashion Days

Fifty Belgian designers will strut their stuff in a series of fashion shows, along with exhibitions, photo shoots, model casting, makeovers and after-parties. Admission is €10, €7 for students or €30 for a weekend VIP pass.

18-20 October, Brussels

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



## From Flanders Fields to London

## Memorial garden will represent return of British soldiers who died far from home

Toon Lambrechts

In the Cloth Hall of Ypres, 70 sandbags lie piled up. It's nothing to do with an imminent flood: The bags contain earth from several British military cemeteries in Belgium and are intended for a memorial garden in London.

On each of the brown jute bags a name has been written, indicating the cemetery where the earth comes from, next to a picture of a poppy. Most of these names refer to places in the Westhoek area of West Flanders, known as Flanders Fields. The "sacred soil" has been collected by local schoolchildren and brought together in the Cloth Hall, also home to the In Flanders Fields museum.

The sandbags are to be shipped to London, where the earth will be part of a memorial garden at the Wellington Barracks near Buckingham Palace. The garden, an initiative of the Guards Museum with support from Flanders House in London, should be ready next year for the commemoration of 100 years since the outbreak of the First World War. On November 8, it will be inaugurated in the presence of members of the Belgian and British royal families.

The design of the garden – intended to be a quiet place of reflection and contemplation – is full of symbolism. The first level of soil takes the form of a rectangle that refers to the cemeteries and symbolises death. On top of it is a circular soil bed, representing eternity as a victory over death. The circular shape also refers to the opening in the roof of the Menin Gate in Ypres, the most famous monument of Flanders Fields, from which every year on 11 November poppies rain down. On the white stone wall of the circle, the poem "In Flanders Fields" will be engraved, as well as the names of



© Kurt Desplenter / BELGA

Kris Peeters (centre) takes part in the sandbag ceremony in Ypres



© Courtesy Flanders House

Children from Flemish primary schools helped collect the soil from military cemeteries in the region

several British regiments that fought in the Great War. "The sacred soil from Flanders Fields will end up in the central circle of the garden," says Andrew Wallis, curator of the Guard Museum and one of the British promoters behind the project. "In this way, the circle becomes a final resting place for the earth, a symbolic return of the soldiers who died on the Fields."

The soil from Flanders Fields – "Sacred soil," according to Andrew Wallis, curator of the Guards Museum and one of the driving forces behind the idea of the garden – was collected by children from 70 schools in Belgium and the

UK. The children will also write texts which will be included in the garden, and in a book to be kept in the nearby Guards Museum. The London garden is the first of its kind, but there are plans to set up similar memorial gardens in France, Germany, New Zealand and Canada as part of the Flemish government's commemoration of the 1914-18 war. Flanders' minister-president, Kris Peeters, took part in a ceremony in Ypres last week, when the sandbags were presented. "This is one of the strongest signals, because it's really moving when you see those 70 sandbags in all their symbolic importance," he said. "The

historical bonds between Great Britain and Belgium, in particular the battlefields and cemeteries in Flanders, are unique. That is why I consider it important that our first memorial garden is created in London."

The Memorial Garden was designed by Bruges landscape architect Piet Blankaert, whose aim is to evoke the simple character of the military cemeteries. "The Memorial Garden is simple by its design, a representation of the graveyards in Flanders Fields brought to London," he said.

► <http://memorial2014.duo.be>

Robyn Boyle

## BITE

## Eel month

"There are lakes in Flanders!" a friend exclaimed upon discovering the Meetjesland region one weekend by bicycle. While not technically lakes, these *kreken*, or tidal creeks, are gorgeous to look at, criss-crossing the panoramic polder landscape as shimmering bodies of water nestled into nature reserves with tall trees and lush grass. Many were formed in the 17th century when dykes would break and flood the area, much to the joy of the freshwater eel, a type of fish that thrives in the muddy bottoms of rivers and ponds.

"Sente", or Sint-Laureins, is home to the Sente creeks, which were once brimming with freshwater eel. The rural town is inseparable from the eel tradition. Here eel fishing was done with typical flat-bottom boats and wide nets and people came to the area from all over Flanders to enjoy eel dishes. When this tradition threatened to disappear forever, some local chefs got together to put Sint-Laureins back on the culinary map.

They wanted to do something about the dwindling number of eel in the creeks, and so stocked them with a fresh supply of young eel, or elvers. Thanks to this, eel can again be enjoyed in numerous restaurants during the winter



months, and especially in October.

Just last year, Meetjesland pickled eel was recognised as an official *streekproduct*, or regional product, by the Centre for Agricultural and Fisheries Marketing (Vlam). Because eel was once so abundant in the creeks, fishermen often brought home more than they knew what to do with. Pickling, the only way to preserve the catch, was traditionally done in stone jars and the results kept in the cellar. Local chefs and Vlam have brought new attention to this important piece of culinary heritage.

In Sint-Laureins, you can not only go for a

delicious meal of eel prepared in a number of ways (smoked, pickled, fried, in beer, cream or green sauce...), but you can also participate in eel-themed walks and bike rides; ask the tourist office of Sint-Laureins for a map.

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

The following restaurants in and around Sint-Laureins are known for their eel:

Cleylantshof: [www.cleylantshof.be](http://www.cleylantshof.be)

Elmare: [www.restaurant.be/elmare](http://www.restaurant.be/elmare)

Krekenpoort:

[www.meetjesland.be/Krekenpoort.htm](http://www.meetjesland.be/Krekenpoort.htm)

Polderzicht: [www.polderzicht.be](http://www.polderzicht.be)

Antonia's Brasserie:

[www.godshuis.be/antonia's-brasserie.aspx](http://www.godshuis.be/antonia's-brasserie.aspx)

De Engel: [www.bistro-de-engel.be](http://www.bistro-de-engel.be)

In den Draaiput:

[www.taverne-in-den-draaiput.com](http://www.taverne-in-den-draaiput.com)

Niveau: [www.brasserie-niveau.be](http://www.brasserie-niveau.be)

Pandora:

[www.restaurant-pandora.bravehost.com](http://www.restaurant-pandora.bravehost.com)

De Roste Muis: [www.rostemuis.be](http://www.rostemuis.be)

Slependamme: [www.slependamme.be](http://www.slependamme.be)

Tijdloos: [www.brasserietijdloos.be](http://www.brasserietijdloos.be)

De Warande: [www.dewaranderrestaurant.be](http://www.dewaranderrestaurant.be)



# Battle lines

## Multilingual anthology reveals universality of war poetry

Denzil Walton

A new multilingual anthology of Great War poetry called *We Werden Honderd Jaar Ouder* (We Became 100 Years Older) has just been published. It contains more than 100 German, English, French and Dutch poems, which are provided in their original language as well as in Dutch. We spoke to compiler and translator Chris Spriet.

### Where did the idea for the book come from?

As a teacher of English, I developed a series of seminars on war poetry. While at first this focused on the "classics", it grew to include lesser-known poets and specific themes (the loss of belief in God, executions, conscientious objectors etc). Meanwhile I had started contributing to the newsletter of the Friends of the In Flanders Fields Museum in Ypres. I would select an original war poem and translate or make my own rendering of it, and add a short comment. Eventually this came to the attention of cultural fund Davidsfonds, who asked whether I would be interested in compiling an anthology of war-related poems.

### What were your selection criteria?

I had three main objectives. I wanted to avoid including too many overly avant-garde poems, so that the poems would be sufficiently accessible by everyone. And I wanted to achieve a balance between the languages represented. The majority are of course in the languages of the three major warring nations: France, Germany and the UK. But I also included some Dutch and Flemish poets, one Italian and even an Indian poet. And finally I wanted to incorporate different styles, from the more patriotic poems in classical, rhyming construction to the more reflective poems in free verse and more experimental styles.



From left to right, Peter Peene of Davidsfonds, Chris Spriet and actor and illustrator Wim Opbrouck, who recited a selection of poems during the book's launch

### Have you chosen mainly the well-known war poets?

I deliberately limited the share that these get in my compilation and



© Wim Opbrouck

broadened the scope to include lesser-known poets, female poets and even anonymous poets. Some are by ordinary privates without the slightest poetic pretensions. The fact that their poems are totally devoid of literary aspirations makes their message all the more urgent and imminent. I also included poems that had been written for the *Wipers Times*, which was a soldiers' magazine distributed in the Ypres Salient for the benefit of the "ordinary Tommy", and for the *Liller Kriegszeitung*, which was published in Lille for the German 4th Army.

### Is this the first time some of them have appeared in print?

Quite likely. This is particularly true of the German poems that were critical of the official national line. Even during the Nazi regime they

were considered degenerate and were completely forbidden. Only very recently did they rise to the surface again. I also include the French poem "Elles" by Henriette Sauret, who ponders what to her is the injustice of the fate of women during warfare. Her original had 20 lines removed by the censor. And I take pride in giving a voice to such literary giants as Claudel, Cocteau, Eluard and even the painter De Vlaminck and sculptor Zadkine.

### Do you see an evolution in the type of poetry written during the war?

Poems written during the initial stages of the war reflect the soldiers' belief that they were in for "a summer's war", which they expected to be over by Christmas 1914. The overall feeling was that the war was an adventure not to be

missed, and that it was a sweet and honourable duty to sacrifice your life for king and country. As the war progressed, sentiments such as sarcasm and boredom, compassion and comradeship crept in. Finally these expressions merged with the theme of "re-creation" – which later would emerge in the completely new poetry of the Imagists and the Modernists.

### What surprised you most about the poems you researched and selected?

What struck me deeply is the extent to which some survivors of the war were beset by an incurable sense of nostalgia. Having survived, but lost the "intensities of hope and fear" as Edmund Blunden put it, they were never to re-experience such intensity of feeling during their later lives. Many found this very hard to deal with. They ended up getting lost in an utter sense of isolation. Blunden never ceased to repeat how he missed those days of "way back when": "I ought to have remained there with my (fallen) comrades."

### What impresses you most about First World War poetry?

One element is the overwhelming communicative appeal of many poems, which has braved the times and remains unimpaired to the present day. It was also a deeply moving experience for me to find out that, even though some poets represented "enemy sides", the feelings they expressed were virtually equal to what was felt on the other side. This increased my awareness of just how universal war poetry was and remains to the present day. War poetry does have a tale to tell, even 100 years on.

*Chris Spriet will be signing copies of his book at Boekhandel De Reyghere, Markt, Bruges on 14 November at 20.00*

# Nationwide survey on homophobia and sexism

The first-ever national survey on homophobia, transphobia and sexism has been launched by Bruno De Lille, secretary of state for equal opportunities of the Brussels-Capital Region. Partners collaborating for the survey are the Centre for Equal Rights and the Fight Against Racism and the Institute for Equality Between Women and Men. The study is being carried out by the University of Antwerp.

The online survey, which will run until 7 December, will assess attitudes regarding equality between the sexes and for members of the LGBT community. Part of the survey specifically concerns the situation in Brussels.



Homophobic violence has proven difficult to eradicate in both Brussels and Flanders. Last year the federal government, following a number of highly publicised attacks, including one on the Flemish radio presenter Sven Pichal and the country's first-

ever homophobic murder, introduced a national action plan. The plan included, among other provisions, training for the police in dealing with complaints of anti-gay violence. In 2012, the number of homophobic attacks reported to police was 157,

compared to 87 in 2011. The true number, however, is likely to be much higher, as many victims do not report attacks to the police or communicate that homophobia might be a motive. Police in Brussels wrote out administrative fines for homophobic

aggression short of physical violence 1,519 times in 2012 – equivalent to four a day.

"There remains a social stigma on gays and transgenders, kept in place by existing power relations and social structures," said De Lille, who is gay himself. "If we know which factors lie at the basis of this sort of stereotypical thinking, policymaking can be more targeted and more efficient. This study is of major importance."

The survey is open to everyone aged 16 and over, is available in Dutch, English and French, takes about 25 minutes to complete and is confidential. **Alan Hope**

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



# A dance of movement and words

## Stage director Arne Sierens on his fascinating method of writing plays

Daan Bauwens

Arne Sierens cannot help but touch your soul. In 27 plays, written or directed by the master since 1982, he constantly succeeded in showing the beauty of disfigured personalities in the midst of an all-too-rough and all-too-recognisable reality. But he does it with a smile. For an audience, it's inevitable: you pity, empathise, commit, wallow in emotion and burst into laughter. "I keep on looking for the boundaries of the truth," says the Flemish stage director and co-founder of Ghent's Compagnie Cecilia.

Sierens is busy. He runs the company together with its other co-founder, actor Johan Heldenbergh. Only six months after the premiere of Cecilia's *Gloria*, his newest work, *Lacrima*, is touring the country. Two weeks ago, he finished the script for *Belgica*, the new feature film by Flemish director Felix Van Groeningen, based on the history of Ghent's famous rock'n'roll club Café Charlatan. Now Sierens is rehearsing *Ensor*, another new production featuring Heldenbergh and acrobats from Circus Ronaldo. In the meantime, Van Groeningen's film *The Broken Circle Breakdown*, based on a 2008 Cecilia play, could get nominated for an Oscar.

### Gift of gab

I meet Sierens in the eye of the storm, on the terrace in front of Ghent's Minard theatre. The statue of Romain Deconinck, beacon of Ghent's working-class theatre, is watching us. I make the mistake of comparing the two. "No," he says, "my characters are drawings. I paint them in colour, not in black-and-white. I turn

them inside out. They have to talk; all of them have the gift of the gab. Lots of people mistake that for a working-class attitude, but that's not always true. I want to show the totality of being human, *la condition humaine*. My main characters might as well be professors or doctors. I will also turn them inside out. But I will always add some rock'n'roll. Things have to go crazy."

The starting points of almost all of his plays, Sierens explains, are character studies. "I don't start with a book shelf," he smiles. "I start with one of the many piles in my study. I collect articles, movies, books, pictures – things that stick in my mind, that give me goosebumps. I put it on one of my piles. Then I choose a pile, think of a title, a theme and start looking for actors."

### Improvisation

When he's found them, he asks them to utilise pieces from the pile that touch them. "They improvise, and we start moulding the characters, together. Nobody knows what the result will be. This is how Compagnie Cecilia makes theatre: based on characters, closely connected with 20th-century avant-garde." The result, he says, "is physical theatre. Most Western theatre is cerebral, made out of text and intellectual constructions. We start with the body. The voice must come from within the body, not the head. What you say must come from deep within."

For those who know Sierens' work, it might sound strange, but he's not in the least interested in telling a story. "I am constantly looking for humanity, that's all. I work with coincidences, mistakes



Only two actors take the stage for Compagnie Cecilia's *Lacrima*

and people's fault lines. I mean, when people get emotional, they might start a sentence, suddenly forget about it and end up in some completely different place. When people blurt out things they weren't supposed to say, it's more truthful than ever. That is what I am looking for: slips of the tongue that reveal their deepest truths."

Sierens also listens to stories people tell with their bodies. "You can see it everywhere: in bars, on the streets. The way people move their head, walk or use their hands tells a story. It's emotional patterns of movement. Nothing is more fascinating than that." This personal fascination, he explains, eventually leads to a

play. "What I want to make is a musical and a physical score. I make a dance of movement and words. Just like a choreographer." With this unique method of working, Sierens has succeeded in creating plays that are addictive, that keep audiences hooked from beginning to end. "The theatre we offer is no reproduction," he says. "Each night is another boxing match. It is real. I have the tendency to create plays with 'impossibilities': They are impossible for the actors to play perfectly. I force them to surprise each other on stage. Of course, things go wrong. They have to. Everyone is forced to react in a different way than the night before. Nobody really knows what is going to happen."

In Cecilia's first-ever production, 2004's *Maria Eeuwigdurende Bijstand*, the actors had to perform on an ice rink without skates. "They would constantly fall. It influenced their way of acting, the tonality of their voices. The audience sees that it is real, not acted. They recognise it, they laugh about it, but most importantly they see and feel that it is human."

### Lacrima

*Lacrima* is Cecilia's season opener. A man promises his ex-girlfriend to search for her lost son in the city where he grew up, where he lost all of his illusions and where he has sworn to never



Totally human Arne Sierens

return. "As opposed to all my other plays, this one I wrote at the desk in my study," says Sierens. "I have been thinking about this story for more than 20 years." It was Van Groeningen, he says, who convinced him to write it down. There are only two people on stage. Actor Jan Hammenecker talks, dancer Sayaka Kaiwa moves around, inside and on top of 16 tons of concrete blocks. "A Japanese dancer who doesn't understand a word of Dutch," says Sierens. "She's a fantastic dancer, but I forbid her to dance on stage. She just reacts and follows her impulses."

## MORE PERFORMANCE THIS WEEK

### An Old Monk

LOD / Josse De Pauw and Kris Defoort

Based on the oeuvre of Thelonious Monk, actor Josse De Pauw's monologue explores how "mind and body just cannot get tuned into each other." 16-17 October, NTGent, Ghent

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

### Lange dagreis naar de nacht (Long Day's Journey into Night)

Antigone

One tragicomic day in the life of a hopelessly broken family that tries to get back together (pictured). Directed by Peter Monsaert and based on Eugene O'Neill's masterpiece 16-18 October, Stadsschouwburg, Sint-

Niklaas; 17 October, De Groote Post, Ostend; 18 October, De Schakel, Waregem

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

### The Rite of Spring

Ewout D'Hoore and Vooruit

In Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, an old wise man chooses a young girl, who dances herself to death, offering herself to spring. In this Vooruit production, artist Ewout D'Hoore reinterprets the choreography with elderly in a residential care home. 16-20 October, De Vijvers, Ghent

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

### Neomaïzena

Gosie Vervloessem, Einat

Tuchmann and De Pianofabriek

Two young performance artists make a link between the neoliberal society and corn starch. "Just

like corn starch, neoliberalism swallows everything, only to benefit itself." 18-19 October, Beursschouwburg, Brussels

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



16 October  
to 2 November

### Lacrima

NTGent Minnemeers

Minnemeers 8, Ghent

► [www.compagnie-cecilia.be](http://www.compagnie-cecilia.be)



# Through the looking glass

An excellent selection of local artists vie for attention in Antwerp

Christophe Verbiest

The Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp mingles its collection of Flemish artists with pieces owned by the province. It's a delicately mixed balance of the famous and less so and ends with an incredibly mesmerising work.

While the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA) is closed for renovation until 2017, its collection isn't gathering dust in the depot. Their works by Rik Wouters, for instance, are on show in Mechelen, whereas Bruegel and his followers can be seen in Lier. Moreover, in Antwerp's Fabiolazaal, the museum is staging temporary exhibitions using its collections from the 19th and 20th centuries. The fifth instalment, *The Moderns. Duos*, is a somewhat special case. This time, KMSKA shows its works by local and international artists together with paintings and sculptures from the art collection of Antwerp province. The province holds more than 2,000 pieces, trying as much as possible to incorporate works by artists with links to the province. Those artworks are displayed in reception rooms and offices. But even for a highly motivated art

lover, it would be very difficult to see a majority of the collection. *The Moderns. Duos* has selected 30 of these works and, as the title suggests, paired them in dialogue with works from their own collection.

## Better together

The two works that form a pair are visually linked in one way or another. Sometimes they share the same subject: the city views of Cedric Morris and René Guiette, or the still lifes by Wouters and Floris Jaspers. At other times, the echoes are more formal: two gestural abstract paintings by Hans Hartung are shown next to Koen van den Broek's "Blue Border #3". Apart from some rather well-known names, like Fred Bervoets, Emile Claus and Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven, there are some nice, (re)discoveries to be made. Pieter Rottie, for instance, has completely dissolved in the mists of time. He's present with two uncanny portraits: "Lucienne", a girl's face from 1938, and the undated "Mevrouw Craeybeckx". Or take the two small paintings by Bert De Beul: These untitled works show upper parts of buildings with no signs of human presence.

Especially the left one is, in colour and composition, reminiscent of a Giorgio Morandi still life. Lucio Fontana, on the other hand, is one of the most famous artists in the exhibition. The 1965 painting is one of a large series called *Concetto spaziale*, consisting of a monochrome canvas and vertical cuts. The one in Antwerp has four of them, slightly bending from right to left. Even after seeing other works from this series before, I'm continually moved by pieces from *Concetto spaziale*. It's art stripped of all its frills and is nevertheless – or should I say therefore – extremely powerful. And still it's not the high point in this exhibition. That comes at the end, when Jef Verheyen's "Zwarte ruimte" (Black Space) – a brooding black painting – is confronted with "Zonder titel (Santa Maria del Salute)" (Untitled (Santa Maria del Salute)) by David Claerbout, which hangs inside a black box. Claerbout is mostly known for his videos, so it's a bit confusing

entering the box and seeing nothing. Is the video not working? But no, the work is a very dark photo. You have to linger a bit until your eyes adjust. But it's only when you walk towards it that this photo starts, by lack of a better word, to come to life. It's as if you're standing on the stem of a boat that's entering a port. Out of grey mists the blurred contours of a building appear, the Basilica di Santa Maria della Salute in Venice. It draws you in, further and further, the image getting sharper and clearer, until at one point you're just a few centimetres away from the picture. You'd love to step into the frame and disappear. At least, that was my experience. It's one of the most mesmerising artworks I've seen in a long time. It left me feeling both topsy-turvy and captivated by its mysterious beauty. This work by Claerbout alone justifies a visit to this exhibition.

Until 27  
January

Fabiolazaal  
Jezusstraat 28, Antwerp  
▶ [www.kmska.be](http://www.kmska.be)



© 1928, KMSKA/Lukas Art in Flanders, photo by Hugo Maertens, Sabam



© Collectie Provincie Antwerpen, SABAM

Kees van Dongen's 1928 painting "Monseigneur Gerasimos Messara" (left), paired with Jan Cockx's portrait of Flemish author Roger Avermaete from 1919

## WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

### Mathilde told to "wear local"

The Flanders Fashion Institute (FFI) has called on Queen Mathilde to **extend the range of clothing by Belgian designers** she wears on official occasions. "The Queen would be a great ambassador for Belgian fashion," said Agnes Wené of the FFI. "We've provided her with a stack of information about Belgian designers, and we hope she'll give some of them a chance in the future." At present the Queen often wears clothes by Natan and occasionally Dries Van Noten. "She could easily go a step further and choose from among a wider range of designers," Wené said.

### Debut prize for first novel

Christophe Van Gerrewey is the **winner of this year's Debuutprijs** for a first novel for *Op de hoogte* (Up to date), a love story in the form of a letter. According to one jury member, there was little doubt this year over who the winner would be. "In this novel, Van Gerrewey has created a new genre, a new concept which derives from the epistolary novel but at the same time is quite different," said journalist Joel De Ceulaer.

### comic protests Putin regime

Comedian Geert Hoste, known for his end-of-year shows in which he roasts politicians, has taken part in a **demonstration outside the Russian embassy** in Brussels, lighting a symbolic candle against the repressive regime of Russian president Vladimir Putin, whose birthday is on Monday. Hoste is an ambassador in Belgium for Amnesty International, whose emblem is the candle and who will carry the candle to Moscow along with a petition. "In Belgium I'm free to make jokes about politicians and royals, but many people in Russia can't," Hoste said. "That's why I'm passing my flame on to all of those trapped in Putin's web."

### VRT archive agreement signed

The public broadcaster VRT has signed an agreement with the Flemish Institute for Archiving (VIAA), for the **digitisation of the broadcaster's huge archive** of audiovisual material. The VIAA was set up by the Flemish government last December, with a view to making progress on the digitisation of the 500,000 or so hours of audiovisual records held by various historical and heritage organisations in the region.





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Claiming an identity

Painting and Other Stuff

Until 2 February | M HKA, Antwerp | [www.muhka.be](http://www.muhka.be)

The politically powerful work of acclaimed Chicago-based artist Kerry James Marshall rings confrontational on different levels. His focus on other African-Americans – portrayed both in everyday scenes and as comic book heroes in an attempt to denounce white power – at times puts his primarily white M HKA audience in Antwerp in an awkward position. Flemish visitors are used to art that represents people who look like them. But the black and brown faces on Marshall’s canvasses remind us that our art history is and has always been “coloured” by a Western perspective. After this historical marginalisation, Marshall wants to fill the “lack in the image

bank” – not only to give the black community its due place, but also to claim an identity for himself in the predominantly white contemporary art scene. As a child, Marshall always liked to draw. But growing up in a black neighbourhood in Birmingham, Alabama, it wasn’t easy to find role models. So Marshall learned about Western painters in the library, and cut out images from books and magazines as reference materials. Going to college in Los Angeles, he was the only African American student in his painting class. The installation “Baobab Ensemble”, an improvised sitting area around crates, discarded materials and video screens, reveals his work



© Courtesy Rennie Collection

method. Just like underneath the baobab tree, you can have a seat here and peek inside the plastic folders with his “Image Bank” pictures. It’s just one of the five themes of *Painting and Other Stuff*, which is the most exhaustive Marshall retrospective ever to come to Europe. In addition to paintings, photographs, videos and sculptures are also on view in exhibition

sections like “Readdressing Art History”, “Notions of Beauty”, “Commemoration” and “The Everyday”. Social emancipation runs as a recurring theme throughout the exhibition. A series of enormous ink-stamps, “Mementos” (*pictured*) carries Black Power slogan prints, while “Rythm Mastr” offers a comic-book superhero series inspired by African mythology. But the most striking images are those that don’t require much explanation, rooted as they are in feelings that we all share – like love and a desire for beauty.

This outstanding exhibition is the result of a major collaboration between several European museums, and it will later travel to Copenhagen, Barcelona and Madrid.

Tom Peeters

VISUAL ARTS

M.K. Čiurlionis: Dreaming of Lithuania

Until 15 December | Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent  
[www.mskgent.be](http://www.mskgent.be)

In celebration of the Lithuanian Presidency of the European Council, Ghent’s Museum of Fine Arts showcases the work of one of that country’s pioneering modern artists. Fin-de-siècle painter and composer Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis combined his twin trades in a unique way. The concept of synaesthesia was nothing particularly new at the time, of course. Baudelaire had already tasted sounds and heard colours decades earlier, inspiring Čiurlionis’ contemporaries in Western Europe to do the same. But these were mostly amateurs; Čiurlionis was the real thing, not just a visionary but a formally trained technician who was able to tinker with the nuts and bolts of his chosen media, to fuse sound and vision. Appropriately, portions of the exhibition are accompanied by Čiurlionis’ musical compositions. **Georgio Valentino**



THEATRE

12 Angry Men

22-26 October, 20.00 | Bozar, Brussels  
[www.bozar.be](http://www.bozar.be)

Brussels’ American Theatre Company (shouldn’t that be “Theater”, then?) stages the classic drama about the tense hours between crime and punishment. A jury of 12 deliberate over the future of a young man accused of murder, and their arguments reveal the deep philosophical tensions that run just under the surface of contemporary American society. Originally written for television by screenwriter Reginald Rose, *12 Angry Men* became an institution after it was adapted for the silver screen in 1957. The ATC has become something of an institution in Brussels too. Since 1969, the award-winning, non-profit community theatre company has been putting on twice-yearly productions in the capital, all the while relying solely on volunteers. **GV**



CONCERT

Bent Van Looy

17 October, 20.00 | Ancienne Belgique, Brussels  
[www.abconcerts.be](http://www.abconcerts.be)

The frontman of Ghent buzz band Das Pop has gone solo. Developed and tested in Paris, the intimate, piano-based songs of Bent Van Looy’s debut album *Round the Bend* were later recorded in Los Angeles with hotshot American producer Jason Falkner. Now, the local-boy-done-good is back in Flanders to present the new set to the audience that first propelled Das Pop to local stardom. Falkner is still

on board, too. Not only does he play in Van Looy’s backing band but – a solo artist in his own right – he’s also the night’s opening act. The Ancienne Belgique venue and Brussels mobility minister Bruno De Lille have partnered to encourage concertgoers to leave their gas-guzzlers at home: Cyclists receive half-price tickets and a snazzy, free fluorescent safety vest at the door. **GV**



EVENT

Jenever Festival

19 & 20 October | Across Hasselt  
[www.jeneverfeesten.be](http://www.jeneverfeesten.be)

Belgium is rightly famous for its national beverage but the international success of Belgian beer has long obscured the country’s *other* alcoholic speciality. Jenever has a long history, a broad public and an even stronger kick than a hearty Tripel brew. But Hasselt hasn’t forgotten its favourite spirit. The capital of Limburg province is home to the National Jenever Museum and puts on this city-wide festival every year. Hasselt comes alive with music, street theatre, markets, exhibitions, food (where else can you learn to make jenever pâté?) and, of course, drink. Lots of drink. There’s even a fountain that spews locally distilled jenever. Best of all, the festival is free. Even the Jenever Museum is waiving its entry fees for the weekend. Cheers. **GV**



Film

Bruges

**Razor Reel:** Sixth annual Fantastic Film Festival featuring more than 50 films from the fantasy genre, fascinating shorts, a competition for debuting filmmakers, the European fantastic shorts competition, Q&A sessions with international guests and plenty of culture and amateur arts including educational workshops, exhibitions and a books-and-movies fair (at the Bruges Beurs hallen) **Until NOV 2 at Ciné Liberty, Kuipersstraat 23**  
[www.rfff.be](http://www.rfff.be)

Ghent

**Home Movie Day:** The worldwide international movie event is being celebrated in Ghent with music theatre for kids (ages five and up) by Pantalone and free family film screenings and documentaries, including the Belgian premiere of *This is For You* and short films *George & Henriette* and *Zonder versnelling* (in Dutch) **OCT 19 11.00-19.00 at Het Huis van Alijn, Kraanlei 65**  
[www.huisvanalijn.be](http://www.huisvanalijn.be)

Dance

Brussels

**Drift:** Flemish-Swiss choreographer Cindy Van Acker combines body language, lighting and sound to evoke the many meanings of the word “drift” for this new duet in which she performs with dancer Tamara Bacci **OCT 18-19 20.30 at Kaaitheater, Saintelettesquare 19**  
[www.kaaitheater.be](http://www.kaaitheater.be)

Food & drink

Across Flanders

**Oyster markets:** Celebrate the opening of oyster season at this annual event, hosted by three well-known brasseries and a selection of renowned oyster farmers, including Véronique Guillardau, Benoit Massé and Kees Sinke **OCT 18 17.00-21.00 at La Quincaille, Brussels**  
**OCT 19 11.00-17.00 at Dock’s Café, Antwerp**  
**OCT 20 11.00-15.00 at Pakhuis, Ghent**  
[www.quincaille.be](http://www.quincaille.be)  
[www.docks.be](http://www.docks.be)  
[www.pakhuis.be](http://www.pakhuis.be)

Brussels

**Megavino 2013:** Festive 15th edition of the international wine fair, this year featuring Spain, the world’s third biggest wine producer, represented by some 50 producers and importers from every region, plus a cava tasting stand, tapas bar, music, entertainment and, of course, wine from numerous other countries **OCT 18-21 at Brussels Expo, Belgiëplein**  
[www.megavino.be](http://www.megavino.be)



# Talking Dutch

## West-Vlaams for beginners

Derek Blyth

You maybe know this problem if you are a foreigner in Flanders. You spend three years attending Dutch classes, every Tuesday evening from 20.00 to 22.00, learning all the grammar, perfecting your pronunciation, working on those difficult words like *vijfhonderd vijftig* (555). It is a slog, but you can at least console yourself with the thought that at the end of it all you will be able to sit down in a Flemish cafe with a beer and chat away happily to the locals. But then you go to somewhere like Ghent or Bruges, sit down in a cafe and realise that you do not understand a single word the locals are saying, because they are speaking their local dialect. Now there is a solution,

according to a recent report in *De Morgen*. *De VDAB in Kortrijk pakt uit met een opmerkelijk initiatief: een lessen reeks West-Vlaams voor beginners* – the VDAB (the Flemish employment agency) in Kortrijk has come up with an interesting initiative: a course of lessons in West Flemish for beginners. *Wuk zeg je?* I beg your pardon? Well, let me explain. *De VDAB wil buitenlanders die in Kortrijk komen werken zo de kans geven om makkelijker te integreren* – the VDAB wants to give foreigners who come to work in Kortrijk the opportunity to integrate more easily. *Die mensen leren vaak al AN, maar daar zijn ze niet veel mee als alle burens of collega's West-Vlaams spreken*. These people often learn to speak proper Dutch, but they still don't get very

far if all their neighbours or colleagues speak West Flemish dialect. Now they can sit in a classroom and learn how to speak like a native of Kortrijk. They are taught to say words like *toarte* (tart) when they go to the baker's and *iezerdroad* (wire) when they go to the hardware store. By the end of this six-lesson course, the students will know exactly what it means when they hear the words *vuufoendrd vuuvnviftug* (555). But I see a couple of little problems with this idea. The first is that there is not just one West-Vlaams dialect. There are several versions, such as coastal West-Vlaams, which they speak in towns like Ostend, continental West-Vlaams, which is spoken in the middle of the region, and west West-Vlaams which is what you hear in towns and villages up close to the French border. And of course you only have to drive 38 kilometres down the motorway to get to Ghent, where no one will have the slightest idea what you are saying when you go into a bakery and ask in West-Vlaams for a *Toarte*.



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## VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY

**Sébastien Van Passel** @SebVanPassel  
What a #belgian week! #reddevils #WorldCup #Brazil2014 #vanlierde #ironman #hawaii and #englert #nobel #lesoir #RTBF #destandaard #rtlvti

**Jewish Daily Forward** @jdfoward  
Monument in #Brussels named for Francois Englert, #Nobel prize-winner and Holocaust survivor

**Kris Peeters** @MP\_Peeters  
It was a pleasure meeting you today @HanneloreKraft. Looking forward to strengthen our cooperation further. #Flanders #NordrheinWestfalen

**Flanders Image**  
Jan Verheyen's *The Verdict* is one of the 10 must-see films at this year's Chicago International Film Fest, says the Chicago Sun Times

**Fans of Flanders**  
How to take the train in Flanders...#SOSFlanders latest helpful tips for life! Hilarious! How close do you sit to people??...

**David Baeckelandt**  
Call to Action - Gazette Centenary Preparations  
As many of you are well aware, last Sunday in Detroit we celebrated our Annual Dinner commemorating the 99th anniversary of the *Gazette van Detroit*. We will celebrate the 100th...

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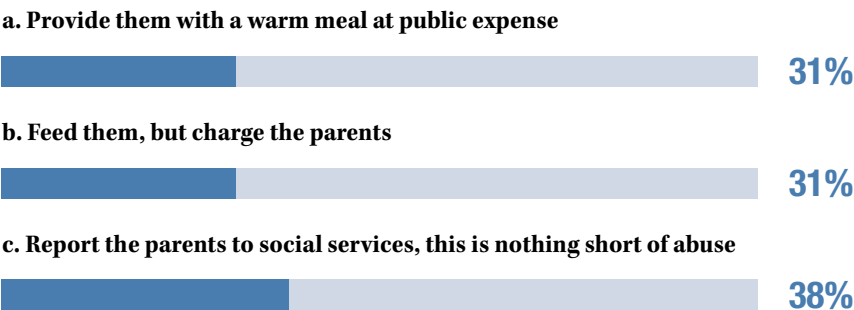
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## Poll

09/10/2013: What should be done for pupils who come to school with no lunch?



Last week the Flemish education council and the cities of Antwerp and Ghent reported increasing numbers of primary school children coming to school with an inadequate lunch or none at all, forcing schools to take their own measures to make sure kids don't go hungry. More than one in three of you

thought this was a justification for bringing the parents to the notice of social services, presumably because enough food can be regarded as a basic right, especially for children. The rest of you were split between two options, both involving the school providing a warm meal, but divided as to who should pay. Some

said make the parents pay, which could be difficult to enforce, while others recognised that the parents have already shown themselves unable or unwilling to take care of the problem and thought it was important enough for the taxpayer to foot the bill.

Next week's question:  
Will you be watching Belgium's progress in the World Cup finals next year in Rio? (see p2)  
Log in to the FT website and vote at this link: [www.flanderstoday.eu/current-affairs/belgium-clinches-place-world-cup](http://www.flanderstoday.eu/current-affairs/belgium-clinches-place-world-cup)

## THE LAST WORD

**Daily bread**  
"Ten months of the year I'm the baker for the 25,000 residents of Koksijde, and two months for 200,000 people. It's hectic all right."  
Baker Stephan Destrooper, like many businesses at the coast, is winding down for the winter season

**Caught off guard**  
"This is an unfortunate coincidence. No-one but our staff is ever aware of our planned activities."  
Police in Oostkamp, West Flanders, were embarrassed by five burglaries in the area while officers were busy with an anti-burglary campaign

**Beers & babes**  
"We think of beer as not being sexy, yet studies show that men have a definite preference for women who drink beer and order one on a first date. That sort of woman comes across as strong, independent and self-assured."  
Writer Sofie Vanrafelghem has started a campaign to encourage more women to drink beer

**Fame-o-phobia**  
"I'm starting to fear I might become the Smartest Person. If every journalist wants to call me up after taking part only a couple of times, is it not insanity to want to win?"  
Dutch lawyer, writer and TV presenter Prem Radhakishun has won a place in the finals of the Flemish TV quiz *De slimste mens ter wereld*

