

Horses of heritage

The shrimp fishers on horseback have been recognised by Unesco as protected cultural heritage

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Eight Flemish cities have joined forces to save energy costs and combat climate change

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Spreading the gospel

New political platform is pushing Flemish teens to become more politically active

Andy Furniere

With the “mother of all elections” approaching fast and thousands of teenagers set to cast their first-ever votes in May, we asked researchers how interested Flemish youth really are in politics and examined the Flemish government’s work to encourage active citizenship

With the independent platform BPolitix, three fresh-faced teenage friends are hoping to encourage fellow students to critically reflect on politics in Belgium before they cast their first votes in the May elections of next year.

The group of 17-year-olds is using social media in a major way to propagate its message, but is also planning a series of debates across Flanders next year.

BPolitix officially launched earlier this month, the brainchild

of Arnaud Hoornaert, Simon Rastelli and Samuel van Bael. The three met during a session of the Model European Parliament (MEP), in which students from across the European Union act as lawmakers and brainstorm on cross-border issues, like migration, trade agreements and GMO regulations.

According to Hoornaert, these kinds of MEP activities offer a great entry point for young people into the current political situation. But he notes that participating in the MEP is only possible for a limited number of teenagers. “When we talk to our friends, most of them don’t show much interest and also lack essential knowledge,” says Hoornaert, who lives in Loppem, West Flanders. “Many of them don’t even know the difference between the regional minister-presidents and the federal prime minister.”

Because of the importance of the next elections, which the

Flemish media have dubbed “the mother of all elections”, the three friends set up a team of a dozen other young members to establish their own information platform. The group is mainly targeting final-year secondary students, many of whom will vote for the first time next year. Since most teenagers are very active on social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, these are BPolitix’s main channels to reach out to Flemish youth.

The new group will distribute informative articles and editorials through its website and social media platforms. With animated videos, for instance, they will attempt to explain complex topics, like the difference between the federal and regional institutions and the main political parties. The founders say one of their goals is also to encourage young people to think about policy issues that affect their daily lives, like the upcoming major secondary education reform

Unesco recognition for shrimp fishers on horseback

Oostduinkerke's traditional shrimp fishers have been added to the list of world heritage

Alan Hope

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) added the horseback shrimp fishers of Oostduinkerke on the Flemish coast to the world list of intangible cultural heritage at its annual meeting last week. The shrimp fishers ride their Brabant draft horses into the North Sea, dragging shrimp fishing nets behind them, which pick up grey shrimps from the sands under the shallow waters near shore. There are only a few left who continue the tradition, and they are the last of their kind. They were designated in Flanders as protected cultural heritage in 2009. The fishermen, who only work off the shore of Oostduinkerke, are a



The shrimp fishers on horseback at Oostduinkerke are the last of their kind

popular tourist attraction, and they were honoured in July by being the subject of the last official visit by King Albert II before stepping down from the throne. "The tradition gives the community a strong sense of collective identity and plays a central role in social and cultural events," said Unesco in a statement. "The shrimp fishers function on principles of shared cultural values and mutual dependence. Experienced shrimpers demonstrate techniques and share their knowledge of nets, tides and currents with beginners." Oostduinkerke mayor Marc Vanden Bussche said his town had cherished the shrimp fishers since the 1950s, buying up land for a paddock

for the horses and making plans for an information centre on the industry. "With the recognition of Unesco comes the responsibility to carry this craft over to succeeding generations," he said. "We are proud that the committee had to spend so little time considering our candidacy." One of the fishermen, 70-year-old Eddy Dhulster, told VRT news: "This has made me a very happy man. A true horseback fisherman loves the sea in the deepest of his heart, as well as what the sea brings, and his horse. That's the most important part."

Veerle Baetens wins European Film Award

Veerle Baetens won the European Film Award for Best Actress last weekend for her role in the breakaway Flemish hit *The Broken Circle Breakdown*. It was the solo win for the film, which had five nominations, more than any other film at the annual awards, which take place in Berlin. Baetens said she wasn't expecting to win as she was up against some of Europe's most famous actresses, including Keira Knightly (*Anna Karenina*), Barbara Sukowa (*Hannah Arendt*), Naomi Watts (*The*

Impossible) and Luminita Gheorghiu (*Child's Pose*). Since its premiere at the Ghent Film Festival in 2012, *The Broken Circle Breakdown* has been showered with international awards, including the Public Prize at the Black Nights Film Festival in Tallinn last week, which marked its 40th award. Two other Flemish films won awards at the prestigious ceremony. The prize for best short film went to Tom Van Avermaet's *Dood van een schaduw* (*Death of a Shadow*), which stars

Matthias Schoenaerts. "This is a special time for Flemish cinema," the director said in his speech. "We are really making great strides." Van Avermaet's 20-minute short was this year nominated for an Oscar. The European Film Award's Young Audience Award, meanwhile, went to *Nono, het zigzagkind* (*The Zigzag Kid*) by Flemish director Vincent Bal, who based it on a book by the Israeli author David Grossman. AH

www.europeanfilmawards.eu

Two dead and more than 65 injured in multiple-car collision

A massive pile-up last week involving more than 130 vehicles closed the A19 motorway at Zonnebeke, West Flanders, for an entire day and evening. The prosecutor's office in Ypres said that the accident had been caused by "a dense, treacherous fog". There were in fact three separate collisions: one in the direction of Ypres and two in the direction of Kortrijk. A total of 132 vehicles were involved, all of which had to be towed from the scene. One person died at the scene and another later in hospital. Several more have been upgraded from critical to serious condition. More than 50 suffered minor injuries. Governor Carl Decaluwé thanked the 400 emergency workers involved at the scene. "The circumstances were extremely difficult because of the three large blocks of



© Kurt Desplenter / BELGA

cars," he said. "Our people had to go on foot to the middle block with their equipment." "It was chaos, complete chaos," one witness told VTM news. "Lorries driving into one another. Cars on top of each other." Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters issued a statement expressing sympathy with those involved and wishing "courage for the emergency services in these difficult circumstances". AH

Storm causes little damage in Flanders

The "Sinterklaas storm" of last Thursday saw record sea levels along the coast. Governor Carl Decaluwé had called a state of emergency on Wednesday but lifted it at 4.00 on Friday morning, after water levels began to descend from their height of 6.33 metres – 23 centimetres higher than expected. "There were no problems anywhere, thanks to the preparatory work everyone

carried out," Decaluwé said. "In one or two places, the sandbags proved their usefulness." The storm was a result of the coincidence of the spring tide and high winds, and, despite the high water, the worst of the expected damage was avoided when winds backed down unexpectedly. Winds along the coast were recorded at speeds up to 97 km/h at Zeebrugge and 90 km/h elsewhere. The

last time the water reached the heights of Friday morning was in 1953. In Antwerp, high levels of the river Scheldt, caused by the situation at sea, washed over the Scheldekaaien, where parked cars had been removed on Wednesday afternoon. The river's flood gates were closed, which kept the effects of the high water to a minimum. AH

Good World Cup draw for Red Devils

Marc Wilmots' Belgian side secured one of the kindest draws possible for the World Cup finals in Brazil next year, matched with Russia, Algeria and South Korea in the group stage. Although Belgium slipped from fifth to 11th place in this month's FIFA ranking, all three of their rivals in Group H are far behind in the listing. Under the guidance of Italian coach Fabio Capello, Russia at No 22 are in their first World Cup finals in 12 years, but they have a poor record at major finals since

the Soviet breakup, making the knockout rounds only once, at Euro 2008. South Korea, in their eighth consecutive World Cup appearance, are currently 54th in the FIFA rankings, but have the best recent record of the group, reaching the 2002 semi-finals. Algeria at No 26, have never gone past the group stage. Belgium's first game is against Algeria in Belo Horizonte on 17 June. They play Russia in Rio de Janeiro on 22 June and South Korea in São Paulo on 26 June. Leo Cendrowicz

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

10,000,000

sightings of bird, insect and mammal species in Flanders by visitors to waarnemingen.be, hosted by Natuurpunt. The 10-millionth sighting was a Eurasian nuthatch (*Sitta europaea*) in Zonhoven, Limburg province

€840,000

subsidy granted by Flemish heritage minister Geert Bourgeois for "extremely urgent" restoration of the façades of the Boeren Towers in Antwerp, which have been severely affected by corrosion

25,000

jobs could disappear in social aid agencies and municipal and provincial administrations in Flanders as a result of budget cuts, according to the Christian trade union ACV

15,000

people visited the Royal Museum of Central Africa in Tervuren last weekend, before it closes for renovation works scheduled to take three years

10,000

children received a gift from Sinterklaas this year thanks to the help of municipal social aid agencies (OCMWs)

WEEK IN BRIEF

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters, federal foreign affairs minister Didier Reynders, King Filip and prime minister Elio Di Rupo **attended the memorial ceremony for Nelson Mandela**, which was held on Tuesday of this week. Mandela died last week at the age of 95. Members of the public can sign a book of condolence at the South African embassy in Brussels. “His long non-violent struggle against the injustice of the apartheid regime inspired millions worldwide to follow the same path,” said Peeters. “Nelson Mandela proved that one man can change the world, and that one idea and one conviction can be stronger than 1,000 armies. Nelson Mandela has had to leave us, but his legacy will live on forever in the collective consciousness of humankind.”

The crown princess Elisabeth was under special police protection last week after an anonymous letter was received by the newspapers *La Dernière Heure* and *La Libre Belgique* from someone threatening to **kidnap the 12-year-old daughter of King Filip** and Queen Mathilde. An investigation into the identity of the author of the letter, who cited immigration problems as his motive, continues.

De Persgroep, publishers of *De Morgen* and *Het Laatste Nieuws*, has appealed against the decision by the competition council to **allow the merger of media houses** Corelio and Concentra into the single entity Mediahuis. The council agreed in October to the merger, which joins together *De Standaard* and *Het Nieuwsblad* from Corelio with *Gazet van Antwerpen* and *Belang van Limburg* from Concentra, cutting the number of competing newspaper publishers on the Flemish market from three to two. Arguments will be heard by the court of appeal in Brussels.

The **ban on gay men giving blood** could be reviewed, federal health minister Laurette Onkelinx told the Senate last week. The ban is part of European guidelines on blood donor selection, she said, but a Council of Europe decision in March recommended a review of the criteria. Onkelinx said that selection should be based on risk factors rather than identity and that she would ask an expert group to report on possible changes to the policy.

Flemish couple Bart Philtjens and Geertrui Praet, **who paid a surrogate mother** to carry a child for them, have had their conviction of abuse of a child overturned by the court of appeal in Ghent. The couple took the surrogate mother and her partner to court after they sold Baby D, who is the biological child of Philtjens, to a couple in the Netherlands for €12,000. The court in Ghent found that Philtjens and Praet had at no time treated Baby D, who is now eight years old, as merchandise to be bought and sold. The child has been left with the Dutch couple to avoid disruption to her well-being – although her parents were each sentenced to eight months suspended for their part in the transaction. The surrogate mother received a sentence of one year suspended and had to return the €12,000 to the Dutch couple.

Flemish education minister Pascal Smet has confirmed that a decree to organise the **formation of schools into networks** will not be introduced during this term. This is the minister’s third plan, after the reform of secondary education and teachers’ career tracks, that will not be translated into a decree before the elections in May. Instead of through a decree, the reforms will be carried out in phases through a master plan, at the request of the education sector, said Smet.

Petrus Jozef Triest, the founder of a number of charity organisations that cared for the poor, has been **exhumed from his last resting place** in the mortuary of Lovendegem in East Flanders to be taken to the convent of the Sisters in Kortemark, West Flanders, as part of the process of having him beatified as a saint. Triest died in 1836.

Dozens of workers for Ford Genk and its supplier companies will be obliged to **repay sums ranging from €1,250 to €3,750** received in error from the state service for employment benefits (RVA). The “crisis premium” is paid out in cases where a worker receives a redundancy payment no higher than the legal minimum, and varies according to the number of year in the job. In the case of Ford and its suppliers, unions wrongly indicated workers who chose to leave early were eligible for the benefit. The RVA has now informed unions that the benefits received will have to be repaid.

This year’s **BOB campaign to discourage drinking and driving** during the holiday period was launched last week in the city hall of Brussels. The campaign is organised by the institute for road safety, insurance industry federation Assuralia and the Belgian brewers’ federation. “Thanks to BOB campaigns in the past, a great many victims and fatalities were avoided,” said federal interior minister Joëlle Milquet at the launch. “However, alcohol remains a frequently cited cause of road accidents.” The campaign has the support of the restaurant industry, employers’ organisations, taxi companies and public transport authorities De Lijn and MIVB.

► www.ikbob.be

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



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Jan Goossens

Jan Goossens, artistic director of the Royal Flemish Theatre (KVS) in Brussels, has been awarded this year’s Citizenship Prize by the P&V Foundation, which works to engage citizens – especially young people – in civic participation.

Goossens, 42, was born in Antwerp. He studied philosophy and Germanic languages at the University of Leuven, where, he said, he “bloomed” and first developed the love for theatre which would later determine the course of his life.

At the age of only 21, Goossens was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s lymphoma, which was treated with a mixture of radio- and chemotherapy. After five years, he was declared in remission, but the treatment had provoked a chronic leukaemia.

In the absence of a suitable bone-marrow donor, his leukaemia was treated with interferon proteins, a controversial treatment, but one that worked: Several years later, he was free of the leukaemia as well.

By that time, he was already artistic director of the KVS, having been appointed at the tender age of 29. Whatever his health may have had in store for him, his professional path was as if strewn with rose-petals. In 1993, he was

picked up by Gérard Mortier, former head of De Munt opera, to be his deputy at the Salzburg Festival. From 1996 to 1998, he worked for opera director Peter Sellars. He also gained experience working with choreographer Wim Vandekeybus and Frie Leysen, who now directs the Vienna Festival.

Under Goossens’ leadership, KVS has been transformed – not only materially with the opening of the renovated theatre in 2005 – but also culturally and spiritually. To the displeasure of some members of the cultural elite, Goossens refuses to see his theatre as a Flemish enclave in a foreign city but instead set out to make it a major player on the cosmopolitan cultural scene.

His conviction extends all the way to Belgium’s former colony of the Congo, where he and KVS have established deep ties with artists, musicians and stage performers, which includes the founding of an annual festival in Kinshasa and regular exchanges.

“He was exemplary in how he made his commitment in a way that inspires and encourages others,” said Mark Elchardus, chair of the P&V Foundation, “and sparks the desire to take one’s place in the world as a fully committed citizen.”

OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Patience of a saint

It hasn’t been an easy year for Sinterklaas. First, the fourth century bishop found his helper, Zwarte Piet, accused of being a racist symbol of slavery and colonialism. Then, on the evening he’s supposed to be dropping in on the homes of good girls and boys, he had to brave a storm that saw people evacuated from the coast and water lapping over the banks of the Scheldt in Antwerp.

But he managed to fulfil his tasks – and in some rather creative ways. In Deinze, the Sint made his way to the Onze-Lieve-Vrouw primary school in an electric car, followed by his Piets in a go-cart. Staying with the sustainable theme, they handed out not sweets, but lunch-boxes and water-bottles.

Far from green, however, was his arrival at De Springveer school in Aalst, where he landed on the football pitch in a helicopter laid on by some of the kids’ parents. Things weren’t much greener in Geraardsbergen, where he made his arrival in a convertible. It seems that roadworks prevented him from making his traditional approach in a steamboat up the Dender.

But perhaps the biggest surprise came in the Abraham Hans school in Oudenaarde, where he almost didn’t



© Michiel Zappa/Wikimedia Commons

show up at all. Having ventured up on a roof from which he apparently could not descend, the Sint had to be rescued by the fire brigade. He showed up (late) at school in a fire engine, with lights blazing and sirens blaring.

According to Bpost, more than 400,000 children sent letters to Sinterklaas this year across Belgium, keeping 20 members of the post office staff busy replying with a surprise. Last year’s record of 225,000 now lies in tatters.

FLANDERS TODAY



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Visible once more

With a short break in the troubled years from 2007 to 2011, the Flemish socialist SPA has been in government continuously since 1988, but the party has never been in the lead.

Because of this position, SPA does not always attract much attention – certainly not of the kind the popular N-VA is getting plenty of. With elections on the way and opinion polls down, this causes some nervousness in SPA ranks. Party president Bruno Tobback is sometimes blamed for not being “visible” enough.

Vice prime-minister Johan Vande Lanotte, meanwhile, enjoys plenty of visibility – though not always of the positive kind. As energy company Electrawinds finds itself in financial trouble, all heads turn to Vande Lanotte, who was president of its board during the years his party was in opposition. At the time, Vande Lanotte himself believed his ministerial career to be over. He therefore turned his attention to business, although he remained a senator.

Over the years, Vande Lanotte has become the object of many a myth about the power he exerts, in his home town of Ostend as well as elsewhere. Now, he is believed to have played a role in attracting government funds to Electrawinds. His opponents accuse him of a conflict of interest – which Vande Lanotte vehemently denies.

Last week, Tobback defended his vice prime-minister in a rather awkward manner. “No-one has done more for Ostend than Johan since Leopold II.” The reference to the king of dubious reputation was daring, but the message was clear: SPA would stick by Vande Lanotte, no matter what.

This weekend, as the socialists gathered for a congress in Ghent, Flemish minister Freya Van Den Bossche went one step further. To avoid cases such as Electrawinds, politicians should keep out of all business, she proposed.

At the congress, Tobback came up with another remarkable proposition: Small communes should merge, he said, so they can offer their citizens the service they deserve. The idea is not new, but putting it into practice has been impossible so far.

Both proposals – fewer communes and a strict division between politics and business – are likely to meet with a lot of opposition from other parties. Their electoral appeal seems rather small, too. But it does make SPA once again a party that is talked about. One that is visible beyond the Vande Lanotte controversy. Maybe that was the idea from the start.

Designer talent in Hong Kong

Kris Peeters at global event as part of Belgian Spirit delegation

Derek Blyth

Flanders’ minister-president Kris Peeters was in Hong Kong last week as part of a Belgian trade mission led by Queen Mathilde. Belgium’s three regions joined forces for the Business of Design Week (BoDW) under the collective name Belgian Spirit.

BoDW is the largest design event in Asia and concentrates on proving the increasing economic importance of design, creativity and innovation. The Flemish delegation included a large number of design firms as well as individual designers and architects. Several educational institutions also took part.

The Antwerp luxury fashion label AF Vandevorst caught the attention of fashionistas and journalists with their special pair of \$3 million diamond-encrusted ankle boots. The footwear was the result of a



From left: Wallonia foreign trade minister Jean-Claude Marcourt, Queen Mathilde, Brussels foreign trade minister Celine Fremault, Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters and federal foreign minister Didier Reynders break open a giant ball of Belgian chocolate at BoDW

collaboration between the designer, Antwerp World Diamond Centre, Diarough/UNI-Design and Flanders

Fashion Institute.

Peeters took time off from the design fair to attend the official

opening of Antwerp firm Studio Dott’s new Hong Kong branch. Studio Dott was founded in 2000 under the name Concrete and is now one of Antwerp’s leading design consultancies. Its new Hong Kong office plans to help Asian companies make their products fit the needs of the European market.

Studio Dott director Pieter Lesage plans to use the Hong Kong base to reach Chinese companies that want to sell their products in Europe under their own brand name. “It is worth getting advice because Chinese products are often excellent technically, but they do not always look good,” Lesage said. He added that the colour of a product did not matter for the Chinese but is essential for the European market. “They still think purely in functional terms,” he said.

New arts decree will help to “develop talent” in Flanders

The Flemish Parliament has approved a new Kunstendecreet (Arts Decree) to streamline the way the arts are supported in Flanders. The new measure was introduced by culture minister Joke Schauvliege following criticism of flaws in the previous decree, approved in 2004. “This new Kunstendecreet paves the way for a multidisciplinary approach and breaks down the barriers between the different disciplines,” she said.

The new decree calls for the minister to set out a strategic vision for the arts at the start of each new government term. It also includes measures that will help Flemish artists break through internationally and become more actively involved in the creative economy. Schauvliege’s decree makes a clean break with the old arts funding system in which disciplines like dance, theatre and visual arts were considered separately. Her new approach classifies artists and organisations into five categories – development, production, presentation, participation and reflection.

The subsidies will no longer be based on



fixed committees of experts from each discipline but on a pool of experts from the five new categories. The subsidies will also be granted for longer periods – five years instead of the existing two-year or four-year grants.

One of the aims of the decree is to give the major Flemish arts organisations a more secure financial basis. Organisations such as deSingel and Vlaamse Opera (pictured) will still have to submit a plan every five years, but they will no longer have to worry every year about whether their grant will be cut.

Schauvliege said that these measures will “guarantee that our artists and art organisations can develop their talents more than ever, both at home and abroad”. DB

King Filip criticised for royal pardons for traffic offenders

King Filip has apologised to the families of traffic accident victims after it was revealed that he had granted a royal pardon to several traffic offenders. The TV programme *Royalty* reported last week that the king had used his royal power to pardon 11 offenders.

The king was criticised by several road safety organisations, including the Belgian Institute for Road Safety (BIVV) and Parents of Children Killed in Road Accidents. Flemish transport minister Hilde Crevits told Radio 1 that she wanted more clarity on the decision that was made.

The revelation has sparked off debate in the federal parliament on the abolition of royal pardons. N-VA and Open VLD

consider it an anachronism. Theo Francken of N-VA called it “a custom dating from the middle ages or the Roman Empire when the emperor could decide a person’s fate by raising or lowering his thumb”.

The decision to turn applications for pardon over to the king, however, is made by the federal justice department and was mainly granted to prisoners suffering from serious illnesses to help reduce the prison population. Justice minister Annemie Turtelboom announced that no more pardons will be granted before the elections next May. DB

Constitutional reforms cost Flanders €7.8 billion

The latest round of constitutional reforms will cost Flanders about €7.8 billion, according to a report published by the financial newspaper *De Tijd*.

This sixth round of reforms includes the transfer of various powers from the federal government to the regional level. But, in an effort to decrease the national debt, the budget for the formerly federal responsibilities was not transferred to the regions. Therefore, each of the three regions suddenly faces a sharply increased financial burden.

The Flemish government will now have to cover the commuting costs of civil servants based in Brussels, as well as civil servants’ pension costs and a portion of the escalating bill caused by the ageing population.

Flemish finance minister Philippe Muyters came under fire for failing to lay aside funds in preparation for the costs of the reforms. “It was impossible to prepare,” he told *De Tijd*, “because the reforms dragged on for such a long time before we knew precisely what they involved”. DB

SP.A proposes one-way plan for Brussels streets

The Flemish socialist party wants to turn Brussels’ main thoroughfares into one-way streets to ease the city’s chronic traffic congestion. Brussels parliament member Jef Van Damme said that radical solutions were needed to tackle traffic congestion in the capital. SP.A’s plan would affect the main roads into Brussels, known as *steenwegen*. These are often congested due to commuter traffic, making it difficult for buses and bicycles to use them. Van Damme says that the socialist proposal to reduce cars to one lane would make it easier to lay down tram lines, bus lanes and cycle paths. “This would encourage a lot of Brussels residents to leave their cars at home,” he said. “So we would be able to decrease pollution and improve the quality of life.”

Under the plan, streets such as Waversesteenweg and

Ninoofsesteenweg would bring traffic into the centre, while Leuvensesteenweg and Bergensesteenweg would take traffic out of the city.

The party also proposes the creation of about 10 new pedestrian-only areas. The most ambitious plan is to create a four-kilometre pedestrian route to connect North Station with the Dansaert quarter and Molenbeek. “This would be the longest pedestrian shopping street in Europe,” said Van Damme.

The politician admits that Brussels already has ambitious plans to solve the traffic problem, but they are long-term strategies. “We can’t wait another decade for a new metro line,” he said. “It’s better to go for affordable projects that will bring immediate improvements.” DB

► www.brusselsmobility.be

Spreading the gospel

BPolitix complements Flemish parliament programme to raise political awareness

► continued from page 1

and the high youth unemployment rate. But BPolitix's ambitions extend beyond just raising awareness. By distributing digital and written surveys – so-called BPolls – on social media and in schools, they also want to actively collect data on teenagers' political views. They're also hoping to organise presentations in schools and debates with local politicians on issues like mobility and sustainability. The first such Groot Jongerendebat (Big Youth Debate) will take place in Leuven next February. BPolitix is teaming up with local youth organisations to organise it. This makes BPolitix's goals quite similar to those of the project De Kracht van je Stem (The Power of Your Voice/Vote), which the education committee of the Flemish Parliament has been running for a decade. "The difference is that BPolitix is more embedded in the world of youngsters today," Hoornaert says, pointing out that the De Kracht project doesn't use social media. De Kracht co-ordinator Kris Van den Bremt acknowledges this criticism: "Although our website is adapted to youth of different ages, it's true that for the moment we prefer to primarily support teachers, who bridge the gap to the students." She says that BPolitix and their outreach on social media serves as a complement to their own work.

“Adolescence is an essential period in the development of political interest”

The Flemish Parliament's education committee offers teachers and teachers in training tools and lesson materials to explain politics in the classroom. "Helping students to develop a sense of public responsibility is part of the compulsory education plan, but many teachers struggle to achieve this goal," Van den Bremt says.

In addition to offering teachers classroom tools, De Kracht also invites students to the Flemish Parliament for guided visits and day-long events. These educational activities, which include mock debates, take place twice a week in the Parliament's commission rooms (pictured on cover). Every January, the parliament's education committee organises "dialogue classes", debates between Brussels and Flemish fifth- and final-year classes. The students also get a chance to talk to politicians from the different political parties.

In the run-up to the elections, De Kracht is hosting the first Stemmersdag, or Voters' Day, an extra activity for final-year secondary students in March. "The main purpose is to raise the interest of students through accessible information and debate with politicians," says Van den Bremt. "Students can interrupt politicians by flashing a red card – like referees during football matches – which means the politicians have to keep their explanation more simple."

In February, teachers are invited to the parliament to participate in master classes and workshops focused on communicating to students how the electoral process works.

A research project commissioned by the Flemish Parliament demonstrated that the



From top: BPolitix co-founder Arnaud Hoornaert says many of his friends aren't interested in politics; ambassadors of the Flemish Youth Council meet to talk about social inclusion; the Flemish Youth Council protests in Brussels against the controversial municipal GAS fines

project is succeeding in its aim of increasing students' political knowledge. In 2011, political science students at the University of Antwerp examined the impact of De Kracht and found that students' knowledge of the political decision-making process improved after participation in the programme. The popular education programme also quickly

"sells out". Every year, about 3,000 students get a chance to participate in De Kracht days at the parliament. "Expanding the programme is difficult because the commission rooms are only available on Mondays and Fridays," Van den Bremt explains, "and our evaluations prove that the location has an important added value for the students' experience."

Still, according to Marc Hooghe, professor of political sciences at the University of Leuven (KU Leuven), Flanders is not investing enough resources in student-tailored educational programmes like De Kracht. Van Hooghe, who is also on the De Kracht steering committee, points to the European Parliament's permanent visitor centre as a good example of how institutions can provide extensive, week-round information.

According to the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), more intense citizenship education is needed in Flanders. Organised in 2009 by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, more than 140,000 14-year-old students in 38 countries and regions completed ICCS questionnaires. The Flemish chapter of the study was carried out by the University of Antwerp and the Free University of Brussels (VUB). Although the Flemish teenagers scored reasonably well on knowledge about and trust in political institutions, they didn't do as well in other areas.

Democratic rights

The ICCS poll revealed that Flemish students on average attach less importance to fundamental democratic rights and on equal opportunities than do teens from other countries. Their sense of citizenship self-efficacy and their desire to follow a television debate about a controversial issue, for example, is low. The same is true of their willingness to participate in legal protests. Hooghe, who heads the specialised Centre for Citizenship and Democracy at KU Leuven, is more optimistic about the knowledge and involvement of Flemish teenagers. In a recent study conducted by the centre, 73% of secondary school students passed a test on political knowledge.

Still, the difference between the high scores of general humanities students (ASO) and the low ones of those in professional education (BSO) was remarkable. When they measured the political interest of the teenagers, the Leuven researchers also found that ASO students performed twice as well as the BSO students.

"This gap between ASO and BSO is very concerning," says Hooghe. "It's important that we don't create a society with population groups that seem to be living in different worlds." Hooghe hopes the new BPolitix platform will help but feels that additional initiatives will be necessary.

He points to a recent report from the Flemish Youth Council, the Flemish government's official advisory body for youth-related matters. One of the suggestions the council made was the introduction of a separate course on social and political education. "If you adjust the level of the course to the different levels of general and professional education, this could be a very useful addition to the curriculum," Hooghe says. Another focus should be to increase the media literacy of professional education students.

The KU Leuven centre's research also emphasises the importance of improving citizenship education in schools. "We find that, just like for many other aspects, adolescence is an essential period in the development of political interest," Hooghe explains. "If you are not stimulated as a teenager, you are not very likely to become a politically involved adult."

► www.bpolitix.be

WEEK IN
BUSINESS**Autos ▶ exports**

Some 500,000 used cars were exported from Belgium in 2012, 74% more than the previous year. The bulk of the traffic is shipped from Antwerp to Africa. The leading destination is Cotonou in Benin, with 173,000 vehicles going on to Nigeria.

Aviation ▶ Emirates

The Dubai-based airline is to launch a daily service between the Gulf state and Brussels Airport from August.

Foam ▶ Recticel

The Brussels-based polyurethane foam producer has signed several contracts worth €364 million in total to supply several European car producers with inside doors and dashboard panels for the next 10 years. Clients include BMW, Mercedes, Porsche, VW and Volvo.

Banking ▶ Banca Monte Paschi

The Brussels branch of Italy's Banca Monte Paschi is for sale as part of the bank's worldwide restructuring. The local affiliate employs 110 people and has deposits of more than €800 million.

Artificial turf ▶ Desso

The Derdermonde-based artificial turf and flooring specialist is supplying the Sao Paulo Arena stadium, home of the forthcoming football World Cup, with a hybrid turf mixing natural grass strengthened with synthetic fibres.

Bakery ▶ La Lorraine

The Ninove-based bakery and pastry group is seeking €75 million to finance its international development. It is a leading supplier to the retailing industry and operator of the Panos sandwich outlets chain.

Headhunters ▶ Russell Reynolds

The Brussels office of the executive search consultant has been selected to seek a new CEO for telecommunications company Belgacom.

Retail ▶ The Kase

The French mobile phone accessories and equipment retailer has inaugurated its first store in the Wijnegem shopping centre, near Antwerp, and has plans to open up to 10 more in Flanders over the next year.

Electrawinds seeks investors

Flemish wind energy producer is faced with €362 million of debt

Alan Hope

The board of Electrawinds, which operates a large wind-turbine farm off the Flemish coast, has decided not to apply for bankruptcy while talks to attract new investors continue. The decision to pull back from the brink of closure was taken at an emergency meeting last week.

The Ostend company will sell off overseas properties in an effort to bring down its high level of debt, which sits at €362 million. It hopes to bring that sum down with the sale of parts of its operations, which include wind farms and biomass operations in Belgium and elsewhere.

Talks continue between creditors and shareholders, which will be watched carefully by the federal and Flemish governments. Electrawinds

has received some €150 million in public support, which would be lost if the company were to go bankrupt. The Flemish government invested €25 million via investment fund PMV, another €15 million with the federal government through the fund DG Infra+ and has signed €13 million worth of credit guarantees. The investment fund GIMV, 30% owned by the Flemish government, is in for a further €53 million.

For all their investments, however, neither of the two governments received much in the way of control. CEO and founder Luc Desender holds about 42% of voting shares, with the Flemish government via GIMV on 7.3% and the federal government on about 9.4%. Desender was recently able to use his voting influence to reject a rescue plan by a consortium



that included the private fund Fortino of former Telenet CEO Duco Sickinghe, together with the PMV and GIMV. That plan would

have diminished Desender's share and given more say to outsiders, including the government.

Brussels taxi concerns go on part-time strike

Three of Brussels' taxi associations are continuing to take part in protests against new meters imposed on them by the region. For the time being, their actions are only part time in one location.

Following a large-scale protest earlier this month that saw the drivers blocking major arterials in the centre of Brussels as well as the inner Ring road, they are now protesting at South Station every morning between 8.00 and 11.00, according to Constantin Tsatsakis, director of the ATB association.

Taxi representatives are protesting against the enforced introduction of digital meters, which record all of a vehicle's movements and issue an automatic receipt for every journey. The Brussels government claims the new meters will save drivers and taxi companies administrative work and protect against fraud. "We



are not against the introduction of the meters as such," Tsatsakis said. "But we object to the fact that the costs will not be fully covered by the region."

The meters costs about €3,000 each, of which the region has agreed to pay one-third. The tax on taxi drivers will also be cut by €350 a year. Along with the ATB, the other two striking associations, Taxis United and UPETTC, make up a minority of all taxis in Brussels. Another four associations have accepted the introduction of the new meters without protest. AH

New national stadium will be for football only

The new national stadium planned for the Heizel complex in Brussels will not include an athletics track, according to an agreement reached last week by the various partners in the scheme. The stadium, intended for the use of the national football team, will include 50,000 seats, with a possible 10,000 additional places for special events.

The Memorial Van Damme, Belgium's premier athletics event, will not therefore be accommodated in the new stadium. Until 2020, the annual event can remain at the King Baudouin stadium, also located at Heizel. The stadium is due after that date to be demolished to make way for the new Neo shopping complex. All parties agreed that a new stadium for athletics needs to be planned for Brussels. According

to Van Damme organiser Wilfried Meert, the event will stay in Brussels. "We're extremely happy that our demand for an athletic stadium to be retained has been heard," he said. The new stadium will be open air and host 31 programmed matches a year as well as other events. The Flemish government is heavily involved in preparations for the new stadium as it is located on the part of Heizel that sits in the Flemish municipality of Grimbergen.

The government had previously expressed a preference for a single stadium combining football and an athletics track – an option rejected from the outset on the grounds of cost. The new stadium will cost an estimated €314 million, to be financed entirely by the private sector. AH

Flanders meets Europe for speed-dating

Some 250 Flemings active in European affairs gathered in Brussels' De Munt last week for a speed-dating event that saw them strike up conversations with Dutch speakers working in other sectors. "We are bringing together 250 Flemings, all active in the European sphere," explained Jan Buysse just before the event. Buysse is the director-general of Vleva, the Flemish-European liaison agency, which sponsored the event. "They are experts in Belgian government institutions, the Flemish government, the European institutions and the business world. One thing links them all: they're all professionally occupied with European affairs."

Although speed-dating as a

phenomenon started out bringing people together for potentially romantic reasons, it's expanded in scope as a kind of networking. The principle of cutting through the elaborate rituals and small-talk to get straight to the point has found plenty of applications in business. The Vleva event put the European experts at the disposal of people who have signed up, giving outsiders a valuable opportunity to meet exactly the people they might want to be in contact with for career or business reasons. "The whole intention of the event is to bring people in contact with each other," said Buysse. AH

▶ www.vleva.eu

Tomorrowland expands to two weekends

Flanders' summer dance music festival Tomorrowland has received permission from the city of Boom, Antwerp province, to expand to cover two weekends next year for its 10th anniversary edition. Known as the best dance music festival in the world, Tomorrowland will be able to sell twice as many tickets next summer, thanks to the extension.

"Last year, requests for tickets was enormous," read a statement by Tomorrowland founders Manu and Michiel Beers. "The organisation was overwhelmed with requests for tickets months after selling out from people who really wanted to be there. The demand is much larger than the capacity."

The three extra days will bring the total number of tickets on sale to 300,000. There is no doubt the tickets will sell: Last Year, Tomorrowland



sold out its 150,000 tickets in a few hours.

The Beers brothers emphasise that the extension from three days to six is one-time-only for the jubilee "in order to limit the pressure on the neighbourhood, our organisation and the beautiful recreation area De Schorre".

Tomorrowland takes place from 18-20 and 25-27 July, 2014. Half of all tickets for both weekends are reserved for Belgian buyers. Those tickets go on sale early next year. Lisa Bradshaw

▶ www.tomorrowland.com

Smart thinking

Flemish cities sign up to network promoting better energy policies

Senne Starckx

Eight Flemish cities are committed to bringing their energy policy to the next level. Because they will house the majority of the population in the future, cities are well placed to combat climate change on a global level. More than half of the world's population will soon live in cities, according to UN statistics, and this number is substantially higher in Europe. The ideal "city of the future" differs considerably from the urban environment we are used to today. The city of the future is often referred to as a "smart city" – smart in the way it produces and distributes energy, treats waste and organises the flow of goods and people. Eight Flemish cities have pledged to transform themselves into smart cities: Antwerp, Genk, Ghent, Hasselt, Kortrijk, Mechelen, Leuven and Ostend. Together they have formed the Smart Energy Cities Network, a sort of "classroom" in which each comes up with a project to make itself smarter when it comes to energy. The eight are guided by the Flemish Institute of Technology (VITO) and EnergyVille, a research platform for sustainable energy and intelligent energy systems based in Genk. The cities will be encouraged to share their ideas.

"An important focal point for smart cities is the way in which they deal with energy," says Guy Vekemans of VITO, whose title is "strategic developer of smart cities" at the Mol-based research centre. "Keeping this in mind, smart cities will always try to avoid a negative impact from their energy policy on the urban environment and the quality of life of its residents."

Collaboration is the key word in becoming a smart city. Vekemans says: "Since many individual cities and municipalities today are suffering from restricted budgets, collaboration between governments, companies, investors and community-based organisations is crucial. But even then, cities have to prioritise certain projects and bundle their financial resources. The initial transformation to a smart city starts with urban pilot projects. These allow us to study how smart cities look outside the lab – including economies of scale and the involvement of real people. We call these urban projects true living labs."

One of these pilot projects is the development of a new climate plan by (and for) the city of Ghent. The city is looking for innovative solutions for a comprehensive energy policy at city, neighbourhood and even building level. In the district of Sint-Amandsberg, a range of measures will be applied to promote sustainable renovation of residences, encourage energy-efficient transport and help combat "energy poverty".

"The goal of our climate policy is not only to help combat climate change but also to lower the



Ghent deputy mayor Tine Heyse puts her name to the Smart Energy Cities Network

energy bill of our citizens significantly," says Tine Heyse of Groen, the alderman for environment, energy and climate in Ghent's city administration. Heyse mentions the contemporary problem of energy poverty: "People with lower incomes risk ending up in a poverty trap today, because they can't keep up with the rising cost of energy. That's why we will provide free energy scans for homes, specific subsidies, cheap loans and extra investments in council housing."

The Ghent climate plan is being developed in close collaboration with its citizens, gathered under the flag of Ghent Climate Alliance. Another member of the Smart Energy Cities Network is Kortrijk, where the administration is working on a detailed supply-and-demand map of its energy use. "Our ambition is to combine this map with statistics such as population density, construction dates of individual buildings and potential for the integration of renewable energy," says Gerda Flo, Kortrijk's sustainability manager. "For every individual neighbourhood, we want to know the best road to sustainable living. The aim is of course rational use of energy, but for one part of the city, solar energy might be the best way to reach that goal, while for another this could be a district heating network or a complete renovation." Sustainability in its most tangible form will be realised in an urban development project called

Kortrijk Weide. This currently fallow area will house a centre for adult education, a swimming pool, an event hall and a surrounding park. Flo explains: "The combination of several functions regarding buildings makes it possible for us to work out an integrated approach. Each of the buildings will get an ambitious water, material and energy programme, but just as important will be the benefits established by setting up smart combinations."

"For example, water neutrality - where every single drop of used water is reused - is difficult to achieve for every single building. But for the entire area, it's a feasible ambition."

The Smart Energy Cities Network is part of a wider European initiative, called Step-Up. It provides cities in the EU with financial support to realise certain innovations in terms of energy policy. Part of this initiative is the "mayor's covenant", a city's commitment to an extensive reduction of CO₂ emissions via energy efficiency and renewable energy. Currently, more than 4,000 European cities have signed up. One of the goals of the covenant is to lower CO₂ emissions by 20% by 2020. Ghent and Leuven have already gone further, by pledging to become climate-neutral by 2050.

Think-tanks presents plan for a climate-neutral KU Leuven

In response to a report on CO₂ emissions from the University of Leuven (KU Leuven), a working group of the university's think-tank Metaforum has presented its action plan "KU Leuven Climate Neutral 2030". The university in its entirety emitted almost 200,000 tons of CO₂ in 2010. The biggest share of energy consumption comes from buildings and transport facilities. The Metaforum experts confronted the university community with these data during three round table discussions over the last few months. These meetings resulted in a long list of possible measures that KU Leuven could implement in a relatively short period of time with few inconveniences. The most important themes

are buildings, energy, mobility, green zones, purchases and health. Among the proposed initiatives are insulation, renovations, ICT tools to avoid transfers, regional purchases and conserving green zones. The policy should also, says Metaforum, include campaigns aimed at students and staff such as general guidelines to limit the paper used to print Master's theses. The Metaforum experts also recommend the practical integration of new policies through advisory bodies such as a sustainability council and an expertise centre. These should unite the knowledge of researchers, staff and students. Sustainable thinking should also be translated into education and research, through



transdisciplinary courses and ecological research projects. Andy Fumiere

WEEK IN INNOVATION

Proba-V satellite ready for operations

Proba-V, a European microsatellite developed by a Flemish consortium, has successfully completed its six-month test phase. It will now monitor global vegetation until 2015, providing information on crop yields, droughts and desertification. Proba-V – which is about the size of a washing machine – was created through a co-operation between QinetiQ in Kruike, OIP in Oudenaarde and the Mol-based Flemish Institute for Technological Research, with funding through the Belgian Science Policy Office. After the launch in May at the European Space Agency base in French Guiana, all instruments were evaluated, with positive results.

► www.vito-eodata.be

New Vlerick chair examines banks

KBC bank and Vlerick Business School's Centre for Financial Services are co-operating for a new chair at Vlerick on the role and positioning of financial institutions. Through the KBC Chair on Customer Insight, KBC will add its practical experience to academics' knowledge. In the coming academic year, two topics are up for discussion. First, there will be research into the impact of regulation on the traditional role of banks and the evolution of expectations of KBC's stakeholders – clients, employees, shareholders and the public. The second focus lies on service-based banking and insurance using "smart data" – data turned into actionable insights. The programme will examine how information from financial transactions can be applied to improve the services to clients. Later, researchers will analyse the impact of huge amounts of data on the European financial sector.

Leuven team finds cause of dyslexia

Defective communication between parts of the brain triggers the development of dyslexia, not the incorrect registration of sounds in the brain, according to researchers at the University of Leuven who examined the brain functioning of 50 adults, half of whom had dyslexia. Using MRI scans, the team monitored participants' brain activity while they listened to sounds of speech. The researchers found that while the registration of the sounds was the same for everyone, parts of the brain responsible for language processing had problems connecting to areas that register sounds. The insight means that brain stimulation therapy, in which different parts of the brain are simultaneously stimulated, could help dyslexic patients. AF

The Top 20 for 2013

Flanders Today correspondents searched far and wide for the best holiday gifts the region has to offer (in no particular order). Happy shopping!

1 What's Cooking

Bring a little *waterzooi* into someone's life with *What's Cooking in Belgium* by expats Anna Jenkinson and Neil Evans. Beautifully designed for the kitchen or coffee table, it combines recipes for traditional Belgian dishes with essays on the country's food culture (€35)

Buy it at:

Copyright Bookshop

For books that make their presence felt, browse the mighty tomes at Copyright. While art, photography and design are its strong suit, this coolwhite venue also offers books on cooking, gardening and the art of living (*Nationalestraat 28a, Antwerp, www.copyrightbookshop.be*)

2 Mini Ampli speaker

High-tech meets hi-fi in this cute retro speaker for your mp3 player, smartphone or tablet computer. At just 10cm tall and lightweight, it runs on either batteries or a USB cable (included) (€30)

Buy it at:

Paplou

Vintage clothing and retro style combine with home-grown Belgian design at this quirky shop, a labour of love for owner Babs Van Briel. She is equally passionate about promoting local, organic and fairtrade products, and about making retro fashion affordable (*Dorpsstraat 37b, Hasselt, www.paploustore.be*)

3 Ketjep and Mayo

Because they're often picky eaters, finding the right gift for foodies can be quite a task. But this Brussels Ketjep and Mayo range of sauces will tick all the boxes – made with nothing but fresh ingredients and sold only in select shops (about €3 each)

Buy it at:

Rob's Gourmet Market

Brussels' most classy supermarket packs its counters with the finest meat and cheese, fruit and veggies, and bread and pastry. With aisles stocked with gourmet treats from around the world, any visit is a delight – but especially this month (*Woluwelaan 28, Brussels, www.rob-brussels.be*)



4 Flowering primrose necklace

What about a poetic piece of glass jewellery to win over the woman of your dreams? Ghent-based glass artist Leen Van Waes drew inspiration from Ophelia's garden for her latest collection. But move fast; the collection is on its way to selling out. (€349, www.leenvanwaes.com)

Buy it at:

Cooremetershuys

In the midst of Ghent's medieval Graslei, this arched cellar shop sells unique jewellery, hats, leather bags, scarves, pottery and porcelain from local and European designers. There's also a focus on fair trade, with pottery and handbag collections made by craftsmen in Colombia and Peru (*Graslei 12, Ghent, www.cooremetershuys.be*)



5 MUD

An empty box may not be what you expected from Santa, but this one comes with a voucher for four MUD makeup refills. The professional products from the Make-Up Designory school in Hollywood are now available in retail for us mortals, too (€21.50 for box, €15.50 each refill)

Buy it at:

Beauty by Kroonen and Brown

This niche beauty shop near the Zavel carries perfumes by Amouage (from the Sultanate of Oman) and Miller Harris (London). There's mineral makeup by Jane Iredale, and now also MUD – an exclusive for Brussels (*Lebeauststraat 49, Brussels, www.kroonenandbrown.com*)



6 Leather jacket notebook

Would you believe this leather notebook used to be an '80s jacket? When not releasing a new collection, fashion designer Elles de Koe roams the nation's second-hand markets for jackets and other wares she can give a new life (€35)

Buy it at:

Le Chalet

This pop-up gift store, housed in an old cheese shop, was especially set up for Christmas shopping. Unique clothing pieces, accessories and interior design objects by Belgian designers, like de Koe and Anaïs Van Hoorebeke – who happen to be running the shop (*Boelare 22, Eeklo, www.ellesdekoe.be*)



7 Quintessence scented candle

With mysterious sounding names like Ishara, Ur-Zaba and Arali, these scented candles from the Parisian Quintessence label take you on a journey to a forgotten Mesopotamian empire. Opening the sleek black box takes just seconds, the candle lasts hours (€36-€115)



Buy it at:

Siblings Factory

This concept shop opened its doors in September and has topped every trendy shopper's must-visit list since. Men's and women's clothing, accessories, vintage furniture, magazines ... and one of the coolest interiors in town (*Oude Graanmarkt 31, Brussels, www.siblingsfactory.com*)

8 Lilliputiens backpacks

Going to school can be scary for the littlest students, so why not send them off with a friend? Jef the dog and Walter the dragon are two of the whimsical yet durable nylon backpacks from Belgian toy company Lilliputiens (€36-€39)

Buy it at:

In Den Olifant

This classic toy store has no website because owner Nadia Wellens likes getting to know her customers personally. She also believes in old-fashioned toys that engage a child's imagination – no batteries required (*Aldestraat 24, Hasselt, tel 011 23 12 43*)

9 Neon art light

Flaunting but flattering, no modern interior can do without. Brighten up those long winter nights with the names of your loved ones in neon. Those who feel like splurging can also opt for neon poetry lights. The collection also includes numbers (€49 per letter)

Buy it at:

Piet Moodshop

Just opposite arts centre Vooruit, this former pop-up shop specialises in stylish and original gifts at every price point. From the old tile floors and high ceilings to the antique wooden furniture, everything about this shop, run by an interior and floral designer, makes you want to indulge (*Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 94, Ghent, www.piet-gent.be*)



10 Hugo Claus verses

For poetic gifts, opt for one of the newly published collections by the great Flemish writer Hugo Claus. His widow Veerle selected the love poems for *Je buik van pimpelmees* (Your Blue Tit Belly, €10), while *Even Now* (€19.95) offers a career overview in English in a lucid translation by David Colmer

Buy it at:

Passa Porta

If you are shopping in tongues, this international bookshop in downtown Brussels is just the place. It has a solid selection of poetry and fiction in four languages and an open interior design that encourages browsing (*Dansaertstraat 46, Brussels, www.passaporta.be*)

11 Red Devils football scarf

It's black, it's red, it's yellow, and it's made of cashmere. This is exactly what the football fan in your life needs to show off his or her loyalty to Belgium's national team in the lead-up to World Cup. (€75)

Buy it at:

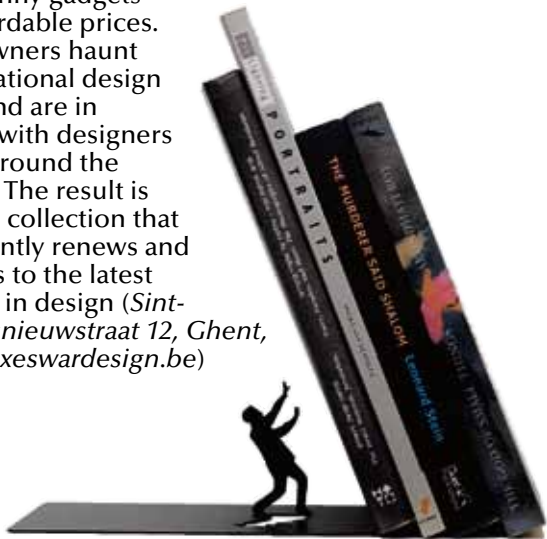
www.savile-rogue.nl

You've got to love a shop with a mission: This place only does football club accessories. Visit the Dutch site for the cashmere scarfs for both youth and adults or the British site for other accessories, including leather touchscreen gloves



12 Falling bookend
Ever felt like you would crumble under the weight of those classics by Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy? This bookend by Artori doesn't just keep your books from falling over, it serves as a constant reminder of your college years. Added bonus: it looks like a really *big* present when wrapped up in its box (€17.50)

Buy it at:
Axeswar Design
Since 1995, this famous shop has sold vintage and funny gadgets at affordable prices. The owners haunt international design fairs and are in touch with designers from around the world. The result is a shop collection that constantly renews and adjusts to the latest trends in design (*Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 12, Ghent, www.axeswardesign.be*)



13 Native Union iPhone cover
The vast majority of smartphone covers on the market aim for either function or flash. Finally, there's one worthy of Apple's sleek design icon. Natural cherry wood veneer is combined with a chic splash of colour. Available in black, white, green, orange and blue (€50)

Buy it at:
Oui
Opened exactly one year ago, Pascale Wagelman's shop in the centre of Hasselt has quickly established itself as the go-to destination for a sophisticated mix of interior décor and unique gifts. Each item is hand-selected from around the globe. Specialities include Danish design, home accessories and natural materials (*Aldestraat 50, Hasselt, www.oui-shop.be*)

14 Kewpie
These cute dolls were first made in Germany after 19th-century American cartoonist Rose O'Neill's series *Kewpies*. An antique Kewpie doll will cost you a fortune, but since they're all the rage in Japan, you can score cheaper, plastic ones, too, in all sizes and colours (*from €8*)

Buy it at:
Pika Pika Japan
This new shop is entirely dedicated to all things "made in Japan". Clothes, notebooks, lots of toys and gift items in the very brightest of rainbow colours. Perfect for the kids, but will also appeal to anyone with a soft spot for cute thingummies (*Waterloosesteenweg 525a, Brussels*)



15 Gold leather bag
Surprise your special someone with this gold leather bag, new from Ghent-based designer Roos Vandekerckhove. Mostly known for her multi-coloured scarves, in stores from Paris to Tokyo, this creative designer is now making accessories and shoes. The bags also come in fluorescent colours, or covered with pony hair (€299)

Buy it at:
Humør
A newcomer to the Ghent lifestyle scene, this shop focuses on young Belgian and Scandinavian fashion talent and out-of-the-box interior design. It's run by photographer An Gyselinck, and sports a cosy, outdoor winter bar (*Bennesteeg 19, Ghent*)



16 Lavazza limited edition cup
When Italian design meets Italian coffee ... you get a limited edition Lavazza coffee cup. Every year, the coffee label releases a few new designs, for sale at coffee houses and select shops (€24.95)

Buy it at:
Lavazza boutique
Located in Brussels, this is the first Lavazza boutique for Belgium. Pop round and discover a wide range of coffee and coffee machines, or sign up for a workshop to learn how to brew a perfect cup of Italian coffee with barista Jeroen Clauwers (*E Jacquemijnlaan 128, Brussels, www.lavazzaboutique.be*)



17 Alessi glass ornaments
Italian design company Alessi has taken the familiar characters of the Nativity scene and turned them into whimsical baubles for your tree. Large ornaments are sold individually, while smaller ones come in a set of five, featuring Joseph, Mary, Jesus an ox and a donkey (€16 each, €58 set)

Buy it at:
Donum
This elegant showroom, located in a renovated Post Office building from 1899, is beautifully decorated for the holidays. The collection combines home interiors, furniture and giftware, featuring Flemish designers like Pieter Stockmans alongside international brands (*Havermarkt 31-33, Hasselt, www.donum.be*)

18 Selenite heart
You can't go wrong with a gift from the heart, right? Take the saying literally by buying your special ones a white or orange heart made from selenite, which is said to have peaceful healing properties. You can use this pretty mineral stone as a paper weight or use it to decorate the house (€10)



Buy it at:
House of Wonders
From fossilised dinosaur teeth to picture frames made from wood from old African boats, everything sold at House of Wonders is actually a gift from nature. Some of the shop's treasures are more than 500 million years old (*Vossenplein 76, Brussels, www.houseofwonders.be*)

19 FlagBag
Made from recycled city banners, these cute bags can be used for makeup, school supplies, you name it. At 19 x 21 cm, they're just the right size to slip in your shoulder bag or carry-on (€29)

Buy it at:
Okazi
Hasselt-based FlagBag is an initiative of second-hand shop Okazi. The handmade bags and accessories can be found at several locations, including the tourist information office and the Fashion Museum gift shop, but for the best selection, head to the little shop inside Okazi itself (*Sint-Truidersteenweg 150, Hasselt, www.flagbag.be*)

20 Grand Marnier Special Edition
Grand Marnier is always an excellent gift, but this trussed-up red bottle of the classic orange liqueur, sporting a delicate illustration of the City of Lights, is especially welcome this time of year (€22)

Buy it at:
Prik & Tik
If you thought Flanders couldn't get better, let us introduce you to this supermarket dedicated to drinking. It's not what you might call fancy, but you will find pretty much any alcoholic beverage you seek – and often the right glass to serve it in – at democratic prices (*Across Flanders, www.prikentik-uw-drakenspecialist.be*)



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

WEEK IN
ACTIVITIES

Wintertime in Leuven

More than a Christmas market, Leuven's seasonal offerings include a range of activities for young and old, including a retro carnival, beer tours, ice skating, ghost walks and holiday concerts. Highlights include the Great Begijnhof lit by candlelight and grand opening festivities on 12 December, starting at 17.00. From 12 December, across city centre

► www.wintertijdinleuven.be

Ghent Winter Run

Need some motivation to get active as the weather gets colder? How about a winter run for the whole family? With 5 and 10k fun runs, a half-marathon, full marathon and even a 1k kiddie run, there's something for the whole family. The course goes through the green belt around Ghent, with the starting point at Blaarmeersen recreation park. 15 December, 10.00, Topsporthal Vlaanderen, Zuiderlaan 14, Ghent

► www.gentloopt.be

Handmade in
Belgium

This annual handicrafts fair for independent designers takes place in C-Mine, the former Winterslag coal mine. Handmade clothes, jewellery, accessories and home décor for everyone on your gift list, plus workshops, refreshments and kids' entertainment. 14 December 15.00-20.00; 15 December 10.00-18.00, Evence Copélaan 91, Genk

► www.handmade-in-belgium.com

Brussels CitySki

Brussels' Kunstberg is the setting for a 150-metre-long artificial ski slope. Enjoy lots of powder, ski lifts and pro equipment as well as spectacular views of the city centre. Soak up the après-ski atmosphere in the mini Alpine village, with mulled wine, Swiss raclette, pine trees and wooden chalets. Ski initiation classes available. Daily, 14 December to 5 January, €5

► www.upcommunication.be/cityski

Swish, Swap
and Make-Up

Every month, Muntpunt in Brussels hosts a workshop with the theme "Creative Living in the City". This month, it's all about "swishing", a fun way to exchange your retail mistakes for someone else's unwanted fashion treasures – shopping without the financial hangover or buyer's remorse. And it's good for the planet since it keeps usable clothes and accessories in use. 14 December 13.00-16.00, €5, reservation required

► www.muntpunt.be

An essay a day

Roets calendar fills in gaps in our knowledge one day at a time

Alan Hope

Did you know that atlases of the 16th and 17th centuries labelled what we now call the Azores as the "Vlaemsche eilanden"? Or that the largest banana collection in the world is to be found in the laboratory of the department of tropical agriculture at the University of Leuven?

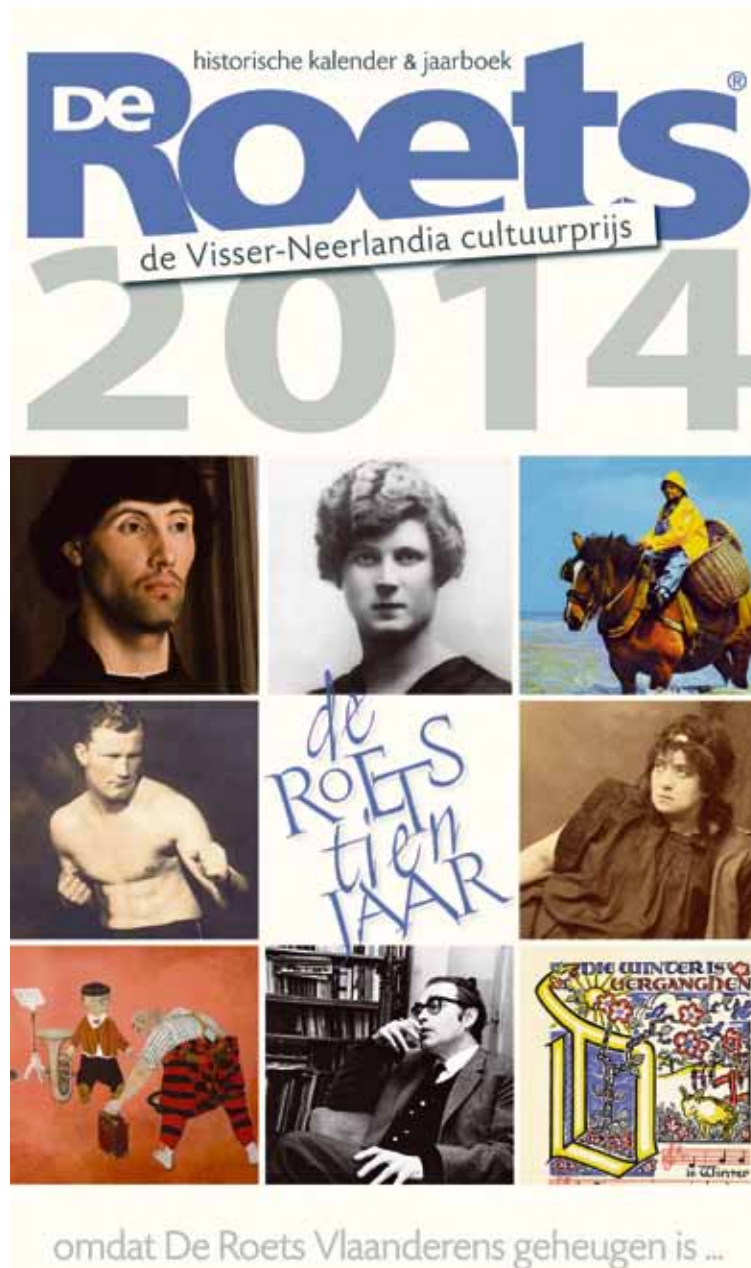
If you did, you're probably familiar with De Roets, a historical calendar whose every page features an episode from Flemish history or a biography, while every day brings a few tasty morsels of conversation-stopping information like the above, known in Dutch as *weetjes* and in this context as *roetsjes*.

De Roets is now in its 10th edition. It started in 2005 out of a sense of concern that general knowledge no longer seemed to be especially general, explains Jo Vranckx, the calendar's editor.

"It seemed as if the collective memory of the Fleming was on the decline," she told *Flanders Today*. "Someone was asked, do you know who Peter Benoit is? Yes, he answered, he was a famous DJ with Peter Koelewijn in the 1960s." Benoit, for readers who may not be aware, was a Flemish composer who founded the forerunner of Flemish Opera and died in 1901.

"It's enough to make your hair stand on end," Vranckx says. "Someone else thought Maria van Bourgonië was a Dutch fashion designer. There are only two things you can do: Either you walk away, do nothing and leave things as they are; or you decide something has to be done."

Thence came the idea of making a historical calendar, something people could hang in their homes and pay attention to from time to time – "To shake up the Flemish, and the Flemish youth especially, and get them to find out more about their



own culture, their history and their roots – hence the name. The calendar is a labour of love.

"Everyone connected with De Roets works for nothing, including me, but it's a full-time occupation. A passion,

you might say. Since I retired four years ago after 40 years as a teacher it's been my pleasure to bury myself in De Roets. It's a little bit addictive, but at least it's a safe and enjoyable addiction."

The website lists a couple of hundred names of people who have contributed text, illustrations or research over the years. There are also testimonials from readers – the calendar sells about 19,000 copies, Vranckx says – including some BVs, or well-known Flemings.

For example, Rik van Cauwelaert, former editor of *Knack*, for whom the big problem with De Roets is its addictive effect: "You want the years to go by more quickly, so you can get to read the next, always surprising, edition." Professor Frank Fleerackers, chairman of the Union of Flemish Academics: "If the roots of a society are to be strengthened by education and interaction, De Roets shows the way." And even *Flanders Today*: "The short, anecdotal biographies are utterly engrossing, so you end up reading through the calendar as if it were a book" (*Flanders Today*, 5 December, 2007)

The 2014 edition features articles on personalities as diverse as master brewer Albert van Roy, empress Johanna van Vlaanderen and Tjil Uilenspiegel. It also has a foreword from Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters: "De Roets in Flanders in Action. Humility, resourcefulness and drive are central – those properties which will take us to the top five of European regions by 2020. De Roets is pure reading pleasure, 365 days long."

De Roets 2014 is available from the website, as well as Standaard and Davidsfonds bookshops across Flanders, price €15.

► www.roetsinfo.eu

Alan Hope

BITE

In praise of the provinces

Back in September, we reported how tourism minister Geert Bourgeois wanted Flanders to promote its regional food and drink products – known as *streekproducten* – in a more co-ordinated manner. Bourgeois wanted to see the entire region help with promotion, where sometimes the job is currently being left to the provinces.

A worthy goal, but one that will take some time to bring to fruition. In the meantime, two provinces – Flemish Brabant and East Flanders – are taking giant steps forward in the realm of *streekproducten*.

The economic council of East Flanders province (EROV) wants to go one step further and create a European centre of expertise in the field, bringing together know-how and suggestions from other regions in Europe.

EROV recently organised a seminar with representatives from East Flanders, from Pistoia in the Italian province of Tuscany and

from Poznan in Poland and Kent in England. Among the ideas shared among the group: a campaign in Kent to have consumers spend 10% of their food budget on locally produced foods, and from Tuscany, the growth of regional products to become part of the area's image.

The group could easily have looked to Flemish Brabant for an example of best practice. Back in 2011, the province published what can only be described as an encyclopaedia of its own regional products, many of which have also received the seal of approval of the Flemish marketing board Vlam – such as table grapes from Hoeilaart and Overijse, cheesecake, watercress and *witloof*. Now Flemish Brabant has created a comprehensive website that features the products, producers, events and recipes. The range of products is eye-popping: no fewer than 567, from krik-filled chocolates from Gooik (pictured) to the dark beer called Zwet – a

dialect word for *zwart* or black. There are 132 producers listed, each with a page of biography, address details and links to their products.

"Flemish regional products are presented to the consumer in a contemporary manner," explains Paul Vleminckx, chair of Streekproducten Vlaams-Brabant. "If we want to maintain our role as a marketing pioneer, we have to be innovative."

The site also lists a small sample of the restaurants and bars in the province, which includes the Leuven restaurant Trente of Kwinten De Paepe, young Flemish top chef of 2011.

"The digital world is evolving at lightning speed, with social media and apps playing an ever-larger role in our lives through the use of



© www.traffestreek.be – Photo: L. Collet

smartphones and tablets," said Monique Swinnen, the province's deputy for agriculture and rural policy. "Our new website provides us with an answer to that trend. User-friendliness and accessibility are central to the design, without losing sight of the visual aspect."

► www.traffestreek.be

Positive energy

Nuclear experts look to inspire next generation at Antwerp roadshow

Daan Bauwens

Antwerp University recently hosted *Plasma's. Fusie! Energie?*, a touring theatrical and interactive workshop on the subject of nuclear fusion. The show attracted more than 3,000 third-year students from 63 secondary schools in Flanders and the southern Netherlands over three days.

Instructors from the Dutch Institute for Fundamental Energy Research have been touring the show for 14 years. In 2003, its founder, Professor Nick Lopes Cardozo of the University of Eindhoven, was given the Shell Award for Sustainable Development and Energy for translating the complex process of nuclear fusion into language that appeals to teenagers' imaginations.

Immediately after the multimedia show, students took part in workshops led by Flemish researcher Jef Ongena, the director of research at the Plasma Physics Lab at Brussels' Royal Military Academy and the former task force leader of the Joint European Torus – the world's largest experimental nuclear fusion reactor, which is located in Oxfordshire, England – and Christian Dierick, the Belgian liaison officer for ITER, the international nuclear fusion research project, which is building a reactor in the south of France.

"Nuclear fusion creates 'positive energy'; it creates no waste, and it's an inexhaustible source,"



Students visiting the nuclear roadshow in Antwerp last month explored energy issues with a series of workshops and hands-on activities

explains Dierick. "We want to teach students that fusion is a very simple application of the most fundamental laws of physics. But fusion is an extreme case; before we can produce energy with this method, there are a lot of technological difficulties that have to be solved. Our message is: We have to move forward. We need to innovate, and we need young minds to dedicate themselves to scientific research."

The show and workshops are not only about nuclear fusion. "We want to discuss broader energy issues," says Dierick. "Today's energy issues are much more complex than most people think. It is not black and white.

For instance, we teach students that, due to the increase of energy coming from the sun and wind, we rely more than ever on gas power stations. Issues regarding storage of energy from sustainable sources, with high variability and unpredictability, are still not solved. Students have to understand why the world is not switching to sustainable sources all at once. In that way, we are going against the current trend."

Before the show, organisers at Antwerp University made it clear that the intention was not to polarise or promote nuclear energy. "We want to give today's youngsters the necessary background knowledge to

take informed, balanced decisions about complex energy problems instead of acting out of a gut feeling," explains Rita Van Peteghem, co-ordinator of the Continuing Education Centre at the university. "It is important, because these students are tomorrow's citizens and policymakers."

The centre, which invited the fusion show to Antwerp in collaboration with the university's science department, also organised training for secondary school teachers at the end of September. "We developed a total concept on nuclear fusion," says Van Peteghem. "Teachers go back to class with new lesson materials and teaching aids. They have about two months to teach their students about fusion. Then they come here, and all the information they have gathered in class is summarised during the show, in a lively and entertaining way."

One thing teachers take back to class is the "minister's game". "The teacher plays the role of a minister in politics, and the students have to inform the minister about the best decisions on which sources of energy to use," Van Peteghem explains, "much in the same way as would happen in parliament. Students learn that democratic decisions should be based on sound science instead of rumours."

Feeling at home at school

Centre marks five years of helping pupils and parents settle in

Andy Furniere

For five years, the Onderwijscentrum Brussel (OCB) or Brussels Education Centre has been helping teachers with daily challenges, like supporting children with little knowledge of Dutch. But the OCB also organises language immersion for pupils during holidays and supports parents in finding the right school. The organisation, part of the Flemish Community Commission, celebrated this anniversary with a week full of activities.

During the festivities, teachers in Brussels were invited to participate in a quiz, browse through the specialised library and submit stories about their own experiences. The centre also asked teachers and experts to answer questions during online chat sessions about language issues, parent involvement and so-called "broad schools" that work closely with civil society organisations. "There was a lot of interest from schools in other large cities in Flanders," says OCB director Piet Vervaecke, "since they are increasingly confronted with the same situations as here."

The most crucial moment in its five years was the foundation of the broad schools platform in 2010,

according to Vervaecke. "In a short space of time, we have now assisted in establishing 28 broad schools that receive subsidies," he explains.

He gives a concrete example of how these schools work: "In some areas of Brussels, many parents don't have the resources to teach their children how to cycle. Through co-operation with social organisations, schools can for example provide bicycles and integrate lessons on cycling into the curriculum."

Another important project involves offering parents advice on choosing and registering at the right school. For children between the ages of six and 12 who have been in Belgium for up to two years, the centre also organises a month-long summer school and a week-long spring school. These intense language immersions include fun activities like graffiti workshops.

The multilingual reality of Brussels is central to the OCB's activity. According to Vervaecke, on average about four out of five students in Brussels' Dutch-speaking schools don't speak Dutch at home. To help teachers deal with this situation, OCB sends its coaches to classes and provides lesson material. Side by side, coaches and teachers



organise fun ways to familiarise children with speaking Dutch. One role-playing game involves giving children a shopping list consisting of drawings, which they have to explain to children playing the role of shopkeepers.

The OCB also focuses on reducing the gap with parents. Teachers receive advice on how to involve parents from all social backgrounds by encouraging them and their children

to talk about school at home. The centre is setting up a pilot project that invites parents to the school for activities such as cooking workshops in their mother tongue. "By showing respect for their native language, we hope to boost their involvement," Vervaecke explains.

Next year, the OCB will start a project revolving around pupils' free time in the playground. "Schools sometimes struggle to turn these breaks into more valuable moments for children's development," says Vervaecke. The OCB has its own research department that identifies the needs of the education fields and searches for solutions.

Despite the support of organisations like the OCB, 40% of Brussels teachers aged under 30 leave the Brussels-Capital Region after five years. That is an improvement compared to a few years ago, when the figure was 50%. "We have to keep working to create more of a community feeling at Brussels' schools," says Vervaecke. "Everybody involved should realise that they don't stand alone and that a lively city like Brussels also offers many opportunities."

► www.onderwijscentrumbrussel.be

WEEK IN EDUCATION

Computers in schools not used enough

The number of computers, laptops and tablets in Flemish primary and secondary schools has increased considerably in the last five years, but teachers don't use them enough in lessons, according to the Flemish government's ICT integration monitor, for which 741 schools participated. There is about one computer per six pupils in primary education, and one for every two pupils in secondary. In secondary, one in three teachers regularly uses a computer during lessons, compared to half in primary education. But 13% of the teachers in secondary education never use a computer in class.

Fewer branches of study suggested

At a meeting with school boards and heads last week, the Flemish Network of Catholic Secondary Education (VVKSO) suggested ways to reduce the number of branches of study. The purpose is to examine how the structure can be made more transparent with measures that don't require a decree from the government. Currently, the final two years of secondary education count more than 150 study concentrations. Analysis shows that most pupils in the general studies of economics-modern languages, for instance, go on to complete a Bachelor's degree, but so do pupils who follow business sciences or accounting in technical education. VVKSO suggests uniting these pupils in one concentration called economy and society, and director-general Mieke Van Hecke confirmed that many schools were taking steps in this direction.

Teachers asked to repay €400,000

The Flemish Agency for Education Services (AgODI) is demanding that 188 teachers repay back-pay they received by mistake. Some are being asked to repay as much as €20,000, and in total, AgODI is looking to retrieve €400,000. Until 2012, the law stated that AgODI should allow back-pay up to 10 years after the date. Teachers were entitled to back-pay because of, for example, incorrect calculations or the submission of inaccurate information previously. A new law changed the term to five years after the original date, but AgODI did not act accordingly in all cases. Flemish ombudsman Bart Weekers recommended to the Flemish Parliament that it "show fairness" by cancelling repayment demands and integrating the amount in the budgetary resources of 2014. **AF**



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Reflections on imperfection

Hooverphonic look for a new sound in some surprising locations

Christophe Verbiest

The march of technology means it's easy to make a record these days – but it also leads to a standard sound. Flemish band Hooverphonic took a patchwork approach with their eighth album, in the hope of stitching together something unique.

This spring in the Champagne region of France, a lorry driver smashed into the gates of a listed house. It was an accident, but still: It wasn't part of the plan when Hooverphonic chose it as one of the houses where they were going to record their new album, *Reflection*. Luckily, it wasn't as dramatic as it first looked.

Singer Noémie Wolfs recalls: "While we feared our stay in France would end before it had started, the caretaker of the neighbouring house reassured us that it was not the end of the world." And it wasn't. The recording went ahead as scheduled. The recording also took place closer to home: in a house in Ghent; in a loft that used to be a brickworks in Boom, near Antwerp; in an old farm in Hasselt and a church in Hoeselt, both in Limburg province. The band had good reason to choose such a laborious recording process.

"Over the years, things have changed a lot on a technical level: It's much easier to record and mix your music yourself," points out Alex Callier, the brains behind the band. "But it also leads to a standardisation: Everything sounds the same because all over the world everyone is using the same digital plug-ins which create the same sound effects. *Reflection* is a reaction against that. "Don't get me wrong, I have nothing against computers or plug-ins, but on the new album we wanted a sound that no one else could create. So the starting point was: We're going to record in spaces where a recording has never been made before."

They didn't do it for financial reasons, Callier stresses. "It would have been less expensive if we had just used one professional recording studio. We had to move four times



and recorded much more than we needed.

"During an earlier interview, someone pointed out that The Rolling Stones recorded an album in a villa in the south of France, but that's not what we did. We recorded all the songs at each different

“All our hosts turned out to be great people, and that's not surprising

location and afterwards we made, for each song, a patchwork of the different recordings. Our approach led to a particular atmosphere: a perfect imperfection.”

At first, their record company wasn't convinced by the idea of people hosting the band. Callier says: "They feared we would end up with freaks." They didn't, but surely they screened their hosts? "Almost not at all. We had one conversation, we listened to the room and that was it. In a case like this you have to follow your gut feeling. All our hosts turned out to be great people, and that's not surprising: Only open-minded folks would give their key to strangers and let them work in their house."

I first met Hooverphonic, then still called Hoover, at the beginning of 1996 when they were mixing their debut album in the now defunct Whitfield Street Recording Studios in London. Callier was the great talker of the bunch, and that hasn't changed.

The line-up, however, has been shaken up several times. Callier founded the band in 1994 with Frank Duchêne, who left after four years, and Raymond Geerts, who is still the band's guitar player. Wolfs, who joined in 2010, is the band's fifth singer. The most famous was Geike

Arnaert, who held the post between 1998 and 2008 and went on to pursue a solo career under her first name.

"I wasn't really prepared for what was going to happen to me," Wolfs says, looking back on her beginning with the band. "Those first weeks I almost didn't eat, that's how stressed I was. But after playing and surviving the first show, at the Ancienne Belgique in Brussels, I knew it could only get better. And it did."

The surprises of *Reflection* are the three male voices that have been added to the music. Callier explains: "I wasn't something we set out to do, but while writing and demoing the songs, we realised they asked for it. Live, I or one of the extra musicians used to sing backing vocals. We're not the greatest singers in the world, so we went to look for some young singers. It's not so surprising that we

have replaced strings with singers, because strings are the instruments that are the closest to the human voice."

If you want *your* gate smashed by a famous band, I'll have to disappoint you: It's not going to be Hooverphonic. Callier says: "We're not going to repeat this. It's typical for Hooverphonic to keep changing. On *No More Sweet Music* we worked with an orchestra of 40 musicians. And we followed it up with *The President of the LSD Golf Club*, a trippy psychedelic album with no singles. Then we opted for pop songs with the grandeur of the 1960s. *Reflection* contains short songs – 15 for 42 minutes of music – without many frills. And maybe the next one will be a fully digital album. Or not. Only time will tell."

On tour from
23 March

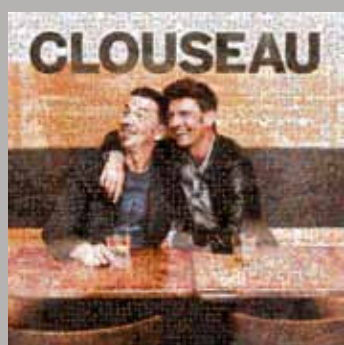
Across Flanders
► www.hooverphonic.com

NEW ALBUM REVIEWS

Clouseau

Clouseau • Parlophone

"I'm hungry for rock'n'roll,"



sings Koen Wauters on the new, eponymously titled album of the duo he forms with his brother Kris. But Clouseau, Flanders' most popular band of the past 25 years, have never been associated with rock'n'roll and that's not going to change with this album. *Clouseau* contains a mix of ballads and broadly arranged pop tunes. It's not surprising, and they won't win many new hearts with their 11th studio album in Dutch, but the fans won't be disappointed: Cuvée Clouseau still tastes like it used to.

► www.clouseau.be

Flip Kowlier

Cirque - De avonturen van WM Warlop • Petrol

Three years after Flip Kowlier surprised with a reggae album, he opts again, on *Cirque (Circus)*, for pop songs. In some of them he and his band get help from the City of Cambridge Brass Band and the London Chamber Orchestra (both recorded at Abbey Road). In his dialect from Izegem in West Flanders, which sounds exotic to most Flemish ears, Kowlier looks at life in a circus. There's some joy and even fun to be found, but also much

more melancholic feelings, in line with Kowlier's previous albums: Love is frail, life is shaky and when alcohol takes over, a man (or, as on this album, an animal) acts in a way that can only lead to a shameful awakening. Kowlier is a dealer in subtle beauty.

► tinyurl.com/Kowlier

Psycho 44

Suburban Guide to Springtide • Gentle Recordings

Almost four years after they reached the final of the Rock Rally, Psycho 44 finally release their debut album,

Suburban Guide to Springtide. And a musical springtide it is: explosive, loud and noisy rock music, enhanced with electronics. It's not a coincidence Queens of the Stone Age picked Psycho 44 as the opening act for their Brussels concert this year, nor that one of the tracks is titled "Dance MTHRFCKR Dance", since this foursome hailing from Grobbendonk (in suburban Antwerp) unashamedly aim at your legs. It's party time when Psycho 44 are around. A party with heavy guitars.

► www.facebook.com/PSYCHO44theband



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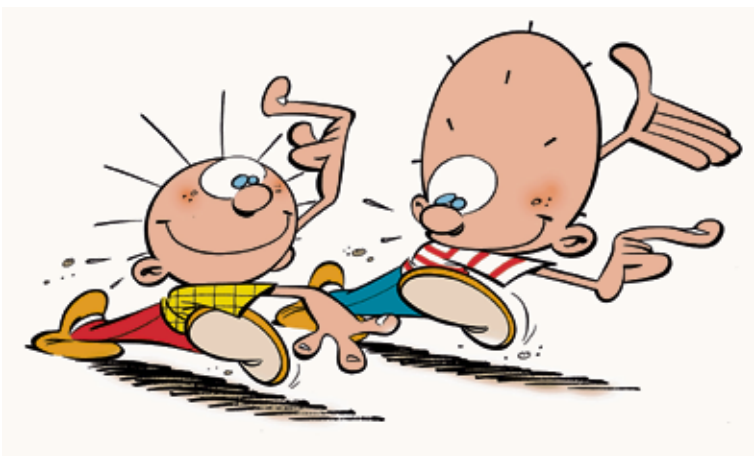
Lucky Luke and Jolly Jumper are in the house

Stripgids Festival

13-15 December | De Warande, Turnhout
▶ www.stripgids.org

Good news for fans of Flemish comics: It's an odd-numbered year, and that means that Stripgids – the magazine devoted to the state of Flemish comics – is hosting its biennial festival this month in Turnhout. And it's the 20th anniversary edition to boot. On the opening night of the festival, the Flemish Culture Prize for Comics, also known as the Bronzen Adhemar (named after the genius son of cartoon character Nero), is handed out. This year, the prize goes to Marc Legendre, the creator of *Biebel*, a strip that ran from 1983 until 2002 and follows the exploits of the title character

as he gets involved in all kinds of absurd adventures, largely with his best friend Reggie (pictured). Besides the bronze statuette, Legendre see a retrospective of his work staged as part of the festival. A second exhibition is dedicated to another great hero in the history of Flemish comics: *Lucky Luke*, the singing cowboy who shoots faster than his shadow. The adventures of Lucky Luke and his horse Jolly Jumper are known worldwide. The series, created by Maurice De Bevere, known by his pen name Morris, was inspired by 1940s westerns, but with a slapstick twist. The Stripgids festival also hosts



workshops where you can test your drawing skills, interviews with artists and, of course, much in the way of comics to discover. At an antiques market, experts are on hand to estimate the value of your old comic books. On Saturday night, cartoonist and musician Theo van

den Boogaard presents *Bob Dylan Illustrated*, which features songs of the legendary American folk singer specially illustrated for the event.

Toon Lambrechts

Stripgids Festival's two exhibitions are open until 19 January

CONCERT

GET TICKETS NOW

Ben Harper
1 May, 20.00 | Koninklijk Circus, Brussels
▶ www.cirque-royal.org

Bob Dylan famously went electric in 1965. Californian singer-songwriter Ben Harper replies a half-century later—and with far less fanfare—by going the other way. Harper's last US tour was a strictly acoustic affair and successful enough to repeat the experiment in Europe. To tell the truth, Harper has always had one foot in the acoustic world. Since the appearance of his debut album nearly two decades ago, the singer has built a fan base of college hippies and modern bohemians enamoured of the earthy authenticity of his reggae-meets-roots style, not to mention his activism.

Georgio Valentino



FAMILY

Kerstkrans maken
14 December, 14.00
National Botanic Garden, Meise | ▶ www.plantentuinmeise.be

'Tis the season for holiday decoration, and the first step in any respectable home is the acquisition of a Christmas wreath to greet visitors at the front door. Sure, you could buy one, but that's no fun at all. Let your kids handle it. The National Botanic Garden of Belgium (which is soon to be administered by the Flemish government after years of regional



wrangling) hosts a wreath-making workshop for kids aged six to 12. The garden supplies the all-natural materials as well as a drink and a cookie. For their part, the children supply the imagination and the elbow grease. Mum and Dad need only supply a fee of €17.50. **GV**

PERFORMANCE

Stones in Her Mouth
13-14 December, 20.00 | KVS, Brussels
▶ www.kvs.be

Fortunately for Brussels, this December Dance highlight is making a second appearance before leaving the country. It's the latest work by New Zealand choreographer Lemi Ponifasio and his MAU company, who were tapped by December Dance curator Wim Vandekeybus precisely because Vandekeybus is interested in "things that are furthest from my own work". Where the Flemish choreographer often brings in a rock band to supply his soundtrack, Ponifacio relies on the raw human voice and percussive breathing. His work is also politically charged; his advocacy of human rights has made him a hot commodity in some circles and a *persona non grata* in others. *Stones in Her Mouth* features



10 Maori women who communicate their oppression through chant and dance. It's powerful, otherworldly stuff. **GV**

FILM

Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom
17 December, 20.00 | Bozar, Brussels
▶ www.bozar.be

Adapted from Mandela's own memoir, British director Justin Chadwick's *Long Walk to Freedom* is an intimate look at the South African leader (played by Idris Elba) and his wife Winne (Naomie Harris). Chadwick (*The First Grader*) follows the young Mandela from a bucolic youth to his early law career in Johannesburg to his arrest and

lengthy incarceration and finally to his release and landmark moment as the first democratically elected president of the Republic of South Africa. Critics anticipate Oscar nominations for the film and its lead. The upcoming Belgian premiere is especially poignant in light of Mandela's death last week at the age of 95. **GV**



Concert

Brussels

Kundry: Three German singers channel Richard Wagner's titular femme fatale in three different styles at three different locations. The (three-part) performance begins at the Kapellekerk, continues at the Briggittines and ends at the repurposed railway station Recyclart
19 December 19.00 at Kapellekerk, Kapellemarkt
▶ www.goethe.org

Lier

The Animals: Like many rock groups from the '60s, these British Invasion hit-makers have splintered into different units, each claiming the name and the fame of the original combo. The current line-up features founding drummer John Steel but not singer Eric Burdon or guitarist Hilton Valentine
14 December 20.15 at Liers CC, Aarschotsesteenweg 3
▶ www.lierscultuurcentrum.be

Performance

Brussels

Hamlet: The Brussels Opera stages a 21st-century version of French composer Ambroise Thomas' 19th-century adaptation of Shakespeare's timeless 16th-century drama
Until 22 December at De Munt, Muntplein
▶ www.demunt.be

Heist-op-den-Berg (Antwerp province)

The Lonesome Dreamer: Flemish singer/guitarist Paul Michiels climbed the international charts with his pop group Soulsister in the 1980s and has since remained active as a solo artist. This one-man show tells his life story through monologue and song
13-14 December 20.00 at Zwaneberg, Cultuurplein 1
▶ www.zwaneberg.be

Exhibition

Brussels

Shadows and Lanterns: Original shadow puppets, optical illusions, magic lanterns and an elaborate, Rube Goldberg-style praxinoscope show us what entertainment looked like before the advent of modern cinema
Until 26 January at Autrique-huis, Haachtsesteenweg 266
▶ www.autrique.be

Ghent

MK Čiurlionis: Dreaming of Lithuania: Last chance to see this unique sound-and-vision retrospective on the career of the 19th-century Lithuanian Symbolist synaesthete
Until 15 December at Museum of Fine Arts, Fernand Scribedreef 1
▶ www.mskgent.be

Talking Dutch

One step at a time

Derek Blyth

Things move slowly in Brussels. Sometimes they do not move at all. But occasionally they at least start to move in the right direction. That seems to be happening with walking in the city thanks in part to a unique non-profit organisation called Trage Wegen (Slow Roads), which maintains and campaigns for the use of footpaths. *De Brusselse voetganger heeft lang in de kou gestaan* – the Brussels pedestrian has been left out in the cold for many years, said Geert te Boveldt of Trage Wegen in a recent interview with *Brussel deze week*. *Maar stilaan lijkt de politieke wind uit de juiste hoek te waaien* – but gradually it seems that a new political wind is blowing in the right direction. This fresh breeze is coming from the Brussels Capital-Region, which recently approved a *Strategisch Voetgangersplan*, a Strategic Pedestrian Plan. This long and ambitious document promises to make Brussels *een voorbeeldige voetgangersstad* – a model pedestrian city, like Barcelona, Zurich or Lyon. There are plenty of good reasons to take Zurich as a model, rather than, let us say, Los Angeles. *Stappen is goed voor mensen én hun omgeving* – walking is good for people

and for the environment. *Voor gezondheid, sociale cohesie én de lokale economie* – for health, social cohesion and the local economy. So let's get walking. Unfortunately, it isn't quite that easy in Brussels. *De openbare ruimte lijkt grotendeels gereserveerd voor auto's* – public space appears to be largely reserved for cars, argues te Boveldt. And there is also a psychological problem that makes it difficult to turn Brussels into a model pedestrian city. *De kortste weg om*



een boulevard over te steken is vaak lastig te vinden: zo wordt de psychologische afstand nog groter – the shortest route to cross over a boulevard is often difficult to find: This makes the psychological distance even greater. There are all sorts of barriers to overcome, according to the organisation, but the most difficult one is cultural. People in Brussels are reluctant to leave their cars at home. Trage Wegen has made an excellent start by drawing up a map of “slow roads” in Brussels where pedestrians can walk safely. The map is almost finished. Teams of local volunteers were out on the streets of Ukkel and Anderlecht last weekend to chart the final slow roads in the city. This is definitely a step in the right direction. The only problem is that the city is not going to change overnight. We will have to wait until 2040 for the Pedestrian Plan to be realised. Sometimes slow roads can be very slow indeed.

VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY

f UK in Belgium – British Embassy Brussels: HRH The Duke of Edinburgh visited Ypres, Belgium on 11 November for a Last Post ceremony to mark the gathering of soil from battlefields in Belgium for a Flanders Fields memorial garden in London.


f In response to: Extra computers in schools not used sufficiently
Luke Lamb: I have two children in a Bruges school, and I feel that they need to speed up a little with the computer world.

t Jimmy_VdV @TheJimeister
Great to see that Flemish/Belgian cinema gets noticed in Europe (and beyond).

t Cycling In Flanders @cyclingflanders
De Rampe. A mean cobbled climb in the Flemish Ardennes. #cycling #cyclinginlanders #cobble #berg... <http://instagram.com/p/hc8O67Bozz/>

t Alice Rawsthorn @alicerawsthorn
Great theme for the Flanders Design Triennial opening to the public this Sunday – Conflict and Design. www.conflictanddesign.be/en/homepage

t Margaret E Atwood @MargaretAtwood
Brilliant! Seat Assignments: Flemish-style portraits with T-paper: <http://bit.ly/1hI68Yc>

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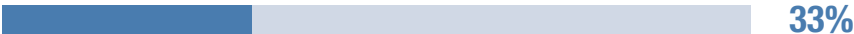
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Poll

Ryanair has announced its intention to start flying out of Brussels. Politicians and competing airlines are up in arms. You?

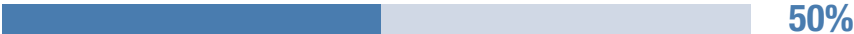
a. Anything that saves me having to go all the way to Charleroi is good news



b. Ryanair is a necessary evil. Who can afford to pay full fare?



c. Ryanair competes unfairly, swallows up taxpayer subsidy and exploits its own staff. They need to be called to order



Nobody ever has a good word to say about Ryanair, and still we all use them whenever possible, because no one in their right mind throws money away, right? Yet only a little more than one in six of you would even go so far in standing up for the upstart airline as to call it “a necessary evil”. You’d think people

would be more grateful, even taking into account the lack of legroom, the surcharges for everything, the scratchcards, the catering and that annoying fanfare when you land. After all, most of us are several hundred euros richer because of Ryanair. And half of you would put an end to that. Presumably if Ryanair is called

to order, they’ll be forced to pay their pilots more, and to pay social security in Belgium instead of Ireland. So costs will go up, which means fares will have to rise. Or the company will turn its back on Belgium, and we’ll be left with only Brussels Airlines, which comes to the same thing. Goodbye cheap city breaks.

Next week's question:

Teachers are being asked to repay up to €20,000 each in back-pay because of an administrative error. Should they have to?

Log in to the Flanders Today website and click on the VOTE button on the homepage!

THE LAST WORD

Rent-a-Gran

“Consider it like a dating site. People who are looking for a free baby sitter should stay away. For all other questions, we remain open.” *elifvoorgrootenklein.be* aims to bring together kids without grandparents and older folks without grandkids

Grimm for a reason

“Fairy stories were originally intended for illiterate adults to communicate moral lessons. To make them more realistic, there was a lot of violence. Those elements have been lost with time, but I’m picking them up again.” Stany Crets on his new stage musical *Assepoester (Cinderella)*

Healthy new year

“I’m going to be cooking the sort of food I eat. Anyone who knows me, knows what to expect: no sugar, no flour, no animal fat.” Celebrity chef Piet Huysentruyt makes a return to TV screens in the new year with a daily cooking show

Money for nothing

“In fact, we should be pleased that some strange benefactor has chosen us. But still, we all have an odd feeling about the whole thing.” The 17 residents of the Adonis apartment complex in Koksijde have each received a €20 note in their mailbox for the last three days from a mysterious donor

