

## Pay to play

Belgium begins its pilot project to charge a fee per kilometre to drivers

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## In memory of Olivia

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# Thou shalt be a world-class city

**Brussels City councillor Bianca Debaets thinks she knows exactly how to transform the capital into a genuine world-class city**

Alan Hope

It takes some chutzpah to frame your wish-list as a set of 10 Commandments. When we meet in a hip coffee shop close to the Beurs in Brussels and the cool jazz threatens to drown out the interview, she pulls the wire out of the back of the speaker near our table. It gives us some peace and quiet without depriving the rest of the clients of their listening pleasures. Clearly, Bianca Debaets is a woman who makes things happen.

**B**ianca Debaets (*pictured*) is a member of both the Brussels City council and the Brussels Parliament, and she'll be leading the list for Christian-democrats CD&V in the regional elections in May. She has just published a book with her vision of a future Brussels, *10 Geboden voor Brussel: Naar een wereldstad met wereldklasse* (10 Commandments for Brussels: Towards a World City with World Class).

It's a work of 10 chapters, including one by journalist Guido Fonteyn on *de rand* – the Flemish periphery of Brussels – and one by lawyer and former head of the Brussels bar Dirk Van Gerven on the capital's economy.

The 10 Commandments are:

- 1 Thou shalt become a world city on a human scale
- 2 Thou shalt provide decent housing for all
- 3 Thou shalt build enough schools
- 4 Thou shalt fulfil thine international vocation
- 5 Thou shalt be a fully-fledged capital for Flanders and Belgium
- 6 Thou shalt be a city where everyone feels at home
- 7 Thou shalt be an economic motor unto the land
- 8 Thou shalt be a cultural crucible to thy people
- 9 Thou shalt embrace thine periphery
- 10 Thou shalt be a city well run

I ask Debaets to take us through a few of these more closely.



# Road fee pilot project begins

Actual amount of fees for driving on Belgian roads still to be determined, says Crevits

Alan Hope

The much-publicised tariffs for a national road-fee test project are not a fair basis on which to judge the real fees that will be levied when the system goes national, said Flemish mobility minister Hilde Crevits last weekend. The federal government plans to implement a fee for driving on Belgium's roads. Last week the fees for the test period were announced. During the trial period, a tariff will apply of 9c/km on urban roads, 6.5c/km on ordinary roads and 5c/km on motorways. A daily return trip from Ghent to Brussels, for example, would cost €30 a week at peak times or €15 off-peak. Late evening hours cost nothing. The pilot, which begins on 17

February and involves 1,200 test subjects, will last two months and cover all three regions: Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia. The tariffs for the test period have been agreed to, but, said Crevits, the final charges are yet to be negotiated and will depend on the results of the trial. "There is no real framework that exists today," Crevits told VRT radio. "We want to look at the impact on driving behaviour and also to research the social effects. After that, we can consider tariffs. A report afterwards will make clear the good and the less-good points of a toll system. But in any case, no decisions will be taken until all the results of the test are in." Meanwhile, coalition majority

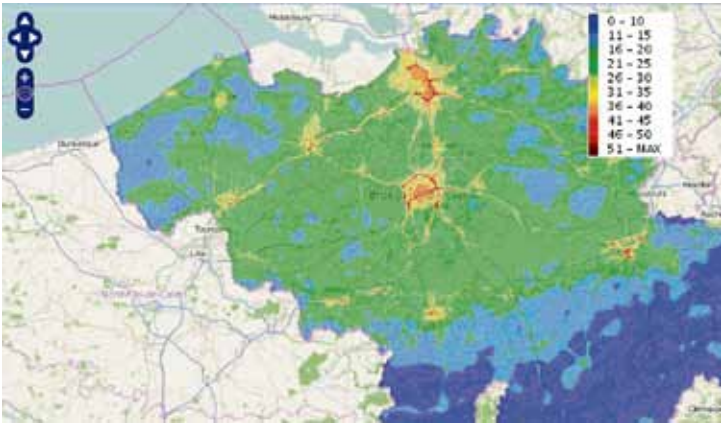


party SPA came out against the government's plan. Fraction leader Bart Van Malderen said there were too many conditions and too few

advantages for the driver. However, the party, like Crevits, stressed that the test project would not necessarily be indicative of any definitive implementation of the system when it eventually appears nationwide. Motoring organisation VAB expressed concern about the idea of fees for driving on Belgium's roads. "The average driver will have to pay €1,000 per year," he told *De Morgen*. "Not everyone has the luxury to drive to work outside of rush hours." An online petition against the implementation of driving fees, launched last Friday as plans were announced, had gained more than 100,000 signatures as *Flanders Today* went to press.

## Air unhealthy in Flanders' cities, according to new map

Air quality in Antwerp, Ghent and Brussels is poor to the point of being unhealthy, while the air quality in the rest of Flanders fails to meet EU limits for fine particulates, according to the latest study by three government agencies: the Inter-regional Environment Office, the Flemish Institute for Technological Research and the Flemish Environment Agency. The three came together to draw up an interactive map of air quality across Belgium to present for the first time a picture, accurate down to street level, of how healthy the air is in any particular area. The most striking aspect of the map is the orange-red colour surrounding Brussels, showing an unusually high concentration of



fine particulates in the air, which have been linked to a range of respiratory complaints. The darkest passages, showing concentrations of pollutants of 1.6 micrograms per cubic metre or above, centre on the Brussels Ring and downtown, Antwerp, Ghent and the region south of Kortrijk to the French border. Zooming in on Brussels, green areas such as Jubelpark, Ter Kamerenbos

and the Sonian Forest have lower concentrations of fine particles. Within the region, World Health Organisation limits are generally exceeded: Virtually the whole population lives in unhealthy air, according to the map. "The heavy traffic, with a lot of diesel cars in a small surface area, is the cause of the poor air quality in Brussels," said Frans Fierens of the Inter-regional office. "The air in our region is cleaner today than several decades ago," said Tom Nawrot, researcher at the University of Hasselt, "when coal was being burned and there were virtually no environmental laws. However, most European countries are doing better than we are." AH

## Brussels-Capital Region bans open-air GMOs

The Brussels-Capital Region has banned the cultivation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in the open air, fearing the contamination of classic crops. According to the region's agriculture minister, Céline Fremault, who introduced the ban, it is almost unavoidable that pollen or seeds from the GM crops will contaminate ordinary crops – a position firmly opposed by those who support the use of GMOs. They point out that despite GMOs being cultivated now for some years, not a single case of cross-contamination has been seen. According to the government, agricultural areas in Brussels – the region has some 650 hectares of farming land – are too close together to exclude the risk. Allowing both kinds of crops to grow side by side would be more costly than the extra economic value of the GMO crops, Fremault said in a joint statement with the region's environment minister, Evelyne Huytebroeck. The region stresses that its decision is not a commentary on the sale of GM products or on the larger environmental effects of the crops. Those are European and federal questions, said a Fremault spokesperson. According to the government, the decision means that Brussels is Europe's first GMO-free region. AH

## Master architect critical of Beursplein pedestrian plan

The Flemish government's master architect, Peter Swinnen, has heavily criticised the plans revealed last month by Brussels City council to introduce a pedestrian-only zone along the major artery in the centre of the city, between Beursplein and De Brouckereplein. The plan includes deadlines which are "untenable and unrealistic", Swinnen said, while arguing in favour of a car-free zone within the Pentagon, or the ring road around the city centre. As well as the pedestrian zone, the plan includes a parking route via the Wolvengracht, Kantersteen and Van Arteveldestraat, something which Swinnen predicted would

end in failure. In an opinion piece in *De Morgen*, he said the streets concerned were too narrow to cope with the likely volumes of traffic. The congestion, he said, "would simply be displaced 250m from the centre". The association of retailers in central Brussels also attacked the plan, from another angle. "This is a war against the car," said Alain Berlinblau of the association. "This will ruin our business. Access is being blocked, at the same time as the new shopping centre Neo will have easy access from the Ring. Our customers will move off to that kind of shopping centre," he said. Neo is one of three shopping complexes planned for the area in the near future, though



it is the only one backed by Brussels-City council. AH

## THE WEEK IN FIGURES

3 in 10

bills are still being paid too late by local and Flemish government concerns, according to Unizo. Almost two-thirds of business-to-business invoices are paid on time, but governments remain problem payers

800

screens of the Brussels public transport authority MIVB will carry Valentine messages from the public on 14 February. Send a message of maximum 120 characters with tag #MIVBlove before 13 February

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

6,000

rabbits rescued by firefighters from an overturned lorry in Drongen, near Ghent. The operation took several hours as the rabbits had to be removed from their crates and brought to safety by hand

562

companies in Flanders went bust in January, according to consultancy Graydon, 1% less than in the same month last year. There were 155 bankruptcies declared in Brussels

€10 million

in possible damage claims arising from recent storm weather in West Flanders. Governor Carl Decaluwé has asked for the storm to be declared a natural disaster to speed up pay-outs



WEEK IN BRIEF

The government of Flanders has started legal action against Belgocontrol, the national air traffic control authority, over a decision to **change some flight paths over the municipalities** north of Brussels. The changes involve two take-off routes shifted so they now pass over Flemish municipalities instead of over the Brussels-Capital Region. Environment minister Joke Schauvliege said the action sought the cancellation of Belgocontrol's decision. Previously the mayors of Grimbergen, Machelen, Meise, Wemmel and Vilvoorde wrote to minister-president Kris Peeters to complain.

A majority of Flemish Catholics think the **church needs to review its position on issues such as divorce**, co-habitation, contraception, homosexuality and same-sex marriage, according to research by the University of Leuven. Among committed churchgoers, including those employed by the church, more than 75% think the church needs to be more open-minded about such issues. "This demonstrates that those who have remained faithful to the church in fact share the same opinions as the average Fleming," said Geert De Kerpel of the Christian magazine *Tertio*, where the findings were published.

King Filip visited the Royal Mint in Brussels last week to help strike the **first euro coins featuring his image**. In a break with tradition, the new king is shown facing right instead of left. A set of the coins are available for sale from the mint for €24. Existing Albert II coins will remain in circulation.

► [www.europemint.eu](http://www.europemint.eu)

The **30 km/h speed limit imposed within the inner ring in Brussels** in 2010 is a flop because accompanying measures to enforce the limit have not been introduced. At the same time, drivers ignore the limit, according to doctoral research carried out by traffic scientist Levi

Vermote of the Free University of Brussels (VUB). Despite a speed limit of 30 – except on the central avenue between North and South Stations and Diksmuidelaan, where the limit is 50 – the average speed of vehicles within the ring is 36.76. In addition, accidents went up in the year after the new limit came into effect, from 424 to 498.

Belgium is among the **cheapest countries in Europe for mobile telephone charges**, according to a study by the telecoms regulator BIPT. For post-paid subscriptions – customers who receive a regular bill, in other words – Belgium's operators are bettered only by those of France and the UK. The study looked at 591 tariff plans from Germany, France, the Netherlands and the UK and found that prices here had gone down in general by 45% between August 2012 and August 2013. For pre-paid accounts, which account for 48% of users, Belgium came in second-cheapest after Germany. However, the use of mobile broadband internet is still too expensive, BIPT said.

The holiday campaign of **drink-driving checks** saw 73% more checks than the year before. Of 340,000 stopped and given a breathalys, 2.8% of drivers in Flanders were found to be driving over the legal limit.

Walking Madou, the project that pedestrianized Leuvensesteenweg at Madouplein in the Brussels district of Sint-Joost-ten-Node, has won the Brussels **prize for the creative use of public space** from a jury that included Dag Boutsen, the head of architecture at Sint-Lucas, VUB cultural philosopher Eric Corijn and representatives of Mobiel Brussel. The project, an initiative of then-mayor Jean Demannez in 2010, found the busy artery closed to traffic and painted yellow. Walking Madou was scrapped, however, by the district's current mayor Emir Kir when he took office in 2012. Residents responded enthusiastically, but Kir considered it bad for local businesses.

Sharp-eyed bird watchers last week caught a rare sight of **three pink pelicans flying over Ghent**. The birds were recorded over Gent-Zuid, then the Watersportbaan and later the Bourgoyen Ossemeersen nature reserve. They were later reported over the Oosterschelde flood barrier in Zeeland. The birds, which are native to south-east Europe and the Middle East, are thought to have escaped captivity somewhere nearby.

The **Elsensesteenweg in Brussels was closed down this week** for the third time in 18 months for works on a defective gutter. The road was renovated in last spring, with new footpaths and a new asphalt layer. It was soon discovered that the new paths were too wide to allow two buses to pass on the road. The footpaths were reduced by 60 centimetres and the space filled with poured concrete. That soon started to deteriorate, however, and will now be replaced with concrete blocks. The carriageway will be closed for 10 days between Francartstraat and Waversesteenweg.

Senator Jean-Jacques De Gucht has proposed a resolution in the Flemish Parliament to make **first-aid training compulsory** in the first, second and third years of primary and secondary education. Lessons in resuscitation techniques should be provided and teachers should be able to follow courses free of charge, he said. "The training could save many lives as people will dare to act more quickly if they have the necessary knowledge," said De Gucht.

Brussels-Capital Region opened a new central administration last week that will eventually allow all **traffic lights at crossroads to be controlled** remotely by computer. At present, 30 major junctions are connected; eventually the centre will cover all 500 junctions in the 19 municipalities. The centre will allow better organisation of traffic flows and also allow repairs to traffic lights to be carried out more quickly.

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



Griet Cnudde

Depending on where you stand, she's either Flanders' biggest stick-in-the-mud or she's a giant-killer ready to defend the little guy against powerful entrenched interests. Either way, Griet Cnudde, a lawyer specialised in property law, was back in the news last week. She first appeared in the headlines last April when she helped six residents of the Zuider dock neighbourhood in Antwerp to get the popular Sinksenfoor fair moved out of the area after this year's edition, as well as winning for them damages of €45,000. Last week she was back in court, trying to get an interim injunction against the organisers of the dance festival Tomorrowland from expanding to two weekends this July. You couldn't take on a bigger opponent in Flanders: The festival is not only one of the region's most successful international events, it's the most popular dance festival in the world. This year for its 10th anniversary edition, it wants to expand from one weekend to two. "I'm sure I'll now be branded as an intolerant spoilsport, but that doesn't bother me," said Cnudde. "I'm as fond of a good party as the next person, but forcing people

to walk around with bags under their eyes for two weeks isn't really on." Just like with Sinksenfoor, the residents who live in the area of the De Schorre recreation park in Boom, Antwerp province, where Tomorrowland is held, are complaining about noise and nuisance. Cnudde complains that the festival is selling tickets for the additional weekend before they have all the necessary permits. Cnudde, who is a member of the Antwerp firm Lexeco specialising in construction and real estate law, won her case last year, and no-one will be surprised if she triumphs again. Hopefully this time without the death threats aimed last year at her clients by angry fair-going residents. "There's a risk I'll be called a moaning minnie or a NIMBY advocate in the coming weeks," she said. "But I'm just not. I live in the centre of Ghent, where, as you know, a noisy party takes place every year that lasts for nearly two weeks. But the Gentse Feesten grew up historically, and the organisers do everything possible in co-operation with locals to limit the nuisance. Then you don't hear me complaining – on the contrary, I'm happy to party along."

OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Lock up your vehicles

One of the unforeseen effects of the mild winter we've enjoyed so far was revealed last week: an increase in the number of calls to motoring organisation Touring about cables in car engines being gnawed through. In the month of January alone, there were 126 calls, far more than any other January. Last year there were 1,440 calls during the whole year. The cause is the stone marten, a member of the marten family of long-bodied mammals, similar to ferrets and weasels. For reasons not yet fully known to science, stone martens choose the spring to go around chewing through tubes and cables. Although they can snip through the cables of a starter motor in a single bite, nothing gets eaten,

whence the perplexity. The activity may be connected to the marking of territory by young males. Or it may be a result of young animals checking out their surroundings to find out what's tasty and what's not. It usually happens in April or May, but it's happening now with the unseasonably warm winter. Motorists in Flanders last year faced bills for repairs to marten damage worth €900,000. According to the Flemish Institute for Nature and Forestry Research (Inbo), the



© Zeifram/Wikimedia Commons

best way to keep martens away from your car is to park it in a closed garage. (A marten can, however, squeeze through a split five centimetres wide.) Martens may also be discouraged from entering buildings by the use of ultrasonic noise generators or proprietary deodorants. One thing that won't work is to kill them. "The removal of a territory holder results in the disappearance of social barriers that kept animals of the same sex away," Inbo explains. In other words, the local marten will no sooner be gone than he's replaced by a former competitor.

FLANDERS TODAY



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## 5TH COLUMN

Anja Otte

### Different levels, same parties

In our federal system, the Flemish and federal governments can consist of different coalitions. The Flemish government is supported by a majority consisting of CD&V, N-VA and SPA. At the federal level, the government led by the French-speaking socialist Elio Di Rupo is supported by CD&V, SPA and Open VLD (who, incidentally, do not have a majority among the Flemish in the federal parliament).

Foreign observers are often baffled, not so much by the so-called non-symmetrical majorities, but by the fact that the federal and regional and community governments are on an equal footing. One government does not prevail over the others; they each have their own responsibilities.

Different coalitions also mean different oppositions. Open VLD is an opposition party in the Flemish parliament, while N-VA is an opposition party in the federal parliament. That in itself is not a problem. In fact, the system was designed that way and to some, non-symmetrical majorities are the pinnacle of federalism.

They shudder when they think back to the times of Jean-Luc Dehaene and Luc Van Den Brande, both Christian-democrats, prime minister and minister-president respectively of perfectly symmetrical coalitions. In the early days of federalism, Dehaene called the shots to the point of reducing the Flemish government and its minister-president to flunkies. Kris Peeters is living proof of how times have changed. As Flemish minister-president, he is also the undisputable number one within his party.

Last week, however, several parties expressed a preference for symmetrical coalitions: Both Open VLD and SPA believe they make things easier, while CD&V's Peeters also believes in "positive co-operation" between governments.

Do they want to go back to the days of Dehaene and Van Den Brande? Hardly. They are bothered though by some side-effects of non-symmetrical coalitions, especially the tendency to blame the other level for anything that does not work out. This leads to a feeling of semi-permanent deadlock and to frictions even between coalition partners. Such was the case recently when federal minister for work Monica De Coninck (SPA) clashed with her Flemish colleague Philippe Muyters of N-VA.

Whether symmetrical coalitions are the answer remains to be seen. A complete symmetry, however, can never be achieved, as on the federal level there are always French-speaking parties to take into account.

# Kid-friendly plans awarded

## Thuis in de Stad prizes go to child-friendly urban initiatives

Derek Blyth

Flanders' minister for urban policy, Freya Van den Bossche, has awarded this year's Thuis in de Stad prize to three initiatives developed in Antwerp, Brussels and Ostend. The first prize, worth €75,000, went to Ostend for its Groene Lint, or Green Ribbon, project aimed at linking 15 green zones on the edge of the city into a single extended park.

The €50,000 second prize was awarded to Antwerp for its Groen Neerland project. This was praised for the way in which it combined a new housing project with a large park containing a nature reserve, orchards, ecological gardens and a barbecue zone. "Groen Neerland demonstrates that urban development doesn't have to involve



Ostend's Green Ribbon connects natural areas that ring the city

the destruction of nature," the jury said.

Finally, the third prize of €25,000 went to the Flemish Community

Commission in Brussels for its Tok Toc Knock festival. Organised by the Flemish theatre KVS, this community project was aimed at

involving people in urban areas where there was little in the way of culture.

Van den Bossche also organised an open day on the theme "children in the city", which brought together politicians, managers, academics and children to discuss ways of making cities more child-friendly and liveable.

"Flemish cities have evolved in recent years into nicer places for families to live," Van den Bossche said. "There are more children being born. The future of our cities is in their hands. That means it is essential to design cities on their scale and to listen to their needs. A city that is good for children and young people is also a city that is good for everyone."

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

## Kris Peeters launches weekly tours of industrial Flanders

Flanders' minister-president Kris Peeters set off last week on the first leg of a campaign tour to major industries across the region. He began the voyage – called Kris Peeters on Tour – in West Flanders, where he was accompanied by several senior politicians from his Christian-democrat party CD&V, including transport minister Hilde Crevits, MEP Marianne Thyssen and federal state secretary Hendrik Bogaert. The politicians started off in the town of Roeselare, where they visited Maselis, which produces cereal-based health foods (pictured). They then went on to Bruges to meet students and staff at Ter Groene Poort hotel school.

This week saw Peeters and Thyssen in East Flanders with federal defence minister Pieter De Crem and Flemish



© Belga

environment minister Joke Schauvliege.

Peeters said the aim of the tour was to ask people: "What sort of Flanders do you want to live in?" His party will use the results to shape a social-economic plan to promote economic growth without cutting social security.

"The coming five years will define the future of Flanders," he said. "We want to devote those five years to clear, sustainable and targeted choices." DB

## R&D gets long-term financial support from government

Flanders' innovation minister Ingrid Lieten is increasing long-term financial support for Flemish companies engaging in R&D. Her new science and innovation policy has been approved by parliament, which means that the government can now begin to provide more help to companies developing innovative ideas and assist them in obtaining grants from the Flanders innovation agency IWT. Lieten has responded to calls from companies and industries for increased support for long-term research initiatives, particularly in strategic sectors such as the chemical industry, which is a crucial element of the Flemish economy.

Chemical companies are looking to solve problems, like raw materials shortages and declining oil reserves, by developing innovative solutions, such as recycling CO2 waste. A breakthrough in this area would make Flanders less dependent on importing raw materials from the United States and the Middle East.

"There is a lot more openness in the innovation landscape today," Lieten said. "The innovation agency is reaching out to small- and medium-sized companies that in the past did not know about the instruments available to them. Innovation is not reserved for an elite but for every company, large or small." DB

## Antwerp dismisses prize-winning city architect Kristiaan Borret

Antwerp's city council decided to dismiss city architect Kristiaan Borret and look for a new candidate with "experience in Belgium and internationally". Borret's role was to ensure a high standard and consistency in new architecture in the city. Appointed by Patrick Janssens' socialist-controlled city council eight years ago, he was meant to remain in the post until 2016. The city council said last week that it wanted to "redefine the job in terms of content and organisation". Borret supervised landmark projects in the city such as the MAS city museum and the new Port House, which is still under construction. He won the Flemish Culture Prize for Architecture last October and was praised by culture minister Joke Schauvliege for "ensuring that architecture was not just about isolated statements but an instrument to bring together our urban space in all its facets." The city had already made deep cuts in the city architect's department last October, reducing the team from eight to just two people. After learning of his dismissal, Borret said: "For me personally, these past few years have been a wonderful period. I am pleased that I could contribute to the urban development of Antwerp. It was truly inspiring to work for a city and a population that shared a single vision." DB

## De Crem faces criticism over call for income-tax freeze

The deputy chair of the Flemish nationalist party N-VA, Ben Weyts, has criticised Pieter De Crem of the Flemish Christian Democrats (CD&V) for saying that there should be no reduction in income tax in the near future.

The N-VA recently proposed slashing Belgium's high income tax rate as part of its election manifesto, but De Crem argued last week that it would be foolish to cut tax rates until growth had risen above 2%.

"We were astonished by this statement by CD&V," Weyts said. "No constitutional changes, no income tax cuts. It seems as if the Christian Democrats don't want to change anything in this country. But we do." N-VA, he continued, "is in favour of tax cuts for everyone who works, saves and runs a business. It is time for this country to reward people who take responsibility rather than punish them."

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters, also economy minister, distanced himself from De Crem's position in an interview later the



© Mark Abzug

same day, arguing that De Crem was speaking personally and that he did not reflect CD&V's party policy. "We have always said that there has to be a serious component in the next government agreement on cutting labour costs," he said.

Groen chair Wouter Van Besien, meanwhile, also disagreed with De Crem. "Our country needs to cut income taxes to kick-start the recovery and create new jobs." He also disagreed with De Crem's statement that the financial crisis was over. "I don't know what planet De Crem is living on, but many young people in Flanders and Brussels can't find a job, small businesses are struggling to invest, and poverty is on the rise." DB



# Ten Commandments for Brussels

## Vision for Brussels includes radical thinking on transport, housing and education

► continued from page 1

### A world city on a human scale

I put it to her that this is already the case. Brussels is the capital of Europe but also the location of seven of the 10 poorest municipalities in the country.

"Brussels is certainly a world city, at least in the way it's put together. The capital of Europe, 120 nationalities and more than 100 languages spoken. But if, for example, I have friends from other countries who come to visit me in Brussels, and they arrive at South station ... that's not something that makes me proud of my city."

Brussels is better known in the world as a concept than Flanders, or even Belgium. "That's true. Brussels is a very strong brand. But when I talk about world class, the example of South Station is a good one. Also, if you take people for a walk through the centre – rubbish dumped here and there, abandoned buildings, people sleeping rough on the streets. That's not worthy of an international city, and that's something we need to work on."

### Decent housing for all

Here, the book provides a number of surprisingly revolutionary ideas, such as recruiting people to act as temporary occupants of empty properties – house-sitters, in effect – or taking over empty office properties to turn them into flats. Inspiring ideas, perhaps, but are they realistic?

"I think it's perfectly realistic. Brussels is growing very fast, with another 200,000 people expected by 2020, and we're going to have to find a way to put a roof over the heads of those people. We also know that there are more than 40,000 people on the waiting list for social housing. However, if you look at the number of vacant properties in Brussels, we see that there are 15,000 to 30,000 homes standing empty right now. There's 1.5 million square metres of office space, empty. Make use of that space, and the housing problem is more or less solved. It's not as hard as people think."

Some first steps have been taken, she says. "In the current legislature, there are six projects with the title Reconversion of Offices to Homes, with subsidies from the Brussels-Capital Region for the owners if they turn their vacant office properties into housing."

One of those is the horseshoe-shaped Chambon building on the Wolvengracht, the former offices of ASLK bank and later Fortis. Work is now going ahead to turn it into 350 apartments and student rooms.

### Build enough schools

Another reason for the flight of people from the city is the lack of school provision, particularly acute in the Dutch-speaking system. The demand for Dutch-speaking education is growing constantly, even – and perhaps especially – among non-Dutch-

speaking families. That means there's less space for Dutch-speaking children.

"Then we see parents finding school places in the *rand* or, worse still, the parents decide they've had enough of Brussels and go live in Flanders, where things are a lot simpler. That's not the effect we're hoping for. We argue for more balance, also for the sake of those non-Dutch-speaking children – how can they learn Dutch if the class is full of children who don't speak it? That's no good to anyone."

### A city well run

I put it to her that Brussels is something of a running joke in being 10 times smaller than London but having 19 mayors for London's one.

*"If friends arrive at South Station, that's not something that makes me proud of my city"*

"The model of one region and 19 municipalities is no longer of these times. I believe more in the model we see in cities like Paris or Berlin: where there's one central city authority that lays down policy for the entire territory, but where you also hang on to local entities to take care of strictly local matters.

She once had a post in Paris where she learned to appreciate the running of the city and the local *arrondissements*. "They're responsible for things like local footpaths, school meals and so on – things that are very close to local people.

But issues like urban planning, mobility, things that relate to the development of the city as a whole – those all belong to the central Paris



© Yves Herman/Reuters/Cordis



© Sean Hayford O Leary

Bianca Debaets isn't fond of South Station (top), but she does believe in Brussels' potential to become more like Oslo in terms of transport (above)

government. Here in Brussels, on the contrary, the central and local authorities work against each other."

### A city where everyone feels at home

Which cities, I wondered, were her inspiration in drawing up this wish-list? "There's not a single city that acted as an inspiration," she explains. "It changes from chapter to chapter. For something like mobility, for example, I found the cities of northern Europe inspiring. I visited Oslo and Stockholm and saw how things were done. You see, for example, how they've pushed the car into the background and made much more room for cyclists and also for green spaces in the cities. Those are places it's agreeable to live in; you can actually breathe. For a model of government, I've mentioned Paris."

Speaking of mobility, we're sitting only metres from the Beursplein, exactly the right spot to consider the plan announced by Brussels-City for the pedestrianisation of the central avenue, from here to De Brouckereplein. "I'm delighted that something is going to be done," Debaets says. "Other cities at home and abroad took steps a long time ago to reduce the traffic in their historic centres. However, I have a number of questions about the Brussels plan – a few footnotes, if you like. I had a problem when I heard the alderwoman responsible

[Flemish liberal Els Ampe] say, 'We want to make access to the city easier for cars'. And I thought, no that's absolutely not the direction we need to be going in at all. We want to make the city centre low-traffic, to make space for cyclists and pedestrians. So you can't at the same time say you want to make access easier for cars. Those two things are contradictory."

If anything is going to change in Brussels, it's going to come from the city council and parliament. Looking around at her fellow representatives in both places, what's the level of optimism? Does she think the recommendations in her book have a chance? "Absolutely," she says. "I see a lot of hopeful signs. I mention some of them in the book. For instance, Brussels has very high unemployment figures, 20% youth unemployment. And the regional government has decided young people need more customised employment support. So if a young person leaves school and can't find work, you give them either additional training, or you sit down with them and find a tailor-made way of fitting them in somehow. And we're seeing now for the first time that it's working. But you have to have the political courage."

And that political courage, she says, exists in Brussels. "I see signs of it."

*10 Geboden voor Brussel: Naar een wereldstad met wereldklasse by Bianca Debaets is published by Lannoo*





WEEK IN  
BUSINESS

## Books

## ► Standaard Boekhandel

The Flemish bookstore chain has announced a 3% increase in sales for 2013, thanks to sales of CDs, which the chain started selling in late 2013. The company said the CD market was still worth some €100 million a year, and the company would be able to provide alternative sales points now that Free Record Shop has closed down. Sales in the book business, meanwhile, remained stable.

## Brewing ► AB InBev

Leuven-based AB InBev has taken over Blue Point, the brewer of speciality beers from Long Island, New York, for an undisclosed sum rumoured to be in the region of \$24 million (€17.7 million). The acquisition gives the company a strong position on the fast-growing craft beer market in the US, where AB InBev is still best-known for mass-market brews like Budweiser.

## Electronics ► Sony

The Sony facility in Zaventem could be "significantly" affected by a decision by the company to cut 5,000 jobs worldwide, as well as the sale of its computers division, represented by the Vaio range of laptops. The Zaventem facility employs 350 people, mainly in Vaio production, and job losses could be significant, according to union representatives.

## Freight

## ► Port of Brussels

The port of Brussels processed 3% more freight in 2013 than in the previous year, mainly from 25% more cargo passing through the port: There was 6% less loading and unloading in the port itself. Building materials account for nearly 55% of all freight, followed by petroleum products on 27%.

## Telecoms ► Telenet

The Flemish media regulator VRM has warned that competition problems could result if Liberty Global, the parent company of media provider Telenet, takes a stake in De Vijver Media, which owns TV stations Vier and Vijf. In a report to Flemish media minister Ingrid Lieten, the VRM said the consequences could be far-reaching and distort competition in TV services.

## Vehicles ► Volvo

The 3,500 employees of Volvo in Belgium are awaiting details of possible job losses after the Swedish parent company announced 2,400 redundancies on top of 2,000 job cuts previously announced. Volvo Trucks in Ghent employs 2,200, with another 1,300 employed at Volvo Construction Equipment in Vilvoorde.

## Agriculture has highest rate of fatal workplace accidents

## Boerenbond calls for an accident prevention agency for farmers

Alan Hope

Agriculture is the most dangerous economic sector in Flanders for industrial accidents that lead to deaths, with 16 fatalities in 2013 in farming and horticulture, overtaking the construction sector.

In 2012, construction and farming were equal with 21 fatal workplace accidents. However, there are about 270,000 people employed in the construction sector, whereas agriculture employs only about 50,000.

Accident figures in the agriculture sector are less publicised, explained agriculture minister Kris Peeters in parliament last week, because most victims in construction are employees, whereas most victims of agricultural accidents are self-employed and do not feature in the official figures. In three out of four cases, said Peeters, the victim of a



© Joëlliers / Wikimedia Commons

fatal accident is the owner of the farm.

In one case in 2013, the victim was working for a third party on infrastructure and was crushed by a bale of straw. In 11 cases, crushing

was the cause of death, with one death each caused by falling, machinery, drowning, electrocution and fire.

The government's agriculture and fisheries department will begin

encouraging farmers to take workplace safety more seriously when processing applications for permits or subsidies, Peeters said. "The figures show that raising awareness and prevention are more needed than ever," he said. "The agriculture sector needs to pay more attention to the subject of safety. The Flemish government intends to make sure that happens." "Safety is a daily concern to every agricultural and horticultural business," responded Piet Vanthemsche of the farmers' union Boerenbond. "Safety is, year after year, built into the fabric of this organisation. I call on the government to create an accident prevention agency in which the expertise of all partners can be brought together. Boerenbond will also play its part."

## Closures at Home Market were "bolt out of the blue"

Unions representing staff of the home decoration chain Home Market have described the company's decision to close all 41 stores in Belgium as "a bolt out of the blue". The news of the closures came last week after a brief meeting of the enterprise board.

The company said the difficult economic situation was the reason, together with "a series of unfortunate developments in the market" – among them the increased popularity of DIY.

Home Market has 41 stores across Belgium, 26 of them in Flanders, employing a total of 233 people. According to union representative Philip Joostens, the company undertook a review of its entire marketing strategy only a year ago but never gave the new concept a chance to succeed. The company invested €10.5 million in marketing and development between 2007 and 2013.

No date has been set for the closures. Management and unions are due to meet for the first time this week, under the so-called Renault procedure on collective redundancies. AH

## VRT closes news bureaux in Washington and Beijing

The Flemish public broadcaster VRT is closing its permanent news bureaux in Washington, DC, and in Beijing from next year, switching to the use of "pop-up correspondents" instead, the organisation announced yesterday. The broadcaster said that the change was part of a plan to extend international news coverage, with more reports from more locations.

"VRT wants to be able to react to what goes on in the world in a more flexible manner and be able to send reporters for longer periods to the world's news hotspots," a spokesperson said. "If the fires are burning in Cairo, VRT News will spend more time there. If the pressure is rising in Russia, the news service will be able to be there for a longer period of time."

The news service will, for example, spend at least a month in Brazil during World Cup this summer, not only to cover the event but also to "tell deeper stories from the heart of society".

"The world is changing at a rapid pace, and political and economic challenges



© Nathalie Dohmans / VRT

are now global in scale," said editor-in-chief Luc Rademakers (pictured). "So the VRT needs to be able to put up its tent in more places at one time, with foreign expertise from a variety of angles and countries, making our coverage more mobile. The goal is to make our coverage more varied and more balanced, with more attention paid to the less-reported corners of the world, such as Latin America and northern Europe."

Funds saved by closing the China and US bureaux will go to help finance correspondent travel, but the two countries will continue to receive the news service's full attention, said Rademakers. AH

## Belgacom CEO's salary exceeds €650,000 cap

The new CEO of Belgacom, Dominique Leroy, will be allowed to earn more than the new salary limit set by the government for state-controlled concerns, the federal minister of government enterprises said last week.

Leroy's salary could go as high as €800,000, once bonuses and other benefits are taken into account. Those include group and hospitalisation insurance and a company car. Leroy (pictured) already had access to many of these benefits prior to being appointed CEO, as she was already a top Belgacom executive. "This is not what was agreed," federal minister for the economy Johan Vande Lanotte told VTM News. Federal minister of foreign affairs Didier Reynders agreed. "There was a very clear decision by the government not to pay



© Belgacom

more than €650,000," he said. The agreement made last December was that the CEO's package would be made up of a basic salary of €500,000 and a variable remuneration of benefits to a maximum of €150,000. AH

## New innovation centre iMinds Health launched

Flemish innovation minister Ingrid Lieten has launched iMinds Health, a new department of the ICT research centre iMinds, which will focus on developing solutions for the challenges in the health-care sector.

The new innovation centre will carry out digital research but also create and commercialise technology. The CEO of iMinds, Wim De Waele, stated that the new department can build on the expertise of iMinds. "We have in the past years invested in more than 25 research projects on, among others, medical data exchange and the use of digital solutions in the care sector," said De Waele.

During the launch at the Zorgidee (Care Idea) symposium at Hasselt University last week, iMinds Health presented two projects: HIPS and b-SLIM. HIPS will merge the management of follow-up care for hip surgery patients in two hospitals. The goal of B-Slim is to develop the Super Coach mobile application for people with obesity, which will monitor factors such as eating habits and physical activity to provide customised advice. Andy Furniere



# A future for cancer patients

## The Olivia Hendrickx Research Fund supports cancer research at KU Leuven

Andy Furniere

In April of 2000, two-year-old Olivia Hendrickx died of cancer. The tumour found in her brain stem was diagnosed just six months earlier. "At the time, all the doctors could do was treat her with chemotherapy," says Olivia's mother, Ilse De Reze, a lawyer from Herentals, Antwerp province. But the specialist at the University Hospital of Leuven (UZ Leuven) who treated Olivia, Stefaan Van Gool, told De Reze about the immunotherapy research project he was embarking on. De Reze decided to support this pioneering research to give other brain cancer patients a future. Together with family and friends, she set up the Olivia Hendrickx Research Fund. The fund raises money specifically for the work of professor Van Gool, a leading expert on cancer immunotherapy – the technique of using the body's immune system to attack tumours instead of targeting the tumour itself. Politician Herman De Croo (Open VLD), then chair of the Chamber in the Federal Parliament, immediately helped to promote the fund. The team also started organising both large and smaller events, with an annual gala concert at De Munt in Brussels as the highlight. In 13 years, the fund has raised more than €2 million, according to De Reze, who serves as the fund's chair. This money has been invested in equipment and staff for the two labs of Van Gool's team at KU Leuven. One lab is used for experimental research, while the clinical lab serves to produce a therapeutic vaccine against brain cancer tumours. Throughout the years, the KU Leuven team has treated about 500 patients from 27 countries, the largest number of patients any clinic worldwide has treated using



Pictured, second from left: Herman De Croo, Herman Van Rompuy, Stefan Van Gool and Ilse De Reze visit the UZ Leuven clinic

this technique. The vaccine is not a miracle medicine against cancer tumours but is showing clear results. "About 10% of our patients have a considerably longer life, with a good quality of life," says Van Gool. "A patient who came to us in 2001 is still alive thanks to the vaccine." This success is remarkable, more so because brain cancer is particularly quick in devastating the health of patients and very tenacious in coming back. To battle the cancer, the researchers have created a therapeutic vaccine using the patients' white blood cells. The white blood cells are transformed into dendritic cells, part of the immune system. "These cells function as a sort of vacuum cleaner, cleaning up dangerous material like cancer cells," explains Van Gool. The vaccine then kicks the immune system into action, to slow down or prevent further growth of the tumour. The importance of immunotherapy was acknowledged by the Nobel

Foundation in 2011, when it awarded the Nobel Prize for medicine to the Canadian cell biologist Ralph Steinman. In 1973, Steinman coined the term "dendritic cells" after discovering how they activate the immune system. Last year, the leading magazine *Science* chose cancer immunotherapy as the biggest breakthrough of 2013. "Immunotherapy shows promising results in the battle against many forms of cancer," says Van Gool. At UZ Leuven, the team is also targeting gynaecologic cancers. But Flanders' other university hospitals have not missed the opportunities of immunotherapy. A team at Brussels specialises in treating melanomas; the department at UZ Ghent works mostly on asbestos lung cancer; and UZ Antwerp houses expertise on using the technique to battle leukaemia. The government of Flanders also supports immunotherapy projects through the TBM programme at its agency for innovation through

science and technology (IWT). The TBM finances applied biomedical research with a clear health purpose but with only limited financial potential for the industry. "Since our vaccine is created with the personal material of every individual patient, we can't make a commercial product," explains Van Gool. The Belgian medical insurance agency Riziv also pays back part of the significant cost of the vaccine – about €9,500 of the total €16,000 for each dose used during the trial study with adult patients who have newly diagnosed brain cancer. The work of the lab is, however, being threatened by the European Union, which is considering imposing stricter regulations. "The EU actually targets the mass-producing pharmaceutical industry, which can afford to comply with their new legislative measures, but the regulation would make our research almost impossible," declares De Reze. Because the team at UZ Leuven manufactures vaccines on a regular basis, the regulation considers them legally as a sort of enterprise. "But we should be categorised as a hospital with no commercial goal and thus get an exemption status," says De Reze. To achieve this goal, the fund has invited several MEPs to the lab, to see for themselves the activity that takes place there. Last month, president of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy visited the lab and promised to provide support. A final decision will be taken in about two years.

Donations can be made to the Olivia Hendrickx Research Fund via the website

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

## WEEK IN INNOVATION

### HoGent updates system for clothing sizes

A team of researchers from the University College Ghent have analysed the shapes of 5,000 people, the first time such a measurement has been taken in 24 years. "Since 1990, the body shape of the average Belgian has evolved," says co-ordinator Alexandra De Raeve. "The most common shape is now a straight pear shape with broad hips and thighs and a wide waist, looking a little like the capital letter 'H'." Because the measurement indexes haven't been adapted, many people are now having problems finding clothes that fit well and look good. It is not yet known how the new measurement indexes will look – whether they will be made up of colour or letter codes, figures or pictographs. "The situation will improve if designers adjust the current standard measurements," said De Raeve. More info will be provided at a local congress in May.

### 1 in 3 cases of cancer could be prevented

One in three cases of cancer could be prevented, the Foundation Against Cancer announced last week, on World Cancer Day. In 2012, there were 69,382 new cancer diagnoses in Belgium. It's estimated that one in three men and one in four women are confronted with the disease before they are 75 years old. Breast cancer is the most common form of cancer in the country, followed by prostate and colon cancer. Annually about 25,000 patients die from the disease in Belgium. According to the foundation, one in three cases is a result of the patient's lifestyle and could be prevented. The foundation names tobacco, overuse of alcohol, overexposure to UV rays, poor eating habits and too little exercise as the main causes.

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

### UGent professor monitors doping in Sochi

Professor Peter Van Eenoo, head of the doping control laboratory at Ghent University, is the scientific expert to the Olympic Games in the Russian city of Sochi. Van Eenoo was also involved in doping monitoring during previous Olympics in Athens, London and Turin and now has the role of quality supervisor of the Olympic laboratory. During two weeks of competition, the lab will analyse about 2,000 urine and 600 blood samples from athletes. Only seven laboratories worldwide have sent a specialist to the games. AF

## KBC bank launches incubator for start-ups

It all began with some free space and an in-house KBC innovation contest back in 2011. A few floors freed up in the bank's Antwerp offices after it had consolidated with two new training centres in Ghent. The idea of filling the vacant floors with something sustainable came to the Antwerp team. "We wanted to bring starters into that space and guide them through their first business steps," says Lode Uytterschaut from KBC, who is co-ordinating the innovation incubator, called Start it @kbc. After adding some partner organisations into the mix – among them Accenture, Flanders DC, Cronos, Mobile Vikings and Antwerp University – KBC launched its start-up programme in November of last year. Ninety start-up companies applied, 28 of which were selected and offered a space in the KBC Tower overlooking the Meir shopping street. The selection criteria were idea originality and potential contribution to the development of a sustainable society. The final entrepreneurs selected range from 20 and 50 years old and work in the fields of technology, e-platforms, sustainability and mobility.

"They have just started getting underway these last few weeks," Uytterschaut says. To ensure daily progress, the bank and its partners "try to listen to our start-ups, analyse their needs, share knowledge, introduce them to our top business clients and organise relevant workshops." Daring entrepreneurial innovation and banks are two concepts not often paired. "The bank sector is often seen as very conservative, focused on risk analysis," Uytterschaut says. "As such, innovation usually gets pushed aside." Housing 28 starters would therefore not only support start-ups in difficult economic times but also revamp KBC's image, making it a more dynamic place to work. "KBC hopes to take all lessons learned from the start-ups and apply that innovative knowledge across the organisation," Uytterschaut explains. "What's more, the initiative throws a line out to our 'intrapreneurs' – entrepreneurs working within KBC's offices." Erik Luts, one of the senior general managers of the Antwerp branch, notes that "just two months into Start it @kbc, it's already clear that KBC and its partners are meeting a real need among start-ups." As a result, more businesses are trying to join



in. Phone operator and partner Mobile Vikings hopes to expand the concept to Hasselt, while Vlerick Business School has offered to help bring the project to Ghent. "An eighth and ninth floor are also being added in the KBC Antwerp tower, to house more starters/intrapreneurs and carry out trainings," Uytterschaut adds. On the virtual side, an agreement has been reached with the online platform Startups.be and ICT research institute iMinds.be to further strengthen ties with the start-up tech community across the country.

Kelly Hendricks

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



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# Fighting for free speech

## Academic institutions join forces to offer shelter to persecuted writers

Andy Furniere

In the 19th century, several well-known writers came to Brussels to live and work in freedom at a time when this was impossible in their home countries. French literary giant Victor Hugo fled to the Belgian capital in 1851 after being exiled because of his social and democratic ideas. He came back several times over a period of 20 years, finishing, among others, his masterpiece *Les Misérables* in Brussels.

Philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels also famously wrote their Communist Manifesto while living in Brussels in the company of exiled socialists from all over Europe.

It's with this tradition in mind that Passa Porta, Brussels' international house of literature, established the Victor Hugo project in 2010. With the writers' association

Russian Boris Korkmazov gave lectures and participated in debates. The third guest writer, Moroccan journalist and author Ali Amar, arrived in Brussels last month. Amar was co-founder of the independent weekly newspaper *Le Journal Hebdo*, which had to stop its activities after political pressure. His critical book on King Mohammed VI was banned in Morocco but became a bestseller in Europe after being published in France. He is now working on his third book.

On 12 February, Amar will lecture about his work and the importance of freedom of expression at Brussels city hall. Journalist Béatrice Delvaux will interview him afterwards. Special guests at the ceremony will be the managers of four Brussels academic institutions supporting the project: the Dutch-speaking VUB and University College HUB



Journalist and writer Ali Amar's critical book on King Mohammed VI was banned in Morocco

of students, from both language communities, will now have the chance to learn from a reputed author with unique experience."

Although several faculties will be involved, each university has a different task. The VUB focuses on the judicial dimension, the ULB on language, Saint-Louis on the literary background and the HUB on the journalistic side. The institutions will organise workshops, lectures, seminars and debates to which all students from the partner institutions are invited. The events will be in either English or French.

"For our journalism students, Amar's fight for freedom of expression can be a real eye-opener, making clear how important critical journalism is," explains Mark Lambrechts, administrator at the HUB's arts faculty. "He can also teach students about the best methods for thorough research."

Persecuted writers can also find refuge in Antwerp at the Schrijversflat (Writers' Flat) of PEN-Vlaanderen, the Flemish branch of PEN International. This initiative is supported by the city, the province and the University of Antwerp. The project attracted media attention last year, when the Nigerian author Tade Ipadeola was refused a visa to lecture in Belgium. PEN-Vlaanderen president David Van Reybrouck said at the time that this wasn't an isolated incident and demanded more government support for cultural exchange. Goethals of Passa Porta confirms that this strict attitude is limiting their hospitality options. "To provide a foreign writer with a visa for two years in Belgium is currently much more difficult than it should be," she says.

► <http://writersinresidence.passaporta.be>

*"Amar's fight for freedom of expression makes it clear how important critical journalism is"*

PEN International, they joined the International Cities of Refuge Network – an association of cities that provide shelter to persecuted writers.

Thanks to the project, two foreign authors have already lived and worked for two years in an apartment provided by the City of Brussels. During their residencies, Serbian Dejan Anastasijevic and

and the French-speaking ULB and Université Saint-Louis Bruxelles.

The four universities will sign the charter of Brussel Vluchtstad (Brussels, City of Refuge), pledging an annual investment of €2,500 each. "We wanted to widen the scope of our programme," says Nathalie Goethals of Passa Porta, who has co-ordinated the project since the beginning. "A large group

## Grooming tomorrow's environmental doctors

There is little doubt today of the environment's influence on human health.

To help medical professionals more quickly make the link between the two, the feasibility of an environmental health certification course is being examined.

Where one lives, works and exercises, and if those places are in or outdoors, all determine how often our bodies come in contact with environmental factors that affect our health. These factors range from chemical (fine particulates, formaldehyde) to biological (moulds) to physical (noise, humidity, heat).

"Studies come out daily proving the onslaught of illnesses brought on by the environment," says Joke De Backer of the Flemish Agency for Care and Health (VZG). "In the case of Flanders, environmental-related complaints and suffering tend to accumulate on respiratory issues, like asthma and allergies, and cardiovascular disease. The environment can also be a leading cause behind chronic endocrinal problems with Flemings, like infertility."

In most cases, environment is just one of multiple factors causing disease and tends to play the role of ailment amplifier. "This varies from person to person depending on each individual's reaction and tolerance," explains De Backer. "Children, the elderly and the chronically ill are always more susceptible."

In order to recognise which environmental factors



The programme will allow doctors to look at environment's broad impact on human health

influence health problems, the agency is teaming up with the federal government, the communities and the regions for Cell Environment-Health, which is creating a nationwide certification course on health and environment for medical professionals.

"Doctors are often a first and regular point of contact with their patients and know what sort of environments they are living in," says Yseult Navez, a co-ordinator of the project on behalf of the federal public health service. It is important that medical professionals thus can identify the possible links between environment and health."

Until now, not much attention was given to environment and health in medical coursework. "This course should not really be thought of as

'new'," says De Backer, explaining that smaller-scale trainings in environmental health were available in Flanders before. "This certificate will thus take into account previous coursework, while looking at the impact of the environment on human health from a broader perspective. It will be a course adapted to all medical professionals, from general practitioners and paediatricians to midwives and nurses."

The coursework would ideally consist of basic and advanced courses in environmental medicine, with participants receiving an environmental medicine certificate upon completion.

To launch the initiative, the Cell Environment-Health recently held a conference to present the project to colleges and universities across the country. "The Flemish universities showed much interest," Navez says, particularly Leuven, Antwerp and Hasselt. "The next steps will be to continue working individually with these universities to formulate study programmes."

Will Flemish children soon be dreaming of becoming environmental doctors? For Navez, only time will tell. "Indeed, environmental doctors are recognised and hold full-time practices in some countries. But we must first see how this certification programme performs before considering the much more difficult administrative process of proposing a medical specialisation." **Kelly Hendricks**

## WEEK IN EDUCATION

### School experience cause of bad behaviour

The difference in delinquent behaviour between children of Belgian and foreign origin is not caused by ethnic background but by their experiences at school, according to research released last week by the University of Leuven. The researchers examined the link between illegal behaviour and the origins of 2,502 Brussels pupils from Dutch-speaking secondary education. They found that those with a foreign background were involved in considerably more serious crimes, such as threat of assault and carrying a weapon. Those without a foreign background were more often involved in robberies and fare-dodging. Researchers say the likelihood of delinquent behaviour increases when children follow classes in technical or professional education, have to repeat a year, don't feel comfortable at school and skip school regularly.

### Colleges demand money for tech studies

Flemish university colleges are demanding more government support for their economic and technological study programmes. According to the colleges, these two streams account for about 45% of their students, but they are underfinanced by the Flemish government. For a student in applied informatics or chemistry, a university college receives up to 60% less support than for students in many other programmes. The directors feel the current financing system is to blame. "Study streams that prepare students for bottleneck professions are now not receiving enough means," seven directors said in a statement.

### Private school for children with autism

From next academic year, a private school will operate from one of the buildings on the citadel site in Diest, Flemish Brabant, to provide adjusted secondary education to children with autism. The school, named De Lift, will prepare pupils for higher education by paying special attention to their specific challenges. "Children with autism typically have problems keeping up in regular education but are too intelligent for the special education system," says founder Katrien Beelen. "As a consequence, many youngsters become discouraged and stay at home." Aside from academic lessons, teachers will provide training in areas such as social skills, while information technology will be a central subject in class.



WEEK IN  
ACTIVITIES

## Lupercalia

Here's a different kind of Valentine's Day event: a pagan love festival in the middle of Ghent. This "erotic evening" includes theatre, music and spoken word, visual arts, photography and cabaret. You can even join in a striptease workshop or pose nude for an artist. *15 February, 19.00, Theater Tinnenpot, Tinnenpotstraat 21, Ghent, €20, reservations required*

► <http://tinyurl.com/Lupercalia-Ghent>

## Love Bugs Parade

Held in conjunction with an exhibition of Volkswagen Beetles at Autoworld, this car parade departs from the museum for a tour of the city. *16 February, Free, Jubelpark, Brussels, parade begins at 14.00*

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

## Knuffelduik

What better way to bond with your partner (or a buddy) than by jumping into the icy waters of the North Sea? Festivities begin at 10.00, at 14.30 the warm-up begins and at 15.00 the signal is given to jump in. The day ends with fireworks on the beach at 18.30. All proceeds benefit Kiekafoebe, a non-profit that provides seaside holidays to children with cancer. *16 February, 10.00-19.00, Zeedijk, Oostduinkerke*

► [www.dekust.be/evenementen/knuffelduik](http://www.dekust.be/evenementen/knuffelduik)

## Tour of Molenbeek

Foyer, the community organisation in Molenbeek, has a new audio tour of this multicultural Brussels neighbourhood. The 75-minute walk takes you through the streets, accompanied by historical commentary, interviews with residents, music and sound clips. Download it free from Foyer's website or borrow an MP3 player with the tour from Foyer's offices at Werkhuizenstraat 25.

► [www.foyer.be](http://www.foyer.be)

## Creativity Fair

The Cosmodrome planetarium in Genk is organising its first fair dedicated to new ideas and products with an emphasis on science and technology. A "maker space" gives you the chance to explore your own creativity in a hands-on setting. *15 February, 14.00-21.00, Planetariumweg 19, Genk, free*

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

Anderlecht's  
Folk Giants

Members of two local groups dedicated to preserving Flanders' folkloric traditions will show visitors the nine Anderlecht giants, several parade floats and 600 historic costumes. *16 February, 14.00, reserve via 02 526 83 65 or [toerisme@anderlecht.irisnet.be](mailto:toerisme@anderlecht.irisnet.be)*

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

## Bigger, brighter, better

## Museum Night Fever returns to Brussels for splashiest edition so far

Georgio Valentino

On a chilly winter's night in 2008, seven Brussels museums participated in the first edition of Museum Night Fever. It was a noble experiment, an after-hours programme meant to open the doors of the capital's cultural institutions to young artists working across a variety of media, from the visual to the performing arts. It was a success, too, with some 4,500 visitors.

In seven short years, the event has quadrupled. Last year counted 16,000 revellers, and more are expected this year when the event takes over Brussels on 22 February. Indeed, 2014 is the biggest year yet. Twenty-four museums are on board, and not just the usual suspects. Bozar and Wiels are lovely venues, but they're nevertheless spaces where contemporary "happenings" happen all the time. More interesting in this context are the event's more unlikely partners, like the Museum of Natural Sciences, the Royal Library of Belgium and the Parlamentarium.

Then there's the human element: a full 500 artists and volunteers who will cram 100 events into five hours. Make sure you plan wisely; the programme and an interactive city map are available online. The venues are scattered across the capital, but transportation is a cinch. Thanks to



Museum Night Fever lets young artists loose in the capital's cultural institutions, like Musée Wiertz

the MIVB, Night Fever ticket holders can ride the regular public transport network and special event shuttles all night for free.

The events run the gamut. Some are exhibitions. Some are performances. Some are workshops. Some are "popular" in spirit. Some are "contemporary". Some take their inspiration from their host venue's regular programme. And some are *sui generis*.

The Museum of Natural Sciences and international arts organisation MacSwell are taking the all-of-the-above approach. Dozens of artists have been invited to participate in live painting, film projections,

3D mapping, aerial silk and a multimedia exhibition of the world's weirdest animals.

The Royal Library's sumptuous Lotharingen Palace hosts an evening of fashion and music. A team of stylists from the Free University of Brussels (ULB) marry today's contemporary couture and the flamboyant finery of the 18th century. They lead a series of workshops followed by a decadent chamber music concert and fashion show.

Wiels unites with the P.A.R.T.S. dance school to open a new exhibition in style. The multidisciplinary work of German contemporary artist Franz

Erhard Walther is on display until May, but only at Museum Night Fever will you see dancers perform original choreographies inspired by it.

Then there's the Parlamentarium. The European Parliament's information centre is also the only one that can boast a massive floor map of Europe. Naturally this fixture will be used to full effect when 20 young choreographers present modern interpretations of European folk dances. The same space later turns into a techno dance party.

If parties are your thing, the more intriguing official afterparty starts at midnight at the old Bellevue Brasserie (now under new ownership and drily rechristened Brussels Event Brewery). The repurposed industrial space is a labyrinth, and the Night Fever crew plan to use its every nook and cranny. DJs and live musicians perform on five stages, each catering to a different crowd: disco, reggae, hip-hop, vintage and "Balkan fever".

**22 February,  
from 19.00**

Across Brussels

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

## EIGHT FLEMISH BEERS IN WORLD'S TOP 100

Eight out of the 10 Belgian beers to make it onto this year's Top 100 in the world on the influential website RateBeer are from Flemish breweries: 3 Fonteinen Hommage from Beersel; Gouden Carolus Cuvée Van de Keizer (blauw) from Het Anker in Mechelen; Sint-Bernardus Abt 12 from Watou, West Flanders; three beers by De Struise brewery in Oostvleteren (Black Albert, Pannepot and Pannepot Reserva)

and, of course, Westvleteren 8 and 12 from the Sint-Sixtus abbey in Westvleteren.

Westvleteren 12 is routinely the first or second-rated beer in the world on the site. This year, however, RateBeer broke with tradition and declined to place the top 100 beers in order. However, both Westvleteren 8 and 12 achieved a perfect score of 200: 100 for style and 100 overall. Four of the other Flemish beers also

achieved a perfect score.

The majority of beers on the list are from the US, reflecting the site's readership, with mentions for Canada, England and Denmark.

RateBeer this week also named the Kulminator in Antwerp



among the top beer bars in the world, together with In de verzekering tegen de grote dorst in Lennik, Flemish Brabant, 't Brugs Beertje in Bruges and the two Chez Moeder Lambic cafes in Brussels.

► [www.ratebeer.com/RateBeerBest](http://www.ratebeer.com/RateBeerBest)

## BITE

## Local food for local people

We all know by now that the best and most sustainable sort of food is seasonal and locally produced. Food policymakers talk about the "short chain" – as little time and distance as possible between the field and your plate is the ideal.

But how much land would it take if Flemish farmers were to provide all the food consumed by the Flemish people? That's the question tackled by the Flemish government's department of agriculture and fisheries in a report called "Food Footprint". The answer, to cut a long story short, is that it would take more agricultural land than Flanders has.

Some figures: Residents of Flanders eat an average of 2.79 kilograms of food a day, for an annual total of 6.4 billion tonnes. If that food were to be provided only from produce grown here, you would need 808,700 hectares of farmland – or a kitchen garden measuring 1,282 square metres for every man, woman and child in the region.

According to the study, slightly more than one-quarter would be used for crops: 40% for oils and fats, 31% for grains, 10% for fruit and sugar, 9% for potatoes, 7% for vegetables and the remaining 3% for miscellaneous plants. If that arable land were in one place, it

would take up more room than Flemish Brabant.

And then there's the animals. Not only do animals take up space, the food grown to feed them does, too. For cows and pigs alone, you need more than 350,000 hectares of land and 586,000 for feed – the provinces of Antwerp and East Flanders combined. The figures take into account that animals are also fed locally – so farmers have to produce substitutes for products currently imported, like palm oil and soy.

In reality, Flanders has 665,500 hectares of agricultural land, including pasture, and few families

have a 1300 square-metre garden, let alone every person. This means we are eating more than we can produce – according to the report at the expense of someone somewhere else, most likely in the developing world.

The only consolation? Flanders is not the worst offender. If every person living here requires 1,282 square metres to feed themselves, it's a lot worse by the neighbours: The Dutch need at least 1,448, and the Brits a conservative 1,785.

The full study, described as a "theoretical thought exercise", can be downloaded from the website.

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



# And relax...

## A new yoga centre in Brussels puts the focus on healthy living and mindfulness

Katrien Lindemans

Avoid stress and take things slowly. Live a healthy lifestyle. Be more active. Were these your resolutions for the new year? If you're still struggling to make them work, perhaps a visit to the newly opened yoga centre Yyoga will help you get there. You'll find it right in the centre of Brussels, on Vismarkt. Yyoga is a place to relax, in one of the capital's busiest areas. It took owners Robbie Makroczy and Colin Wolf two years to find the right space. "When we bumped into this former art gallery, we knew it was right," says Makroczy. "We turned it into a yoga centre of 400 square metres with several rooms for yoga classes. The building has a large window looking out on to Vismarkt, so we decided to transform the first part of the space into a shop dedicated to all things yoga." When you enter Yyoga, leaving the cobbled and bustling Vismarkt behind, you'll find yourself in a modern yoga boutique. "We want this space to be open to everyone and focus on conscious, healthy living, rather than spirituality," Makroczy explains. "Tradition plays an important role with yoga. But we live in the 21st century and yoga needs to adapt to modern needs as well. Whatever religion or background our visitors have, we want them to come together and focus on themselves. Mindfulness, that's what yoga is all about." No sitar music, no burning incense sticks; instead the centre has white

walls and shelves, a yellow ceiling and a big blackboard featuring all the different classes. "My partner Colin is a yoga practitioner and an interior design architect," says Makroczy. "He's the creative brain behind the modern sanctuary look of the studio and all the Yyoga visuals." Originally from Hungary, Makroczy started doing yoga at an early age. He is a certified yoga instructor and has trained in Europe, Asia and the US. "Over the years, the physical aspect of yoga has gained more importance," he explains. "Working on your body, mastering the different postures and living a healthy life are key in our western society. But to me, the ultimate goal of yoga is to change your thinking and mind." To cater for all our modern needs, Yyoga offers a variety of classes: hot yoga and hot flow, in heated rooms up to 37 degrees Celsius, hatha, vinyasa flow and freestyle flow. "We have six yoga instructors, me included, as we believe students need to practise with various teachers to get a broader picture of yoga," Makroczy explains. "Some like to focus on breathing techniques and more traditional yoga, while others see yoga as an intense workout with lots of sweating." There's no dress code at Yyoga, just wear something comfortable. Unlike with many other sports, you don't need expensive shoes or attire to get started. "A good yoga mat and a light outfit will do," says Makroczy.

"In our Yyoga shop we sell some essentials, mainly from small, European companies. We picked outfits in organic cotton and yoga mats from natural rubber to give our customers an alternative to what they find in big shops. Conscious shopping is part of a healthy lifestyle too." For those wanting to relax or practise yoga at home, the boutique sells all sorts of accessories too, from soy wax scented candles to eye pillows stuffed with lavender, organic soaps to a nail bed – a mat with sharp spikes to stimulate blood flow. A selection of yoga books is on its way. The centre is open to anyone looking for information about yoga classes or yoga in general. Several classes are given every day and all the instructors speak English

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

## DOWN ON THE FÄRM

For more conscious shopping, try organic supermarket Färm. It's a couple of houses down the street from Yyoga and opened only a few months ago. Färm shares the same values as Yyoga: a mindful choice in the middle of the city. Spread over nearly 400 square metres, you'll find groceries from mainly Belgian, organic suppliers. There's a large fruit and vegetable room, one with dairy products and meat substitutes, and aisles stacked with condiments and dry goods. The space was too small for an in-house bakery and butchery, but there's a regular supply of fresh bread and vacuum-wrapped meat. The shop was founded as a co-operative, and a share in Färm costs €20. Besides a 2% discount

on your purchases, being a shareholder enables you to take part in meetings and workshops to improve the future of the shop.

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



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Yyoga co-founder Robbie Makroczy demonstrates a pose at his new school in Brussels



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# This is not a pop group

Ictus have commissioned new compositions for their upcoming Kaaitheater performance

Christophe Verbiest

Contemporary music ensemble Ictus are long-time collaborators with dance ensemble Rosas. For their new performance, *This is Not a Pop Song (II)* at Brussels' Kaaitheater, they've commissioned new songs on the theme of pop, but with a twist. Founder Tom Pauwels talks to *Flanders Today*.

“Every day I pinch myself,” Tom Pauwels says joyfully. “I’m being paid to listen to music, to work with composers, to come up with new projects. Amazing!”

Pauwels is the guitarist and one of the two leaders of Ictus, the chamber orchestra from Brussels that’s been around for 25 years. Even if you’ve not been to their concerts, there’s a good chance you’ll have heard them. *Vortex Temporum*, *Drumming* and *Mikrokosmos* are three pieces that dance ensemble Rosas will be performing all over Europe during the first half of the year. Apart from all being choreographed by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, they have another trait in common: The music is played by Ictus.

“Our collaboration works on different levels,” explains Pauwels, who shares artistic duties with pianist Jean-Luc Plouvier. “Listening to new music that Rosas receives, suggesting music that really seems fitting for them. For instance, a few years ago Jean-Luc gave *Vortex Temporum* to Anne Teresa. It’s a constant dialogue.”

One wonders where Ictus would be without Rosas, with whom they share a building in the southwest of the capital. Looking at their agenda, the concerts seem to be overshadowed by Rosas performances. “I can’t deny that Rosas is an important partner,” Pauwels admits. “It’s a great synergy, but it changes from one season to the next.”

This year, he continues, “there’s an extremely large number of



performances due to the success of *Vortex Temporum*. Over the years, Ictus has had the chance to grow, partially thanks to Rosas. But we also play 50, 60 concerts each year, in different line-ups, from trios to the whole ensemble.”

“A group that stays together for so long, that’s amazing”

Ictus have been around for more than two decades, and they’re made up of 21 musicians, several of whom have been there since the beginning. Pauwels, who turns 40 this year, is the youngest member of the ensemble. “A group that stays together for so long, that’s amazing,” he says. “We’ve built up quite a lot of expertise. I can imagine in 10 years,

due to advancing age, we might be getting problems with – it’s only human – memory or concentration.” With that in mind, Ictus, together with the ensemble Spectra, is investing a lot of time in an advanced Master’s in Contemporary Music at the School of Arts in Ghent: Young musicians from all over the world are being coached. “It’s an alternative form of scouting,” Pauwels explains. But he also adds firmly: “I think Ictus are at the height of their skills. What we do with Rosas for *Vortex Temporum* – playing the work by heart, without a conductor, for more than 100 dates all over the world – wouldn’t have been possible 10 years ago.”

Pauwels and Plouvier are the artistic directors, but they’re no dictators.

“We want musicians with a strong personality, who bring their own ideas and dare to question ours,” says Pauwels.

Next week, Ictus is performing *This Is Not a Pop Song (II)*, about two years after the first edition. “In the past 10 years or so, a sub-group spontaneously emerged within Ictus, with important roles for electric guitar, synthesizers and drums. But within a very heterogeneous context: mixing – and this has become our trademark – acoustic and electric instruments.”

If one of the four new works in the show has the traits of a pop song, it certainly won’t be your usual tune. “We asked composers to write short compositions, using the pop song as a model, but twisting it. Or not;

that’s the composer’s choice.” All but one has vocals.

An impetus for both editions of *This Is Not a Pop Song* was the presence of flautist Michael Schmid. “He’s a great performer and vocal artist,” says Pauwels. He was the only vocalist during the first edition, but this time around he gets a couple of sidekicks: Austrian composer Eva Reiter and Brussels-based American dancer, choreographer and performance artist Eleanor Bauer will both sing their own compositions.

“In the first edition, we noticed that we tapped into a new audience. And we see, a bit to our surprise, that our regular, slightly older audience has stayed interested, too.”

*This Is Not a Pop Song (II)* wasn’t planned in advance for this season, and the costs weren’t covered in the ensemble’s budget. So they turned to crowdfunding. Participants could give an amount ranging from €10 to €100, for which they would receive perks, from an Ictus ringtone (€10) all the way to an invitation to a rehearsal and one of the concerts (€100).

But having only collected €725 of the desired €4,400, it wasn’t a huge success. Or, as Pauwels phrases it: “It’s a fiasco. The money will be returned to sender; that was the deal if we didn’t succeed.”

But it doesn’t mean the end of Ictus’ crowdfunding ambitions. “It’s a way of discovering who our audience is,” he says.

Pauwels also has a little surprise for everyone who expressed the desire to support *This Is Not a Pop Song (II)*: They’ll still receive a free ringtone. But not of a pop song.

18 February, 20.30

29 March, 20.00

Kaaitheater

Saintelettessquare 2, Brussels

deSingel

Desguinlei 25, Antwerp

► [www.ictus.be](http://www.ictus.be)

## MUSIC REVIEWS

### Mörg

#### Wat houdt de honden stil? • Mörg

A qualified industrial designer, Geert Hautekiet has worked in theatre and as an illustrator, a storyteller and a musician over the past 20 years. His new band, Mörg (not to confused with his 2008 project Mr & Mr Mörg), combine a whole series of string instruments (guitars, dobro-ukulele, even a tennis racket!) with low-pitched brass (euphonium, sousaphone) and violins. On their debut, *Wat houdt de honden stil?* (What Keeps the Dogs Quiet?), this results in an eclectic rootsy sound, varying from zestfully rocking to intimate folk-bluesy. The album is only available on vinyl, but at shows the band sell a do-it-yourself CD kit.

► [www.morg.kaiet.be](http://www.morg.kaiet.be)

### Eriksson Delcroix

#### For Ever • Waste My Records

The couple Björn Eriksson (with credits ranging from Zita Swoon to The Broken Circle Breakdown Band) and Nathalie Delcroix (Laïs) share a love for country music. For their

previous collaboration, The Partchesz, they mixed the genre with electronics, but there’s nothing of the sort on the new album *For Ever*. The dozen country duets here hark more back to traditional country (is that the clatter of hooves in “The Valley”?) than the hip alt country of the past decade. But that’s fine: The twosome present heartfelt songs that never sound nostalgic. Antwerp has become a suburb of Nashville.

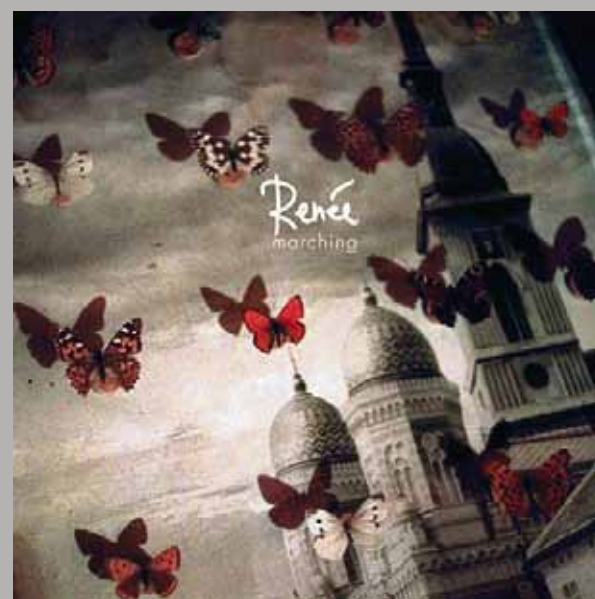
► [www.erikssondelcroix.com](http://www.erikssondelcroix.com)

### Renée

#### Marching • Zeal

Two years after her praised debut, *Extending Playground*, Renée Sys, who hails from the small West Flemish town of Sijsele, surprises with the follow-up, *Marching*. It was born out of the singer’s love for marching bands: Each song started with a drum rhythm and a vocal. The rest of the instruments were added later. The result is a collection of pop songs, not just mere rhythmic ideas, with at their heart Renée’s highly addictive voice.

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





WEEK IN ARTS  
& CULTURESportpaleis, AB  
top 10 in world

Sportpaleis in Antwerp and Ancienne Belgique (AB) in Brussels have been listed among the most popular concert venues in the world by the American concert industry magazine *Pollstar*. AB came third in the world list of club-size venues, with 236,768 tickets sold in 2013, behind House of Blues in Boston and 9:30 Club in Washington, DC. "As a Flemish cultural institution, the Ancienne Belgique ... shows a small region can become a giant in the concert landscape," said culture minister Joke Schauvliege. Sportpaleis came in eighth in the world ranking for arena venues, with 741,319 tickets sold in 2013. That list is led by the O2 Arena in London on 2.1 million tickets. The Lotto Arena in Antwerp came in 86th place, with the Ethias Arena in Hasselt also making the Top 100 at 94.

Stromae wins  
record eight MIAs

Hip-hop and dance master Stromae swept Flanders' Music Industry Awards last Saturday, winning all eight categories for which he was nominated. The wins – for Dance, Solo Male Performer, Pop performer, Album, Composer, Artwork, Video clip and Hit of the Year ("Formidable") – are particularly notable for the Flemish awards show as Stromae is a *Brusselaar* who sings in French. The singer broke the record for the number of wins in one year (previously held by Milow with five). Other winners included Trixie Whitley for best Solo Female Performer, Hooverphonic for best Group and Daan, who won for Alternative. A Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to Rocco Granata, the Italian accordionist and singer who rose from the mining community of 1950s Limburg to the top of the pop charts with his hit song "Marina". The movie of the same name based on his life is in cinemas now.

► <http://mias.een.be>

Non-native speakers  
sought for play

Fast Forward, the theatre company that presents plays for those learning Dutch, is looking for non-native speakers of the language to perform in its next production. Participants need to be at least 18 years old and able to sing for the production of *Gelukkig zijn* (*Being Happy*). Rehearsals begin in the autumn, and the piece will be performed early next year. Anyone interested should email [info@fast-forward.be](mailto:info@fast-forward.be) or visit the website for more information.

► [www.fast-forward.be](http://www.fast-forward.be)

## It's all Greek to me

## Greek presidency's cultural programme shows the good, the bad and the ugly

Georgio Valentino

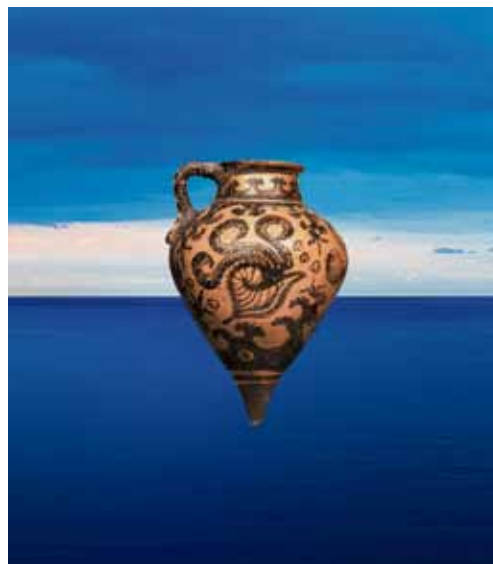
On 8 January, the Lithuanians handed over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union to the next in line: the Greeks. This not the first time that the Hellenic Republic has held the rotating, six-month presidency. It has happened thrice before – in 1983, 1988 and 2003 – albeit under far different circumstances than today. This is the Greek state's first presidency since Europe's economic fortunes took a turn for the worse, and the Greek people were made scapegoats for an entire continent's financial short-sightedness. All the more proof that the presidency is a wholly symbolic office. Symbolism has its place, but for all the fanfare in Brussels, it's business as usual in Athens. Still private-sector unemployment climbs as public-sector services are cut ever closer to the bone. Still Greek politics edge nearer the precipice of desperate violence. Still Europe routinely castigates the Greeks for their imputed financial and political irresponsibility.

And, naturally enough, the Greeks are losing faith in the European project.

The only sign here in Brussels of that on-going discontent was a peaceful demonstration that infiltrated the presidency's inaugural concert last month. Before the performance, a handful of Greek activists unfurled a political banner, launched a chant and were promptly hissed into silence by countrymen in black ties and military uniforms, who were presumably just happy to be there enjoying an evening of Händel, Hasse and von Gluck.

Hence the irony of the cultural programme of the Greek presidency. It's at best *unseemly* to celebrate institutional art in a diplomatic bubble when your constituents suffer back home. Such sybaritic displays can only further discredit the Greek government and the European Union in the eyes of not just the Greek people, but the European citizenry at large.

But fortunately, that opening gala was a rare misstep in a programme that is, if not necessarily 'engaged' in the Sartrean sense, at least mindful of its political context.



© Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports

Bozar was the presidency's natural partner in the endeavour, being, as it is, in the midst of a years-long focus on the Mediterranean basin. This began with the 2012 exhibition *Mapping Cyprus: Crusaders, Traders and Explorers*, continues with *Nautilus: Navigating Greece* and later moves later into projects exploring Byzantine influence on Siennese painting and Renaissance representations of the Ottoman Empire.

The *Nautilus* exhibition currently on view is an integral part of the project and doubles as the centrepiece of the presidency's cultural programme. Its curators take the long view, tying together millennia of Greek history with the common thread of maritime exchange. Nobody will be surprised to learn that the Mediterranean has impressed itself on this seafaring people's imagination from the start.

Here is the expression of that imagination, or at least a taste of it. One hundred works from antiquity to the present day are on display. Many of the archaeological pieces are shown outside of Greece for the first time, including one 3,500-year-old fragment of a wall painting considered among the earliest known representations of ships in

ancient art.

Not all the objects are so old. Some of the exhibition's most striking (and intact) works are its two dozen contemporary paintings, sculptures, photographs and installations.

These pieces anticipate the spring/summer exhibition *No Country for Young Men*, dedicated to the new generation of Greek artists working under a cloud of crisis. *No Country* aims to show that, although Greece's recent woes present challenges, they also offer the proverbial silver lining: namely an opportunity – even an obligation – to rethink the status quo and pioneer new forms.

Cinematek celebrates the same spirit in contemporary Greek film, which has been anything but depressed these past five years. On the contrary, a new wave has emerged, led by directors like Yorgos Lanthimos (*Alps*, *Dogtooth*) and Athina Tsangari (*Attenberg*). The film museum's New Greek Cinema series presents a cross-section of the movement's output, much of which has never been screened in Belgium.

There are concerts, too. Among Bozar's musical guests are clarinet virtuoso Dionysis Grammenos, singer Savina Yannatou and her band Primavera en Salonico as well as folk legend George Dalaras, who headlines this year's edition of the Balkan Trafik festival.

So much for the official programme. Local Philhellenes are marking the Greek presidency in their own way, most notably Brussels' world music centre Art Base. It hosts an extensive series of traditional concerts as part of the fringe festival. Later this month, Greek a-cappella quintet Stringless will perform their smooth vocal harmonies. Speaking of harmony, international bouzouki ensemble Kosmokrotors will in March unite Greek, Dutch and Belgian musicians who sing Athens' trademark urban folk music *rebetiko* in three languages.

Until 27  
April

Bozar  
Ravensteinstraat 23,  
Brussels  
► [www.bozar.be](http://www.bozar.be)

## Photographers submerged into the Sochi story

Thousands of reporters are descending on the Russian city of Sochi to cover the Winter Olympics, but Dutch photojournalists Rob Hornstra and Arnold van Bruggen arrived earlier than most. They started work on their Olympic story in 2009, arguing that the way to cover the multi-billion euro transformation taking place for the Games was to be there while it was happening.

They also wanted to see how far the ripples caused by the Games extended, which meant venturing further into the Caucasus region, from the contested country of Abkhazia, around 40 kilometres from Sochi, through war-torn North Ossetia and Chechnya, to Dagestan on the shores of the Caspian Sea. In all, they made 11 trips to the region over five years.

With so many places to see and people to meet, this form of "slow journalism" produced a vast amount of material. Hornstra and van Bruggen have told their story year-by-year in themed books, newspapers and exhibitions, as well as in a massive report on the whole endeavour.

The relatively modest selection at the FotoMuseum in Antwerp only scratches the surface, yet *The Sochi Project: An Atlas of War and Tourism in the Caucasus* still provides a fascinating primer on the Olympic city, as well as an insight into this highly engaged form of photojournalism.

In Sochi itself, Hornstra and van Bruggen



© Rob Hornstra, courtesy Fialand Gallery (Amsterdam, Paris)

Striptease dancer Aliona waits outside the restaurant of the Zhemchuzhina Hotel, where she works nights

documented the conditions of migrant workers brought in to transform the city, but also explore the hotels, beaches and sanatoria that have made it a tourist attraction since the Soviet era.

Hornstra's images range from close-up portraits, such as their favourite "floor lady" from one vast hotel, to more documentary photographs of workers, residents and tourists. One prominent series depicts the singers they found performing in practically every restaurant in the resort.

Eclectic in their methods, the pair also shoot architectural studies, from brash new developments to Soviet ruins, and landscapes that open up the region as they move deeper into the Caucasian mountains. There are forensic images of bullet fragments and bloodied clothing, pictures of pictures, videos and photos found on their travels.

The images are striking as art, particularly the portraits, yet each also plays a role in the journalistic narrative. Time and again, this way of working makes the political personal, deepening our appreciation of what it means to live in these often-troubled situations. It is also fascinating to see how often the reporters themselves become part of the story they are telling.

Ian Mundell

Until 2  
March

FotoMuseum  
Waalsekaai 47, Antwerp  
► [www.fotomuseum.be](http://www.fotomuseum.be)



From Palmen to Pussy Riot  
Mind the Book

20-23 February | Vooruit, Ghent

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

Mind the Book, three full days of indulgence in authors, debates and book-buying, is back in Ghent after spending last year in Antwerp. It's a bold little international festival in its focus on non-fiction, which leaves right out sure-fire names that draw in the crowds. But for the lack of Tom Lanoyes and Ian McEwans, there is a wealth of intellectual prowess in the room – actually several rooms spread across Ghent's labyrinthine culture centre Vooruit. And this year the English-language choices are many. The timing couldn't have been better for authors concerned with human rights; this month's Olympics in Sochi has got debates on the subject infiltrating both our online and offline lives. A series of critical articles got British correspondent Luke Harding of *The Guardian* kicked out of Moscow in 2011, but he had enough material to publish *Mafia State: How One Reporter Became an Enemy of the Brutal New Russia*. His latest



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book covers the story around whistleblower Edward Snowden. At Mind the Book, Harding presents the talk "Freedom of Speech: Snowden and Pussy Riot"

together with Russian/American Putin biographer Masha Gessen, known for her interviews with the currently *very* famous Russian punk band. Her brand new book is called *Words Will Break Cement: The Passion of Pussy Riot*. There's more on the Russian theme from writer and historian Catherine Merridale, who will present her new book *Red Fortress: the Secret Heart of Russia's History*. Her knowledge of the Kremlin building alone will impress you. Other English-language highlights include the multi-talented psychologist and author Andrew Solomon, who will bring along his newest book *Far from the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity*, and Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (pictured), whose new book *Americanah* introduces us to a memorable group of new immigrants to the US. And a little nod to fiction indeed: During Mind the Book, Flemish culture minister Joke Schauvliege will hand over the Flemish Community's Prize for Letters during a special event featuring Dutch author Connie Palmen. **Lisa Bradshaw**

CONCERT

GET TICKETS NOW

Sisters of Mercy  
22 May, 20.00 | Ancienne Belgique, Brussels

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

In most parts of the world, Sisters of Mercy are considered a cult band, whose body of work commands critical respect and a modest but die-hard following. In Belgium, it's a different story. Almost 40 years after forming in mid-1970s Leeds, Andrew Eldridge's goth-rock outfit continue to sell out every show.

Eldridge is the only original member left and, although the Sisters haven't recorded any new material since 1990, they are known for constantly re-inventing early hits like "Body and Soul". One final bit of trivia: Eldridge named the band after a Leonard Cohen song, *Georgia, Georgia*.



PERFORMANCE

Ghost Road  
19 February, 20.00 | 30CC, Leuven | ► [www.30cc.be](http://www.30cc.be)

Ghent musical theatre company LOD takes us to a deserted town where the sole remaining inhabitant, an old woman, tells a haunting story of boom and bust. The concept was inspired by a road trip that creators Fabrice Murgia and Dominique Pauwels took through the American southwest. Murgia developed the scenario, while Pauwels undertook the musical direction. Since its Rotterdam premiere in 2012, Ghost Road has been on a voyage of its own, touring through the Netherlands, Belgium and ultimately France. If all goes well, it will form the opening chapter of a trilogy. Murgia plans to pick up the narrative in an abandoned Chilean mining town (used by Pinochet as a political prison) and, later, the radioactive ghost town of Fukushima. (in Dutch) **GV**



© Kurt Van der Elst

VISUAL ARTS

Jan Vanreit: Losing Face  
Until 30 March | Kazerne Dossin, Mechelen

► [www.kazernedossin.eu](http://www.kazernedossin.eu)

Flemish painter Jan Vanreit's work is interwoven with the violent history of 20th-century Europe, but where textbooks give us an aerial view of cataclysmic events like the Second World War and the Holocaust, Vanreit gets up close. His focus on the individual and its most distinguishing feature, the face, emphasises the human dimension of these epic tragedies. Millions of people were persecuted, imprisoned, murdered or escaped. And each has a story to tell. The host museum has a story of war, loss and change of its own. Mechelen's Kazerne Dossin began as an army barracks before being requisitioned by the SS during the German occupation and used as a transit hub for Jewish prisoners bound for



Auschwitz. The site has a new face now: Holocaust memorial, museum and documentation centre. **GV**

CLASSICAL

Leif Ove Andsnes  
16 February, 20.00 | Bozar, Brussels | ► [www.bozar.be](http://www.bozar.be)

Norwegian Leif Ove Andsnes is no run-of-the-mill pianist. Thanks to his technical virtuosity, his vision (he once landed a grand piano on a mountaintop via helicopter for an unconventional recital) and his good works (he participated in the Feel the Music programme, which gave deaf children the chance to make music), Andsnes is recognised as one of the pre-eminent pianists of his generation. His most recent laurel: He was inducted last year into British magazine *Gramophone's* Hall of Fame. His latest preoccupation is Beethoven. He frequently performs the concertos with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, but for this concert at Bozar, he plays a solo programme of the mad genius' best-loved sonatas. **GV**



Concert

Antwerp

**Giovanni Di Domenico:** The Brussels-based Italian pianist and his five-piece band play at Antwerp's landmark jazz bar. The self-taught musician comes from the new school of jazz and is influenced by world music and radical political theory  
**18 FEB 21.00 at Café Hopper, Leopold de Waelstraat 2**  
► [www.cafehopper.be](http://www.cafehopper.be)

Classical

Antwerp

**Tacács Quartet:** World-famous Czech string quartet (and *Gramophone* Hall of Famers) perform works by Mozart and fellow countrymen Janáček and Dvořák. The concert focuses on the tension between tradition and modernism  
**15 FEB 19.15 at De Singel, Desguinlei 25**  
► [www.desingel.be](http://www.desingel.be)

Visual Arts

Brussels

**Impressions from the Caucasus:** Several Brussels cultural institutions participate in a multidisciplinary exploration of the region. This exhibition features work by several contemporary artists  
**Until 28 FEB at Pianofabriek, Fortstraat 35**  
► [www.pianofabriek.be](http://www.pianofabriek.be)

Performance

Brussels

**K:** An original story of a woman's love for her husband and children – and the secrets she keeps from them – presented by Brussels theatre company Wijngaard (in Dutch)  
**15-23 FEB at De Markten, Oude Graanmarkt 5**  
► [www.demarkten.be](http://www.demarkten.be)

Ostend

**Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme:** This Flemish adaptation of Molière's satirical comedy is performed by students from Onze-Lieve-Vrouw University College (in Dutch)  
**13-15 FEB 20.00 at De Grote Post, Hendrik Serruyslaan 18A**  
► [www.degrotepost.be](http://www.degrotepost.be)

Family

Antwerp

**The Wizard of Oz:** Musical adaptation of the classic dust-bowl fairy tale. Dress the kids as one of L Frank Baum's characters and you may win a meet-and-greet with Dorothy or another prize (in Dutch)  
**14-15 FEB at Stadsschouwburg, Theaterplein 1**  
► [www.stadsschouwburgantwerpen.be](http://www.stadsschouwburgantwerpen.be)



# Talking Dutch

## Mind the gaffe

Derek Blyth

Yves Leterme is a former Belgian prime minister who is famous for his gaffes. His most famous – and on an international level – was in 2007 when he was asked on television if he knew the Belgian national anthem, and he made the fatal mistake of singing France’s “La Marseillaise”. He has made so many blunders in fact that the phrase *een Letermeke doen* – making a little Leterme – refers to a blooper. Leterme has been making those little blunders on social media since the early days of Twitter. In 2010, he sent a mysterious tweet from Kinshasa to his many thousands of followers that read, in English: “Not at all. Want to learn to know you. You to?” In 2011, he tweeted: *Missch klopt het niet. Maar dat vertel je me zondagav? Werkte je bij Adecco?* – Maybe it’s not right. But you can let me know on Sunday night? Do you work at Adecco? This was quickly followed by: *Als ik teveel vraag, zeg maar. Wil je nt stalken* – If I’m asking too many questions, just tell me. I don’t want to stalk you. Leterme revealed another tantalising detail of his private life in early 2012 with a tweet that read, in English: “Is Henry with you now?” Later that same year, he raised eyebrows again by tweeting: *Goeie morgen. Heb geen oog dicht gedaan na onze telefoon... Xx* – Good morning. I’ve not slept a wink since our phone call... Xx. A few months later, he simply added to the mystery with the laconic tweet: “P”. Leterme, who is now deputy secretary-general of OECD, was back in the news last week with another Twitter gaffe. *Goeie morgen boe... Kga nu nog maar opstaan. Xx* – Good morning moo... Gotta get up now. Xx. The message was probably meant for one person, but it ended up getting sent to Leterme’s 73,200 followers. *Leterme beseftte wellicht snel dat hij opnieuw een*



*blunder had begaan en wiste de tweet onmiddellijk van zijn account* – Leterme quickly realised that he had committed another blunder and immediately deleted the tweet from his account, wrote *De Standaard*. Unfortunately, not quickly enough. The tweet was picked up by @RobbySallaets, who retweeted: *BREAKING! Yves Leterme bedriegt zijn geit met een koe!* – BREAKING! Yves Leterme cheating on his goat with a cow! (Leterme is known to be very fond of goats, which he once referred to as “the poor man’s cow”). The TV programme *De ideale wereld* has now developed a game based on the former prime minister’s blunders called “Leterme’s tweetschiet” – Leterme’s Tweet Shooting Gallery (pictured). *Proficiat, jij bent Yves Leterme’s nieuwe persverantwoordelijke* – Congratulations, you are Yves Leterme’s new press officer, it says. *Schiet jij zijn gênante tweets af voor ze de buitenwereld bereiken* – shoot down his embarrassing tweets before they reach the outside world. *Tien tweets missen betekent ontslag!* – 10 missed tweets and you’re fired.

► <http://deidealewereld.vier.be/tweetschiet>

## VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY

**Robin Wauters** @robinwauters  
Found out two things about @OfficialBirdy just now: she’s part Flemish and her ‘People Help The People’ song is actually a cover. #TIL

**Ramon Suarez** @ramonsuarez  
I really like Ghent. It would be nice to live here a while and finally Nederlands leren

**Lizzie Davey** @WanderfulWorld1  
In Bruges: I Need Your Help! <http://wanderful-world.com/2014/02/07/in-bruges-i-need-your-help/> ... #travel #Belgium

*In response to: Brussels region bans open-air GMO crops*  
**Nadia Ceratto, PhD**@ncbennevis @flanderstoday very proud of it! #opensociety #righttochoose #GMO

*In response to: Crevits approves €3.1m for shuttles to remote workplaces*  
**Madhu Koppamam:** This is a commendable effort by Ms Crevits to reduce private transportation and increase public transportation. However, these remote areas contribute to the Catch-22 situation where there are too few buses for the people living there forcing them to use their own transport leading the authorities to scrap routes because there are not enough people travelling on them.

*In response to: Westvleteren best beer in the world – again*  
**Tamsin Hart Visagie:** You can only drink it at the abbey cafe – In het Vrede – in Westvleteren. So worth it! They have a website. Very difficult to buy to take home.

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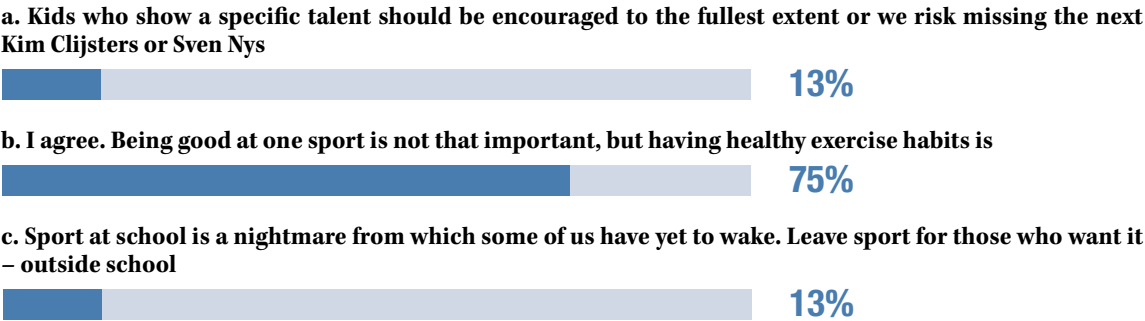
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## Poll

According to a research project at UGent, school children should take part in a variety of sports rather than concentrating on just one in order to develop their motor skills. What do you think?



It seems that *Flanders Today* readers agree with the research. Three-quarters of you were of the same moderate opinion – that healthy exercise for schoolchildren is more important than success at any particular sport. Too many children, according to a Ghent researcher, are too focused on a sport they like, to the detriment of their broader motor skills. Leave sport to one side, says researcher Job Fransen, and have children develop a range of physical skills. You agreed by a large majority. The two other positions – concentrate on finding future sports stars or forget school sports altogether – could barely muster any support between them.

**Next week’s question:**  
Belgium’s three regions will shortly begin a test project to charge a toll of up to 9 cents for every kilometre we travel in our cars on the roads. What do you think?  
Log in to the *Flanders Today* website and click on the VOTE button on the homepage!

## THE LAST WORD

### No-show snow

“There will be no cold snap in the coming two weeks, either. But still it won’t be a record winter. 2006-2007 was even milder.”  
VTM meteorologist David Dehenaauw on the continuing mild weather

### House call

“If people would stay home for three to five days to let the sickness run its course, there would be 75% fewer flu cases, and that all through the flu season.”  
Professor Niel Hens of Hasselt University advises against taking the flu in to work

### Prince Charming

“I don’t like to stand here by myself, so let’s stand together.”  
Prince Laurent plucked a member of the public from the audience at the Music Industry Awards to help him give a prize to Stromae

### Doctor’s orders

“I didn’t think I’d be able to do it, but I’m 77, and I realise there are some things my body can no longer handle. I’ve promised the doctor I’ll listen to his advice.”  
Famed Flemish art curator Jan Hoet was forced to take a month off work after having a second heart attack last month

