

Tram-pede

Tram network to increase by 25% in one of the transport ministry's biggest investments ever

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Green belt

Both a business park and housing will be part of Brussels' first sustainable quarter

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Hemmerechts on Martin

Kristien Hemmerechts on her book based on the life of one of Belgium's most-hated criminals

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Breaking the silence

Website launched by Flemish parents supports children with a little-known anxiety disorder

Andy Furniere

It's not uncommon for children to be shy in their first days at school, but what if they haven't uttered a single word in class after a whole month? In that case, they are probably suffering from selective mutism, an anxiety disorder that is still largely unknown. A new website launched by a group of Flemish parents is trying to spread the word to other parents, teachers, therapists and politicians.

Parents of children with selective mutism established Selective Mutism Flanders about two years ago. Their first initiative was to set up a Facebook page and group for parents to exchange experiences and talk about their concerns. About two weeks ago, they also launched the website, with tips and scientific information for teachers, parents and professionals such as speech therapists and psychologists. One of the driving forces of the organisation is Sam Biesemans from the Brussels district of Watermaal-Bosvoorde. His 18-year old son, Matteo, suffered from selective mutism for

almost 12 years. "From the start of nursery school, he was unable to speak in class or even interact through nodding or shaking his head," says Biesemans (*pictured above with Matteo*). "At home, he could speak to us without any problem."

Although the disorder has been known to scientists for decades, selective mutism has only recently been defined as an anxiety disorder. Typically, children with selective mutism have normal speech development but completely shut down in an environment where they are uncomfortable because of certain social expectations from others – mostly adults with

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New trams on the way for Antwerp, Ghent and the coast

Flanders' Tram capacity will increase by 25% with €320 million injection

Derek Blyth

Flanders' transport minister Hilde Crevits announced a new plan to invest €320 million in a fleet of new trams for Antwerp, Ghent and the coast. The investment will increase the tram capacity on De Lijn routes by 25%. "This is the biggest order ever placed by the transport ministry," Crevits said.

The government of Flanders plans to introduce low-floor trams, which allow passengers to enter without using steps, making them more accessible for all users. The new trams, due to come into operation in 2018, will also be equipped with screens providing travel information.

Antwerp will receive the biggest boost with an extra 66 trams added to the current stock of 155. Some of the city's older trams

will gradually be removed from service as the new rolling stock is installed. Ghent is to get 18 new trams under the plan. The city has 40 older trams, which will be gradually taken out of service.

Antwerp and Ghent are already due to get more trams later this year under a previous government order, with Ghent receiving 10 new trams, while Antwerp's network will be boosted by 34 new models.

Crevits also announced plans to introduce 62 new trams to run along the 68-kilometre coastline. In addition, she is considering a plan to extend the tram line inland to Veurne, which would require a further five trams.



Thousands of First World War munitions found in Westhoek

Police in the westernmost corner of West Flanders – the former war zone now known as the Westhoek – seized thousands of unexploded munitions dating from the First World War last weekend. The munitions were discovered by farmers but never declared to the police.

The bombs and shells, which never exploded and so are still technically live, were found in a barn on a farm in Langemark-Poelkapelle, north of Ypres, and were picked up by Dovo, the army's bomb disposal unit. The thousands of shells filled 10 containers. Further munitions were found at farms in Zonnebeke and Staden.

"This is extremely dangerous," said Langemark-Poelkapelle mayor Alain Wyffels. "If one shell explodes, it can set off a whole chain reaction, with deadly results."

The farmer is thought to have collected the shells he found from time to time – like many farmers in the area where heavy fighting took place during the Great War – without informing the police, as the law requires. Normally, when an unexploded arm is discovered,



Dovo takes the explosives to a safe spot to be destroyed in a controlled explosion.

The discovery of unexploded munitions from the war almost a century ago is known as the "iron harvest" and occurs regularly across what was the Western Front. "They're destroyed here in Poelkapelle, where there's a Dovo barracks specialised in disarming munitions and especially in dismantling toxic munitions," Wyffels said.

The three farmers concerned were not detained, but legal action could follow. *Alan Hope*

Olympic medals out of reach of Flemish athletes

Belgium's last medal hopes at the Sochi Winter Olympics were dashed when the women's bobsleigh duo of Hanna Mariën and Eefje Willemsen came in sixth in the finals. The team, dubbed the Belgian Bullets, had surged into fourth place after the second round, with a podium finish looking tantalisingly close.

The pair said that they had met their target of a finish in the top eight. "If a year ago you would have told me we would take sixth place here, I would not have believed you," Willemsen said.

In the second week of the Games, Katrien Aerts failed to reach the final of the half-pipe freestyle skiing event after she scored 54.40 for 17th place in the first round (see story, opposite page). In figure skating, Jorik Hendrickx – at 21, the youngest Belgian in Sochi – scored 214.04 points and a 16th place finish in his first Olympics, as he performed to Gershwin's "Rhapsody



in Blue".

The best medal hopes came earlier, with speed skater Bart Swings coming fourth in the 5,000m, fifth in the 10,000m and 10th in the 1,500m. Jelena Peeters came 12th in the 3,000m skating race, while Seppe Smits failed to qualify for the semi-finals in the slopestyle.

Leo Cendrowicz

New motorway planned to link Bruges and Knokke

Work will begin next month on one of the most expensive stretches of road ever built in Flanders, with a 12-kilometre link between Bruges and Knokke. The new motorway should improve the connection with the port of Zeebrugge.

At present, the only road out of the port is the N31, a regional road with one lane in each direction. Traffic frequently suffers long delays because the road includes a section of swing-bridge, which opens to allow ships to pass. The new road, the A11, will link Bruges with the E34 expressway between Knokke and Antwerp. The total cost is €694 million, or €58 million per kilometre, making it not only one of the largest projects in years but also one of the most expensive.

Public works minister Hilde Crevits pointed out that the link is more than just 12km of motorway. "There will also be 15km of cycle paths, bridges and tunnels," she said. "There's a lot of attention being paid to all road users and also to nature."

The project includes 500 metres of tunnels, 50 bridges and a 1,400-metre viaduct; €20 million of the cost involves compensation for farmers along the route for their land. Work begins in March and is due to be completed in 2017. *AH*

► www.a11verbint.be

Senate approves road signs in other languages

The Senate's home affairs committee approved a bill last week that would allow road signs in Belgium to appear in a language other than Dutch, French or German. According to the bill's sponsor, former interior minister Guido De Padt, the aim of the bill is to ensure that the many foreign truck drivers who use the country's roads can understand the signs correctly.

"Half of the trucks on our roads are registered abroad," De Padt said. "The drivers are mostly of foreign origin and unable to speak our national languages. They are not able to understand our road signs." The signs would also, of course, assist tourists in the country.

It will be up to the regions to decide whether a road needs to be equipped with multi-lingual road signs. "It might be helpful in cases of major road works, for road safety as well as the effective flow of traffic, if signs were also in English," De Padt said. "Multilingual signs are already a common feature in other countries, such as France and the Netherlands."

De Padt denied claims by N-VA and Vlaams Belang that the proposal was in breach of language laws. "The language laws should be respected, but that shouldn't cause us to lose touch with reality," he said. "As a transit country, we see a great many foreign truck drivers and motorists on our main roads." *AH*

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

100,000

visitors expected in October to a temporary pontoon bridge over the Scheldt river in Antwerp, in commemoration of the bridge used to help people flee the city at the start of the First World War

€17.3 million

in damages claimed by 1,424 victims of the severe storms in West Flanders in January. The provincial governor has asked for the storm to be declared a natural disaster

20%

of young people in Brussels left school in 2012 at the age of 18 without any diploma, up from 18% in 2011 and considerably more than the national average of 12%

70 Mb/s

speed of broadband internet with Belgacom's new VDSL2 network, which will be available in Mechelen shortly and spread to the rest of the country by 2016

€219,532

lifetime cost of bringing up a child in Flanders to age 25, including university, according to family organisation Gezinsbond – an average of €462 a month

WEEK IN BRIEF

A man suspected of being involved in the **29 incidents of rape by men posing as taxi drivers** in Brussels over the last three years turned himself in after being widely recognised in video footage aired by VTM. The footage was filmed in a bank where the victim withdrew money before being attacked in the Ter Kamerenbos. The man has admitted to sexual contact with the passenger but denies that it was an assault. The police believe there are three or four men involved in the case.

Football club **KRC Genk** fired their **coach**, Mario Been, last Sunday, just hours after the Limburg side lost 0-2 to Waasland-Beveren. It was the club's 12th defeat of the season and eighth in 10 games. Been, 50, previously managed Nijmegen Eendracht Combinatie and Feyenoord in his native Netherlands. Genk are currently in sixth position in the league and risk missing out on the playoffs. They are the last remaining Belgian Club in the Europa League and face Russian side Anzhi Makhachkala on Thursday.

Brussels is the **21st best city in the world for expats**, according to rankings by the international consultancy Mercer. The list is drawn up using criteria such as education, traffic and political stability. Vienna headed the list, just ahead of Zurich and Auckland, with the top three unchanged from last year. Worst place to live: Baghdad.

The city council of Maastricht in the Netherlands has given its approval to a plan to introduce a **high-speed tram route** between the city and Hasselt. The line is expected to carry some 9,000 passengers a day from 2018, for a 30-minute trip between the two city centres, joined by 10 stops in Flemish Limburg and three on the Dutch side of the border.

A team from the University of Leuven is **performing tests on 20**

baboons at the Institute of Primate Research in Kenya. In a report, the Anti-Vivisection Coalition (ADC) pointed out that the baboons are caught in the wild, while the European Parliament banned testing on animals caught in the wild in 2010. According to ADC, the Leuven researchers are circumventing the European regulation for experiments supported by the Flemish Fund for Scientific Research. The ADC has asked KU Leuven rector Rik Torfs to step in.

Flemish public broadcaster **VRT has been named government organisation of the year** by a jury made up of Ernst & Young, BNP Paribas Fortis and *De Tijd* newspaper. VRT won ahead of the Limburg reconversion agency LRM and the Flemish waste agency OVAM and was praised for its efficiency, innovation, strategy and customer service. The same jury named the Brussels public transport authority MIVB as government enterprise of the year for the Brussels-Capital Region, the first time that award has been given.

The high council for public health has issued a recommendation that doctors carry out only medically necessary echographies during pregnancy and **avoid the use of ultrasound for keepsake images**. The council said that there is a danger of over-exposure, especially when trying to achieve maximum image quality. Also, "exposure can be prolonged to allow others present to enjoy the view of the echo," the recommendation said.

The start of services by **Ryanair at Brussels Airport** will be greeted on Thursday by industrial action, unions said. Unions complain they were not involved in the negotiation of a contract between the Irish low-cost airline and baggage handler Swissport; they also fear that Belgian jobs may be lost to lower-cost Irish employees.

SALK, the strategic action plan to help **Limburg recover from the closure of Ford Genk**, has marked the creation of its first 1,000 jobs, after decisions last week on a new Ikea store in Hasselt, the extension of a distribution centre for Nike in Ham and the approval of a new prison in Leopoldsburg. The SALK programme has more than €200 million financing from the government of Flanders, the federal government and the EU.

Workers for the **Antwerp sanitation department downed tools** briefly last week in protest at plans by the city to reduce the number of trash collections drastically in the coming years, with residents forced to bring their rubbish to one of 230 sorting stations. A pilot project is due to start in the Dam and Linkeroever areas next year. After receiving assurances that there will be no job cuts, the department resumed work.

Flemish professional cyclist **Kristof Goddaert was killed in a traffic accident** while training last week. The 27-year-old racer for Switzerland's IAM Cycling was training in Antwerp when his front wheel became caught in a railway track. He lost control and fell into the path of a De Lijn bus. Team manager Michel Thétaz described Goddaert as "an exemplary professional rider and a quality person".

Public transport users' group TreinTramBus has criticised plans by the rail authority NMBS to **extend the scheduled times for 100 of the busiest train routes** in the country by up to 10 minutes. Spokesperson Jan Vansevenant said some changes were understandable, but the plan was also being used as an alibi to cover for infrastructure problems and to distract from the fact that no new trains are being added to the network, despite rising passenger numbers.

FACE OF FLANDERS

Leo Cendrowicz



Katrien Aerts

If there was one person who best reflected Flanders' hopes at the Sochi Winter Olympics, it would have to be freestyle skier Katrien Aerts. Like her compatriots, she returned home empty-handed from the games, yet her belief in her sport and her spirit seemed to embody the Olympic mantra that it is more important to take part than to win.

Others performed better, like the Belgian flag-carrier at the closing ceremony, speed skater Bart Swings, who came fourth in the 5,000-metre, fifth in the 10,000m and 10th in the 1,500m. And the so-called "Belgian Bullets" women's bobsleigh team of Hanna Mariën and Eefje Willemsen seemed at one point set for the podium before slipping back to sixth place. Aerts, by contrast, failed to reach the final of the inaugural women's half-pipe freestyle ski event after she scored 54.40 and 17th place overall. But she did so with a verve and dedication that proved inspirational. At 37, she was more than a decade older than most of her competitors, and Sochi was set to be her first and last Games. And she really worked for her place.

From Geel, Antwerp province, Aerts was always going to struggle to find nearby ski

slopes. Travelling by train would take up a huge chunk of time and money, so she spent half of her year living with her boyfriend in a caravan just outside the town of Maaseik in Limburg. "It's a cheap way to live, so I can spend all my money on the skiing," she explained. "I have no television and no internet. I just want to ski, and skiing gives me a lot more pleasure than watching television."

This threadbare approach is representative of Flemish athletes when it comes to winter sports. They are considered a sideline, barely deserving any official support. Yet Belgium can hardly blame its climate or geography for its poor results: neighbour the Netherlands saw its 41-strong delegation pick up 24 medals at Sochi. Still, Aerts defied the odds. She first put on skis aged five and turned pro in 2011, five years after her first half-pipe competition. She was tearful after the Sochi event, but went on to write an extensive post on website, describing the wild swings between confidence and anxiety as the games approached. "I'm proud of myself. I am forever and always an Olympian!"

► www.Katrienaerts.be

OFFSIDE

The Greatest Hembekenaar

Back in 2005, Father Damien won the vote for the Greatest Belgian of all time, for his work with lepers in the 19th century. The scientist and humanitarian Paul Janssen came second, and sporting legend Eddy Merckx came third.

There was little that was surprising about the upper reaches of the list, with other names like Brel, Mercator, Rubens and Daens. Something which cannot be said for the recent election of the Greatest Heembekenaar of all time by the people of Neder-Over-Heembeek.

Neder-Over-Heembeek is a neighbourhood in the north of Brussels bordered by Laken, Vilvoorde and the Brussels-Scheldt canal. It used to be two parishes: Neder Heembeek (Lower Heembeek) and Over Heembeek (Upper Heembeek), and when the two were merged in 1813 they kept both names. Just over a century later, in 1921, the municipality was swallowed up by Brussels-City.

The nominees reflected Heembeek's long and distinguished history. St Lendrik, a seventh-century holy man



who baptised the early people of Heembeek; Filip Van der Elst, the mayor who opposed plans by Leopold II to extend his royal domain into Heembeek; Virginie Peeters, who worked for infants, women and pensioners; Jozef

De Rons, an influential politician in Brussels; Louis Rutgeerts, a doctor who worked for 36 years in the local mother-and-baby clinic; Jan Knops, a pioneer of the Christian scouting movement Chiro; Karel Coosemans, a missionary in Congo; Michel Van Zeebroeck, who was busy with education, social work and local guilds; and Paula Luyten, who founded the local choral society Laetitia.

The winner was Jan Verbesselt (1913-2000), an expert of the local history of the area and of the whole Duchy of Brabant, separated in 1995 into Flemish and Walloon provinces. Verbesselt wrote a 27-volume history of the parishes of Brabant, which is still a reference for local historians. The photo shows him in the ceremonial uniform of the archers' guild of St Sebastian, which he helped revive. The plan now is to approach Brussels-City council to have a street or square in Heembeek named after him.

Alan Hope

FLANDERS TODAY

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With or without SPA

A sure way to find out which party is in a winning mood is to count the number of outsiders it attracts. Take N-VA, the nationalist party set to win the May elections. From traditional nationalists to entrepreneurial types, everybody is suddenly with the N-VA programme. The socialist SPA finds itself in a reverse situation: While some years ago, "white rabbits" – as outside candidates are known – flocked to the party, the socialists' lists are now filled with candidates who go way back.

These are not the best of times for SPA. For decades it competed to be the second party (behind the Christian-democrats); in 2003 the party still convinced 24% of the electorate. These days, SPA stands at 14% or lower still at the polls.

To many people, SPA's ideology, based on social equality, is outdated. N-VA takes a much tougher stance on social issues, opposing minimum wages, introducing "mini jobs" and promising cuts. It points to the PS, the French-speaking socialists, as the one obstacle in the way of necessary reform. This sits well with part of the electorate, many of whom are wealthy but feel uncertain about the future.

All of this places SPA in a difficult position, as defenders of "social prosperity" and the natural ally of the PS. SPA's recent congress was symptomatic of the many problems it faces.

For one, the speech by president Bruno Tobback was interrupted by a militant from the extreme left. The Flemish socialists face severe competition on the left, from PVDA, which is more radical, and Groen, which opposes the Oosterweel compromise on environmental grounds. PVDA is a fringe phenomenon, but any vote that goes to them is a vote lost to SPA.

To make matters worse, the congress also approved a proposition to legalise cannabis, much to the consternation of its leadership. Not only are the opinions on this matter divided, the media attention this startling turn of events got only distracts attention from the party's core message.

To avoid a total wash-out, SPA only has one option: to turn itself (even more) into the anti-N-VA. Mathematically, the next governments will include either N-VA or SPA (their differences have made a coalition between the two impossible). SPA now hopes to attract anyone who is scared off by N-VA's future policies. This, however, implies a defensive stance. Can this be as convincing as the change N-VA proposes?

Verhofstadt visits Kiev

Former prime minister was the first EU leader to speak to protesters

Derek Blyth

Former Belgian prime minister Guy Verhofstadt flew to Kiev last week to speak to anti-government protesters gathered in Independence Square. Verhofstadt, who was recently voted leader of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) in the European Parliament, was the first EU leader to address the protesters fighting the regime in Ukraine.

Verhofstadt (pictured, left) arrived in Kiev after several days of violent clashes that left at least 77 people dead and more than 500 injured. He travelled to Kiev with ALDE vice-president Marielle De Sarnez of France and Hans van Baalen of the Netherlands. In a rousing speech, he told the crowd: "I have the greatest respect for the courage of the Ukrainian people engaging in a long battle for their rights and in standing up for their values, European values."



He later told the press: "We were the first to inform the people there about the EU sanctions. The reaction from the crowds was overwhelming." Verhofstadt's speech was criticised by Idesbald Goddeeris, an expert in Slavic culture at the University of Leuven. "The EU has only added fuel to the fire with Guy Verhofstadt's intervention,"

he told the Flemish radio programme *Bonus*. "We claim to be arbitrators, but in fact we have intervened because of motives other than freedom and democracy. If we had wanted to help Ukraine, we should have done so during the 2005 revolution."

Verhofstadt dismissed the criticism as "completely absurd". He said there was no hidden agenda and the EU was supporting the Ukrainian opposition in its demand for "an end to corruption, media manipulation and government violence". The protests in Ukraine ended abruptly on Saturday after president Viktor Yanukovich fled the capital. Speaking from Sydney, the EU's economic and monetary affairs commissioner, Olli Rehn, said: "It is important that we provide a clear European perspective for the Ukrainian people who have shown their commitment to European values."

Brussels mayor bans Vlaams Belang campaign

Yvan Mayeur, the socialist mayor of Brussels, has banned a campaign planned by Flemish far-right party Vlaams Belang (VB) that involved mobile billboards inviting illegal immigrants to "go home or go to prison".

"We fear a disturbance to the public order," Mayeur's office said. The VB campaign is based on a similar campaign organised by the British government in six London boroughs last summer, which led the deputy prime minister Nick Clegg to criticise the campaign, claiming it was out of step with the tradition of British politics. The VB poster carries the slogan "Illegal? Go home or go to prison! Returning home? For more information..." and includes phone numbers for the state secretary of asylum and migration and for Fedasil, the federal asylum agency. "The slogan is in breach of the anti-racism law," Mayeur said. "The indication of the telephone number of the office of secretary of state Maggie De Block is a way of stoking unrest, which could lead to hostile demonstrations at her office."



The city would take all necessary measures to ensure the ban was respected, he said.

VB had planned to circulate the posters in the centre of the capital last week. "We've been advised by the police that we'd better not bring them," a spokesperson said. "At the launch of the campaign, it was clear that the message was a cause of controversy and debate. We'd rather avoid any incidents."

Filip De Winter, VB's leading member of parliament, said the ban was an example of "electoral propaganda" and promised the party would get its same message across in other ways. The poster campaign is currently still being planned for Antwerp, Mechelen, Vilvoorde and Ghent. *Alan Hope*

New plan to revitalise 100 Brussels neighbourhoods

The Brussels-Capital Region's public works minister, Brigitte Grouwels, hopes to increase residents' participation in the region by focusing on its 100 neighbourhoods. Launching a new project called Wiki'Hood last week, she said she wants to improve city life by encouraging citizens to play a more active role in their neighbourhoods.

"A large city like Brussels has to implement policies to promote community, participation and quality of life," Grouwels said. "Residents often live in isolation and don't take much interest in their neighbourhood because they don't feel connected with it. The result: People leave the city in search of community. We want to change this attitude by focusing on neighbourhood life."

Grouwels has developed Wiki'Hood based on a survey that shows the city is divided



into 100 unique neighbourhoods. She wants to encourage these neighbourhoods to develop initiatives to improve public space, social life, cleanliness and safety.

The project will begin with neighbourhood advice centres where the public can launch initiatives such as installing a sculpture, redesigning a square or launching a campaign to improve cleanliness. "Brussels has to become a city on a human scale," the minister said. "The Wiki'Hood model allows everyone to make a contribution." **DB**

Bourgeois launches Open Data Platform

Flanders' interior minister Geert Bourgeois has launched a new initiative that allows citizens and businesses to freely access government data with as few restrictions as possible. Developed in co-operation with the Ghent-based research institute iMinds, the Flemish Open Data Platform, available in four languages, allows free access to more than 1,200 databases maintained by the government.

Launching the scheme last week, Bourgeois quoted a report by the technology sector federation Agora, which estimates that allowing open access to Flemish government data represents an added value of at least €875 million. Across the EU as a whole, open data will generate €27 billion in direct economic gain and €40 billion to €140 billion in indirect gain. "Open Data provides unprecedented opportunities to offer innovative services that provide economic and social value," Bourgeois said. "Open Data also contributes to more transparency in government as well as more efficiency and helps the government extend the reach of its policies." **DB**

► <http://ckan-001.corve.openminds.be>

International officials welcome pandas at Zaventem

The two pandas loaned to Belgium by the Chinese arrived at Brussels Airport in Zaventem last Sunday. More than 120 representatives of the international press were on hand, with prime minister Elio Di Rupo and the Chinese embassy to Belgium, to welcome the pair, named Hao Hao and Xing Hui.

According to Di Rupo, Chinese president Xi Jinping has promised he will visit the pandas in Belgium. "It's a very special day," Di Rupo told VTM News, visibly moved. "This is something unbelievable for us. This is a sort of strengthening of the bond between our two countries."

Regardless of the effect of the pandas' arrival on international relations, the animals are not a gift. They will stay in Belgium for 15 years at the animal park Pairi



Daiza in Wallonia, with a federal government injection of €10 million. In return, the number of visitors to the park is expected to rise to meet the cost and more. The pandas' first visitors were children from the primary school in Tiegem, West Flanders, who were invited to Pairi Daiza to welcome the pandas to their new home. **AH**

Breaking the silence

Two Flemish youngsters are shining examples of overcoming selective mutism

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a certain authority.

Children can't, for instance, speak in class, answer simple questions at a shop or even interact with visitors at home. Many have relatives with anxiety disorders, speak different languages at home, are perfectionists or have certain symptoms of autism.

According to estimates by the World Health Organisation, seven children out of 1,000 suffer from selective mutism, which means there should be one child with the disorder in every average-sized school. However, research into selective mutism is still at an early stage, and there are not yet specific figures available for Flanders.

Selective Mutism Flanders hopes to encourage research by forging links with similar organisations abroad and setting up an international colloquium.

Joulia, the 10-year old daughter of Julie De Munck from Lokeren in East Flanders, was first diagnosed with autism and is also highly gifted. Just like Matteo, Joulia didn't speak from her first day at nursery school, and suffered from the disorder for about seven years.

Matteo grew up in a family where three languages were spoken: Dutch, French and Italian. "One time, when he was about 10, Matteo slipped on the floor during a swimming lesson and broke his thighbone," Biesemans recalls. "But he couldn't tell his teachers or classmates what had happened. When I arrived to get him, he broke down in tears and told me how much pain he was in." De Munck remembers a similar incident, when Joulia fell in the playground. "But she would almost always come home from school frustrated about something, like because she couldn't tell a teacher she hadn't been given the right lesson material in class. She then

“When he was 10, Matteo broke his thigh, but he couldn't tell his teachers what had happened

worked out this stress on us at home, often shouting in anger."

"Children with selective mutism have extreme, irrational fears of negative reactions if they were to say something," explains Goedele Vandewalle, a retired psychologist with long-term experience in dealing with the disorder at the Centre for Mental Healthcare in Antwerp. "Although they want to speak, the children are physically blocked from interacting and experience extreme stress, which sometimes even causes them to hyperventilate."

De Munck explains that her daughter would shut down if, for example, an unknown person asked her to just say "thank you". "Her face would turn into a kind of mask, with a cramped expression," she explains. "It almost seemed like she was smiling, but in fact she was terrified."



Matteo is now 18 and considering a career in the communications or media sector

As the children are completely unable to explain their feelings to teachers, many think they are being stubborn or even playing some kind of game. "Teachers often try to force them to answer or promise a reward when they do," says Vandewalle, "but such tactics are counterproductive because they only raise the pressure and tension for children." Because some teachers and directors didn't understand the disorder, they thought Matteo and Joulia wouldn't reach the Flemish *eindtermen*, the final requirements to graduate from secondary education. Because of her increasing stress, Joulia spent a few years in the special education system, but Matteo stayed in the regular education system for his entire school career. "We often had to battle against ignorance about the disorder and explain that selective mutism has nothing to do with intellectual deficits," says Biesemans.

Over the years, with help from speech therapists and psychologists, Matteo and Joulia's situations improved. "The best method is cognitive behavioural therapy," explains Vandewalle. "Gradually, we improve children's self-confidence with exercises in so-called *dapper denken en dapper doen* (brave thinking and brave doing)."

Therapists also help parents deal with their own fears and help their children in the best possible way.

For example, a therapist might ask children first to blow out a candle or to make an animal noise, before starting with counting games, speaking actual words and forming sentences. Over the years, both Matteo and Joulia also made close friends who functioned as their spokespeople in class. They would whisper their question or answer in the ear of this friend they trusted and he or she would speak for them. More elaborate speaking assignments could be taped on a recorder and

played in class. In the Netherlands, specialists have developed the pioneering treatment programme *Spreekt voor zich* (Speaks For Itself), which includes an educational computer game (*pictured below*). In the game, children can open gates in a castle only by making sounds, from hissing like a snake to forming actual sentences. A difficult step in the therapy process is when the therapists have to come to the school every week to assist the youngsters. "This is essential because children gradually have to adapt to the actual environment where they experience their fears; simulating the situations in a therapist's office is not sufficient," explains Vandewalle.

But the therapy is expensive, since it typically takes about two years to conquer the anxiety, and the social security system only refunds a small amount of the cost. The distance between the therapist's office and the school can also pose practical problems.

De Munck contacted her niece, Lynn Lammens, who is a speech therapist. But as Joulia was her first selective mutism patient, she had to look up a lot of specific information before the therapy could start. Lammens, a lecturer at the University College Ghent (HoGent), now strives to educate future

therapists and teachers about the disorder. HoGent has already organised a study session for teachers and therapists, and Lammens has given a lecture to school directors and staff from the pupil support agency CLB. Although therapy helped Matteo and Joulia make progress, they both only started to function normally after they changed schools. "In his old school, Matteo was scared about how his fellow students and teachers would react if he suddenly started speaking," says Biesemans. "But at the new school, he no longer had that reputation of 'the boy who doesn't speak'."

In the meantime, Matteo has mastered four languages and doesn't have any problems speaking in public anymore. He is even considering a career in the communication or media sector, perhaps, he says, as a sports journalist.

For Joulia, the step to a new school was bigger because she also went back to regular education. "As a highly gifted child, she didn't get the proper stimulation at special education and got bored," explains her mother. "At that time, she had started speaking to one teacher in particular, who she trusted a lot. But when her brothers started going to another school, Joulia decided that she would join them and start speaking normally to everyone from the first day. To our relief." Joulia now has taken up several hobbies, like music and plans to start creative studies later.

To avoid children with, for example, mild forms of autism or selective mutism being transferred to special education too soon, Flemish education minister Pascal Smet has proposed a decree for more inclusive education. It states that children with special needs should get more support in regular education, to keep up with the rest of the class.



© Spreekt voor zich/Stichting Behandeling Selectief Muisme

WEEK IN BUSINESS

Air ▶ Ryanair

The Ireland-based no-frills airline is seeking to hire 120 pilots and cabin staff for its Brussels operations. The carrier claims that initial reservations for its new flights are in line with expectations, with occupancy rates nearing 80%.

Banking ▶ Dexia

The ailing Belgo-French financial institution has sold its Dexia Assets Management operation to the US New York Life Investments company for €380 million. The company will be renamed Candriam.

Cinema ▶ Kinepolis

The Brussels-based multiplex cinema chain, with operations in Belgium, France and Spain, had 7.9% less visitors last year due to adverse weather and fewer blockbusters, the company announced. Turnover dropped 3.3% to €246 million, while earnings per share were up 12.4%.

Food service ▶ Starbucks

The coffee bar chain plans to open an outlet in Leuven later this year, its 12th after Antwerp, Zaventem, Ghent and Brussels.

Investments ▶ FIT

Foreign investors created more than 4,000 jobs in Flanders last year, according to figures released by the Flanders Investment and Trade. US companies accounted for up to 25% of the total, with French investors in second position at 15%.

Investment ▶ Ghent

The city of Ghent is listed as the 20th best city in the world in which to invest by the *Financial Times*. Number one on their list is London, followed by Helsinki and Eindhoven.

Media ▶ MP & Silva

The Italian media company has signed a €450 million guarantee with the Pro league to handle the auction for the television rights to the Belgian first division football matches for the next six years. Bidders for the rights include cable operators Belgacom, Telenet and Voo.

Supermarkets ▶ Colruyt

The Halle-based discount supermarket has signed a partnership agreement with the German Rewe, the Italian Conad and the Swiss Coop to set up a Brussels-based group buying co-operative called Core. The new operation increases purchasing power of its affiliates and is expected to increase pressure on suppliers.

STEM in Flemish Parliament

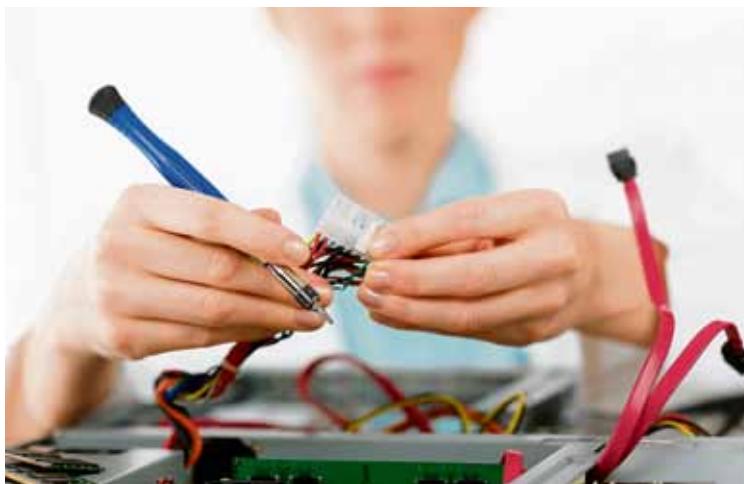
The government of Flanders' STEM event mixed tech students with industry

Derek Blyth

Flanders has set itself the task of becoming one of Europe's top five innovative regions by 2020. But it can only do that if it has smart young people working in the key areas of science, technology, engineering and maths – the STEM sectors.

STEM subjects are vital for the economic future of the region, but there aren't enough graduates specialised in these areas to fill the jobs available. The region has been working for some time to call attention to STEM studies and the careers to which they lead.

Its latest event took place last week in the Flemish Parliament in Brussels, where ministers, students and other experts gathered to discuss the challenges the region faces in terms of energy, the environment, mobility, food and ageing. Speakers



© iStockphoto
opportunity for the government to illustrate the enormous job opportunities for young people with STEM qualifications. The most recent figures show that Flanders currently has 11,000 vacancies in the information technology sector, 25,000 building jobs and 2,000 posts to be filled in the chemical industry every year.

Peeters had just returned from a trip to Berlin, where he spoke with German transport experts on the future of electric cars. He explored the idea of Flemish-German co-operation in developing electric vehicles. He also wants Flanders to develop expertise in new industries, like sustainable crops, nanotechnology and 3D printing. "We create added value with our hands and our brains," he tweeted.

on the agenda included minister-president Kris Peeters, technology entrepreneur and author Peter Hinssen, astronaut Frank De Winne and 10-year-old Lune Van Ewijk,

Flanders' Digital Girl of 2013. There were also workshops where industry professionals met students already involved in STEM studies. The programme was an

Flemish Chamber of Commerce lays out demands for new government



Former Belgacom boss demands €5 million

Didier Bellens, the former CEO of state-controlled telecoms company Belgacom who was removed from his post last autumn, has demanded €5 million in damages for what his lawyer described as "a politically motivated dismissal".

According to Bellens, his contract still had one year left to run when he was dismissed – equivalent to a salary of €2.5 million. To that is added interest and damages, bringing the total to almost €5 million.

If the government refuses to honour the request, his next step will be to bring a case to the employment tribunal. "We have a strong case," lawyer John Bigwood told *De Standaard*. "This was a politically motivated, unjustified dismissal, and we can prove it."

Bellens was sacked after a series of negative comments about the federal government and prime minister Elio Di Rupo. The government claimed there had been "a serious breach of confidence" but also "an accumulation of serious errors".

The federal minister for government enterprises, Jean-Pascal Labille, responded by saying that, while it is Bellens' "right to contest the decision that was taken by the government," their position is that he has no right to damages. AH

The next federal government needs to cut the charges imposed on employers, increase the personal allowance before income tax, reduce energy costs to industry and spend €150 million a year on infrastructure, according to the Flemish Chamber of Commerce (Voka). Those actions will lead to the creation of 165,000 jobs, the organisation said.

Voka presented its list of proposals last week for the new Flemish government that will form after the May elections.

The proposals should, read a statement,

restore the competitiveness of industries, while respecting the budgets of the various ministries.

The list includes five main initiatives. The employers' contribution to social security should be cut to 22% from the current level, which in the private sector amounts to about 32% of gross salary. This measure would cost €8.9 billion.

Another €2.4 billion would raise the tax threshold – the amount a person is allowed to earn before income tax kicks in – by €1,800

per person per year, providing the average family with €50 extra per month and lifting

43,000 out of poverty.

The cost of new infrastructure investment, at €150 million a year, is relatively low, and no figure is placed on a reduction of energy costs to a "competitive" level. Finally, there would be an absolute limit of 1% on public spending growth.

All levels of government taken together, spending would be allowed to grow from €197 billion now to €210 billion in 2019, instead of the forecast €231 billion. "This is a major challenge, which will demand a sustained effort by all of us and choices on the part of society, based on three principles: fairness, an efficient government and every person doing their part," said Voka's director-general Jo Lipeer. *Alan Hope*

SMEs created 9,600 jobs last year



Increased fares for Brussels taxis on the way

The cost of travelling by taxi in Brussels is to go up by 20% per kilometre, bringing the new total to €2 per kilometre. The increase is a compensation for taxi drivers for the introduction of the new digital taxi meter, which, earlier this year, led to taxi companies blockading the streets of the capital in protest.

The new meters will be introduced in early 2016, although the price increase for passengers is likely to come into force before the end of the current legislature in May this year, according to the office of Brussels transport minister Brigitte Grouwels. The cost of stepping into a taxi, currently €2.40, remains unchanged, as does the €2 supplement for rides beginning after midnight.

This is the second time in less than a year that Brussels taxis have increased their tariffs; in May last year the cost per kilometre went up by 14c to €1.80.

The government has also decided to abolish the double tariff that operates outside of Brussels' 19 districts. At the moment, the fare outside the Brussels-Capital Region is €2.70 per kilometre instead of €1.80. It will now become €2 as within the region. In addition, the annual tax paid by taxis to the region will also be reduced, from €575 a year to €200. AH

services (up 6.9%). Distribution, health care and transport also all added jobs. SMEs as a whole in Flanders now account for 640,000 jobs.

"We will keep on hammering on our demand for an across-the-board reduction in costs," Unizo said. "That's the only way to improve the competitiveness of companies and to boost employment." AH

Walking the green talk

Brussels plans a green business park and sustainable housing project

Andy Furniere

No, Brussels will not be the European Green Capital of 2015. It lost the European Commission's competition for the most eco-friendly city to Bristol in the UK last year.

But in making it to the final stage with just four other candidate cities, Brussels convincingly demonstrated its green credentials. And with ambitious plans for a start-up incubator for green businesses and its first-ever sustainable housing neighbourhood, the city is stepping up its green game.

From next year, entrepreneurs with green business ideas will have the perfect working space in the Brussels Greenbizz incubator, located in the canal quarter, close to the Tour & Taxis site. The first sustainable quarter in the capital – dubbed Tivoli – will also be erected in that same area. It will offer passive housing to city residents from 2016. Since the end of last year, work has been underway to open Brussels Greenbizz by next spring. The incubator for green enterprises, partly constructed on a former site of the telecommunications company Belgacom, is meant to stimulate start-ups and spin-offs in the sectors of sustainable building and eco-friendly products.

Which entrepreneurs will move in exactly hasn't yet been announced, but their work could, for instance, centre on renewable energy, biochemistry or sustainable building materials. "Greenbizz will, in the first place, fill a gap in the economic fibre of the capital," says Julien Meganck, managing director of Citydev, which is responsible for city development and economic expansion. The project has received €9 million in subsidies from the European Regional Development Fund, while the Brussels-Capital Region is pitching in €3 million. The project partners are Citydev, the enterprise agency Impulse, environment agency Leefmilieu Brussel and the building



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agency Scientific and Technical Centre for Construction Firms.

The proximity of building materials companies in the Brussels port area is also meant to function as an incentive to new businesses. In the long term, Greenbizz should create 200 new jobs.

"If the companies become successful, Greenbizz could create much more employment," Brussels

internal traffic, which are also meant to ensure that the construction remains an open space that doesn't entirely block the view. A car park with a capacity for 60 vehicles will be constructed underground.

The Brussels-based Architectes Associés is hoping the building will set a good eco-friendly example. "The building will have solar panels, efficient insulation, an innovative

district of Schaarbeek – and the new sustainable Brussels office of energy grid manager Elia. The construction of the incubator is in the hands of Brussels-based contractor CEI-De Meyer.

Close to the incubator, a large public square with trees will connect Greenbizz to Brussels' first sustainable quarter, Tivoli. The neighbourhood will consist of 400 passive residences, 120 of which will be social housing units. It will also house a park, corner shops and an event space. Two new day-care centres will also be erected on-site for residents with children.

Apart from the energy-efficient performance of the buildings, the roads will also be designed for use by pedestrians and cyclists. Special attention will be given to water management and to the permeability of the soil. Open areas between the housing blocks will also offer extra green spaces and improve the biodiversity of the quarter.

Because of some pending judicial procedures, the start of the Tivoli construction works has been delayed until April.

The building will have solar panels and an innovative night-cooling system

economy minister Céline Fremault told a *brusselnieuws.be* reporter. "The incubator will furthermore strengthen the visibility and attraction of Brussels as a place of innovation."

Start-up entrepreneurs will be housed in offices on the first floor of the incubator building (pictured), above three large workshop spaces on the ground floor. The long building will feature two inner streets for

night-cooling system and green roofs covered with vegetation," says Elodie Léonard, from Architectes Associés. To keep its carbon footprint low, the architectural firm will make optimal use of natural lighting and only transport wood from nearby forests. Architectes Associés has plenty of experience in the eco-friendly building sector, having designed the largest passive office in the Benelux – Aeropolis II in the Brussels

Q&A

Herman Goossens is head of the microbiology department at the University of Antwerp and is working on EU preparedness for pandemics

What lessons have you learnt from the EU's response to the last pandemic – the Mexican flu (H1N1) in 2009?

In 2009, the clinical research response was delayed, isolated and fragmented across the member states. As a consequence, the results were of little use for the infected patients. Nor could they be used to adopt effective clinical management strategies. In fact, we failed to collect and share comparable data in a coordinated manner on the treatment and pathogenesis of the H1N1 virus infection.

For PREPARE, we will develop generic clinical protocols, laboratory manuals and standard operating procedures for a quick

deployment of clinical research. We want to stop the first wave of infected patients in the next pandemic being excluded from clinical research. We will also identify ethical, administrative, regulatory and logistical obstacles and provide solutions to prepare each of the member states in case of a pandemic.

Suppose there's an outbreak of a dangerous, highly infectious disease tomorrow. What will happen?

PREPARE would enter into Outbreak Response Mode. On days one and two, decisions would be made on the most imminent clinical questions – like what is the case-



fatality proportion, what are the risk factors for critical illness, and what treatment strategies are effective. On day three, clinical sites across the continent would be recruited, trained and linked into a common

ICT system. In the following days, ethical approvals would be obtained for the first clinical studies. The delivery of these approvals depends on the nature of the clinical trials and the nature of samples taken from the first patients.

Recent pandemics like SARS and H1N1 originated outside the EU – in Southeast Asia and in Mexico, respectively. Do you work on a global scale?

Yes. In fact, the Commission will provide additional funding to roll out PREPARE globally. We have already established contacts with similar initiatives in the United States and Australia. We will also invite organizations in Asia, particularly China, to join PREPARE.

► www.prepare-europe.eu

interview by Senne Starckx

WEEK IN INNOVATION

Study backs pre-surgery checklists

Researchers at Hasselt University (UHasselt) have released a study showing that the use of the surgical safety checklist compiled by the World Health Organisation lowers the number of post-surgery complications by half. "According to estimates, one in five patients risks complications after surgery," says professor Dominique Vandijck of the research group Patient Safety & Health Economy at UHasselt. The checklist, developed in 2007, includes 22 questions that help surgical teams monitor risk factors, such as possible allergies, and clarifies the different tasks of team members. Not all hospitals use the checklist, but the government of Flanders plans to make it obligatory.

Campaign to get elderly Flemings online

Media minister Ingrid Lieten, TV presenter Luc Appermont and a team of senior citizens last week launched the campaign "Dás toch handig, dat internet!" (That's handy, that internet!) at Antwerp's Central Station. The goal is to show older people the advantages of being online. Figures from last year show that about half of all people between 65 and 74 have never used the internet. "One of the assumptions is that the internet is not useful," said Lieten, "but it can help people stay in touch with family and friends, check bus timetables and look up recipes." The campaign will run for two weeks on Radio 2, VTM and Eén, plus three weeks on regional TV. Advertisements are being published in magazines, and libraries will hang posters and distribute brochures.

► www.handiginternet.be

€40m for proton therapy centre

The University of Leuven and the French-speaking Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL) are establishing a centre for proton therapy with the help of the University Hospital Ghent (UZ Gent). Leuven and UCL are investing €40 million in the centre, which will be set up at the University Hospital Leuven (UZ Leuven). The centre will accommodate doctors from UZ Leuven, UZ Gent and the University Hospital Saint-Luc. Other university and non-university hospitals can also join the project to treat their patients. Researchers and experts from the industrial sector will collaborate to develop proton therapy treatments. Proton therapy is especially effective at treating cancers in children and rare cancers in adults, such as tumours near the optic nerve. AF

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Decree for students with special needs postponed until 2015

The M Decree forces schools to mainstream students with mild disabilities

Andy Furniere

The Committee for Education and Equal Opportunities in the Flemish Parliament has confirmed the postponement of the implementation of the so-called M Decree, which focuses on mainstreaming students with special needs in primary and secondary schools. Instead of the original date of 1 September 2014, it will become effective on 1 September 2015.

Last November, the government of Flanders approved a decree to prevent students with slight mental disabilities or with learning disorders like dyslexia from being too quickly referred to the special education system (BuO). Schools should also put more effort into keeping students with mild forms of disorders, like autism or selective mutism, in regular education.

The decree states that students can only be referred to special education if schools can prove that they have tried all "reasonable adjustments", such as software for students with dyslexia. A team of 109 pedagogical experts is available to assist the schools in mainstreaming students. If schools still believe it is unfeasible to keep the student in regular classes, they must provide an



extensive justification of their decision.

Flanders' education minister Pascal Smet said in a press statement that he had made considerable efforts during his term to guarantee the right to regular education for children with a disability. The number of available hours for support by sign language interpreters was raised from 19,600 to 40,000. Schools can request free dyslexia software and technical tools, like adjustable tables and a blackboard camera, for children with motor and

visual disabilities.

The decree follows about 15 years of discussions on the subject, but it also provoked much criticism. The Flemish Education Council (Vlor) responded that there was insufficient time to start the implementation in 2014. "That is much too soon for schools to re-organise or for teachers to develop the necessary competences," it said. Opposition party Groen was also critical of the decree. "It insufficiently guarantees the registration for students who need an adjusted curriculum," said MP Elisabeth Meuleman, education specialist for Groen.

The Christian education unions COC and COV, for respectively, secondary and primary educational staff, also expressed their discontent with the current policy. "We fear there will not be enough budget to guarantee the personal support of students and adjustments to school infrastructure and to prevent the overburdening of teachers and CLB teams," said Jos Van Der Hoeven of COC. The plenary assembly of the Flemish Parliament still has to schedule a final vote on the decree.

More support for teachers needed, says Monard Committee

The support services for teachers have an insufficient effect on the actual situation in the classroom, according to an evaluation committee led by Flemish education specialist Georges Monard, who also was a driving force behind the secondary education reform. The committee's recent report states that more co-operation between the education networks is necessary with regard to school curricula and other issues.

Teaching organisations are requesting more personal guidance, especially for new teachers. The schools and umbrella organisations have about 470 support staff, or one per 311 teachers. The support staff are from pedagogical guidance services and the pupil support agency CLB.

Although evaluations of the support staff are largely positive, the committee points out that too many of them work at central services. Monard wants more guidance for teachers and CLB teams at their actual working environment – in the classroom – because that's where they can make a difference in strengthening the skills of teachers.

The support services of the different education networks, says the committee, should co-operate

more, as the challenges they tackle in the schools are often similar. "It's good to hold on to your particular identity, but that doesn't mean you can't learn from each other," says the committee in a statement.

Education networks should also collaborate in preparing school curricula, improve lesson materials, provide special support to new teachers just starting out and provide continuing training to experienced teachers and directors. The committee furthermore emphasises the need to further professionalise the organisation of support services.

The education networks reacted moderately positively to the advice. Mieke Van Hecke, head of the Flemish Catholic Education Network, however, also pointed out that there is not enough staff for individual guidance of teachers and stressed the importance of preserving their own identity as a network.

Flanders' education minister, Pascal Smet, says that he wants to take decisions for a decree before the summer, so that adjustments can be implemented from September on. "But the government will not



interfere in terms of how to do it, just in terms of what to do," he says. "The networks are responsible for the concrete measures to improve the guidance." Member of the Flemish parliament Elisabeth Meuleman of opposition party Groen applauded the recommendation for more co-operation between networks. "Dealing with school fatigue, learning disorders and concerns of parents are all issues that are the same for each network," she says. AF

VUB plans "university district" for Brussels

When the federal police announced recently that they would leave their facilities opposite the campus of the Free University of Brussels (VUB), the university's administrators sensed an opportunity. The location of the soon-to-be-empty facilities was right at the heart of the university's living quarters and seemed like the perfect space for a new international university district.

Earlier this month, the Brussels University Alliance (BUA) unveiled what that district will look like. "The VUB wants to further position itself as an international university, and this implies that it must then create the proper accommodations for students and visitors," VUB president Paul De De Knop said



during the presentation. "We want the university district to ultimately grow to become a 'Quartier Latin'." The project would expand

the housing and facilities for both local and international students and researchers. Since the announcement, nearly 200 undergraduate and 45 post-graduate architecture students from the VUB and the French-speaking ULB, who are working and studying under the BUA umbrella, have been busy coming up with a master design plan for the project.

While De Knop (*pictured*) fully stands behind the project, he said he was pleased to see others supporting it as well. The BUA university partnership was originally created when the two Brussels universities, VUB and the ULB, decided to join forces to be able to offer a number of multilingual educational

programmes.

The co-operation allows the universities to fully optimise their geographic location in Brussels and therefore have a larger impact and more chance of attracting international students and researchers. "The two universities located in the biggest student city in the country deserve the support for the expansion of their international activities," De Knop said.

He added that the co-operation made the universities more competitive with other universities abroad and argued that with projects like this and the sharing of resources, they can do more with less in the future.

Brittany Flatten

WEEK IN EDUCATION

Limburg project helps migrant parents

Limburg province has announced that it will continue with the successful project De kracht van ouders, or the Power of Parents. Since 2011, the socio-cultural organisation Internationaal Comité has co-operated with dozens of cultural associations to set up info sessions, workshops and networking initiatives that have helped parents from other countries to find their way in the Flemish education system. Because of language difficulties and cultural differences, many foreign parents don't understand how the Flemish education system works. As a result, they often can't assist their children with decisions, which hinders the integration process.

► www.tinyurl.com/krachtvanouders

Fewer pupils leaving early for holiday

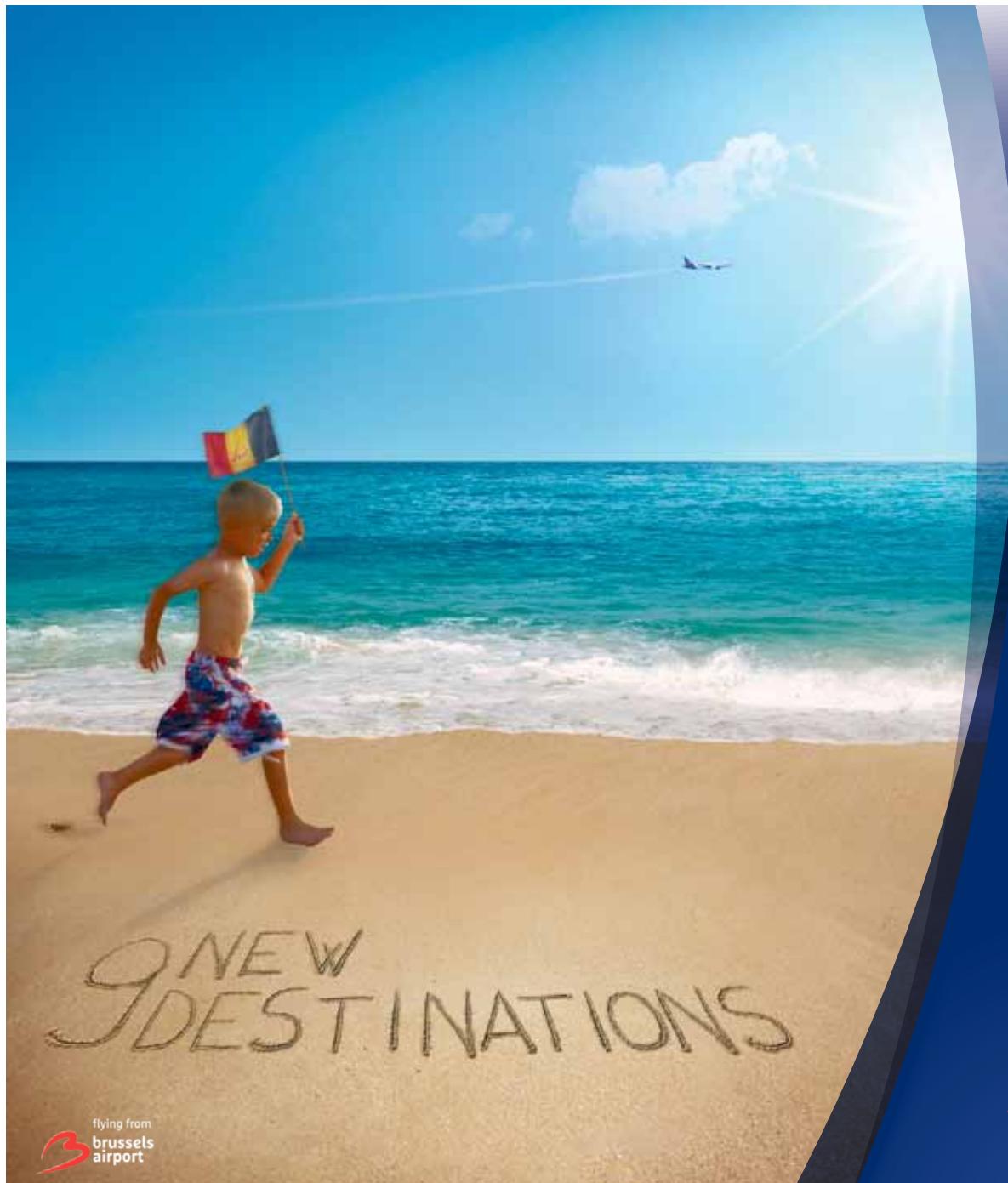
Tour operator Thomas Cook has announced that 40% fewer trips have been reserved for the Wednesday and Thursday before the start of the Kroksus school holiday, which begins on 1 March. It's the first time that the operator has seen its clients' behaviour change since stricter rules were enforced to keep children in school until the last day before a school holiday. "In 2013, Wednesday was also busier than Thursday, but now it's the opposite," said a Thomas Cook spokesperson.

Flemish education minister Pascal Smet set up a central registration system that monitors which children are skipping school to leave on holiday early. Parents too often decided to book an earlier flight because they are cheaper. An absence in the week before and after holidays requires a doctor's certificate. For persistent truancy, school allowances can be cancelled.

Ghent opens classroom for Roma children

The integration department of the City of Ghent is working with the University College Ghent (HoGent) to set up a container classroom on a caravan terrain in the city. The city is investing €10,000 on the classroom for children of travelling communities, mostly Roma people, who have set up camp on the outskirts of the city.

Roma children often can't read or write because their community travels too much for them to be registered at a school. In the container classroom, a dozen students will be able to follow lessons on a voluntary basis from this autumn. HoGent has for several years organised projects on the terrain of caravans for the traveller residents. AF



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An online road map

Flemish provinces help visitors navigate large offer of commemoration events

Alan Hope

The commemoration of the First World War in Flanders, starting this year, promises to be one of the most extensive events the region has ever seen, with activities organised by the federal and Flemish governments, local municipalities and private groups and associations from here and abroad.

Many of the major attractions, such as the Commonwealth War Graves in the Westhoek, Talbot House in Poperinge and In Flanders Fields Museum in Ypres (pictured) are of course permanently available, but the four years to come promise a programme of upward of 1,000 commemorative events.

How to find one's way through that embarrassment of riches? The provinces of West Flanders and Antwerp have joined forces to bring some order to the proceedings and make it possible for the Flemish public and visitors alike to plan their



The commemoration events can be filtered by age group, theme, timeline and geography

outings. The website *wegwijzerwoi*.be is currently a joint effort by the two provinces, but their aim is to open up to co-operation from other provinces, as well as other players in

the heritage field. "Right now, it's easy to get lost in the sheer quantity of information that comes back when you Google 'World War I,'" says Myriam Vanlerberghe,

West Flanders' provincial deputy for culture.

"In the first place, the site is intended for educators, but there's plenty of useful information for tourist guides and other interested parties."

The new website includes a feature that allows visitors to narrow down their search and a database that includes concrete projects, monuments, books and songs. The site is currently only available in Dutch, but the organisers hope to soon offer French and English versions.

A searching can be done by age group, theme, timeline and geography. Themes include topics like occupied areas, economy, the front lines, daily life and propaganda. The timeline also allows searching by date. A geographical search turns up not only monuments and places of interest but also accommodation.

▶ www.wegwijzerwoi.be

Design Vlaanderen puts spotlight on wood in new exhibition

Wood is a fascinating material. It was here before humans ever considered building anything and has never ceased to inspire craftspeople and designers. As every tree is unique, so is every item made of wood. In *Hout: Het nieuwe goud (Wood: The New Gold)*, Design Vlaanderen showcases the best woodwork of some 30 Flemish designers.

Technology has produced an endless list of new materials and fabrics. But even in a world of plastic, graphene and Kevlar, wood rarely gets overlooked or abandoned. "There's a trend to go back to craftsmanship, using natural materials," says Inge Vranken, the exhibition's curator.

"Wood is warm and full of life. And of course, it's often chosen

for environmental and sustainable reasons, too."

The new exhibition came together by happenstance, says Vranken. Design Vlaanderen was approached by another design organisation that was planning to do something around wood. "There was going to be a book on woodwork and, while the other organisation planned to set up an international exhibition, Design Vlaanderen took on the role of showcasing the best of local woodworkers."

Things, however, didn't proceed as planned, and the book and international show were eventually cancelled. "But by then we'd gathered such a great

selection of designers, we didn't need the international frame to continue with our exhibition," explains Vranken.

As it does for all its projects, Design Vlaanderen launched a call and subsequently selected some 30 designers, with their approach to wood the guiding criteria. "The most important thing was that wood had to define the use and the shape of their creations," says Vranken. "The wood had to be visible, too, not covered by paint, lacquer or any other material."

The result is an exhibition that offers an interesting mix of large and small items. "Of course, there's a lot of furniture," says Vranken, "but visitors will see some jewellery and industrial design, as well."

Visitors should keep their eyes open, for instance, for Limburg designer Frederic Boonen's cork garden accessories and the collection of ergonomic wooden brushes (pictured) by the Ghent-based Adriaan Debruyne, designed for PDC Brush. *Katrien Lindemans*

▶ www.expo14-18.be



Until 13 April

Wood: The New Gold

Design Vlaanderen
Kanselarijstraat 19, Brussels

▶ www.designvlaanderen.be

Alan Hope

BITE

Closer to home

We've talked here recently about the short food chain – the idea that the most sustainable food involves as little time and distance as possible between producer and consumer. Well, there can be fewer food chains shorter than the one in which the farmer grows food on the farm, and the customer picks it up from the farm's shop.

According to the latest figures, there are 1,184 farm producers in Flanders – farmers and growers who sell directly to the public either from farm shops or from markets. That's twice as many as three years ago, thanks, according to Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters, to the government's policy in support of the short food chain.

Among the initiatives to promote farm products are two websites. The site *steunpunthoeveproducten*.



is supported by a wide range of bodies, including the Federal Food Safety Agency and the five Flemish

provinces. Those in turn lead to five sites – one in each province – that offer a shop window onto farm production. Consumers can search by type of product – dairy, fruit and vegetables, sugar goods and so on – or by the type of label, which refers to recognised regional products or ordinary farm products. The main site also offers advice for producers on every subject that might come up, from labelling to tax questions to the particular rules attached to the sale of honey, meat, dairy and unpasteurised milk. The second site, *rechtvanbijdeboer.be*, allows a simple one-stop search across all of Flanders and Brussels, with a database of 1,000 farm producers and a variety of different ways to search. If you're looking for a regular delivery of organic greens, for

example, and you live in Ghent, you'll find there are 19 options available. There are two markets, you'll be happy to know, selling organic fruit in the vicinity of De Panne.

In the meantime, last week saw the launch of *DistriKempen*, an Antwerp co-operative of five producers selling goat cheese, apples, pork products, dairy products and vegetables, available through a simple phone call. "We've seen the use of farm and regional products really take off in the last few years, but the real breakthrough has had to wait for a solution to the problem of distribution," said Antwerp province's deputy Peter Bellens. "DistriKempen is the first in our province to provide this service."

▶ www.steunpunthoeveproducten.be

▶ www.rechtvanbijdeboer.be

WEEK IN ACTIVITIES

Youth Film Festival

In addition to movies for young people from around the world, the programme includes workshops on filmmaking, acting and animation. There are age guidelines for all screenings. *1-9 March, various locations in Antwerp and Bruges, €4-€7*

▶ www.jeugdfilmfestival.be

Crocus Festival

Another offering for children during *Krokusvakantie*, this nine-day festival of theatre and dance features original productions from Belgium and abroad. Several performances and activities every day. *Until 6 March, Hasselt cultural centre, Kunstlaan, tickets required for some events*

▶ www.krokusfestival.be

Expo 14-18: It's Our History

On the 100-year anniversary of the Great War, Brussels' Royal Army Museum presents a new exhibition that explores daily life during the Belgian occupation. The wartime personalities and destinies of two cousins, Belgium's King Albert I and Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II, will be a special focus. *Until 2015, Royal Museum of the Army and Military History, Jubelpark 3, €12*

▶ www.expo14-18.be

Flanders Horse Expo

The biggest horse show in Belgium takes place in Ghent this weekend, with a Wild West show, show-jumping, dressage, a Belgian Reining Derby and more. *28 February-2 March, Flanders Expo, €10-€17*

▶ www.flanders-horse-expo.be

Second World War Prison Camp

Fort Breendonk in Antwerp province is one of the best-preserved Nazi concentration camps in Europe. Between 1940 and 1944, 3,500 prisoners passed through its gates. Take a guided tour (in Dutch) with UPV, a non-profit educational organisation. *28 February, Brandstraat 57, Willebroek, 10.30, €10, reservations recommended via 02 629 2750*

▶ <http://tinyurl.com/Fort-Breendonk>

Taste the Flemish Ardennes

Discover the culinary heritage of the region south of Ghent in East Flanders. Highlights include *mattentaart*-baking demonstrations, brewery tours and guided tasting walks. *1-31 March, various locations, reservations required for some events*

▶ www.proefdevlaamseardennen.be

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Raf Simons leads Dior to record year

Flemish designer Raf Simons has led Christian Dior to its best year in recent history, the fashion house announced, with a whopping 31% rise in profits in the second half of 2013, compared to the same period the year before. The Limburg-born designer was appointed the French fashion label's creative director in 2012, replacing John Galliano.

"Simons has the exceptional talent to be able to breathe new life into our fashion house," said Dior CEO Sidney Toledano. Simons has been praised by fashion journalists for his ability to make beautiful clothes that are wearable by average women and men, particularly in the couture line, which saw sales increase by 20% in the period.

Hertmans wins Flemish Culture Prize

The author, poet and playwright Stefan Hertmans has won the 2013 Flemish Culture Prize for Literature for his recently published book *Oorlog en terpentijn* (War and Turpentine). Flemish culture minister Joke Schauvliege announced the prize during Ghent's Mind the Book festival last Friday evening.

Hertmans' book is based on his grandfather's experiences in the First World War, sourced from diaries and sketchbooks that he left behind. *Oorlog en terpentijn* was widely acclaimed; *Humo* magazine called it "a masterpiece".

Hertmans, 52, has won multiple prizes over the years for his work, including the five-yearly Prize of the Royal Academy of Dutch Language and Literature for essays in 2008.

► www.stefanhertmans.be

Brussels cartoonist wins Golden Hat

Knokke-Heist's Cartoon Festival has awarded this year's Gouden Hoed (Golden Hat) for the best cartoon to Dieter Bevers. The Brussels-based Bevers, who works as an illustrator and graphic designer for Belfius, won for his cartoon "Kiss Panda". The cartoon, which shows panda parents perplexed at the behaviour of their young, "presents us with a simple, fresh joke about the generation gap," said the jury.

The jury chose the cartoon from nearly 1,400 submitted to the festival. The Silver Hat, meanwhile, was awarded to Iranian cartoonist Mohammadreza Babaei, and the Bronze Hat went to Turkish cartoonist Kiliçaslan Musa. The winning cartoons can be seen now on the website of the festival; the festival itself runs from 13 July to 14 September.

► <http://cartoonfestival.knokke-heist.be>

Medieval film score

Vocal ensemble Psallentes lets you watch the score onscreen during Noted

Tom Peeters

These days, classical musicians always have a music score within reach, usually on a lectern in front of them, since it's very hard to remember every single note. But this wasn't common in medieval times. Ensemble Psallentes, a Leuven-based choir that focuses on late medieval polyphony and plainchant, wanted to bridge the gap between current practice and the original method of using only one score book for all members of the choir – or, at best, one for the right side and one for the left.

"As an ensemble using mostly sources from the 15th and 16th centuries – we wanted to extend this idea to a

“It's a hobby that has got slightly out of hand

contemporary context," says Hendrik Vanden Abeele, Psallentes' musical director. "So instead of using a score book, we decided to produce a film that would deliver a similar service to our singers."

The big advantage is that the audience can watch the score along with the choir and thus witness the music's medieval origins. The film, called *Liquescens*, is based on the historical manuscript known as "B-Gu Ms 15". It contains 621 pages, was made in the 15th century in Sint-Baaf's Abbey in Ghent and is now kept in the local university library.

As a prominent antiphony, or liturgical choir book, "B-Gu Ms



Musical director Hendrik Vanden Abeele (far right) and the Psallentes choir share their score onscreen

15" is protected by the Flemish Community's *topstukkendecreet*, a decree stipulating that cultural heritage of exceptional importance has to be conserved in Flanders. "An antiphony contains liturgical chants to sing at times of prayer," explains Vanden Abeele. "But this is such a captivating piece of heritage, I want to share my love for it with the whole world."

How serious he is about that is clear if you watch his *Antiphony Walkthrough* on YouTube, in which he comments on the content, the significance and the sheer beauty of the manuscript. "In each video I describe one of the 621 pages. I'm at page 64 now... It's a hobby that has got slightly out of hand."

The original manuscript – 60 x 40 centimetres – is very heavy and exists in a twin version, one for the left half of the choir, one for the right half. Psallentes asked calligrapher Brody Neuenschwander, who has also worked with British film director Peter Greenaway, to recreate and illustrate the medieval manuscript on film. "We asked him to rebuild the manuscript," says Vanden Abeele. "He is specialised in old documents, and with his background assisting Peter Greenaway, for instance in the film *Prospero's Books*, we knew he was especially grounded in suggesting gestures and movement."

"In *Liquescens*, the development of the writings is as important as the final product. Being bound not just to

notes, he could also give the singers instructions through an image or a movement. He really could let his creativity flow, using not only ink but also scissors and stamps. So the audience will watch an artist sitting behind his work table, making his own tinkering part of the film."

The 86-minute movie is divided into four parts, focusing on religious themes such as the Holy Trinity or the lives of saints, expanding its horizon widely from notes and staves. "You can see Brody improvising on the

28 February,
20.00

Are you dreaming what
Residents speak out in a multilingual performance of reflections about Brussels

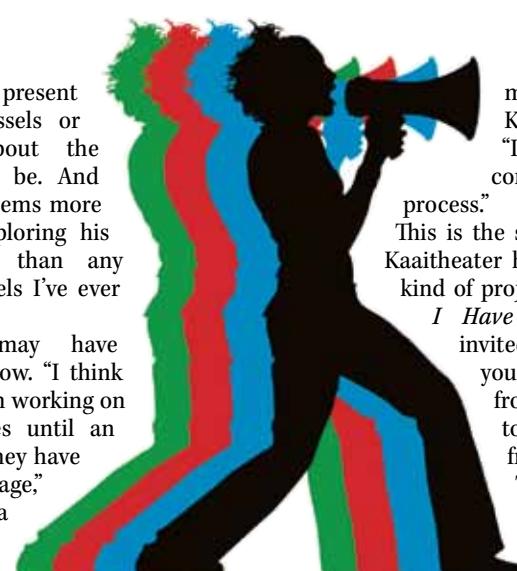
Ian Mundell

It's a Wednesday evening in Brussels, in one of the city's many meeting rooms. The people sitting around the table are here because they have something to say about the city. In three weeks' time – this Saturday, by the time you read this – they will be standing on stage at Kaaitheteater, preparing to speak out.

The idea of *We Have A Dream* is that each person delivers a speech about their dream for Brussels, a topic they can interpret in the broadest way possible. Listening to the work in progress around the table, some people have very concrete dreams about finding work, a place to live and a person to love. Others reflect

on the present state of Brussels or speculate about the way it could be. And one person seems more intent on exploring his subconscious than any part of Brussels I've ever visited.

But that may have changed by now. "I think they will go on working on their speeches until an hour before they have to go on stage," says Lana Willems, the project



manager at Kaaitheteater. "It's a constant process."

This is the second time Kaaitheteater has run this kind of project. In 2011

I Have A Dream invited a group of young people from Brussels to dream in a freeform way. This time there is no age limit, but the

topic is more focused. "We've asked them to write about their dreams about the city or how they are engaged with the city. It's more about how we live together," says Willems.

Participants were sought through the usual public channels, but also by involving organisations working with new arrivals to the city and the homeless. Some 15 to 20 people expressed an interest in the project, with 10 finally signing up. Everyone who wanted to speak will get their chance. And while no selection was involved, the diversity is impressive. There are women active in politics, an aspiring actor and a German expat, along with other newcomers whose

Ghost in the house

Jurgen Delnaet is not about to give up his beloved home in new movie *Halfweg*

Ian Mundell

life of Saint Lieven, whose tongue was cut off," says Vanden Abeele. "While drawing branches with leaves being gradually squared off, he is freewheeling and constantly making associations, while the singers stick to the story."

Since Neuenschwander's notes are not always clear, the ensemble decided to compromise a bit. Singers will sporadically gather around a lectern, so the audience will be able to see their faces. "Reconstruction is always a starting point for Psallentes, but we don't want to become slaves to it. The manuscript is only a means to introduce the audience to our world." This world is partially financed by crowdfunding: The ensemble is trying to raise €3,350 to make a *Liquescens* CD and DVD. At the time of writing, 74% of the amount had been collected. "This only covers the costs for the audio recording of the singers, which is a minor part of the total production process," Vanden Abeele explains. "Despite the fact this is a co-production with Concertgebouw and we receive an €80,000 annual subsidy from the Flemish government, we can always use help. The more we collect, the more projects we can initiate."

In future, the group would like to invest in more pioneering recordings; a CD of religious music by Liszt and other plans concerning Flemish heritage are being finalised. Psallentes also intend to prolong one of their most popular projects, evoking the music of the beguines. And they hope to bring another local antiphony to life by trying to get the audience to sing with them.

Concertgebouw
't Zand 34, Bruges
► www.concertgebouw.be

The action in Geoffrey Enthoven's movie *Halfweg* (Halfway) takes place in a single location, an Art Deco mansion in its own grounds in the Flemish Ardennes. This is disputed territory, claimed with equal force by arrogant architect Stef (Koen De Graeve), who has just bought the property, and previous owner Theo (Jurgen Delnaet).

"We had the luxury of rehearsing in the house before starting the shoot," Delnaet recalls. "That helped, being in the house for a week with no crew. An empty, cold house. And you think: So this is the house where that guy lived, without his wife, with his daughter but not being able to talk about his feelings. And then this other character comes in..."

The twist in this tale is that Theo is a ghost, bound to the property after dying in the bath several years before. Maybe it was an accident, maybe suicide. Either way, he is not about to give up his home and he sets about persuading Stef to leave by complicating his already messy personal life. Stef is having none of it and fights back.

Delnaet was attracted by the prospect of working with Enthoven, whose trademark in films such as *Hasta La Vista* and *Meisjes (Girls)* has been the offbeat treatment of sensitive subjects. "My character's story is very dark, but I knew Geoffrey's work and I knew that it wouldn't be some kind of dreary Swedish story. There would also be humour in it, and that's the type of story I want to tell as well."

The part involves both a complex father-daughter relationship and the notion of a man with regrets about his life who is able to go back and make good. "I think that's a recognisable wish for people, a very deep human need."

One touchstone for Delnaet's performance was the experience of spending time with his father during the last months of his life. "What struck me most was his melancholy on realising that this was it, and it was only this," he recalls. "He didn't feel any remorse about not having done things in his life, just a deep, deep sadness. He showed that to me, and that was very important because he wasn't the most emotional guy during his lifetime. It was one of the images that ran through my mind during the making of this film."

Drawing on life in this way is not exactly a question of technique. "I would like to say that I decide when to use private things, but it always happens," Delnaet explains. "When you read a script for the first time, you are open and you let all these influences and images pass through your mind."



The ghost of Theo is a constant annoyance to Stef in Geoffrey Enthoven's *Halfweg*

And although he is happy to discuss this now, it wasn't something he talked about during the shoot. "I need this personal reflection and imagery to make it true for myself."

A more tangible factor in shaping Theo's character was his costume. The initial idea was for this to be

"My agent told me: You have to dare to wait. So I waited"

slightly dated, reflecting the years that had passed since he died. But then Enthoven had the bright idea that a man who died in the bath would come back as a bathroom ghost. So Theo appears throughout *Halfweg* in boxer shorts, with wet hair and a bath towel around his shoulders.

"If you are true to your work as an actor you are always exposed, that's my opinion," says Delnaet. "But this helps you because it limits you. You only have these clothes on, so it gives you more freedom to act."

You can't hide behind the costume."

Delnaet is a theatre actor whose big break in cinema came with the 2008 film *Aanrijding in Moscou (Moscow, Belgium)*. This gentle romantic comedy set in a Ghent suburb was an unexpected success across Flanders and abroad, but when the offers started to come in he found he was already committed to stage work several years ahead.

In the end he had to make a conscious decision to clear his diary. "My agent told me: You have to dare to wait. So I waited." Four months passed, during which he became increasingly nervous about having no work. Then came the call from Enthoven and the offer of a TV series. "All of a sudden there are these two beautiful parts!"

The series is *Marsman*, in which he plays a man who loses his mother, his job and his wife in a short period of time and is left to look after his autistic adult brother. "So it's heavy, but funny." This will be broadcast on Fén from March.

In the meantime, Delnaet is rehearsing in a stage production of Peter Handke's satire of corporate life *De Laatsten der onverstandigen (They Are Dying Out)*. It premieres on March 13 at Monty in Antwerp and then tours Flanders and the Netherlands until mid-May.

I'm dreaming?

route to the city began in Afghanistan, Iraq and Morocco.

For Dirk Verstockt, who is coaching the participants, this diversity is one attraction of the project. "It is striking to see the differences between – to exaggerate a little – the white, well-meaning young urban professionals and those who have come from very violent backgrounds abroad and are trying to find shelter here."

The project also produces something unique as a performance. "It's like you have an instant ad hoc newspaper, a state of reflection on the city by its citizens," he says.

Verstockt's role is to help each of the participants pin down what they

want to say and to work out the best way to bring it to an audience. As well as this one-to-one coaching, the participants meet regularly as a group, getting to know each other and finding out what connects their feelings about the city. Meetings also allow ideas and inspiration to circulate.

What starts out as half a page of writing gradually grows until it turns into an address lasting up to 10 minutes. "It works on different levels," Verstockt explains. "It's clearing out your own thinking, it's clearing out your own writing, it's addressing an audience. It's also about making clear your own position, and your position

relative to other people."

While most of the speakers are not performers as such, several have been trained through their work and education to write and to present themselves. Others are doing this kind of thing for the very first time. Then there is the language question. Some are fluent in Dutch, French and English, while others are still working to find a voice in one of these languages, or have no alternative but to use their mother tongue.

Sometimes that becomes a part of the story, as in the case of Latif, who has come to Brussels from Iraq. "He went through very rough times and he is totally obsessed with staying

here, so he wants to do his piece in Dutch," Verstockt explains. "He's struggling with it, but I like that single-mindedness."

On the evening, speeches will be delivered in Dutch, French and English, with simultaneous translation as appropriate.

We Have A Dream is a part of Kaaitheteater's series *Me Myself & We*, which explores the tension between

individual desires and the collective cause. Other performances still to come include *We Are Still Watching* (Friday) by Ivana Müller, in which the audience is expected to work together to produce the show according to a written script, and the dance pieces *Pindorama* (10-13 May) by Brazilian choreographer Lia Rodrigues and *Sketches/Notebook* (11-14 June) by American Meg Stuart.

**1 March,
20.30**

Kaaitheteater

Sainctelettesquare 20, Brussels

► www.kaaitheteater.be

Revisiting a dark chapter

Flemish writer Kristien Hemmerechts reimagines story of Belgium's most-hated woman

Rebecca Benoot

During the summer of 1995, Julie Lejeune, Melissa Russo, An Marchal and Eefje Lambrecks went missing. The entire country was shocked, and it only intensified when, a year later, two more girls – Sabine Dardenne and Laetitia Delhez – disappeared.

In the summer of 1996, Brussels resident Marc Dutroux and his wife, Michelle Martin, were arrested. Sabine and Laetitia were eventually rescued, but Dutroux had murdered two of the other girls. Martin became public enemy number 2 when she allowed the other two to starve to death in a secret basement room while Dutroux was in custody. The Dutroux case is considered the darkest chapter in Belgium's recent history.

Flemish author Kristien Hemmerechts (pictured), who is known for novels that often deal with human flaws, alienation and inabilities, made a bold move when she decided to write about the accomplice of Belgium's infamous kidnapper, rapist and child murderer. Hitting a raw nerve in the country's collective past, *De vrouw die de honden eten gaf* (The Woman Who Fed the Dogs) caused a stir even before it was published.

Paul Marchal, father of the 17-year-old An, said: "Unless you're a friend of Martin – and Hemmerechts isn't as far as I know – I will never understand how someone would defend such a despicable woman."

De vrouw isn't, in the end, defending Michelle Martin or apologising for her actions. Hemmerechts, 58, says she wanted to get inside the mind of a character like Martin to explore what made her tick. She didn't set out to write an explosive and controversial novel but one that was "credible and powerful", she says. The rest was cunning marketing by her publisher and the echo-chamber effect of the media.

"The reactions have been emotional, irrational, extreme and



contradictory," she says. "I've been attacked for presenting my central character both in too positive a light, and in too negative a light. So, which is it?"

During the summer of 2012, Hemmerechts was a writer in residence at the VU University Amsterdam and was asked to write a 1,200-word text. The Belgian headlines that summer were Martin's possible early release from prison. Hemmerechts tried to imagine what

it was like for Dutroux's accomplice to follow this debate from inside the institution.

"For an author, it's very interesting to give a voice to a woman who hasn't been heard. But what struck me the most was that she was pregnant when those girls were abducted. What must it have been like for her to live with a man who kidnaps and locks up little girls? The novel is a depiction of how she sees herself, that is, as a victim of Dutroux. There

is a lot of self-pity, a tendency to blame others and an inability to assume responsibility."

Hemmerechts primarily based her novel on facts and testimonies. Martin refused to talk to her, so the author had to fill in the blanks herself, which resulted in "faction", a mix between facts and fiction, which is often the case in historical fiction. "I believe that imagination can take over when the facts only get you so far," she says. "A lot is unknown about the tragic events, to the utter

novel is set in the monastery where Martin, who was released in the summer of 2012, now resides.

For the most part, the novel is a monologue in which Odette sheds light on her relationship with her domineering mother and her submissive sadomasochistic relationship with a man referred to as M. Odette feared M but also gave in to his every whim. Ultimately, no-one knows what went on in Martin's mind or how she became "the most hated woman in Belgium",

I think it's absurd that you shouldn't reimagine old cases

frustration of the parents of the victims."

Hemmerechts points out that neither Dutroux nor Martin have been forthcoming with information. "There remain many gaps in the accounts they have given," she says, adding that she was more interested in dealing with thoughts, feelings and fantasies. "I wanted to reproduce what was going on in her head," she explains. "As a result, I was forced to rely on imagination and presumption. Nobody says what they really think, and Martin is no exception."

Not only An's father, but many others have taken offence to *De vrouw* and said that real and horrific crimes shouldn't be used for entertainment value. "I think it's absurd that you shouldn't reimagine old cases," Hemmerechts says, adding that certain cases will always leave an imprint on people's collective conscience.

She changed the name of the title character to Odette, not only to avoid legal ramifications but because, she says, "there are passages where I let my imagination run wild". The

but Hemmerechts manages to give us a plausible version of the events. Odette is full of contradictions: She's an egotistical woman with a low self-esteem who craves validation from others, but she also tries to be a strong and loving mother to her own children. Eight days after the real-life Martin gave birth to their third child, Dutroux was arrested for theft.

The title of the novel refers to Martin's feeding of her husband's dogs while he was behind bars but not feeding the girls locked up in the basement. Odette/Martin, in other words, was convicted for what she failed to do.

Hemmerechts starts off her novel with a quote from German political theorist Hannah Arendt: "The sad truth is that most evil is done by people who never make up their minds to be good or evil."

De vrouw is a deconstruction of identity. Without sympathising or showing understanding for Martin, Hemmerechts shows us the inner workings of the mind of a woman with a horrific past and an uncertain future.

FRESH FICTION

De zoon, de maan en de sterren (The Son, the Moon and the Stars)

Leo Pleysier • *De Bezige Bij*

The title of this short story collection evokes images of a still life and, in a similar, portrait-like vein, award-winning author Pleysier focuses on snapshots of ordinary lives in minute detail. Tackling themes of family, loneliness and longing for times past, the stories centre on protagonists of Pleysier's age (late 60s), making this collection a personal one. The pieces are short, sweet and, though slightly predictable, never trite. ★★★★

De vrouw die blijft (The Woman Who Stays)

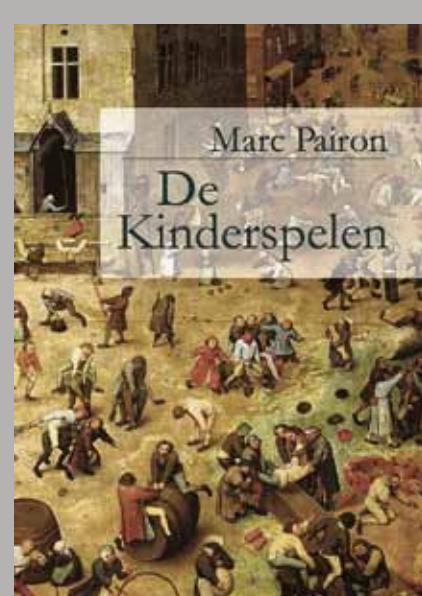
Ann Thijssen • *Prometheus*

Ann Thijssen's debut novel is a contemporary and slightly sentimental epic with a classic feel. It focuses on the life of Else, who loses her baby after 9/11 and decides that the only way to get her life back on track is to turn her world upside-down. She leaves her boyfriend to become a governess in the south of France. Mystery quickly follows. ★★★★

De kinderspelen (The Children's Games)

Marc Pairon • *Stichting Charles Catteau*

The debut novel of poet Marc Pairon, *De kinderspelen* focuses on the lives within an ordinary family in a countryside that has turned its back on modern society. As the outside world irrevocably ripples through, we get a touching and beautifully



narrated story about the impact of materialism, dementia and incest at a time when nothing is what it seems. ★★★★

Intifada

Luc Deflo • *Borgerhoff en Lamberigts*

In the last 15 years, Deflo has written no fewer than 25 thrillers – many of them bestsellers, some more chilling than others. *Intifada* tells the story of civil servant Gabriel Jansseune, who is sick and tired of all "those Moroccans" getting their way in his city and goes on a killing spree to purge Brussels of what he sees as the bad apples. The police and the media follow in hot pursuit. ★★★★

Four days of crazy Aalst Carnival

1-4 March | Across Aalst

► www.aalst.be/carnaval

Aalst's infamous Carnival, listed as protected Intangible Cultural Heritage by Unesco despite – or perhaps because of – its notorious vulgarity, is about to start again. This Saturday night, the city starts warming up: The "carnival council", a show ridiculing the town's local politicians, ends with the ceremony in which the newly elected Prince Carnival is handed the keys to the city.

On Sunday afternoon, the city's carnival warehouses open and – after a year of preparation by the city's 70 carnival groups – dozens of elaborate floats roll out for the big parade. Aalst turns into New Orleans for the day.

But with some differences. This carnival, for instance, takes no prisoners. Float figures ridicule recent events beyond all sense of decency, with politicians and celebrities often depicted in the most embarrassing poses.



There are no taboos. Last year, one of the groups even succeeded in getting reprimanded by Unesco's director-general for walking around in Nazi uniforms while smiling and singing German songs – a parody of one of Flanders' political parties. The parade, watched by tens of thousands

of spectators, ends at 17.00 at city hall. Then the feast, mostly revolving around the consumption of vast amounts of alcohol, gets underway. On Monday afternoon, the Aalsterse Gilles, masked folkloric figures wearing clogs, perform the ritualistic dance of the brooms to chase away evil spirits and ask the weather gods for a good harvest. More drinking ensues.

Tuesday is either the most fun or the most embarrassing day for townsfolk, depending on their point of view: It's the parade of the Voil Jeanetten (Dirty Jennies) – men (inevitably hung over) dressed up as sleazy women. This year, in an official statement the local police explicitly asked the Jeanetten not to carry around "pornographic photos or aerosol cans".

Last but not least, a figure representing the winter carnival is burned in effigy, set on fire by the Prince of Carnival on Aalst's Grote Markt. Now, the season of Lent can finally begin. Daan Bauwens

PERFORMANCE

Ivana Müller

28 February, 19.00 | Kaaitheater, Brussels

► www.kaaitheater.be

Kaaitheater continues its exploration of collectivity with this double-feature of performances by contemporary Croatian choreographer Ivana Müller. *In Common* tests the limits of co-operation. Ten performers form the theoretical "collective body", a central concept in dance as well as society in general. As they operate within the constraints of agreed-upon rules, we find that the collective body – be it the dance troupe or the democratic electorate – is both more than *and* just the sum of its parts (pictured). In *We Are Still Watching*, the audience becomes part of the collective body, too. Spectators are given roles and responsibilities so that by the end of each of the evening's two hour



performances, a new society has formed in microcosm. (In English) Georgio Valentino

FESTIVAL

Anima

28 February to 9 March

► www.animafestival.be

This long-running animation festival, with features, shorts and special guests for both adults and youth, opens with a bang: *The Wind Rises* is the latest – and last – film by arguably the world's most revered animator, Hayao Miyazaki. According to critics, he has saved his best for last, with phrases such as "astonishing visuals", "the finest work of Miyazaki's career" and even "perhaps the greatest animated film ever made". Younger members of the audience might better appreciate *Otto is een neushoorn* (Otto is a Rhinoceros) by Danish animator Kenneth Kainz, about a boy whose simple drawing miraculously comes to life. The languages and subtitles vary greatly, so check the programme carefully. Lisa Bradshaw

Flagey, Brussels



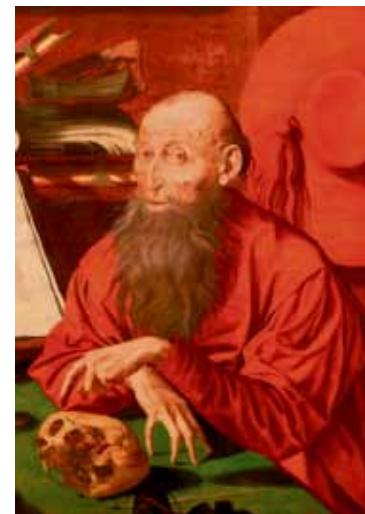
VISUAL ARTS

From Patinir to Ribera:

St Jerome in Words and Images

Until 13 April | Rockoxhuis, Antwerp | ► www.rockoxhuis.be

St Jerome was a curious figure in the fourth century. The theologian espoused classical Greek philosophy when official Church doctrine sought to bury such relics of pre-Christian paganism. It turned out that Jerome was just ahead of his time. He would later become a hero to Renaissance thinkers precisely because of his broad-minded proto-humanism. Indeed, St Jerome was the preferred saint of Renaissance painters, appearing in a full third of all saintly canvases produced in the period. Nicolaas Rockox was one of his champions. The 17th-century Flemish art collector (and Antwerp mayor) kept a portrait of St Jerome by Jan van Hemessen, which is now the centrepiece of an exhibition devoted to Renaissance



and Baroque representations of the forward-thinking saint. GV

CONCERT

Elvis Costello

21 October, 20.00 | Koninklijk Circus, Brussels

► www.cirque-royal.org

Britain's power-pop poet Elvis Costello is a regular headliner in Belgium, most often performing with one of several backing bands (of which the Attractions are the most well-known). His solo voyages are less frequent but more powerful. Here, accompanying himself alternately on guitar and piano, Costello focuses on the songs



GET TICKETS NOW

Concert

Brussels

Tango without Limits:

Tango quartet Tanguarda, led by Bulgarian pianist Maria Martinova, fuses Latin forms with jazz and world music. This performance also features dancers Céline Ruiz and Jérémie Braibart

28 FEB 19.00 at Bozar,
Ravensteinstraat 23

► www.bozar.be

Classical

Ghent

Blind Date Mini #2: The second edition of this student-organised mini-festival promises an innovative programme of contemporary classical music. True to the name, however, details are not disclosed in advance

1 MAR 20.15 at
Handelsbeurs, Kouter 29

► www.handelsbeurs.be

Exhibition

Antwerp

Francesco Ruspoli: The London-based painter reprises his New York solo exhibition *Lost in Contemplation* in Antwerp. Ruspoli is lauded for his use of colour, which seems to leap off the canvas

Until 15 MAR at Ludwig
Trossaert Gallery,
Museumstraat 29

► www.galerieludwigtrossaert.com

Performance

Kortrijk

The Lee Elroy Show: Hans Van den Broeck and his theatre company SOIT present a dramatic production inspired by American crime novelist James Ellroy's *My Dark Places*, which is in turn inspired by the murder of Ellroy's mother (In English, with Dutch surtitles)

27 FEB, 20.15 at Budascoop,
Kapucijnstraat 10

► www.schouwburgkortrijk.be

Carnival

Blankenberge

Carnival Parade: It's that time of year again. Although the rest of Flanders' carnivals are tamer than Aalst's (see above), the coast will be colonised by costumed revellers bent on having a good time

2 MAR, parade starts at
14.30, across Blankenberge

► www.carnaval.blankenberge.be

Herenthout

Carnival Parade: Herenthout's Carnival prides itself on being Belgium's oldest, celebrated in flamboyant fashion since 1892. The festivities are spread out over an entire week, bookended by two Sunday parades

2-9 MAR, across Herenthout

► www.karnaval.darolite.be

Talking Dutch

Don't call us...

Derek Blyth

The situation for local young people looking for a job is far from rosy, so the Flemish employment agency VDAB is trying its best to get them into work by using the latest social media tools. But it isn't always that easy because young people keep changing their habits, according to a recent article in *De Standaard*.

Een handgeschreven sollicitatiebrief is in 2014 een anachronisme – a handwritten job application is an anachronism in 2014. *Maar een cv in pdf formaat als attachment bij een e-mail, is dat ondertussen ook* – but the same now goes for a CV in PDF format sent as an email attachment. *En het gaat steeds sneller* – and things are changing even faster. *De VDAB is best wel actief op Facebook, maar er zit al een hele generatie aan te stormen die Facebook iets voor ouwelui vindt* – the VDAB is now very active on Facebook, but there is a whole new generation coming along that sees Facebook as something for their grannies. *Dus hoe moet de VDAB de jongeren dan wél bereiken?* – So how should the VDAB reach young people? asks *De Standaard*. *Via Twitter? Of is alleen Instagram nog voldoende hip?* – Via Twitter? Or is Instagram



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VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY



Jered Gruber @jeredgruber

Counting down the days until the welcome sight of the Scheldepeloton in Flanders. <http://instagram.com/p/kkEY1LoTEI/>



Nigel Williams @nigelstwits

@TiernanDouieb Antwerp tomorrow, @standupantwerp, sold out and ready to go. PS easy on the sprouts tomorrow you're in a cellar.



OneRepublic @OneRepublic

Bruges, Belgium has now entered our top 3 most beautiful cities we've been to. It almost looks fake pic.twitter.com/HADUvI8lp3



Catherine Baker @richmondbridge

The WW1 centenary meets #eurovision: Udo Mechels's song Hero (In Flanders Fields) in final to represent Belgium https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCF5_Rw_Cl ...



Andrew McQuarrie @McQuazza

Ghent it up ye! Studying in Ghent next year. (Yep...I'm not sure where it is, either.) #ghentitupye



In response to: Senate approves road signs in other languages

fx @fxjtarga

.@marcelsel @flanderstoday is this to put all road signs in every Flemish dialect ?



In response to: App reveals history of forgotten colony

Mike Jarrey: As an immigrant, living in Sint-Maria-Lierde, from where the original 19th century Belgians left for Guatemala, I found this a particularly fascinating read.

Poll

Should there be tighter controls on animal testing in Flanders' laboratories?

a. Leave the scientists alone. They wouldn't use animals for certain tests if they didn't have to

11%

b. Why do the same tests on multiple animals? More regulation and inspections would force the sharing of research results

56%

c. Animal testing is barbaric and has no place in the science of the 21st century

33%

The results of our polls tend to show just how moderate our readers are, even on subjects that might be expected to arouse controversy. Take animal testing in labs: A clear majority of you are neither strongly for nor strongly against it, but do want to see controls and limits

and, above all, no unnecessary use of animals where other means are available.

Of the rest, three times as many people would rather see animal testing banned than deregulated, perhaps because the moderate position has been around for

decades now with not much discernible effect: Animals are still being used in experiments – and in increasing numbers – long after we were led to believe the practice would be phased out. Perhaps moderation only takes us so far.

THE LAST WORD

Future perfect

"Last weekend I went to a party thrown by a friend from secondary school. She told me that in those days I was sure I was going to make it big in Hollywood." Veerle Baetens, star of *The Broken Circle Breakdown*, is counting down to the Oscars

Stage fright

"I have to give the music a chance. Is this a good decision? I have no idea. Is it an unavoidable decision? Certainly. Singing is no longer a hobby; it's now what I do." Successful Flemish actor Koen De Graeve will tour with his band later this year

A leg up

"Your legs seem to work better the day after they've been shaved. For some reason, they feel better. I've no idea why, but that's what most racers say. I shave mine without foam, under the shower. It's done in five minutes."

Tom Boonen prepares for a new cycling season

Home improvement

"When I go home, I decide for myself if I want to work or not. Once I'm clocked out, it's not expected of me that I remain available. That doesn't mean I never check my mail, but that's my own choice." David Van Daele gave up a top law job to work in the less stressful atmosphere of Colruyt

Next week's question:

Flanders' winter athletes came back from the Sochi Olympics with precisely zero medals.

Should we give up on the Winter Games?

Log in to the Flanders Today website and click on VOTE on the homepage to register your vote!



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