

## Suspect denies involvement

As the fourth victim dies, the man arrested says he's not responsible for Jewish Museum shooting

► 2

## Plants that poison

Ghent researchers have found the gene that allows insects to store cyanide from plants

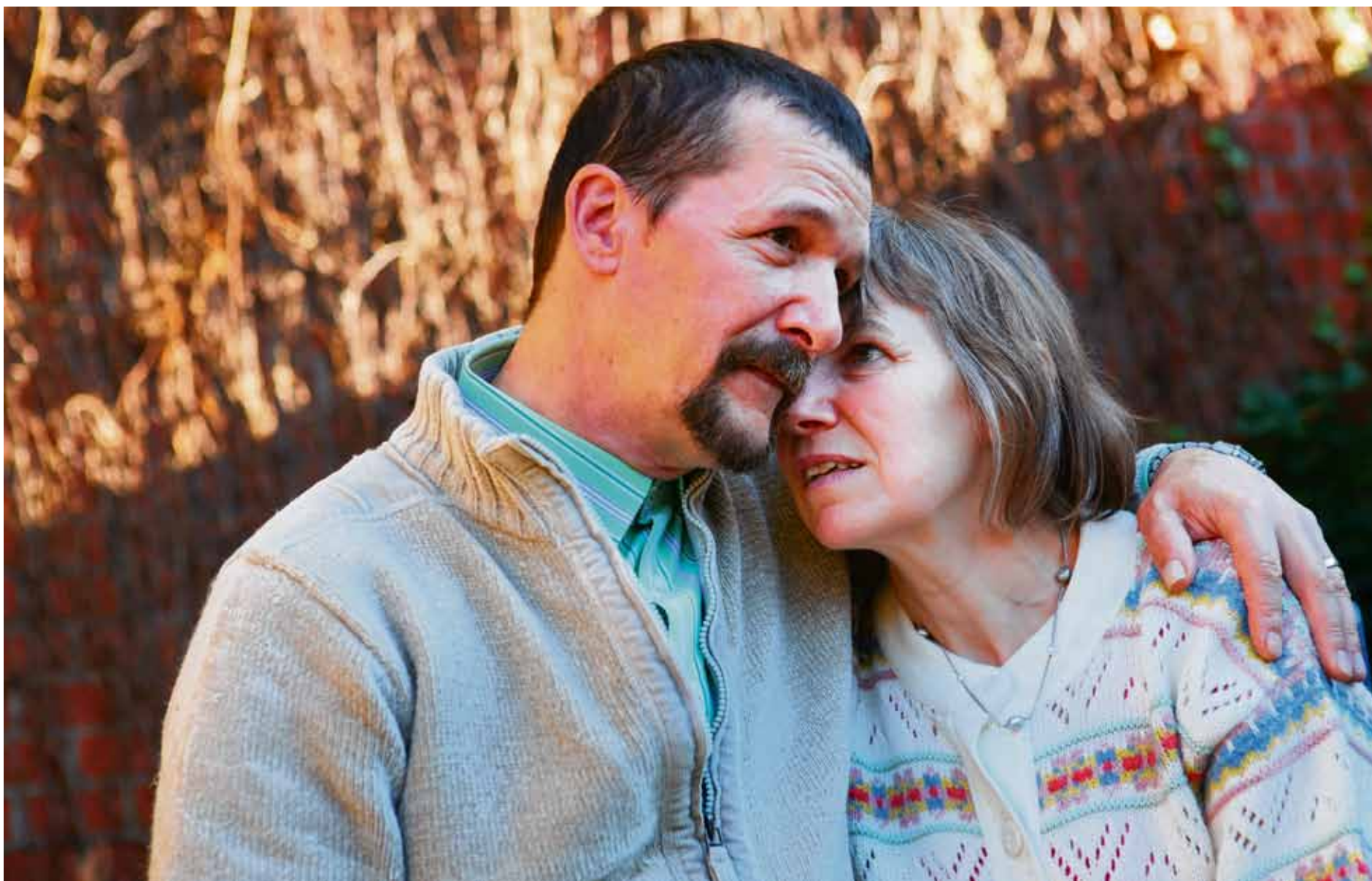


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## Summer at your doorstep

Antwerp's two-month celebration of performance and summertime chill-outs

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# Trouble in mind

## A Flemish network is tackling the challenge of living with early-onset dementia

Andy Furniere

At least 3,000 people in Belgium under the age of 65 suffer from early-onset dementia, but until now, there's been minimal support and information about the condition. A new website aimed at patients, families and health workers is changing that

When you think of people with dementia, you probably don't picture active and working people in their 40s or 50s. But at least 3,000 people in Belgium under the age of 65 suffer from one of the brain diseases categorised under the term early-onset dementia.

A new website launched by Flemish organisations and a Dutch

partner aims to raise awareness about the condition among the public, health-care professionals and policymakers.

Early-onset dementia was first put in the spotlight in Flanders in 2007, when a working group published the first practical manual on the disorder. The group included not-for-profit organisations, hospitals, government agencies, scientists and partners of people with the disease.

"At the time, there was almost no information available on the condition, which caused a lot of frustration among people who were confronted with it," explains Jurn Verschraegen, director of the Flemish Expertise Centre on Dementia.

Now the working group has presented an updated manual and an informative website, in conjunction with Maastricht

University's Alzheimer Centre Limburg. "We developed the website at the request of the children of people with early-onset dementia, who sometimes exchange experiences," says Verschraegen. "The design was in the hands of the daughter of someone suffering from the disorder, who knows all too well which questions have to be answered."

The website includes practical information, the proper channels to search for help, scientific progress and the latest news. It also features the working group's 10-point plan, a compilation of the most important challenges for policymakers in Flanders. It was first published in 2010, as a guideline for the previous government, and was adapted after the Dutch NeedYD study (Needs in Young-onset Dementia) identified more clearly the



# Deacon arrested for murder of elderly hospital patients

West Flemish man carried out “active euthanasia” on up to 40 patients

Alan Hope

The bishop of Bruges has expressed shock at news that a church deacon in Wevelgem has been arrested for murder. The 57-year-old Ivo P is accused of carrying out “active euthanasia” on as many as 40 elderly people over a period of 30 years.

The father of three has been a deacon in the town since 1996; prior to that, he was a registered nurse and then pastoral assistant in the Sacred Heart Hospital in nearby Menen from the 1980s to 2011.

During that period, he is thought to have administered a lethal dose of medication without the consent of the victim in as many as 40 cases, including members of his own family. He recorded the names of the victims in a notebook. They were either given a fatal dose of insulin or suffocated with a pillow. According to his lawyer, Filip De Reuse, the deacon explained that he acted to release patients from intolerable suffering. In the Catholic church, a deacon is a lay office, ordained by the bishop after a training period and permitted to act as witness at weddings and carry out baptisms. They may not, however, celebrate Mass, hear confessions or anoint the sick.

“My client was at that time confronted with people in a hopeless situation and acted from a sort of empathy or compassion,” De Reuse told VTM News. “However, he crossed a line which he now realises he should not have.”

“This is terrible news. We’re more than shocked,” said Peter Rossel, spokesperson for the bishop of Bruges. “Active euthanasia is absolutely not acceptable in the eyes of the church, and if it’s considered to be murder, then we’re simply speechless.”

The hospital in Menen never once received a complaint about Ivo P’s behaviour, spokesperson Kristien Beuselinck said. “Everyone is devastated. Of course nobody would expect this. The staff who knew him well are finding it impossible to comprehend.”

Wevelgem mayor Jan Seynhaeve revealed he had been informed in confidence of the man’s arrest a week ago but refrained from commenting until the news was released. He says the deacon was well-known and well-respected in the town, taking part in various organisations outside the church as well as serving as deacon in several parishes.



## Jewish Museum shooting suspect denies attack

Mehdi Nemmouche, who is in custody in France accused of the shooting deaths of three people in Brussels’ Jewish Museum last month, is now denying the attack. Nemmouche, 29, was arrested in Marseilles last week in possession of a revolver, a Kalashnikov rifle and ammunition, but now claims the weapons were stolen from a vehicle in Belgium.

“It seems that the weapons in his possession are stolen,” said his lawyer, Apolin Pepiezep. “He was planning to sell them in Marseilles. We think the French justice system can handle this case and has the power to convict Nemmouche for illegal possession of firearms.”

A video camera was also found in Nemmouche’s belongings, which shows him talking about his planned attack in Brussels. He can be clearly seen holding the weapons in question. Three people died in the attack, an Israeli couple and a French woman. A Belgian man who worked at the museum was severely injured, but continues to recover in hospital. Pepiezep said that Nemmouche will fight any attempt to extradite him to Belgium to stand trial for three counts of terrorist murder and one of terrorist attempted murder.

Earlier in the week, members of the



World Jewish Congress (WJC) held a ceremony for the dead outside the museum in Brussels and later met with prime minister Elio Di Rupo and federal interior minister Joëlle Milquet regarding security measures. Europe must, said WJC president Ronald Lauder, “do more in the way of education. We can never have enough security to protect people, but what we can do is educate people. There is no room in Belgium or in Europe for anti-Semitism, anti-Christianity or anti-Islam. We must live in peace.”

Milquet later accompanied her French counterpart, Bernard Cazeneuve, to lay a wreath in front of the Jewish Museum. “The people of France and Belgium are united in sorrow today,” Cazeneuve said.

As Flanders Today went to press, it was announced that the fourth shooting victim had died in hospital. **AH**

## Increasing shortage of GPs in Flemish municipalities

Despite several measures, the shortage of general practitioners (GPs) in Belgium is increasing, according to the most recent list of cities and towns with an insufficient number of doctors, compiled by medical insurance agency RIZIV. At the end of 2013, there was a shortage of doctors in about 150 Flemish cities and towns.

Municipalities with a shortage don’t reach the minimum standard of nine GPs per 10,000 residents. In 2006, RIZIV counted 88 cities across Belgium with a deficit, a number which has now more than tripled. According to the Syndicate of Flemish GPs, this shortage will continue to grow in the coming years.

The syndicate says that some doctors are already postponing their retirements because their patients have nowhere else to go.

The number of students training to become GPs, however, is increasing, and the federal government has introduced an “Impulse premium” of €20,000 for young doctors just starting out who work in an area with a shortage. “The government has waited too long to offer this premium,” said Steven Haesaert of the syndicate. “We also need to reduce the paperwork and give each doctor more administrative support.”

**Andy Furniere**

## Flemish cities won’t regulate alcohol sales during World Cup

Flemish municipalities will not follow Brussels’ example of introducing regulations on the sale or consumption of alcohol during the World Cup, according to a poll of local councils.

Last week, Brussels-City council said it was imposing a ban on the sale of alcohol in night shops in the centre between 22.00 and 7.00 during the World Cup period. The area concerned covers the Grote Markt and surroundings, Anspachlaan, Sint-Goriksplein and Sint-Katelijneplein.

Most Flemish municipalities – including Antwerp, Ghent, Kortrijk, Mechelen and Hasselt – are planning nothing new, but some already have strict measures. Leuven, for instance, does not allow consumption of alcohol in public places outside of terraces and



bars between midnight and 8.00. In Bruges, a ban that came into force last month prohibits the sale of alcohol anywhere but bars and restaurants between 23.00 and 8.00. **AH**

## THE WEEK IN FIGURES

14%

fewer fare-dodgers caught riding De Lijn public transport without a ticket in the first four months of this year, despite an increase in the number of people inspected to over 777,000

19’24”

average time consumers experienced electricity power outages in Flanders in 2013, 15 seconds less than the year before

86

stork chicks hatched this year at animal park Planckendael near Mechelen, 15 more than last year and a new record. The new arrivals are being ringed so staff can follow their migration patterns

7

Belgian police officers are heading to Brazil this week to keep watch over the behaviour of Belgian fans at the World Cup

€2 million

raised since March with the introduction of the personalised number plate in Belgium, which costs car owners €1,000



WEEK IN BRIEF

The **directors of the 24 museums** subsidised by the government of Flanders gathered in Brussels last week, each bringing an item from their museum’s collection, to take part in a “visual action” calling for subsidies to be doubled, from €8 million to €16 million. According to the directors, the freeze on budgets for the period 2014-2018 could mean the end of some institutions.

Belgium’s Privacy Commission is providing tips via its website on how to **exercise the “right to be forgotten”**, following a ruling by the European Court of Justice. The judgement means that EU citizens can require internet search engines and other sites to remove personal details “for pressing and justified reasons”.

▶ [www.privacycommission.be](http://www.privacycommission.be)

Jaro Steens and Hanne Verstreken of **Brussels have won the first series of *Mijn Pop-Up Restaurant!***, VTM’s follow-up to *Mijn Restaurant!*, in a close final against the series’ front-runners, Jeremy Meirte and Noémie Aerts from Antwerp. The decision was made by viewers, who favoured the Brussels couple’s reserved, good nature. The winners take away €100,000, while Meirte can be consoled with a job offer from top chef Wout Bru. In related news, Claudio Dell’Anno, the winner of the 2009 edition of *Mijn Restaurant!*, has filed a legal complaint against VTM. Dell’Anno, who now runs his own restaurant in Knokke, is claiming he was entitled to be paid €135,000 for the duration of the show, instead of the small fee participants normally receive. Mediaaan, owners of VTM, have filed a counter-suit.

Tour operators have issued a warning to families planning a holiday abroad this summer not to forget **to obtain a Kids-ID for each child** under 12. Only about half of all under-12s have the card, which is required for travel within the EU. “Every day there are

families at the airport who have to go home because they forgot to get one,” said a Thomas Cook spokesperson.

The **Hotel Méridien was declared bankrupt** last week by the commercial court in Brussels. There is a dispute between the Swiss owners of the familiar hotel, which faces Central Station in Brussels, and the lease holders over the rent of more than €300,000 a month for the building. A curator appointed by the court will now seek a way for the hotel to remain open.

Giel Foubert, the 16-year-old who fought a court battle to be allowed to go to India **to train as a Buddhist monk**, was back in Flanders this week, accompanied by his teacher, to open an exhibition of Buddhist relics in Ghent. The teenager from Sint-Laureins, East Flanders, left six months ago to train at the Jonang Takten Phuntsok Choeling monastery in the north of India.

Antwerp’s prosecutor-general, Yves Liegeois, has been awarded one of this year’s **Big Brother awards** by Flanders’ League for Human Rights, for a speech in which he called for newborn babies to be included in a new DNA database. Other winners were the smartphone, described as “a personal espionage tool in everyone’s pocket” and America’s National Security Agency.

Both male and female students at Genk’s Don Bosco school turned up for lessons last week **wearing short skirts**, in protest at the school’s regulation that allows girls to wear skirts in warm weather but does not allow boys to wear shorts. The protest convinced director Marleen Billen to adapt the rule. “We have asked our supplier of uniform skirts to provide a dark blue pair of smart shorts,” she said.

Michel Moortgat, CEO of Duvel Moortgat, has been given this

year’s **Vlerick Award for business leaders**. Moortgat took over the family business in 1998 and turned it into one of the country’s biggest brewers, concentrating on speciality beers like Duvel, De Koninck and Vedett. The company also has subsidiaries in the US and the Czech Republic. The award was the result of a public vote online as well as of guests at the prize reception in Brussels.

The appeal against the conviction of 28 people who took part in **protests against genetically modified foods** in Wetteren in 2011 has been postponed until October, the appeal court in Ghent announced. The delay was requested to allow civil parties in the action to study a recent ruling by a court in France, which acquitted 54 people in a similar case. The leader of the Wetteren protest was sentenced to six months suspended, and 10 others received three-month suspended sentences. Others were fined and ordered to pay a share of about €20,000 in damages.

A group of **small business owners in Aalst** have stepped up to help a carnival group facing a bill for €1.5 million for damage caused in 2004 when their float caught fire and insurance refused to pay out. The 11 businesses, including a cake shop, a hairdresser, a café and a butcher, have pledged to donate 5% of their week’s takings to the fund to pay the damages. “I find that we as Belgians, especially here in Aalst, ought to look out for each other more,” said Ingrid Roelandt of Patisserie Edelweiss. “This is a signal. Everyone can help a little.”

Denis Knoops, an executive with 22 years of service at supermarket chain Delhaize, has been named as the company’s **new CEO for Belgium and Luxembourg**. Knoops replaces Dirk Van den Berghe, who stepped down last month.

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



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Johan Verminnen

He’s spent more than 40 of his 63 years as a singer, but as he approaches the normal retirement age, Johan Verminnen is instead taking over as chair of Sabam, the association that represents the property rights of Belgian authors, composers and publishers. Verminnen was born in Wemmel, just outside of Brussels, in 1951, and singing seems to be all he ever wanted to do. He first came to public notice at the age of 18 in a talent contest on TV – something we tend to think of as a modern phenomenon. He released his first single a year later. His style is romantic and melancholy, sometimes only narrowly avoiding the overwrought melodramatics of the *schlager* style. His lyrics are in Dutch; one of his biggest hits, “In de Rue des Bouchers”, was sung in Brussels dialect. He’s also recorded numerous songs in French. In the 1990s, he worked for the creation of a separate judicial and fiscal status for artists – a job that is still not complete. In 1992, he

helped set up the representative organisation Zamu for singers and musicians, which gave out awards; it’s now known as the MIA awards. Verminnen began at Sabam in 2007. Sabam collects royalties owed to artists from performances of their music by radio stations, in advertising and in other media. The organisation has been criticised for its sometimes heavy-handed approach to smaller users, such as daycare centres charged for playing music to the kiddies or garages, where loud radios have been judged to be public performances. Verminnen then became one of two managing directors of the organisation – one each for the French- and Dutch-speaking sides. As an artist whose career straddles that language frontier, it’s perhaps appropriate that he was chosen to lead the entire organisation. His place as managing director has been taken by Hans Helewaut, a composer for films and TV who has sat on the Sabam board since 2011.

OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Songs in the key of bee

If you should happen to be in the vicinity of the Antwerp Opera and hear a hubbub coming from on high, have no fear. It’s either local chef Seppe Nobels of the restaurant Graanmarkt 13, or one of his 160,000 new employees. The Opera, you see, is the new location for four beehives, each capable of housing 60,000 bees, placed there by beekeeper Rik Janssens. The bees will provide honey, which will later be sold by the Opera. As a strong supporter of urban farming, it was Nobels’ idea to install the hives. He keeps bees on the rooftop of his own restaurant and uses the honey in his kitchen in sometimes surprising ways. “Antwerp Opera is a very good



© Waagsberg/Wikimedia Commons

location for bees,” Janssens explained. “There are plenty of flowers in the surrounding area. The Zoo is close by, and so is the Stadspark, the botanical gardens and the lime trees of the Graanmarkt. That means a rich and diverse source of food for the bees.” “We all know that the environment and the bee population are under enormous pressure,” said opera intendant Avril Cahn. “This is

Flanders Opera’s way of lending a hand. Projects like this show that everyone can live up to their responsibilities. The opera houses of Paris and Vienna already have beehives. We’re the first opera house in Belgium.” Nobels and Janssens now hope to convince other businesses to give over their rooftops to bee-keeping. For a fixed fee, Janssens’ organisation Amielo will place two hives in a suitable location – roof, balcony or garden. The bees will be looked after by a professional bee-keeper. “Unlike wasps, bees are not attracted by food and drink and present no danger to humans,” the association says.

▶ [www.amielo.be](http://www.amielo.be)

FLANDERS TODAY



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## 5TH COLUMN

Anja Otte

### Racism overlooked

When an article is shared on social media all day, by all kinds of people, you can be sure it has hit a raw nerve. This was the case last week, when VRT journalist Peter Verlinden wrote about a racist word – “negers”, a derogatory term for black people – graffitied on the side of his house.

Unsurprisingly, this was rather upsetting to Verlinden and his family, although he was, according to the article, “not surprised”.

My daughter has a problem, he wrote, for she is dark skinned. He referred to a speech made by Vlaams Belang leader Filip Dewinter, just before the elections. The problem, Dewinter said, was not the “greying” (ageing) of our society but the “darkening” of our society – referring to the increasing numbers of dark skinned people in Belgium.

Dewinter’s remark was reported but did not get the attention similar incidents did in the past, when Vlaams Belang was a much larger party. Most media now consider Vlaams Belang, irrelevant, its meagre score at the ballot box last month only confirming that view. In this light, the remarks were seen as a desperate attempt to get attention. The best thing to do, then, was to ignore them.

Verlinden, however, found the silence that followed both “remarkable and frightening, especially to a brown child’s father”. By their silence, he claimed, other politicians are allowing a racist underbelly to grow in Flanders, of which people will become the victims. “It is therefore my duty to denounce this, if only in the interest of my daughter, who has only been part of Flemish life for 18 months.”

Verlinden did more than just condemn Dewinter. He also asked N-VA, Flanders’ largest party, to state a clear position on the matter, because “roughly a quarter of its electorate are former Vlaams Belang voters”. He wants it to formally denounce any separation of the Flemish population based on skin colour. N-VA politician Liesbeth Homans reacted promptly. N-VA ignoring the “racist provocations” had been a “strategic choice”, not a mark of silent approval. The influx of former Vlaams Belang voters, she added, will not lead to any change in N-VA’s “inclusive” views.

In *De Morgen*, editor Yves Desmet cited similar “strategic” reasons not to give too much attention to Dewinter. “The strategy may have worked. However, along the way we forgot about your daughter, Peter. Our strategic considerations mean nothing to her. ... Thank you for pointing that out to us once again.”

# De Wever to report to king

## N-VA party president received extra week for federal coalition talks

Derek Blyth

As *Flanders Today* went to press, N-VA party president Bart De Wever was in the middle of a one-week extension to draw up a report for King Filip on the formation of a coalition government. De Wever was initially asked by the king to submit his findings last week, but the N-VA leader requested a further week to continue talks with parties on both sides of the language border.

De Wever is expected to try to create a centre-right coalition government that would include his own party but exclude the French-speaking socialists (PS). He is believed to be close to reaching an agreement with the Flemish Christian-democrats (CD&V) and the liberals (Open VLD), but he faces a tougher challenge in trying



Bart De Wever arrives at the palace last week

to persuade French-speaking parties to join a coalition that includes his nationalist party.

De Wever is said to be working towards an agreement with the French-speaking liberals (MR) and

the Christian-democrats (CDH). Political analysts are not optimistic that this is likely to succeed. “It’s impressive that the other political leaders are keeping quiet,” noted political scientist Nicolas Bouteca of Ghent University, referring to the lack of public statement over the last two weeks. “But it’s possible they just want to watch De Wever fail. We don’t know how believable their willingness to talk to N-VA is.” De Wever’s role as *informateur* is to explore possible ways of creating a coalition government. Once that has happened, a *formateur* is appointed by the King to put together a government. But naming a *formateur* is still a long way off, according to Bouteca.

## Agreement on Brussels government coalition shaky

The two sides in the government of the Brussels-Capital Region – French-speaking and Dutch-speaking – have reached a majority ready to begin negotiations for the creation of a governing coalition. Last week three French-speaking parties – PS, cdH and FDF – said they were ready to form a majority. By evening the Dutch-speaking parties Open VLD, SPA and CD&V had also come to an agreement.

The Flemish parties represent the

classical tripartite coalition that governed the region from 2004 to 2009 under minister-president Charles Picqué. From 2009 until last month’s election, the tripartite coalition was augmented by Groen, which provided Bruno De Lille, the secretary of state for mobility and equal opportunities. Groen has now been left out, despite its share of the vote in May having gone up from 11 to 18%, which, according to party president Wouter Van Besien, goes against the wishes of

the electorate.

Open VLD and CD&V ruled out the possibility of taking part in a coalition that includes the far-right francophone party FDF, which, with its 12 seats in the Brussels parliament, is required for the other two parties to form a majority.

In Wallonia, meanwhile, PS and cdH agreed to form a majority for the government of that region. The pact between the two parties, both in Brussels and in Wallonia, was said

by analysts to reduce the room for manoeuvre available to NVA party president Bart De Wever in putting together a coalition at federal level.

De Wever favours French-speaking liberals MR over the socialist PS, yet he also requires cdH to make the numbers work. CdH, however, is unlikely to put its relations with PS at risk in two governments to oblige De Wever in a third. De Wever declined to comment on the latest developments. **Alan Hope**

## Traffic chaos as G7 leaders arrive in Brussels

The leaders of the G7 arrived in Brussels last Wednesday for a summit that focussed on the escalating crisis in Ukraine. Brussels airspace closed for a time as US president Barack Obama arrived on Air Force One. He was taken by his special armoured car – nicknamed “The Beast” – to The Hotel on Waterloolaan, the same hotel he stayed at during the EU-US summit last March.

Obama went later in the afternoon to the Royal Palace where he met prime minister Elio Di Rupo along with King Filip and Queen Mathilde. He then joined the leaders of the other six leading industrial nations – Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the UK – for a working dinner in the Justus Lipsius building on Schumanplein.

The dinner was also attended by Herman Van Rompuy, president of the European Council, and Jose Manuel Barroso, president of the European Commission.

Traffic ground to a halt in several places in Brussels and on the Ring due to stringent security measures coupled with heavy rainfall. The inner ring was closed off for a period due to flooding in the Schuman and Stefania tunnels. The G7 summit was original planned as a meeting of the G8 in the Russian city of Sochi, but the summit was moved to Brussels following Russia’s military intervention in Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula. Obama left Brussels to attend a ceremony in Normandy to mark the 70th anniversary of the D-Day landings. **DB**



From left: European Commission president Jose Manuel Barroso, US president Barack Obama and European Council president Herman Van Rompuy during the G7 summit

## Education minister gives OK for schoolkids to go to World Cup

Flanders’ education minister Pascal Smet has given permission to 15 Flemish students to take time off school to travel to Brazil to watch Belgium play in the World Cup. The students – aged between nine and 13 – won a competition organised by the Belgian Football Association, the National Lottery and several TV channels. The prize was a trip to Brazil to watch the national team – but it meant taking four days off school at the end of term.

Smet’s decision has angered some headmasters and teacher organisations because it goes against his policy of deterring parents from taking children out of school before the end of term to go on holiday. Many parents do so to

take advantage of lower airfares, leaving classrooms depleted in the final days of the school year.

Mieke Van Hecke, director-general of the Flemish Secretariat of Catholic Education, said that Smet’s decision was undermining respect. “He doesn’t have the right to give permission. This goes against all the efforts he has been making to tackle the problem of truancy.”

Smet has defended the decision, saying that the rules can be waived for “personal reasons”. He added that the trip has an educational element as the 15 students would visit a museum, a nature reserve and a project run by the charity SOS Kinderdorpen. **DB**

## Groen appoints new leader in Flemish Parliament

Most political parties have stuck with their former leaders in the Flemish Parliament, but Groen and the far-right Vlaams Belang have opted for new faces to lead the parties.

Environmental party Groen has chosen Björn Rzoska from East Flanders as its leader in the House to succeed Elisabeth Meuleman. Rzoska is widely respected in the party for his work in opposing the government’s plans for the controversial Oosterweel project to complete the Antwerp Ring.

Before entering parliament, Rzoska worked for the Flemish Centre for Folk Culture and published a biography of the Ghent actor Romain Deconinck. His grandfather was a Polish soldier who participated in the liberation of Belgium in 1944.

Meanwhile, Vlaams Belang has appointed Chris Janssens to lead the party in parliament. **DB**



# Trouble in mind

## It's not just the elderly who are affected by dementia

► continued from page 1

needs of people with the condition and their families.

One of the problems included in the 10-point plan concerns the vagueness of the statistics. "The figures we have are based on one study from a research team in the UK, from several years ago," says Verschraegen. On the basis of these results, the working group estimates that there are between 3,000 and 12,000 people with early-onset dementia in Belgium. The early-onset variant thus comprises 2 to 9% of the total cases of dementia.

It's believed that approximately 700 Belgians each year are diagnosed with the disorder, two-thirds of whom are 55 or older. There are also cases known of children and people in their 20s with dementia, but these are extremely rare. "A thorough survey has to replace these estimates with clear figures so a policy strategy can be adopted according to the scale of the problem," says Verschraegen.

At the top of the list of challenges, the working group has placed the need for a quicker diagnosis, which can be achieved through better education of health-care professionals.

According to Mathieu Vandenbulcke, expert on the condition at the University Hospital (UZ) Leuven, on average four-and-a-half years can pass between the first signs of the disease and the correct diagnosis. "Because it is a relatively rare disease," he says, "it is often confused with more common psychological issues."

### Adapted care

Early-onset dementia is often wrongly identified by doctors as depression, burn-out, midlife crisis, obsessive-compulsive disorder, an alcohol problem or schizophrenia.

"Early-onset dementia is an umbrella term that encompasses symptoms of many brain diseases, of which the principal ones are Alzheimer's and frontotemporal dementia," explains Vandenbulcke. Important signs of Alzheimer's disease include memory loss, misinterpreting spatial relationships, speaking and writing troubles, difficulty focusing and mood swings. The frontotemporal dementia symptoms can mainly be categorised as behavioural or language issues. People may become self-centred, emotionally distant, withdrawn and unaware of others' feelings, or they might avoid social contact or neglect hobbies and interests. Language problems include having trouble remembering names, objects, facts and words. Sometimes people also experience changes in their fluency of speech and pronunciation. "It goes without saying that these problems seriously affect someone's personal and professional life," says Vandenbulcke. "It can also cause financial troubles, which are aggravated as people are often at the stage when they still have to pay off a mortgage and children's educational costs."

The progress of the disease forces most people to quit their jobs, and they often become isolated as social contacts are lost. Since this comes on top of the blow of the diagnosis, there is a danger that people can become depressed, putting further pressure on family relationships. The expertise centre therefore calls on health-care professionals to closely follow up their patients' psychological situation after diagnosis. To help people deal with the psychological difficulties, the Flemish Expertise Centre on Dementia is also developing an educational kit, which will be distributed in September. The organisation is also helping to set up buddy programmes that train volunteers to help people with early-onset dementia to carry out household tasks or during recreational activities, like taking a walk.



Early-onset dementia is relatively rare and is often confused with more common psychological issues

Such a programme reduces the pressure on caregivers, like family members, and helps people without a caregiver who is always present.

"People with early-onset dementia often still have a good physical condition and

should be in charge of the behavioural therapy, while social assistants help to improve family ties.

For the moment, there are five centres dedicated to these specific disorders in Flanders, but several more projects are in the pipeline. UZ

*"It goes without saying that these problems seriously affect someone's personal and professional life"*

cognitive capabilities, which have to be further stimulated to limit the effects of their disease," explains Verschraegen. If they need day care or residential care, this should also be adapted to their needs. "Their situation can deteriorate more quickly if they are cared for alongside elderly people with dementia."

The working group is calling for the establishment of more care centres that focus specifically on people with early-onset dementia. The centres should, for example, include more physical therapists who make sure the patients are active enough. Psychologists

Leuven, for example, is setting up a separate crisis and diagnostic centre. Verschraegen feels there should be at least two specialised care centres in each province.

The expertise centre is also involved in setting up programmes at university colleges, which train health-care professionals to deal with the challenges of early-onset dementia. In January, the Roeselare campus of the Catholic University College Vives became the first institution to provide this programme.

The centre is also a partner in the Te Gek!? (Too Crazy) initiative, a campaign started five years



Jurn Verschraegen, director of the Flemish Expertise Centre on Dementia

ago at the Sint-Annendael psychiatric hospital in Diest, Flemish Brabant. The goal is to break down preconceptions and taboos around mental and cognitive illnesses.

Last summer, four people with early-onset dementia cycled over mountains in France to raise awareness about their disorder, an adventure that was recorded in a documentary. As a successor to this Te Gek!? campaign event, the expertise centre is planning a hiking tour in the Himalayas.

### The right support

One of the participants of the cycling tour in France was Luc Claes from Kessel-Lo, near Leuven. His wife, Marleen Ruelens, tells me that her husband was diagnosed with the Alzheimer's variant of early-onset dementia three years ago, when he was 51. The first signs of the disease became apparent in his work as a primary school teacher.

"In class, he often got confused in the middle of his lessons and repeated himself," she says. "At home, he needed more and more time to correct tests because he would have to start over again several times out of uncertainty."

After six months, Claes realised that something was wrong and went to a neurologist, who immediately gave him the correct diagnosis. "This was a serious shock, and a further blow came a few months later when he had to give up his job," says Ruelens.

Losing the job also meant losing a lot of social contact. "Thankfully, we have received lots of understanding from friends, and cycling is an important outlet," she says.

Cycling has, however, recently become more difficult as the disease is impairing Claes' ability to interpret spatial relationships, making it harder to judge how to take a corner and carry out other manoeuvres. His orientation capacities have also deteriorated, so he can no longer go out on his own without getting lost. Sometimes his vision also falters.

Ruelens and her husband have been searching for voluntary work to keep him active, give him a sense of fulfilment and expand his social circle. But they have not yet found anything suitable.

"There should be special volunteering activities organised for people with early-onset dementia," she says. "There are thousands of people out there like my husband, who need the activity and can still do useful work for society."

► [www.jongdementie.info](http://www.jongdementie.info)



WEEK IN  
BUSINESS

## Cars ▶ Audi

The management of the Vorst-based assembling affiliate of the German car group has confirmed plans to invest €500 million in the facility over the next five years to produce the future Audi Q3. The company is also in negotiations to produce another model on the site.

Catering  
▶ Brussels Airport

Newrest-Servair has signed a contract to become the airport's second in-flight catering supplier. A tender had been issued after the takeover of Gate Gourmet by LSG Sky Chefs last year.

Equipment  
▶ Atlas Copco

The Sweden-based producer of compressors and equipment is to invest €15 million in its Wilrijk plant to produce industrial rotors. The company had to choose between its Flanders unit and one in China and chose the local facility for reasons of competitiveness.

## Media ▶ Politico

The Washington-based internet newsletter and magazine publisher is to launch a Brussels operation this year to cover European affairs. The venture is expected to compete with existing specialist media such as Euractiv, *European Voice* and EUObserver.

## Oil ▶ Catteaux

The Belgian petroleum products wholesaler has been sold to the Dutch Argos oil distribution company. Catteaux operates depots in Ghent, Anderlecht and Liège to supply customers throughout the country.

## Retail ▶ Decathlon

The French-based retailer of sport equipment and clothing is to open an outlet in Ghent in October as part of its bid to double the number of stores in the country to 30 within five years. The company is expected to hire up to 75 staff for the operation.

Supermarkets  
▶ Delhaize

The Brussels-based supermarket group has finalised the sale of part of its US operations for \$246 million (€181 million) to Bi-Lo holdings. The company is retreating from Florida and Georgia, where it operated 165 stores. It also sold its Florida-based distribution centre, but still operates 1,100 supermarkets in the US Atlantic Coast area.

## Electrabel pushes up prices

## Consumer affairs minister advises citizens to compare electricity providers

Alan Hope

Consumers have been advised to compare the prices offered by various electricity suppliers, following allegations that the largest of them, Electrabel, is trying to circumvent government measures taken to reduce prices. According to reports, the company is imposing an increase of 10% to 15% on what are known as the "easy customers" – hundreds of thousands of people who have remained customers of the company at a time when hundreds of thousands more began switching suppliers to get better deals.

"I'm getting an intense feeling of déjà vu," commented federal consumer affairs minister Johan Vande Lanotte. "In 2007, 10 days after the elections, prices went up. Now we're seeing the same thing played out. But this time there's no way we're going to take six years to set things straight." Clients will receive a letter from Electrabel informing them of the



new prices. According to Vande Lanotte, suppliers have seen an opportunity to increase prices after the government imposed a cut of about 15% which came into effect in January last year. In addition, some suppliers are refusing to pass on to customers a reduction in VAT from 21% to 6%, which was ushered

in last month.

"It looks as if Electrabel is employing a commercial strategy to recoup the losses suffered by the lowering of VAT and other measures taken by the government to bring energy prices under control," commented consumer organisation Test-Aankoop, describing the move as

"a disgraceful strategy. The price of electricity on the open market remains very low. Nothing can justify such an increase".

Within days of Electrabel's announcement, competitor Luminus announced higher electricity prices, though the company said gas prices would drop. Electricity prices will go up by 10%, said Luminus, worth about €20 a year to the average consumer. Gas prices will come down by about €75, producing a net gain for the consumer, CEO Gregoire Dallemagne said. The company would not comment on Electrabel's strategy or on Vande Lanotte's reaction.

Consumers in Flanders can find a comparison tool on the website of the Flemish energy regulator Vreg. Residents in the Brussels-Capital Region have the same option on the site of their energy regulator Brugel.

▶ [www.vreg.be](http://www.vreg.be)

## Most complaints to financial ombudsman concern payment transactions

Consumers of financial services made fewer complaints to the financial ombudsman service – known as Ombudsfm – last year, and the largest number had to do with payment transactions, according to the service's annual report.

Last year saw 2,324 complaints filed by consumers, 8.5% fewer than the previous year. Of those, 626 were declared admissible. To be accepted by Ombudsfm, a complaint has to meet a number of conditions and must first have been presented to the financial institution concerned without producing a satisfactory result.

The largest single group of complaints – almost one in three of the total – concerned payment transactions, including purchases made following the loss or theft of a debit or credit card. A new sort of complaint appeared in 2013, relating to confusion over the difference between a national bank transfer and a European bank

transfer.

Complaints about consumer credit grew slightly, by six cases to 93, while there were fewer complaints about mortgages, from 97 down to 82. In all, these accounted for 28% of complaints. Complaints about financial instruments no longer make up the largest group, but still represent one in four of all cases. The report says the service had to deal with a number of cases of people with a conservative financial profile – the type of investor not usually prone to taking risks – being sold unusually risky, complex-structured investments.

Meanwhile, in a separate report, the complaints made by businesses went up by 60% to 199 cases. By far the greatest number were related to professional credit, mainly so-called funding loss – the charge levied by a bank or other lender when the client repays a loan earlier than



scheduled, which causes the bank to lose out on interest payments. In most of these cases, Ombudsfm was able to negotiate a reduction in the penalty paid, particularly where the decision on early repayment was made in light of economic circumstances outside the borrower's control. AH

▶ [www.ombudsfm.be](http://www.ombudsfm.be)

## QinetiQ Space designing new docking station for ISS

Leading aerospace company QinetiQ Space has been awarded a contract worth €5 million from the European Space Agency. QinetiQ, based in Kruibeke, East Flanders, will develop a new system for coupling spacecraft with the International Space Station (ISS).

QinetiQ will develop a technical model for the new International Berthing Docking Mechanism (IBDM). The current contract, due to run until 2015, includes the development of an engineering model to be tested on the ground. That should lead to a following development contract, lasting until 2017.

"Until now, the ISS worked mainly with hard-coupling mechanisms, specially designed for large spacecraft, like the Space Shuttle,"



explained QinetiQ managing director Erik Masure. "The coupling of the new generation of lighter spacecraft with the ISS (pictured) has to take place at sufficiently high speeds to ensure a reliable seal. The IBDM is a soft docking system, designed to allow the force required for such a landing to be considerably reduced and to improve the reliability of the process." Andy Furniere

▶ [www.qinetiq.com](http://www.qinetiq.com)

## Sinksenfoor starts on Saturday at traditional location

Antwerp's annual Sinksenfoor summer fair started on Saturday, for the last time at its traditional location in the Zuiderdokken neighbourhood. The massive fair has 154 attractions this year and runs until 13 July.

This is in all likelihood the last time at the location, after local residents complaining of noise and crowd nuisance won a court case. Last year the fair – Flanders' largest – moved to the banks of the Scheldt, this year returning to the Zuiderdokken before taking up its new permanent location at a former railway site in the Borgerhout district. The move to that less-central location has led to protests from attraction and



food service operators.

On 18 June, fairground operators plan to compensate the people of Antwerp for the disruption caused in March by a blockade of roads, which led to traffic chaos. On that day, all tickets and snacks on sale will have a top price of €2. And on 24 June, people with a handicap and their carers can enjoy the fair's attractions for free. AH



# Another's poison

## UGent biologists identify the gene that make insects immune to cyanide

Senne Starckx

The chemical compound cyanide has been a popular poisoning agent throughout the centuries. One of the deadliest poisons on Earth, it was, for instance, used in the Nazi gas chambers under the brand name Zyklon B during the Second World War, and was also the preferred suicide method of German officers and commanders. Adolf Hitler, Erwin Rommel, Heinrich Himmler and Hermann Göring ... they all died after swallowing a cyanide capsule. But use of cyanide as a deadly weapon or chemical warfare in general is not just the prerogative of humans.

Several plants, among them crops like barley, apples, peanuts and almonds, can produce cyanide. The poison is formed in their leaves, stems, fruits, seeds, roots and tubers. The amounts of the substance produced are not harmful to larger animals or to humans. For small herbivores, however, they are highly poisonous.

But there are some exceptions. Butterflies, moths and mites share the enviable quality of being fully resistant to cyanide. They seem to be equipped with some sort of "detoxification apparatus" that converts the deadly compound into harmless molecules.



The two-spotted spider mite (*Tetranychus urticae*) feeding on a plant

to nibble on a cyanide-producing plant, the production of enzymes that releases cyanide from the special sugars is triggered. "So in a way, it's the attacker himself that detonates the cyanide bomb," Van Leeuwen says.

The resistance of butterflies, moths and mites to the cyanide is caused by a unique metabolic reaction in their tiny bodies that sees the poison converted into a harmless amino-acid-based product. In a recent experiment, Van Leeuwen and his colleagues identified the gene that enables this reaction – the beta-cyanoalanine synthase – or BCS – gene.

But on examining their findings, the researchers furrowed their brows. The gene looked familiar. The scientists realised it had been spotted before, but never in animals. In fact, the BCS gene is a typically bacterial gene and is often found in the *Methylobacteria* genus.

"This is a kind of bacteria commonly found on plants," Van Leeuwen explains. "They are also resistant to cyanide, as are many plants, because they need to protect themselves from their own poison. It seems that at some point in evolutionary history, these three cyanide-resistant insects must have hijacked this gene."

A remarkable evolutionary story unfolded before the eyes of the Ghent scientists. Over the course of time, butterflies, moths and mites had apparently developed a gene that allowed them to thrive on plants poisonous to their plant-eating rivals, like

snails, centipedes and aphids. But there was more. In the case of the butterflies, the insects not only proved to be resistant to the cyanide released by their host plant, they themselves produced the poison to repel their own predators.

"If the plant they are feeding on produces cyanide, butterflies can stock the cyanide sugars in special tissues," Van Leeuwen says. "If the host plant doesn't produce cyanide, however, they can still synthesise the sugars they need from amino acids." In both cases, butterflies degrade the sugars to subsequently release toxic cyanide when a predator attacks.

"In the meantime, these predators have learned not to attack butterflies anymore, as they could literally sit rather heavy on the stomach," the biologist explains. "It's really amazing to see how butterflies use the same mechanism as plants to deter their enemies. For moths and mites, it's still unknown if they use the same strategy."

Van Leeuwen admits that this kind of research is quite fundamental, so without particular uses in mind. But he stresses that it can yield applicable knowledge – in biotechnology, for example.

"This work is mainly a remarkable evolutionary story," the researcher says. "But our group works hard to indeed use this knowledge to devise better, sustainable crop-protection tools. Searching and uncovering the protagonists in insect-plant interactions can be of major importance in the biotech industry of tomorrow."

“Butterflies can stock cyanide sugars from plants in special tissues

A team of biologists from Ghent University has now identified the gene responsible for this surprising immunity to cyanide, and their findings have shed light on the mysterious practice of chemical warfare between plants and insects.

Ghent biologist Thomas Van Leeuwen says the release of cyanide by plants typically takes place in two phases. "First, plants synthesise and accumulate a non-toxic compound by adding sugars to certain amino acids," he explains. "Although these special cyanide sugars can already deter herbivores through their vile taste, they are not yet toxic."

In a second phase, when a herbivore begins

## Q&A

**Sofie Metsu is a PhD student at the University of Antwerp, who has identified a new genetic cause of mental disability**

**Which mental disability did you examine?**

The disorder we studied is still unnamed, but you could see it as variation of the so-called fragile X syndrome. This syndrome takes its name from the mutation that causes it, which can be visible as a gap or break in the female sex chromosome. This "fragility" is caused by a so-called CGG-repeat expansion of the DNA: the bases corresponding to the letter sequence CGG are copied many times during cell division. As a consequence, the gene that normally sits on this spot of the chromosome is inactivated and thus cannot code for its corresponding protein. The fragile X syndrome is the most frequent

cause of mental disability within families.

**How did you discover this variation?**

We focussed on a similar fragile site on chromosome 2. As it is the first fragile site of this type that was identified on the second chromosome, we termed it FRA2A. By studying the symptoms as well as the genetics in three afflicted families, we were able to identify this new genetic cause – or this new type of neurodevelopmental syndrome, if you will. However, in our case, the symptoms – slower development during childhood, mental disability – are much milder than in fragile X syndrome patients.



**So how common is this syndrome?**

That's still unknown. The only thing we know is that it's rare. We were only able to find three families in which the disorder occurs, thanks to our colleagues in Scotland and Australia. By way of comparison:

the frequency of the fragile X syndrome, the most common fragile site associated disorder until now, is estimated to be only 1 in 5,000. The frequency of Down syndrome – in which the patient has three rather than two versions of chromosome 21 – is eight times higher.

**Can faulty repetition of DNA on the other chromosomes also cause mental disorders?**

Yes, that's very likely. To date some 30 rare fragile sites spread across all 23 chromosomes have been reported in scientific literature. Until now, 11 of these have been molecularly characterised. And indeed, for seven of these a clear association with a neurodevelopmental disorder (autism, schizophrenia, intellectual disability) has been established.

Interview by SS

## WEEK IN INNOVATION

### Concern about hospital facility rules

A Royal Decree is imposing strict standards on hospitals that care for seriously ill or injured patients under 15. They include the number of beds, available staff and a paediatric department in intensive care. At present, of Flanders' 60 hospitals, only the university hospitals (UZ) in Ghent and Leuven meet these standards. UZ Antwerp will invest in adjustments. If a hospital does not conform, a patient has to be transferred. "This is life-threateningly dangerous," doctor Margot Vander Laenen of Genk's East Limburg Hospital told *De Morgen*. Zorgnet Vlaanderen, the umbrella organisation for the care sector, said: "Belgium is so small that there is hardly anyone living more than an hour's drive from either UZ Ghent or UZ Leuven."

### Diabetes drug improves general health

Flemish PhD student Wouter De Haes has discovered how the medication most often prescribed for diabetes around the world advances a generally healthy ageing process. Among other benefits, metformin suppresses certain cancers and cardiovascular diseases. This was already known, but scientists couldn't explain how it worked. De Haes found that it increased the production of harmful oxygen molecules in the mitochondria, which generate energy in cells by generating small electric shocks. Sometimes oxygen molecules are released during this procedure, which can harm proteins and DNA. But as long as large amounts of oxygen molecules are not released at the same time, they have a positive long-term effect. The cells intercept the oxygen molecules before they can do harm, making the cells stronger.

### VIB discovers cause of cell death

Researchers at Flemish life sciences research institute VIB have discovered the mechanism that causes necroptosis, a type of cell death that plays a crucial role in numerous diseases. Researchers knew cells explode, which causes inflammatory reactions in the surrounding tissue, but not why or how. "We found that cells activate pore-forming molecules that make holes in the membrane," said researcher Peter Vandenabeele. This provides new perspectives for the treatment of chronic and acute inflammatory and degenerative diseases where necroptosis needs to be blocked. **Andy Furniere**



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# The next tech generation

## Genk plans for the future with science and tech workshops for youngsters

Andy Furniere

The City of Genk is launching a range of workshops for youngsters based on technology and science, called Technologiebende (Technology Gang). The annual summer programme of activities for the city's young people has also been updated with workshops around these topics.

From September, the Technology Gang programme will provide half a dozen technological and scientific workshops each week to children between the ages of eight and 14. The youngsters will build robots, design computer games, launch rockets and try 3D printing. The goal is to reach 1,500 children every year.

The workshops will take place at locations belonging to partner organisations in Genk, chosen to encourage youngsters' inspiration and creativity. They include the Cosmodrome planetarium; Crib, the service centre for creative innovative businesses at C-Mine; the provincial Nature Centre and the Technical and Science Academy set up at C-Mine by Limburg Catholic College.

This academy is home to all kinds of tools and high-tech equipment with which kids can experiment: They can use traditional tools like hammers and nails but also get creative at a fabrication laboratory, or fab lab – a workshop filled with computer-controlled machines like 3D printers. The college installed a similar academy at the GreenVille cleantech incubator in Houthalen-Helchteren.

*“We need to solve this mismatch of supply and demand on the labour market”*

Hasselt's PXL University College is involved in the project, organising programming workshops and other activities. The educational not-for-profit organisation RVO-society, linked to Leuven-based nanotech research centre imec, is also sharing its knowhow.

But children don't have to wait until the start of the next school year to experiment with technology. The City of Genk has also re-oriented its summer programme of activities for youngsters, which is now called Technologie is Top (Technology is Terrific).

The youth department has adjusted its Grabbel&Co summer holiday programme for toddlers and kids



From making their own soap to computer programming, kids in Genk will be kept busy all summer long

up to 12 years old, by integrating activities that encourage interest in technology. Kids are also invited to participate in a science and technology week in which they can make their own soap and build creations with Lego bricks. The week finishes with an activity at the Cosmodrome.

The Cosmodrome has also expanded its offer for kids this summer, with activities such as the Dream to Fly show and workshops where youngsters can learn all about air transport. Even the summer's sport camps feature activities based on technology and sciences. Participants play sports in the morning, followed by multimedia activities, like creating an animated video, in the afternoon. This way, the city aims to reach children who otherwise would not necessarily choose technology workshops.

And at Crib this summer, children can learn the basic techniques of making furniture, design model cities and develop computer games. The Academy of Visual Arts and Media is organising workshops in which children can create objects they dream up in their imaginations.

According to the Genk mayor Wim Dries, the city needs to encourage the interest of its youngsters in technology and sciences for educational and economic reasons. “About 40% of students in Genk finish secondary education after repeating at least one school year, which is one of the worst rates in Flanders,” he says. “Genk also has a large number

of young people who leave secondary education without acquiring a diploma and a strong decline in registrations for technical education study programmes.”

The economic trigger for the policy measure is the closure in December of the Ford car manufacturing plant in Genk. “We will not solve unemployment in the region immediately through workshops for youngsters, but I'm convinced it will help develop the manufacturing industry in Genk over the long term,” says Dries.

“We need to train highly skilled technical professionals, as the new manufacturing industry will have to be more customised, small-scale and high-tech,” the mayor adds. “Companies are already looking for staff with this profile and can't find sufficient numbers of them, so we need to solve this mismatch of supply and demand on the labour market as soon as possible to stimulate the economy.”

Another important feature of Genk's strategy is the Technology & Talent (T2) campus at the Thor science park, located at the former mining area of Waterschei. The T2 campus should become a unique knowledge and learning platform where science and technology study programmes are brought together. The establishment of the campus is part of the Flemish government's SALK recovery programme for Limburg province.

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

## WEEK IN EDUCATION

### KU Leuven teams up with Stellenbosch

The University of Leuven and South Africa's Stellenbosch University have signed a preferential partnership agreement. The two have been collaborating for 20 years and are now expanding this co-operation. In contrast to most inter-university agreements, the collaboration comprises all faculties, departments and institutions of both universities and allows them to function as each other's gateway to southern Africa and Europe, through increased exchange of students and staff and joint PhD programmes and research projects.

### Test for aspiring teachers

A working group that examined the influx of students into teacher training is proposing a test before registration. The group consists of representatives of universities, colleges, unions, umbrella organisations and education experts. They started their analysis last year after a critical report on teacher training programmes in Flanders. They propose an orientation process in three phases. The first step should be to better inform secondary students about study streams in higher education. Teachers should encourage students with “educational potential” to start a career in education. The test would be the second phase and should give an idea of the student's knowledge, skills and attitude. In the third phase, the institutions should draw up a diagnosis of the registered students.

### Queen Paola Prizes awarded

The Queen Paola Prize for Education has been awarded to a group of teachers from Overpelt and a not-for-profit association in Brussels. The first-grade teachers at the technical secondary school TIO are the Flemish laureate in the category Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Technology. In the category After-School Support for Youngsters and their School, the Flemish Community's laureate was the not-for-profit Toekomst Atelier (Future Workshop) from Sint-Joost-ten-Node in Brussels. The awards, worth €6,500, were handed over on Wednesday by Queen Paola at the Royal Greenhouses in Laken. The prize was established by the Queen Paola Foundation in 1996 and annually awards teachers who distinguish themselves in their profession through original projects and not-for-profits or people who organise after-school activities targeted at the pedagogical and social development of children.

## Q&A

**Joke De Backer, a 27-year-old teacher at primary school GILO in Scheldewindeke, East Flanders, was elected Teacher of the Year by readers of education magazine *Klasse***

**How hard is it to start a career as a teacher in Flanders?**

It can be tough since you have very little job security until you have worked at a school for at least three years. I've been a teacher for five years, and this was the first year I had my own class. Before that, I always carried out temporary assignments at different schools, often substituting for teachers who were permanently appointed and could return at any time, such as after sick leave. I also feel I didn't get enough individual guidance at the start of my career. On the other

hand, doing many different jobs at various schools gives you a lot of useful experience and ensures that you become very flexible.

**How did your experiences in those first few years help you?**

It helps that I have worked in both regular and alternative education, so I can use the best of two worlds. In alternative education, such as a *leefschool* (live school), I acquired certain techniques to follow up on the well-being of children and to assist them in beginning to make plans independently. But

I also learned that it is useful to have certain guidelines in terms of which skills children should master, which are more common in regular education. I also have experience as a remedial teacher, which now helps me support children with physical disabilities and learning problems.

**You introduced several special activities in your class**

At the end of every week, I sit down with all the children in a circle and ask them to give someone else a compliment. This way, I get an idea of the general atmosphere of the class and of the personal relationships between the children. I also work a lot with music, dancing and storytelling. To keep



children focused throughout the day, I regularly give them a time-out moment to move about freely.

Interview by AF



## WEEK IN ACTIVITIES

### Brueghel Kermis

Folkloric carnival inspired by the life and work of 16th-century Flemish painter Pieter Brueghel, with live re-enactment of his painting "The Grain Harvest". Also live music, entertainment, folk games, pony rides and more. *15 June, 10.00 until late, Rekkem town centre, free*

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

### Retro Tour of Flanders

Nostalgic cycling event in which riders from all over Europe wear vintage outfits and ride classic bikes. The main event on Sunday is not a race but a fun ride of 40, 75 or 100km with stops for refreshment along the way. Vintage bike swap meet and retro dance on Saturday. *14-15 June, Oudenaarde, registration required for Retro Tour*

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

### Living Statue Festival

Encounter living statues throughout the centre of Lommel during this international street theatre festival, along with music, entertainment and more. *14-15 June, 14.00-18.00, Lommel city centre, free parking at Kristalpark with shuttle to centre, free*

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

### Hiking in Pajottenland

Grand opening of the newly expanded hiking network in Flemish Brabant, now covering 750km of trails. Stilt walking, carriage rides, photo expedition, live music, folk games, regional products, and of course hiking! *June 15, 13.00-18.00, Baljuwhuis, Kammeersweg 2, Galmaarden, free*

► [www.rlzzz.be](http://www.rlzzz.be)

### Night Watchman's Tour

The night watchman and his wife take you on a guided tour of Diest, with stories and anecdotes about 19th-century life in the City of Orange. The night watchman sees all, and tells all. *15 June, 14.00, parking Citadel, Leuvensestraat, €3, reservations required via Tourism Diest, 013 35 32 74*

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

### Zaradi Tebe Festival

Alternative outdoor arts festival with poetry, music, street theatre, comedy and circus acts from local and international performers. *14-15 June, 12.00, Pierkespark, Haspelstraat 3, Ghent, free*

► <http://zaraditebe.com>

# Killer jeans

## Antwerp designer Richard Babalola finds just the right cut

Katrien Lindemans

Some 20 years ago, Richard Babalola swapped his home country of Nigeria for Belgium. Currently based in Antwerp with his wife and two children, the artist and designer has been working hard to get his Babson Zotto denim label on the racks of local and international boutiques.

Babalola grew up in a house that was bordered by a tailor shop on each side. In 1989, he obtained an arts degree at the Polytechnic Ibadan institute in south-western Nigeria, and he started making clothes not long after. "My first label was called New Dimension, a collection of tie-dyed fabrics and batiks," he recalls.

Babalola also exported to Europe during that period, and after a friend convinced him to try his luck abroad, he applied for a visa and arrived in Belgium in 1991. "I bought a sewing machine at a Sunday market, not knowing what I'd do with it," he says. "I fell in love with jeans and worked for years to get the right cut and fit."

*"I fell in love with jeans"*

The designer says he went to great lengths to make the best jeans possible. "I would cut up jeans to study how they were made. Then start from scratch with a paper pattern to design jeans with the right fit from waist to foot." In 2008, Babalola registered his brand on the market. "Babson Zotto, with the first part referring to my surname and the second to my oldest brother's DJ name," he explains.

In those first years, Babalola often went down to the factories



To get his name out to a wider audience, Richard Babalola also took up painting

producing his jeans to follow the entire manufacturing process until he was happy with the end product. His exacting standards paid off when his label was quickly picked up by local media outlets. This in turn helped him to win over owners of high-end boutiques, such as La Bottega in Hasselt, to carry his jeans. "Women loved the fit and the finish," Babalola says, adding that some of his designs even include Swarovski crystals. "But as the orders increased, I had to start finding investors." To get his name out to a wider audience, the designer also exploited his other talent: painting. He makes both abstract works and portraits in oil and acrylic.

For his portraits, he tries to come as close as possible to a photograph of the person. "The more you do it, the better you become," he says. His portraits often depict public figures such as footballer Romelu Lukaku, Queen Mathilde, Herman Van Rompuy and TV presenter Ann Van Elsen.

"Most of them don't know that I have painted their portrait, but I want to show that I can do it," Babalola says. Recently, the artist offered such an airbrush portrait to Sally Mbanefo, the director-general of the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation. Upon accepting the artwork at a Berlin fair, she thanked Babalola for "doing his country proud with his handiwork and for distinguishing



himself in his chosen profession". With both his jeans label and artworks, Babalola is hoping to attract investors so that he can grow his business and, in the long term, have his denim exported to the rest of the world. He's interested in Nigeria in particular, not just because it's his native country but also because it currently has the fastest-growing economy in Africa. "I've been in Belgium for over 20 years now, and I've got the experience," he

says. And while nobody knows what the future will bring, the designer is ready for more.

"I'm thinking about a range of T-shirts for both men and women", he says, "made from very high quality fabrics, but sold at an affordable price." What exactly he's up to, he won't reveal just yet. But it wouldn't be a surprise if his artworks have something to do with it.

► [www.zotto.eu](http://www.zotto.eu)

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

Robyn Boyle

## BITE

### Cherry season

The Belgian Fruit Auction in the Limburg town of Sint-Truiden auctioned off the first cherries of the season in mid-May at €18 per kilo. The premiere batch again came from growers Kurt Notelteirs and Greet De Wilde of Ranst, Antwerp province, who have had bragging rights to the first cherries of the season for 13 years straight. Not coincidentally, perhaps, they are also the only local producer to grow their cherries in a greenhouse. "In the Netherlands, it is commonplace to grow cherries in greenhouses, while this is not the practice in Belgium," explains De Wilde. "But because the results are so good, we will continue to expand our operations."

Notelteirs is an agricultural engineer who took over the fruit-growing business of his father



about 16 years ago. Back then, he had 10 acres to work with; the area has more than doubled since. "With the experience I had in greenhouse cultivation, I decided to try my hand at growing organic cherries in a small corner of the greenhouse," says De Wilde. "We had a nice harvest in just a few years."

Cherry season started particularly early this year because of the mild winter. "I expect the season to peak between the third week of June and mid-July," says Filip Lowette, general manager of the national fruit auction. "Luckily, April's frost didn't cause any major damage to the cherry blossoms."

The cherry is a stone fruit and its tree belongs to the rose family. In Flanders, *kers* refers to a sweet cherry, the kind you just pop into your mouth. A sour cherry, or *kriek*, is equally popular, especially for incorporating into tarts, jams or the famous *kriek* beer.

In June and July, fruit producer Jacobs in Sint-Truiden opens its orchards to the public for cherry plucking. A tractor brings you to the trees heaviest with the fruit, where you can pick (and sneak a taste) to your heart's content. All the cherries you collect get weighed and charged at a day price per kilogram. A full basket of cherries weighs 8kg and comes with a €4 discount. It is recommended to register in advance if you want to pluck on a Saturday.

► [www.jacobsfruit.be/plukzelfufruit.asp](http://www.jacobsfruit.be/plukzelfufruit.asp)



# Crashing football's carnival

## A new generation in epic form: The dog days are finally over for Belgium's national team

Leo Cendrowicz

Word association with Brazil might get you some of the following: beach, Amazon, bikini, samba, favela, Carnival. But it will always get this: football. More than any other country on the planet, Brazil is synonymous with the "beautiful game", itself a term coined by perhaps its greatest exponent, football legend Pelé.

The Brazilian players are the only ones with five stars on their shirts, one for each of their World Cup prizes, and – who knows? – maybe a sixth will be sewn on shortly. This year's World Cup in Brazil is thus long overdue.

Also long overdue is a Belgian presence at the party. The last time the Rode Duivels, or Red Devils, took part in a major tournament was the 2002 World Cup in Japan and South Korea where they were knocked out by, of all sides, Brazil.

But even then, it was close. After a goalless 35 minutes, their Captain Marvel of the day, Marc Wilmots, headed the ball into the Brazilian net, only for the referee to disallow it for a spurious foul.

### Confident coach

Wilmots today is, of course, the Belgian coach, whose side play their first World Cup game in 12 years when they line up against Algeria on 17 June at the Mineirão Stadium in Belo Horizonte. They then play their other Group H opponents, Russia, on 22 June at the Maracanã Stadium in Rio de Janeiro, and South Korea on 26 June at the Arena de São Paulo.

But fans will obviously be hoping they are still in the game after that. There is more than a good chance that they will be. The team is already being compared to previous best sides, like the Red Devils who finished runners-up in the 1980 European Championship to West Germany and secured fourth place at the 1986 World Cup in Mexico.

But lean years followed once the big money flowed into the sport after the millennium – the standard of the Jupiler League dropped, and the national side struggled. Since co-hosting Euro 2000 with the Netherlands, Belgium has

failed to reach five out of six major tournaments.

There are many reasons for the turnaround, including the "development vision" for football in schools by the Belgian football association, the KVBV, in practice for 10 years, with constant adaptations based on the feedback of teachers, youth coaches and clubs.

But credit is also due to Wilmots. Capped 70 times by Belgium, with 28 international goals to his name, Wilmots, 45, has instilled a sense of self-belief into the already awesomely talented generation of Belgian players. A former Mechelen and Sint-Truiden dynamo, he has made the Red Devils one of the most organised, disciplined and, frankly, difficult teams to play against.

And what of the players themselves? Years ago, other football fans would have struggled to name a single Belgian footballer, but now they grace some of the finest sides in Europe, including this year's champions in Germany (Bayern Munich's Daniel Van Buyten), Spain (Atlético Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois) and England (Manchester City and national captain Vincent Kompany). The English connection is especially tight: Each of the top seven teams in this year's Premiership (Manchester City, Liverpool, Chelsea, Arsenal, Everton, Tottenham, Manchester United) have at least one Belgian player on their books – and 11 of the 23 players in the Red Devils squad are based there.

### In fine form

Most pundits actually rate Belgium rather than England to succeed in Brazil. It is thus likely that Belgium will be the second team of choice for most English fans this month – or their first choice when England inevitably crash out.

But it is not just their employers' names that make the Red Devils stand out. Let's start at the back: Courtois, named as the Champions League goalkeeper of the season, competes for the position with Liverpool's Simon Mignolet and Zulte Waregem's Sammy Bossut.

In defence, Kompany is amongst



The Red Devils at a training camp on the Flemish coast last week

the finest centre backs in the game today. His defensive partner, Arsenal captain Thomas Vermaelen, has a deserved reputation as a solid stopper, and Jan Vertonghen is one of the first players on the Tottenham team sheet.

Van Buyten, at 35, is entering his seventh campaign at Bayern Munich; Anderlecht's Anthony Vanden Borre has proved himself exceptionally versatile on the right; and full back Tony Alderweireld has already impressed in his first season with Atlético de Madrid.

In midfield, Eden Hazard's exploits with Chelsea won him the Young Player of the Year award. However, Chelsea, which currently have four Belgian players on their books, are regretting letting Kevin De Bruyne transfer to German side Wolfsburg, where he has settled in comfortably. Marouane Fellaini was Manchester United's signing last summer from Everton, where he developed a powerful midfield partnership with fellow Belgian Kevin Mirallas.

In attack, the super-fast Romelu Lukaku's epic form at Everton has already made him one of the candidates for the Golden Boot at the World Cup. Aston Villa's Christian Benteke – sadly sitting out the World Cup with an injury – is a Young Player of the Year nominee. And Dries Mertens has scored an impressive 11 goals in his first season with Italian side Napoli.

Perhaps the most exciting prospect, however, is a player who has only just pulled on his Belgian jersey: Adnan Januzaj. Born in Brussels 18 years ago to Kosovar-Albanian parents, he has been mesmerising in his first season with Manchester United. But it was only in April that he formally confirmed his international allegiance with Belgium. For all his experience playing in front of 80,000 fans at Old Trafford, the World Cup

will be another level of intensity for Januzaj.

Even Wilmots knows that the odds are against Kompany and company hoisting the golden trophy at the end of the final on 13 July. But those odds are still the lowest they have ever been: bookmakers are offering 22 to

one, making them fifth favourites, after Brazil, Argentina, Germany and Spain.

So for all those rooting for the Red Devils, this World Cup is not just about making a comeback, but making it one to remember.

## WHERE TO WATCH THE GAMES

In Brussels, giant screens have been set up to show the Belgian matches in the Koning Boudewijn stadium, in Vorst-Nationaal and outdoors on Koningin Astridplein in Jette and Dumonplein in Sint-Pieters-Woluwe. Vincent Kompany's new sports bar on the Grote Markt, Good Company, is one of many in the capital, including Fat Boys on Luxemburgplein, O'Reilly's on Beursplein, and the Café du Mundial on Nieuwe Graanmarkt,

that will air the matches for one and all.

In Antwerp, Sportpaleis is showing the games on a big screen, as is Kelly's Irish Pub on De Keyserlei and the Sportbar Antwerpen on Ernest Van Dijckkaai.

Ghent is showing the games at Flanders Expo, while its sports bars include Celtic Towers Irish Pub on Sint-Michielsdijck and Patrick Foleys on Recollettenlei, both in the centre.

## FOOTBALL LAID BARE

For fans who want to see another, erm, side of the Red Devils, the Botanique in Brussels is home to a photography exhibition focused exclusively on the national sports heroes – and their naked torsos. With *MMXIV Les Diables/De Duivels*, Flemish photographer Stephan Vanfleteren – a star in his own right – has shot a series of sober yet arresting black-and-white portraits in which the bare-chested players loom large like Greek gods.



Axel Witsel as seen by Flemish photographer Stephan Vanfleteren

Until 17 August

Botanique

236 Koningsstraat, Brussels  
► [www.botanique.be](http://www.botanique.be)



After two years as coach, Marc Wilmots is credited with instilling a sense of self-confidence into the talented new generation of Belgian players



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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 



# Buscemi: full of surprises

The Limburg musician is keeping busy this year with a variety of intriguing projects

Christophe Verbiest

Limburg's Dirk Swartenbroekx, aka Buscemi, talks to Flanders Today about his latest album and his diverse side projects, encompassing concert bands, film scores and the Red Devils

The new album by Buscemi, *Sol y suave*, is a generous mix of dance beats, exotic sounds and lounge grooves. Buscemi, named after the American actor Steve, is the brainchild of Limburg's Dirk Swartenbroekx. With a live band, but also with his DJ act, The Bossa Squad, he travels the world, boosting people's happiness by serving them beats combined with bossa nova or Latin sounds.

Fans of the Red Devils, the national football team, might soon cross Buscemi's path. This month he'll be playing a few times at Dance with the Devils, the event at Brussels' Vorst Nationaal where the team's World Cup matches will be shown on a huge screen. Buscemi is taking care of the party.

"I'm not a football fanatic, but I really dig a tournament like the World Cup," he says. "And my heart beats a bit faster when the Belgian team is winning." He didn't hesitate either when asked to make a remix of the chant *Olé, Olé, Olé*, his being a Latin house version. "I included Brazilian commentators in the mix to transmit the feeling you're in a football stadium."

If you want to know how his own music sounds, you'll have to turn to *Sol y suave*. For eight of the 11 tracks, he worked with a vocalist. Some of them, like Kyoko Baertsoen,



Catch the ever-inventive Dirk Swartenbroekx, aka Buscemi, as he tours Flanders this summer

are Buscemi regulars; other are new. "Most of the people I know personally," he says.

"Luigi Catalano is an Italian singer in Genk, though he's probably not known outside the town. (Actor) Eline De Munck I met at a party. I must admit, I didn't know her, since I don't watch much television. But she told me she also sang and I still had a song for which I needed a voice, so I told her: Have a go. And the result was excellent."

He also receives requests from strangers who want to collaborate with him. "Nowadays, due to contests like *The Voice*, loads of people think they can sing. But I find it charming that people bother to try and contact me. Sometimes they're really interesting."

When he starts working on a new track, Swartenbroekx generally knows whether he wants a vocalist on it or not. "It makes an important difference," he explains. "When I want a vocal, I make sure the music is not too dense, because that wouldn't work with a voice. There's nothing as irritating as a song that's musically packed with a voice on top."

The singers get plenty of freedom in writing the lyrics, "as long as they don't get too cheesy", Swartenbroekx says. "I see myself as a director. I play most of the instruments, which means I create the rhythms, the piano sounds, the structure of the song, sometimes the vocal melody. But I work very intuitively. I follow my feelings."

Though Buscemi does work with male singers, the majority of the voices he uses are female. "My music has a feminine touch. I notice when I DJ, more women than men fill the dance floor. It's probably because my music sounds a little exotic and a bit more stylised than other dance music."

"I love male singers like Tom Waits, Paolo Conte and Frank Sinatra, but women singers dominate my record collection: from Billie Holiday, Sarah Vaughan and Julie London to Joni Mitchell, Alice Russell and Liz Frazer." The most surprising guest on *Sol y suave* isn't a singer, though. Regi Penxten, from the commercial dance formation Milk Inc, co-wrote one track on the new album. "The collaboration was the record label's

idea," Swartenbroekx says. "This is my first album on Mostiko, which is also Regi's label. I knew him, of course, but our musical worlds are quite different. My idea was a bossa nova track with an arena sound. We finished it in a few days."

*"I'm living in an escapist world: I'm travelling to places where people are always friendly and ready to have fun"*

Six years ago, Buscemi wrote a soundtrack for *Man with a Movie Camera*, a silent film by Dziga Vertov. Later, he scored *Mixed Kebab* by Guy Lee Thys and the television series *De Rodenburgs*. He has no new film or television work in the pipeline, but says he's open to new projects.

But cinema will have a place in his work this autumn: As a DJ he'll give a series of film concerts with Kreato, a huge concert band from Halle, featuring some of the greatest movie themes. "*Star Wars* or *Psycho*, the themes from *The Pink Panther* and James Bond, you name it," he says. "I was hoping to also include some music from *Eraserhead*, the experimental film by David Lynch, but that might be too difficult. Anyway, I'm really looking forward to it."

Five years ago, Buscemi surprised

by producing his own wine, to accompany the limited edition of his album *In situ*. Next month, you can buy Buscemi glasses. "I designed them with Philip Hoet, the optician from Antwerp. Well, he mostly did the work, but I gave him some ideas. It's a limited edition, in different colours. Some models come in a special box with an exclusive DJ mix from me."

After a few EPs in 1997, Buscemi released his first full album the following year. Swartenbroekx, who's 47, has no difficulty picking out highlights of the past two decades. "First and foremost, the fact that I can live from what was once my hobby."

"Moreover, music has allowed me to see half of the world. I don't think I would have travelled to Japan or China without the music. Travelling means meeting people. And I'm living in a sort of escapist world: I'm travelling to places where people are always friendly and are ready to have fun." He laughs. "That soothes one's ego."

But there's another, much darker side to Swartenbroekx that's less well-known. It comes out in his one-man project *Azure Mortal*. "I've released an EP with dark soundscapes in the style of Throbbing Gristle or Nurse With Wound, and a 7-inch with two piano pieces à la Philip Glass."

"As a teenager I grew up with new wave, and that's what you can hear in *Azure Mortal*. I'm not only fond of dance music, I also listen to highly experimental music or free jazz." More of *Azure Mortal* can be expected in the future. *Olé, Olé, Olé* it ain't, but it's certainly worth checking out.

*Buscemi is on tour across Flanders this summer*

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





WEEK IN ARTS  
& CULTURECaroline Strubbe's  
films at MoMa

New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMa) will screen Flemish director Caroline Strubbe's two features as part of its July film programme. Strubbe is the first of her generation of Flemish filmmakers whose work is being shown by the prestigious institution. Strubbe's 2009 film *Lost Persons Area* sees the young girl Tessa finding a friend and protector in a Hungarian immigrant. Her 2013 follow-up, *I'm the same I'm an other*, finds Tessa travelling from Flanders to England with her new friend. "Caroline Strubbe's voice is like nothing I have ever heard before," commented Dave Kehr of MoMa. "Intimate, detailed and tangibly realistic but at the same time enigmatic, elusive and with respect for the inherent mystery of people and places."

Hannelore Knuts  
pregnant with  
first child

The parents of Flemish supermodel Hannelore Knuts have confirmed that she is nearly five months pregnant with her first child. The 36-year-old Knuts splits her time between Antwerp and New York, where her partner, Flemish film director Nicolos Provost, also lives. In 16 years in the business, Knuts has walked runways all over the world and been photographed for editorials and covers of fashion, art and lifestyle magazines, such as *Harper's Bazaar*, *Pop*, *New York Magazine* and several versions of *Vogue*.

Radio icon Jos  
Ghysen dies at 88

Jos Ghysen, a long-time Flemish radio and TV personality, died last week at the age of 88. Ghysen is best known as a pioneer in talk radio. Ghysen's evening talk, music and quiz programme "Te bed of niet te bed" (To Bed or Maybe Not) drew one million listeners every week from 1967 clear to 1990. He was also well known for his *cursieffjes* – poetic prose pieces about an aspect of everyday life – which he read weekly in a programme called "Het Schuren Scharniertje" (The Creaking Hinge). In more recent years, Ghysen wrote young adult fiction and posted regularly to his website. Two years ago, he was in the public eye when a former colleague accused him of sexual and emotional intimidation during the years they worked together on the radio. Ghysen denied the allegations. His hometown of Hasselt has opened a condolence book. The funeral is scheduled for 14 June in the city's Sint-Quintinus Cathedral.

## Musical lessons

## English-language version of 14-18 musical brings war tragedies up close

Katy Desmond

"I think it is a story that should not stop being told. It should be taught to every generation because we do not want something like that to happen again," says British actor Kayleigh McKnight. She is talking about her first acting role across the Channel, in the mega-musical *14-18*, an epic tale of four young men grappling with the tumult and tragedy of the First World War as it ploughs through Flanders.

*14-18* is the latest collaboration of multimedia entertainment empire Studio 100 with director Frank Van Laecke, composer Dirk Brossé and songwriter Allard Blom, a team that made its name in Flemish musical theatre in 2008 when it sold some 220,000 tickets to its hit show *Daens*. Complete with moving seats that take viewers in and out of the action at the Nekkerhal in Mechelen and a 360-degree whirlwind of computerised special effects, the team is back and bigger than ever, just in time for the centenary of the First World War.

Rehearsals have begun for the show's one-night-only English performance on 15 June. The show's creators have brought in an almost entirely new cast from London just for the performance, including McKnight, 23, who will play Anna. "I have never done anything this big before," McKnight says. "It is a



little bit scary. I am just so excited because for me this will be a totally new experience. I think for everyone else as well because there is nothing like this in town."

However, if jazz hands and fluff come to mind when you hear "spectacle", McKnight warns you to think again. "You are not going to see a play that is just white-washing the war. It is a hard-hitting production that will affect you emotionally."

Coming from Britain, where every child has watched *Blackadder* going over the top and where in the month of November there is not a shirt on television without a red paper poppy pinned to it, McKnight acknowledges a personal connection to the script. "I think everyone can say that they feel connected to it," she says. "There

are no people alive anymore who were in the war, but everyone has family ties to it. I have family that were part of both world wars."

Apart from an emotional experience, it has also been an educational one for McKnight. "To be honest, I did not really know much about the First World War. In schools, we get taught more about the Second World War. I did not realise the extent of Belgium's involvement, that they were basically stuck in the middle."

She describes how *14-18* has helped



Kayleigh McKnight (left) who plays Anna, with Free Souffriau (right), her Flemish counterpart in *14-18*

her better understand the full toll the war took on Europe. "It is nice to see the Belgian perspective and not just the British one, because it did affect everyone. It was not just the British. It was not just sons and soldiers, but friends and girlfriends and wives. It was everyone. Everyone was exactly the same."

It is this message that the actor would like audiences to take home. "I do not know how the elections have gone down in Belgium, but in Europe right now there is this whole feeling of discontent – everyone feels unhappy. When people see a show like this and actually look back and remember what happened, they realise what people sacrificed for what we have right now."

15 June,  
19.00

## Nekkerhal

Nekkerspoel-Borch 9999, Mechelen  
► [www.1418.nu](http://www.1418.nu)

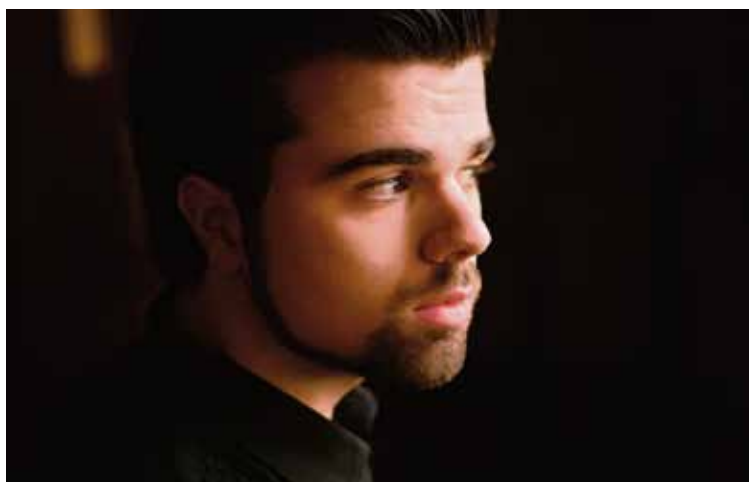
Welsh festival explores impact of war  
on Belgian refugees

This year's Gregynog Festival in Newton in the county of Powys in Wales will adopt a particularly Belgian flavour. The current edition of the classical music festival explores the effects of the 17th-century English Civil War and the First World War that started 100 years ago on musicians in Wales and the borderlands.

About one million Belgians fled their homes at the start of the war in 1914, with around 100,000 settling in the UK. The refugees included composers and artists who escaped to Wales at the start of the war, thanks to the philanthropy of the sisters Gwendoline and Margaret Davies, who with their stepmother Elizabeth, arranged for their accommodation.

The Davies sisters not only built up one of the country's largest art collections, they also established the Gregynog festival in 1933 and later gifted their mansion, Gregynog Hall, to the nation.

Among the artist refugees were composers Eugène Guillaume and Nicolas Laoureux, sculptor George Minne and Ghent-based painters Valerius de Saedeleer and Gustave van de Woestijne. The latter's son David, who was born during this



exile and given the name of Wales' patron saint, later went on to become a concert pianist and composer in his own right.

"The Belgian refugee artists are quite well known in Wales, and there have been exhibitions about them here and in Belgium," says Dr Rhian Davies, director of the festival.

As a music historian, Davies had always been intrigued by one sentence in an exhibition catalogue that read: "There were also very distinguished Belgian musicians who came and gave a sequence of chamber music concerts across

Wales." That was "a red flag to me, really," she says, "and I wanted to find out more. I began my research several years ago."

Davies says that although she is a researcher by training, the project was challenging. "But I've discovered sources in the UK, in Wales in particular, and in Belgium," she says. "I think this is just the beginning

because there's such a groundswell of interest now, and I hope very much that the festival and all the publicity will perhaps bring more information to the fore, in the sense of finding family members and so on."

Artists who will take the Gregynog stage in the coming weeks include Antwerp-born violinist Yossif Ivanov (pictured), who came second in the Queen Elisabeth Music Competition in 2005, and the Flemish Radio Choir. There's also the Brabant Ensemble, an Oxford-based vocal group that draws the majority of its early music repertoire from the Duchy of Brabant.

"The four last concerts of the season I will be reviving music for violin, for chamber ensemble, for orchestra and for chorus. All of it by the composers I've identified as having come here," Davies explains. "I had to find their names first of all, then find their manuscripts, evaluate it and see what was good to revive. It's quite an ambitious project, as it turned out." Alan Hope

13-29 June

## Gregynog festival

Venues across Wales  
► [www.gregynogfestival.org](http://www.gregynogfestival.org)



Summer's longest party

## Zomer van Antwerpen

Until 31 August | Across Antwerp

► [www.zva.be](http://www.zva.be)

Summer in Antwerp means one thing - apart from barbecuing along the Scheldt and navigating the sea of people at Park Spoor Noord - and that is Zomer van Antwerpen, or Summer of Antwerp. The city's feast of the season lasts over two months and occupies rooftops, hangars, parks and the odd industrial area. This year, Zomer van Antwerpen celebrates its 20th anniversary. The birthday programme is filled to the brim with concerts, theatre and circus shows, movie nights and innumerable parties. Most of which are free, by the way.

The ever-popular chill-out spot Zomerbar has found a new location

on Sloepenweg in Antwerp-North close to the harbour, where you'll also find circuses and a temporary library. Children can play while parents, well, drink, in a dreamy holiday-like setting. The bar is open every day during July and August, so cheers.

On the other side of the city, in the bohemian family neighbourhood known as Zurenborg, you'll find the Zomerfabriek (on Minkelerstraat). By day, free dance, street soccer and basketball workshops take place in the Urban Sports and Culture Hall. And when the sun goes down, you can catch a movie, listen to spoken word and DJ sets or bring down the house on the dance floor. There's



© Julie Verhulst

a party concept for almost every day of the week, from Global Bass Thursdays to Jammin' Sundays.

Still a slot or two to fill on your calendar? Enjoy solely optimistic films on the big screen at Cinema Urbana (in Hangar 19a on Plantinkaai), experience theatre at unique locations throughout the city and sleep in the Nulsterrenpension. As the ironic moniker "zero-star pension" indicates, this abandoned gas factory offers unpretentious and cheap lodgings to anyone looking for a fun place to spend the night. (Incidentally, it is also the perfect place to crash if you lose your keys shaking what your momma gave you in the Zomerfabriek.)

Too much fun to process? You can find an overview of the festivities along with a detailed programme on the website. **Catherine Kusters**

## PERFORMANCE

## Don Giovanni

Until 21 June 20.15 | Across Flanders

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

What started out 17 years ago as an idea to rescue opera from the confines of elitist opera houses everywhere and give it back to the people has proved a success. Zomeropera is a yearly festival of opera that is accessible and affordable. It's exciting, too, in part because the operas are held in unique, unexpected locations. This summer's edition features *Don Giovanni*, a modern adaptation of

Mozart's 1787 opera in two acts. It is a masterpiece of drama but also brimming with humour, and a magnificent score to boot. The story of Don Giovanni still appeals: An adventurer and lover of life, Giovanni manages to seduce every one of the 2,065 women to cross his path. No one can resist him, or so it seems ... until disaster strikes. (In the original Italian with surtitles in Dutch) **Robyn Boyle**



## FESTIVAL

## Strangelove Festival

19-21 June | Extra City, Antwerp

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

Primarily a film festival, Strangelove offers a rich choice of features, shorts, documentaries and classics from queer cinema. Highlights include the altruistic *Fuck for Forest*, about an NGO that sells erotic films to save the Amazon, and the award-winning documentary *Pussy Riot*, about the young, punk-rock feminists who stood up against Putin. This fourth edition is all about

small revolutions, gender-bending performances and play-along fairy tales. So, in addition to film, the festival also features a diverse mix of music, photography, literature, dance, workshops and exhibitions. Every evening the bar serves up drinks and food to enjoy along with a healthy helping of live gigs, queer performance art, eye-opening video installations and more. **RB**



## VISUAL ARTS

## CuriosITIES

Until 29 June | Fashion Museum, Hasselt

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

A suit and tie can still look sharp, but more often than not the classic combo is perceived as old-fashioned, boring, even downright stuffy. At a time when the boundary between formal and informal is slowly fading to grey, and tie shops around the world are forced to close their doors for lack of business, Hasselt's Fashion Museum and The LAB have joined forces in a creative counteroffensive: a unique exhibition in tribute to the dying necktie, featuring the work of some 100 designers and artists, each with their own quirky take on this most traditional of garments. **RB**



© Hilde Silvers

## CONCERT

## Katy Perry

4 March, 2015 | Sportpaleis, Antwerp

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

She's one of the hottest pop stars at the moment (*and* the world's most followed Twitter personality, for your information): Katy Perry is at the peak of her career with last autumn's release of her third album, *Prism*. It climbed straight to the top of the charts in 97 countries, taking over the planet with strong singles like "Roar", "Dark Horse" and "Birthday". Next year Perry will promote the album during a whirlwind 18-country visit to Europe, a crazy, colourful trek called the Prismatic World Tour. But surely she will revive a few of her most memorable hits, too, for the sake of her biggest fans, including "I Kissed A Girl", "Hot N Cold", "Last Friday Night" and "Firework". **RB**



GET TICKETS NOW

## PERFORMANCE

## Brussels

## Clangdelum

**Cinematographica:** A new composition by Flemish sound artist Hans Beckers wherein image, sound and live performance collide to create a surprising piece in which Beckers improvises, interacting with the various images and sounds *12 & 26 June at Pianofabriek Kunstenwerkplaats, Fortstraat 35*

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

## Turnhout

**The House that Built Us:** Flemish theatre group UNM and choreographer/performer Koen De Preter present an open-air performance and nostalgic trip through the best feel-good pop music of the 1980s *11-14 June at de Warande, Warandestraat 42*

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

## VISUAL ARTS

## Brussels

**MMXIV Les Diables/De Duivels:** Famed Flemish photographer Stephan Vanfleteren's series of portraits of the 26 Belgian national football team players, like you've never seen them before *Until 17 August at Botanique, Koningstraat 236*

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

## Ghent

**Siedlung:** Ghent artist Elly Van Eeghem projects photographs, video footage and archive material onto the walls of Ghent's Malem district, in a story about one architect's dream to build a neighbourhood for the community *12-15 June 20.00 at Oud-Strijderslaan 1 (in a former school next to the church)*

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

## FAMILY

## Brussels

## SuperVliegSuperMouche:

Free children's outdoor arts festival, featuring more than 60 surprising workshops and performances (acrobatics, dance, music, film...) for kids of all ages (including a special corner for babies and toddlers) *15 June 10.00-19.00 at Park van Vorst*

► [www.svsm.be](http://www.svsm.be)

## FOOD &amp; DRINK

## Damme

**Dammbiance:** First edition of the herring festival, organised by Rotary Damme to raise money for charity, featuring food and drinks, a concert by Shantykoor Blankenberge and an auction of the season's first herring *15 June 11.30-16.00 at Markt Damme, Kerkstraat 12*

► [www.rotarydamme.org](http://www.rotarydamme.org)



# Talking Dutch

## Sign language

Derek Blyth

You might have other things on your mind as you drive along the motorway, but Flanders' acting tourism minister Geert Bourgeois wants you to think about the sites you'll see just off the next exit. Last year, he commissioned Flemish photographer Carl De Keyser to shoot a series of photos for new tourist signs along the motorways. The minister had decided it was time to replace those drab, old brown signs that date from the 1980s.

*Heel wat borden zijn nog amper leesbaar, andere zijn beschadigd of inhoudelijk gedateerd* – Many of the signs are now barely legible; others are damaged or the information was out of date, Bourgeois said.

The first of the new signs went up recently on the E40 near Bruges. *Het stelt de Rozenhoedkaai voor met de twee Brugse torens: de Onze Lieve Vrouw kerk en de Halletoren* – it shows the Rozenhoedkaai with the two Bruges towers: the Onze-Lieve-Vrouw church and the Cloth Hall tower, noted *Het Nieuwsblad*.

More signs are on the way. *In de komende weken zullen alle 39 geplande toeristische borden worden neergepoot langs de verschillende Vlaamse snelwegen* – Over the next few weeks, the 39 tourist signs will be placed as planned along the various Flemish motorways. The new signs are meant to catch the attention of drivers travelling at 120 km/h, so they have to be clear. *Door met foto's te werken in plaats van met pictogrammen* – by working with photos instead of symbols – *hebben we borden gemaakt die veel directer tot de verbeelding spreken*, we have created signs that appeal much more to the imagination, minister Bourgeois explained.

But not everyone is happy with the results. Some resorts at the coast have complained because they don't have a sign. And Aalst is not happy either. *Aalst vond het bord dat het kreeg te flauw* – Aalst thought that its sign (*pictured*) was too dull. You would have thought they might have been pleased



because their old brown sign was truly weird. It showed something that looked like a printing press, along with a drawing of the town hall, a medieval helmet, a person who appeared to be throwing someone off a castle and a question mark. The message seemed to be: Visit this very strange town? No, I don't think so.








One person in Aalst at least is excited about the new sign – because he is on it. Snapped during the town's infamous Carnival celebrations, resident Chris Vinck was chosen to represent Aalst's charms. Millions of drivers will glimpse him as they head along the E40 towards Bruges and the coast.


Vinck has already become something of a celebrity because of his face on the sign. *Plots kreeg ik langs alle kanten telefoon en mail* – suddenly I was being bombarded with phone calls and emails, he told *Het Nieuwsblad*.

Moreover, the sign is intended to last 30 years – *dat is waarschijnlijk langer dan ik zal leven* – that is probably longer than I will live, Vinck noted.

Most of the other new signs tend to favour views of deserted streets or empty fields. At least Aalst's sign has some people. And no question mark.

## VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY

- **Nick Power** @NickyPfor3  
Who's everyone cheering for in the World Cup? #Belgium
- **Paul Willis** @WorthingWander  
#Belgium was lovely. Made me very sad to see war graves near #Ypres. I expect the veterans will have an emotional day today #remembrance
- **David Coleman** @havecamera  
The docks of Bruges once bustled at night. Now it's still. And beautiful. [bit.ly/1pHWWaf](http://bit.ly/1pHWWaf) #bruges #travelphotography #Belgium
- **Jimmy** ⓧ:οΣΛΣ @JiMFDV  
Today History is being celebrated! Demanding respect, pride & admiration! #DDay70 #USA #GB #Canada #France #Belgium #Denmark and many others
- **Adeline Bouché** @AdelineBouche  
If #London has the Oyster Card, should #Brussels not have the Mussels Card? #Tip #Metro #Belgium
- **Willem Van de Wiele** @WVandewieleW  
Obama left brussels... It seems we can ... Drive in a car again through the city #brussels #Obama
- **Vincent Kompany:** Amazing scenes in Westkapelle! So many kids cheering for us, they're the real stars! Hard to give everyone a signature but we do our best and love the support! #Belgium

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## Poll

Campaigners want organ donors to register so that their donations cannot be blocked by relatives in case of their death. What do you think?

- a. That's a good system. The deceased then makes it clear what they want, and families are not allowed to block their wishes**

67%
- b. Families know better than anyone what the deceased wanted. A card signed years ago should not count more than a family's wish**

0%
- c. Two people die every week for lack of donor organs. No one should have to register; families should be barred from objecting**

33%

The current system in Belgium for organ donation is "silent consent": Doctors are allowed to take your organs unless you have registered during your lifetime that you do not want this – or unless your family objects upon your death. If you register your wish to donate your organs in advance, however, families cannot object.

Our poll shows that most of you agree with this system. We all know how huge the benefits of organ donation are and that it's too difficult a decision for loved ones to make during a very emotional time. One-third of you would go further, though, and allow organs to be taken unless the deceased has registered that they do not want this. Families wouldn't be allowed to be involved at all, even if you have not registered to be an organ donor. That would make transplant teams' jobs easier and ultimately save lives – but it's a bit far to go for most of us at the moment.

**Next week's question:**  
A former university lecturer has been offered a job as a strawberry picker by the Flemish employment agency. Do you think benefits should be cut to those who don't accept any job available to them?

Log-in to the Flanders Today website to vote! [www.flanderstoday.eu](http://www.flanderstoday.eu)

## THE LAST WORD

- Treasure hunt**

"I don't make anything out of this. The sponsors don't pay me a percentage of the money they put up. It's just a social experiment to see how fast something like this can spread."

Marketing expert Ilse Himschoot is posting clues on social media to the location of a hidden envelope containing cash, somewhere in Flanders
- Buggy bites**

"Delicious, crunchy and full of flavour. You just have to shut your eyes and tuck in. These ones taste a bit like potato chips."

Commuter Karin Verhaegen took advantage of a tasting of mealworms organised in Brussels South Station last week to celebrate Belgium's approval of 10 insects for consumption
- Copper-cobana**

"Our job is mainly communication and interaction. The Brazilians have their own culture and laws, which the Belgians have to adapt to. If problems emerge, we're ready to help."

Police officer Patrick Crabbe is one of a special squad travelling to Rio for the World Cup to check bad manners by Red Devils supporters
- Longest day**

"We knew we were taking part in a historic moment, but we had no time to think about that. We had our job to do."

Admiral Daniel Geluykens was one of 12 Belgian veterans of D-Day present in Normandy last week for the 70th anniversary

