

**CROSSING BORDERS**

Employment ministers are signing deals to make recognition of diplomas and working across the Benelux a lot easier

\ 6

FUN WITH FOOD

A unique programme in Ghent introduces children from poorer neighbourhoods to the joys of healthy eating

\ 9

**HOLIDAY HAPPENINGS**

Searching for a few ideas to fill your agenda this holiday season? Look no further than our guide inside

\ 11



Admiral of the Fleet James Gambier shakes hands with John Quincy Adams at the signing of the Treaty of Ghent in this 1914 painting by French artist Amédée Forestier

Finding common ground

With the Treaty of Ghent, the city played a vital role in ending the War of 1812



Daan Bauwens

More articles by Daan \ flanderstoday.eu

Two hundred years ago, Ghent was the setting for the signing of an agreement that brought to an end the War of 1812 between the US and Britain. A series of musical events will commemorate the anniversary.

Christmas Eve, Ghent, 1814. An American delegation, led by future president John Quincy Adams, and a British delegation, under the guidance of Admiral James Gambier, walks out of Ghent's Carthusian monastery with a treaty in their hands that will bring peace to North America.

As commemorations ring out in the Flemish city this month, we take a look at some key questions. What was

this war about? What did the treaty guarantee? And why on earth did they pick Ghent?

The story starts in 1776, with a phrase every American knows by heart: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." It is the most famous line of the Declaration of Independence, with which 13 North American colonies announced their break from Britain. The Revolutionary War ended in 1783 when Great Britain officially recognised its colonies along the Atlantic coast to be an independent nation – the United States of America. But the struggle for independence wasn't over. "The British empire only recognised the states on paper," explains Luc François, professor emeritus of history at Ghent Univer-

sity. "Trade over sea and fishing rights remained in British hands. At the beginning of the 1800s, the British even imposed an economic blockade on North America, killing the young nation's economy, just to maintain its grip on its former colonies."

What's more, during the European war against Napoleon, the British needed experienced sailors. Britain decided not to recognise the right of British subjects to become US citizens and started taking British-born naturalised Americans by force into the Navy, infuriating the Americans. In the midst of these tensions, a third party became involved. "The Indians were not too happy with the expansionist nature of their new neighbours," explains Fran-

Teams replay Christmas truce

“No more appropriate symbol” for First World War anniversary



Alan Hope
Follow Alan on Twitter \ @AlanHopeFT

Young players from 10 football clubs in England, Scotland, France, Belgium, Germany and Austria travelled to Flanders last week to take part in a commemoration of one of the most iconic moments from the First World War: the Christmas truce of 1914. On 24 and 25 December, 1914, German and Allied troops put down their weapons and met in No Man’s Land to share food and tobacco, to kick a ball around and to leave behind the horror of war for just a few short moments. It was the casual football matches that have remained the most enduring images of the truce. “There is no more appropriate symbol for the 100th anniversary of the Christmas truce football matches than young players from the nations who fought against each other in 1914 coming together in a different kind of Flanders fields in Ypres,” the organisers said in a statement. “They are coming



© Illustrated London News 1915/Wikimedia

not only for the football but also for education, culture and to commemorate the spirit of the Christmas truce.”

The trip began on Friday with a visit to four sites in the area and the laying of wreaths at the Menin Gate during the Last Post ceremony. Group matches took place on Saturday at KVK Westhoek’s ground in Ypres, with each side in a group playing the other four sides once in matches of 2x15min. The teams taking part were: in Group A, Chelsea, Schalke 04, Valenciennes, Anderlecht and Hearts; in Group B, Liverpool, Borussia Mönchengladbach, Paris Saint-Germain, Club Brugge and Rapid Vienna. Chelsea advanced to meet Liverpool in the semi-finals on Sunday, then played PSG in the final, winning 1-0. Hearts youth academy manager Roger Arnott said it was “an absolute honour to become the first Scottish team to play in the Christmas Truce Tournament, which not only focuses on football but more importantly incorporates the historical and cultural significance of what happened 100 years ago.”

Dowager Queen Fabiola laid to rest in Brussels

The funeral of former queen Fabiola, widow of the late King Baudouin, took place on Friday in Brussels. Queen Fabiola died the previous weekend at the age of 86. The service was held in the cathedral of Saint Michael and Saint Gudule, contrary to the late queen’s personal wish, which was to have a small, quiet funeral in her own church, Our Lady of Laken. Protocol requires, however, that all state funerals take place in the cathedral, though Fabiola’s coffin was laid directly on the floor of the church, rather than on a support, in a sign of humility in line with her wishes. Members of the royal family and Belgian politicians attended, with overseas visitors including former Dutch queen Beatrix, Japanese empress Michiko and representatives of royal families from Luxembourg, Sweden, Denmark, Spain, Norway, Thailand and Morocco. Will Tura, the Flemish singer who performed at the funeral of King Baudouin in 1993, returned to provide an emotional moment



© Olivier Polet-Corbis/CORBIS

with a version of his song “Hoop Doet Leven” (Hope Inspires Life), during which King Filip was seen to wipe away a tear. “It was very intense,” Tura said later. Fabiola was laid to rest in the royal crypt beneath the Church of Our Lady in Laken, where all of the Belgian monarchs and their wives are buried, with other members of the royal house. She shares the tomb of Baudouin, which she has visited regularly over the past 21 years, including one unannounced visit in 1995 accompanied by Pope John Paul II, in Belgium to celebrate the beatification of Father Damien.

\ AH

Federal minister says no to Brussels’ canal-side modern art museum

A plan to create a new contemporary art museum in the canal zone in Brussels appeared to have come to an end last week, after state secretary Elke Sleurs said that the existing modern art collection should return to the Royal Museums of Fine Arts. The statement also signalled a problem for the new Fin de Siècle Museum on Kunstberg. The Brussels-Capital Region wanted to build a modern art museum in the former Citroen garage on Ijzerplein. The museum was planned as part of a wide-ranging development of the canal

area, stretching from the industrial quays opposite Tour & Taxis to the slaughterhouses in Anderlecht. The art for the new museum, however, is the responsibility of Sleurs, state secretary of science policy, a portfolio that covers the functioning of the Royal Library, the Royal Museum for Central Africa, the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, the Jubelpark complex and the Royal Museums of Fine Arts, among others. The fine arts museum’s modern art collection vanished into storage when the existing museum closed

for repairs in 2011. Since then, the Capital-Region has been working on a plan for a new museum. But according to Sleurs, the federal government’s plan has always been to return the collection to its original home in the fine arts museum. That presents Brussels with another problem: the new Fin de Siècle Museum currently occupies part of the building Sleurs has in mind for the renewed modern art museum. But Sleurs said there might still be room in the new federal museum for its Art Nouveau collection. \ AH

Winterpret traffic plan to remain in Brussels

The temporary traffic regulations introduced during Brussels’ Winterpret festival will be maintained as part of the city council’s new traffic management plan. Emile Jacqmainlaan is now one-way inbound, while the parallel Adolphe Maxlaan is one-way outbound. Lakensestraat is closed to traffic from outside the centre. To allow traffic to switch from Jacqmainlaan to Maxlaan, Sint-

Michielsstraat near De Brouckèreplein changes direction. “The change of direction is required to help traffic flow better and to make public car parks more easily accessible,” said Els Ampe, alderwoman for mobility. The terminus of bus line 47 to Vilvoorde moves from De Brouckèreplein to Ijzerplein, although the bus still stops at De Brouckère. The terminus of bus 88 to

Heizel moves to Augustijnenstraat. Some De Lijn buses will change their route slightly. For cyclists, nothing of the present situation changes. In related news, public transport authority MIVB said it would lay on more trams and buses over the weekends before Christmas as well as 3 and 4 January for the start of the sales. \ AH



complaints to the Brussels Airport ombudsman about aircraft noise between February and November during the Wathelet Plan of route diversions. In the whole of 2013, there were 9,770 complaints



kilometres an hour speed limit to be introduced in 95% of streets in Antwerp, mobility alderman Koen Kennis said. Some 45% of streets currently have a 30 km/h limit. Only major arteries will be excepted



of people in Flanders are in favour of a new tax on assets that total more than €1 million, according to a poll carried out by iVox for Knack magazine and VTM news



days of strikes on the railways this year, compared to 18 last year. Only three of the days were caused by internal NMBS issues; the rest were anti-government protests



second-hand bras donated in Flanders as part of Oxfam’s Women Support Women campaign to provide low-income women with quality lingerie

WEEK IN BRIEF

Police in Marseilles have detained five people for questioning in **connection with the shootings at the Jewish Museum** in Brussels last May, which left four dead. The shooting suspect, French national Mehdi Nemmouche, is in prison in Bruges awaiting trial. The five are suspected of having helped Nemmouche. The Brussels prosecutor’s office stressed that the arrests are part of an investigation being carried out by the French authorities and not currently linked to the Brussels case.

Brussels mobility minister Pascal Smet has filed a criminal **complaint against the ride-sharing company Uber** as an illegal taxi service and has asked the Computer Crime Unit of the federal police to block the smartphone app used by customers. “New initiatives like Uber are welcome in the city if they show a little bit of respect for the rules,” Smet said. “Talks with Uber on that subject have delivered nothing, so now we’ll come at the problem in another way.”

Prime minister Charles Michel cancelled his appointments for two days last week after his partner, Amélie Derbaudrenghien, **lost the baby she was expecting** in March. Michel has an 11-year-old son from a previous marriage.

A 4-2 defeat to hosts India on Thursday means Belgium’s **Red Lions hockey team will not reach the Hockey Champions Trophy** semi-finals. The Red Lions, ranked fifth in the world going into the match, took an early two-goal lead, but India levelled within 10 minutes. The final 4-2 score means India meet Pakistan in the semi-final.

A new law came into force last weekend obliging the food

industry to provide clear and comprehensive **information on all food packaging**, with particular attention to possible allergens among the ingredients. Allergy information must also be readily available on request in restaurants, snack bars, butchers, bakeries and even school canteens where foods that are not pre-packaged are sold.

Traffic experts have expressed concern at the possible risks of a new **supertram introduced in Ghent** last weekend, the first of a planned 10. The Flexity 2 tram is 42.66m long and will service line 1, the busiest in Flanders with 35,000 passengers a day. Each tram can carry 378 passengers, compared to the 250 of existing models. But the tram’s length could be a danger to pedestrians in the city’s narrow streets, mobility expert Johan De Mol of Ghent University said. De Lijn should have implemented safety measures such as warning lights in the curbstones but did not, he said.

Hasselt and Diepenbeek in Limburg have **banned the sale, possession and use of nitrous oxide**, also known as laughing gas, used in spray cans and once widely used in medicine and dentistry. Inhalation of the gas produces euphoria, but can also lead to respiratory arrest. The drug is being found more frequently at student parties, according to police chief Philip Pirard. Anyone found in possession faces a €350 fine.

A 52-year-old man from Antwerp has been arrested and charged with **attacking an 18-month-old child** with a screwdriver in a Delhaize supermarket in the city. The man had no relationship to the child, and the motive remains unclear, though he is known to authorities as being mentally ill. As *Flanders Today* went to press, the toddler was still in hospital, and it was

announced that she had lost the use of one of her eyes due to the attack.

The new **Liefkenshoek railway connection** under the Scheldt in Antwerp has opened. The 16.2km tunnel carries goods traffic from and to both sides of the river and will ease the pressure on the Kennedy tunnel. The construction, a public-private co-operation, cost €873 million. The port of Antwerp aims to see 15% of all container traffic moving by rail by 2030, compared to just 8% now.

Environment minister Joke Schauvliege has approved a **grant of €500,000 for 40 allotment projects**, which will help create 500 community gardens, bringing the total area now being cultivated on allotments in Flanders to 20 hectares. The original budget of €300,000 was not enough to cope with the explosion of demand, so the budget was increased, Schauvliege said.

When Belgium tweets, it **tweets mainly about Flemish TV shows**, according to a study of the most common hashtags of the past year. The most popular trending topics were the TV soap *Thuis*, the Flemish edition of *The Voice* and another soap, *Familie*. Also appearing in the Top Ten were talk show *Reyers Laat* and politics programme *De Zevende Dag*.

The Flemish Red Cross has announced ambitious plans to double the number of **free three-hour first aid courses** for sports trainers and youth workers, as well as providing five times as many longer courses for teachers. In Europe, there are three times more injuries caused during sports than on the roads, the organisation said, and 2.5 times more in schools.

FACE OF FLANDERS



© Courtesy De Standaard

Kristiaan Borret

The Brussels-Capital Region has a new *bouwmeester*, or master architect, but he’s not new to the job. Until earlier this year, Kristiaan Borret was doing exactly the same job in Antwerp. Both Antwerp and Brussels have a master architect, as does Flanders. The master architect and his or her team are called upon for their advice on the architectural, planning and landscape aspects of federal, regional and local projects, and may also be brought in on private projects. The first Brussels master architect, Olivier Bastin, was appointed in 2009 and served until this year. He is succeeded by Borret, who was appointed in Antwerp in 2006 but was let go last February due to urban planning there “proceeding according to a different political vision,” he said at the time. Borret, 48, was born in Ghent and graduated in architecture and civil engineering from the University of Leuven (KU Leuven) in 1990, before taking post-graduate degrees in politics from UCL, in philosophy from KU Leuven and a Master’s in urbanism from the Polytechnic University of Catalonia in Barcelona. He went on to work for the

urban planning department at KU Leuven and the architecture department at Ghent University, where he has been guest professor since 2005. Beginning this academic year, he has been dean of the faculty of design sciences at Antwerp University. Borret was chosen unanimously from the list of candidates by the advisory committee to the regional government. The government pointed to his experience in Antwerp, his strategic insights into the questions of urban planning in Brussels and his “clear desire to translate those into action”. The Brussels region’s public works minister, Pascal Smet, stressed the importance of good design in the public space for the quality of urban life. “This government has major ambitions in that area, as shown by the decision to demolish the Reyers viaduct,” he said. “Kristiaan Borret, given his experience, has a major contribution to offer in the coming years to the creation of a new Brussels.” The new master architect’s department sees its annual budget increase from €590,000 to €1 million for the course of Borret’s five-year term. \ Alan Hope

OFFSIDE
Nowhere better than home

Those wanting to improve their Dutch ought to watch the soap *Thuis*, according to political party Groen. “The media can play a cohesive role in society,” said An Moerenhout, a member of the Flemish Parliament. “It’s also a good way to learn Dutch, with the help of subtitles. Hearing half an hour of Dutch spoken every day while reading it is a good exercise.” We at *Flanders Today* agree wholeheartedly, having experience the impact of TV – and *Thuis* in particular – on our own Dutch skills first-hand. Should you go the *Thuis* route, here’s what you’re getting into.

Thuis (which means both “at home” and “ourhouse”) premiered on Eén on 23 December, 1995, and has been shown every weekday since. Seven of the original cast are still on the show; the 3,000th episode was broadcast in 2011. The format is a familiar one: a limited number of interior sets and a fairly extensive repertoire of characters, with changing storylines that tend towards melodrama. One of the beautiful things about learning Dutch in such a way is that you master what the Flemish call *tussentaal* (literally “between language”), a mixture of dialect and “proper”



© VRT

Dutch. A word of warning: You may in the course of your new Dutch-speaking life come across someone who appears not to understand a word you’re saying. This is likely to be someone who is learning Dutch by watching *Familie*, the VTM soap that is *Thuis*’ arch-rival. \ AH

FLANDERTODAY  Flanders
State of the Art

Flanders Today, a weekly English-language newspaper, is an initiative of the Flemish Region and is financially supported by the Flemish authorities.

The logo and the name Flanders Today belong to the Flemish Region (Benelux Beeldmerk nr 815.088). The editorial team of Flanders Today has full editorial autonomy regarding the content of the newspaper and is responsible for all content, as stipulated in the agreement between Corelio Publishing and the Flemish authorities.

EDITOR Lisa Bradshaw
DEPUTY EDITOR Sally Tipper
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR Alan Hope
SUB EDITOR Linda A Thompson
AGENDA Robyn Boyle, Georgio Valentino
ART DIRECTOR Paul Van Dooren
PREPRESS Corelio AdPro
CONTRIBUTORS Daan Bauwens, Rebecca Benoot, Derek Blyth, Leo Cendrowicz, Katy Desmond, Andy Furniere, Diana Goodwin, Julie Kavanagh, Catherine Kosters, Toon Lambrechts, Katrien Lindemans, Ian Mundell, Anja Otte, Tom Peeters, Daniel Shamaun, Senne Starckx, Christophe Verbiest, Débora Votquenne, Denzil Walton
GENERAL MANAGER Hans De Loore
PUBLISHER Corelio Publishing NV

EDITORIAL ADDRESS
Gossetlaan 30 - 1702 Groot-Bijgaarden
tel 02 373 99 09
editorial@flanderstoday.eu

SUBSCRIPTIONS
tel 03 560 17 49
subscriptions@flanderstoday.eu
or order online at www.flanderstoday.eu

ADVERTISING
02 373 83 57
advertising@flanderstoday.eu

VERANTWOORDELIJKE UITGEVER
Hans De Loore

5TH COLUMN

The ultimate taboo

Only rarely do political scientists act as more than observers. Dave Sinardet, an academic at the Free University of Brussels (VUB), however, initiated a new debate when he wrote a column about company cars in financial daily *De Tijd*.

Company cars are very common in Belgium. They are regularly offered as part of a salary package, which is why Sinardet calls them "wage cars", rather than company cars.

Company cars are popular because of Belgium's high labour costs; they cost employers less than giving employees pay rises. Since the concept was introduced in the early 1990s, taxes paid on "personal benefits" have gone up considerably, but company cars are still favourable to both employers and employees.

Moreover, when fuel costs are covered, people with company cars have no incentive not to use them. On the contrary, Sinardet points out, the more they use their vehicles – on weekends and holidays, too – the greater the benefit they receive.

Hence the mobility and environmental problems in and around Antwerp and Brussels, Europe's two most congested cities.

Sinardet proposes scrapping the generous fiscal treatment of company cars. Instead, just lower labour costs, he says. This, the academic argues, would be a veritable tax shift: moving taxes away from labour towards, in this case, pollutants.

The idea was well received by environmental and health organisations, which came up with more than 20,000 signatures in support. But for politicians, the topic is the ultimate taboo. Federal finance minister Johan Van Overtvelt considered the idea but was quickly shut down by N-VA president Bart De Wever.

Company cars have simply become too accepted to touch. Also, many people fear that taxing them more will merely be just that: higher taxes. Again.

"Dear government, I want to continue to reward my people," entrepreneur Harry Demey wrote last week. He, too, is confronted with the high costs of labour. "If I want to give one of my employees a raise, 70% of it goes to the government," he lamented.

"I am very concerned should company cars be addressed," he continued. "My left-wing ideals say go ahead. But my sense of responsibility as an entrepreneur says no." \ Anja

Otte

Unions threaten more strikes

National strike on Monday shuts down transport, schools and industry



Derek Blyth

More articles by Derek \ flanderstoday.eu

The general strike last Monday, 15 December, brought large areas of Belgium to a standstill. The strike was called by the country's main unions in protest at the government's austerity measures, including changes to the pension system, retirement age and skipping an automatic adaptation of wages to the cost of living in 2015.

Belgian rail operator NMBS said no trains ran on the day, while Brussels Airlines cancelled more than 80 flights out of Brussels Airport. International rail services were also severely disrupted, with no Eurostar trains running between Brussels and London. Thalys services to Paris, Amsterdam and Cologne were cancelled for the day.

Road traffic experts said many commuters were making plans to work from home, thus easing congestion. Brussels public transport authority MIVB and Flemish counterpart De Lijn confirmed that no services were operating. Many primary and secondary schools also shut down for the day, postponing exams until the next day.

The national strike was the last in a series of strikes planned across the country, but socialist union ACOD announced last week that the strikes could continue into 2015 if demands are not met.

Employers' federation VBO responded angrily, calling for a limit on the right to strike. The organisation has criticised union activists who plan to put up blockades at factory gates and industrial estates to prevent employees getting to work. "There is a right to strike, but that doesn't mean that you can do anything you



© Olivier Gouallec/Demotix/Corbis

want," said VBO's Bart Buysse. "It is illegal to intentionally block the railways, roads or waterways."

The union for the self-employed (NSZ) has also come out in favour on a limit to the right to strike. "A lot of employees are fed up with the endless strikes because it makes it difficult or impossible to get to work," said NSZ director Christine Mattheeuws. "The unions are shooting themselves in the foot because their actions

are going to lead to more job losses."

ACOD is one of the most powerful unions in the country, representing civil servants, teachers, police officers, prison guards and railway staff. It wants to force the government to modify its planned changes to the pension system and retirement age. "If the federal government doesn't make any concessions towards the unions, further action will be unavoidable," said ACOD president Chris Reniers.

The president of the Christian trade union ACV, meanwhile, also threatened to organise further protests after 15 December. Marc Leemans said it was unfortunate that further strikes were necessary, but that it was the fault of "a government that refuses to listen to us".

Karel Van Eetvelt, head of the employers' federation Unizo, immediately criticised ACOD's threat of further strikes. "The elections didn't work out as they had hoped, and now they are resorting to extortion to bring the government to its knees," he said. "There is nothing positive about this. It is unacceptable."

In related news, Brussels' transport system (MIVB) and Flanders' transport system (De Lijn) both announced that passengers who lose the use of their passes because of strike action cannot apply for compensation. The authorities argue that the lack of service was not caused by them, but by the unions.

"In the past we gave out 'sorry passes', but that was when the strike originated within MIVB," explained spokesperson An Van Hamme. A spokesperson for De Lijn agreed that the strike "fell outside of our responsibility".

European Commission considers office space in Flanders

The European Commission is considering taking up office space in the Flemish periphery around Brussels. EU administration needs to find two new buildings – a 30,000 square-metre building to be available in 2019, and a larger complex offering 100,000 square metres of space by 2020.

Until now, the Commission has refused to contemplate moving out of Brussels, but financial pressures require a change of thinking. "The cost is forcing us to look elsewhere," Leszek Madeja of the Office for Infrastructure and Logistics told *Le Soir*. "We have to wait to see what estate agents are able to offer us. We have to take various factors into account. The prices are lower outside Brussels, working habits



The EU is outgrowing its traditional quarter

have changed, and technology has evolved. But one essential element remains, which is accessibility." The Commission recently considered moving to two sites near Josaphat Park and Delta metro station, but both were eventually ruled out. The organisation currently occupies buildings at several sites in Brussels, with the key office buildings clustered around Schuman metro station. \ DB

Ministers meet to discuss new palm oil regulations

Federal foreign trade minister Kris Peeters held talks last week with Douglas Uggah Embas, the Malaysian minister for Plantation Industries, who had come to Brussels to discuss new European regulations on the labelling of palm oil, one of his country's major exports.

The EU law, which came into effect on 13 December, requires retailers to label precisely the type of oil used in food products, rather than simply using the generic term "vegetable oil". This means that consumers will be able to tell if a product contains soybean, cottonseed or palm oil. The palm oil industry has been criticised by environmentalists for destroying Malaysia's tropi-



© Craig/Wikipedia

cal rainforests to create oil palm plantations. It is hoped that the new EU law will encourage a move to sustainable palm oil production.

But the Malaysian minister argued that the new measures created a negative image of the palm oil industry. \ DB

Subsidies support projects that tackle radicalisation

Flanders' minister for home affairs and urban policy, Liesbeth Homans, has approved a budget of €154,080 to subsidise two projects aimed at tackling radicalisation among young people. Homans said earlier this year in her policy statement that she wanted to support Flemish cities in imple-

menting measures to prevent young people being influenced by radical ideas.

"In the spring of 2013, several Flemish cities were confronted with radicalised young people who had left for Syria to fight the Assad regime," she said in a statement. "The rise of IS has made

this problem all the more urgent. Flemish cities now face serious challenges."

The funding has been awarded to the Flemish association of cities and towns (VVSG) and the charity Motief. "These subsidies have been awarded in response to appeals for help from cities and towns,"

Homans said. "They will establish a regional contact point and provide support for frontline work focused on young people who are at risk of adopting radical ideas."

The projects will initially focus on Antwerp, Brussels, Mechelen, Vilvoorde, Kortrijk and Maaseik. \ DB

Finding common ground

US and British negotiators came to Flanders to hammer out peace settlement

continued from page 1

çois. “Tensions and violence increased, and soon the Indians received support from the British. From 1783 on, there are reports of frequent Indian uprisings and fights with the Americans.”

A blockade, forced recruitment and support for the Indians weren't enough for the British. “The empire needed to focus on the war against France on the continent,” François says, “but its hands were tied overseas. It needed to sort out the mess and make the Americans understand they would only survive under British conditions. From the colonies in Canada – under the rule of the British crown – the empire invaded American territories, and the war took off.”

The War of 1812 was an atypical war, especially compared to the gruesome conflicts in Europe at the time. Neither side seemed ready or even willing to fight: Britain was in trouble in Europe; the army in the Canadian colonies wasn't large enough for a full-blown offensive; and the US was suffering from a lack of unity, with army service voluntary and unpopular. Soldiers often objected to fighting outside their own states.

Consequently, the War of 1812 consisted of a relatively small number of battles, mostly of the hit-and-run type. Nevertheless, the British succeeded in invading Washington in 1814 and setting fire to many public buildings, among them the Capitol and the presidential mansion, now known as the White House.

As the fighting went on, and thousands were killed, the war remained inconclusive, with neither side winning or losing large territories. A new British blockade brought the American economy to its knees. British landowners were getting tired of high taxes to sponsor the war and the cost of getting merchant ships across the Atlantic.

In early 1814, the British and Americans decided to start negotiations. But with most of Europe at war, it was hard to find a neutral and safe place. The consulates in Gothenburg, Sweden, were chosen.

Until 6 April, 1806, that is, when the war in Europe ended unexpectedly, and Napoleon was sent into exile on the Italian island of Elba. The allied forces – every European nation except France – took control of the French empire,



© Bettmann/CORBIS

An illustration by an unknown artist of the Burning of Washington in 1814. The White House can be seen burning in the background

“For Americans, the treaty is their second Declaration of Independence

“It wasn't the president but state governors who exerted the real power over the territories, as is often the case nowadays,” François says. “For instance, Connecticut and Vermont spoke out openly against the war. And Massachusetts was willing to fight only if its own territory was in jeopardy.”

including Ghent. The British and Americans changed their minds and picked Ghent for the upcoming negotiations.

“It was much better, as nobody had ever really liked the choice of Gothenburg,” says François. “It was too far, too isolated and too small. Besides, the Swedish king

had served as a general in Napoleon's army. The delegations needed another big city, as close as possible to London and the sea but on neutral ground. At the time, the allies did not know what to do with Ghent: It didn't belong to any nation yet, but it was well-developed and prosperous, calm, stylish and comfortable – the perfect place for talks.”

Of course, Brussels was larger and met all the aforementioned criteria, too. “Too dangerous,” François says. “At the time, the allies didn't want to bestow Brussels with the role of a new capital. While it was often overlooked, in these parts back then, there was a sort of Belgian sentiment, a longing for a Belgian state. Brussels would be a perfect capital of such a state. The allies didn't want this sentiment to flourish.”

In August 1814, the negotiations started while the war went on. In September, the Battle of Plattsburgh put an end to the British invasions of New York. As a consequence, the British diplomats in Ghent received the message to drop their demand for a native buffer state between British Canada and the United States. In the end, both negotiating parties agreed on going back to the territorial boundaries of 1812.

Is that all? “It appears to be, yes,” says François. “The treaty itself doesn't say much. It mostly promises the establishment of commissions that will then decide on fisheries, territories, slavery and the

question of the natives.” But its symbolical meaning, he continues, “goes much further. For Americans, it's their second Declaration of Independence. In 1814, the Brits finally realised they had no say over their former colonies anymore. The treaty itself was the basis of a long-standing friendship between the two nations.”

The United States was a respected nation now. Great Britain kept its territories in the north. The successful American defence of Fort McHenry in September 1814 inspired Francis Scott Key to compose the lyrics for the national anthem, “The Star-Spangled Banner”. The defence of Brit-

ish loyalists against the Americans was used to spark a new sense of Canadian nationalism.

So there were no losers? “The Indians,” says François. “Right up until today.”

America's natives, he explains, “lost heavily and could hope for nothing after this. The native question disappeared from the agenda; even though it was discussed in Ghent, the native buffer state never came into existence. Without any European allies in North America, their rights as a people were never respected. The US expanded, and the Indians ended up in the reservations, resulting in the complete decline of their way of life.”

TREATY OF GHENT EVENTS

21 December

Choirs from East Flanders will commemorate the signing of the treaty with free performances in Sint-Baaf's Cathedral and the nearby church of Sint-Niklaas. The concerts start at 15.00 and continue until 18.00. The choirs are Furiant from Wondelgem, Arabesk from Mariakerke, In Dulci Jubilo from Sint-Niklaas and Makeblijde from Zele.

24 December

At noon, all churches in the city of Ghent will ring their bells to celebrate the peace that was brought to North America. During the midnight mass, Bishop Monseigneur Lucas Van Looy will deliver a message of peace at Sint-Baaf's Cathedral. It was here on Christmas Eve 1814 that the signing of the Treaty of Ghent and the subsequent peace were celebrated by a thanksgiving mass, attended by both the British and American delegations.

27 February

The internationally renowned choir Collegium Vocale Ghent, founded in 1970 and led by Philippe Herreweghe, will perform. Details on venue, time and theme will follow.



© Paul Hermans/Wikipedia

A plaque hangs in Ghent's Veldstraat at the place where the quarters used to be that housed John Quincy Adams and other negotiators in 1814



© Corbis

The Treaty of Ghent was signed and sealed by American and British negotiators on 24 December, 1814

WEEK IN BUSINESS

Air \ Niki

The Austrian low-cost carrier, launched by former Formula 1 driver Niki Lauda, will start operating two flights a day out of Brussels Airport to the Slovakian capital Bratislava starting on 1 April. The move is believed to be connected to the incoming Slovakian EU presidency in the second half of 2016.

Aluminium \ Reynaers

The producer of aluminium profiles for the housing industry, based in Duffel, Antwerp province, plans to build a production unit in Phoenix, Arizona, to supply the US market with high-end window and door frames.

Chemicals \ Nyrstar

The Brussels-based zinc and metals group is investing €20 million to build a water purification station at its 250,000-tonne-a-year zinc foundry – one of the world's largest – in Balen, Antwerp province. The new facility will start operating at the end of 2015.

Media \ Politico

The US political media group officially inaugurated its Brussels operation last week, which includes taking over *European Voice*. The Washington, DC, company is believed to have invested up to €10 million in partnership with Germany's Axel Springer group in the new venture and will operate a website, publish a magazine and organise meetings and conferences on EU related topics.

Fast food

\ 100 Montaditos

The Spanish fast food group, specialised in mini-sandwiches, tapas and cheap drinks, plans to open up to 40 outlets in the country over the next five years including in Brussels, Leuven and Ghent in 2015.

Pharma \ MediMarket

The fast-growing pharmaceutical retailer is launching its first store in Antwerp next year. The store will stock some 7,000 over-the-counter products as well as run a prescription pharmacy. The company expects to have up to 20 outlets throughout the country by 2020.

Retail \ Apple

The long-awaited Apple store, to open in the autumn of 2015 on Guldenpieslaan in Brussels, has started recruiting key staff. Similar job openings are expected early next year for the Ghent and Antwerp outlets, due to open in 2016.

Benelux countries to recognise each other's degrees

Ministers cut red tape to improve work opportunities across borders



Alan Hope

More articles by Alan \ flanderstoday.eu

[HTTP://STARTPUNTGRENsarbeid.BENELUX.INT](http://startpuntgrensarbeid.benelux.int)

Federal labour minister Kris Peeters intends to sign an agreement in the new year with his counterparts from Luxembourg and the Netherlands, under which any one of the three countries will automatically recognise a higher education diploma obtained in one of the other countries. Last week, Peeters, Luxembourg minister Nicolas Schmit and Dutch minister Lodewijk Asscher signed an agreement to work on a more fluid cross-border labour market in the Benelux.

At present, obtaining recognition for a diploma in another country is a time-consuming process, and procedures for working over the border are complicated. About 300,000 people

cross the borders of the Benelux, France and Germany each day to work – only 1.2% of total employment in those areas.

The ministers see great potential for growth in cross-border employment through the elimination of some of the challenges job seekers face and by making it easier for employers to hire them. “We are missing employment opportunities in border areas such as Limburg, despite a high level of unemployment there,” Peeters said. “The Benelux and adjoining regions have 37% of all cross-border commuters in the EU, and the phenomenon offers us chances we have to be able to grasp.”

The three ministers also gave their backing to a better information campaign for anyone think-



© Courtesy labour ministry

From left: Nicolas Schmit, Lodewijk Asscher and Kris Peeters signed an agreement to work on a more fluid cross-border labour market in the Benelux

ing of applying for a job over the border, starting with a new website (*above*).

Proximus goes after disgruntled Telenet customers

Telecommunications company Proximus, formerly known as Belgacom, has set its sights on recruiting up to 12,000 dissatisfied customers from its arch-rival, Mechelen-based Telenet.

The Telenet customers are signatories of a petition complaining about price rises in subscriptions for Telenet packages, including landlines, mobile, digital TV and broadband, due to take effect in the New Year. A number of them have applied to Telenet to be allowed to make a group purchase of a packet for a lower price, such as is now commonplace in the energy market. Telenet has yet to reply, but Brussels-based Proximus is ready with its answer: A cheaper package is already available for anyone who switches over. “We’ll be contacting them this week,” Proximus spokesperson Jan Margot told *Het Nieuwsblad*. “We’re 10% cheaper than Telenet at the moment, and with



this latest increase, the difference will be even larger.”

Federal telecoms minister Alexander De Croo said it was important for competition to ensure that customers can switch service providers as easily as possible. The market in telecoms bundles, he said, saw very little competition, which led to higher tariffs compared to neighbouring countries.

“You also see very little customer crossover,” he said. “Customers seem to be attached securely to their operators.” At the same time, he confirmed there was no legal bar to group purchases of cable or internet services. \ AH

Crowds go wild as Primark opens in Brussels

A crowd of at least 2,000 bargain-hunters lined up last week in Brussels' Nieuwstraat for the opening of the country's second outlet of the Irish low-cost clothing chain Primark. Queues were already forming at 8.00 for the opening at 11.00. The new Primark store takes up 1,600 square metres on the country's most expensive shopping street, on the spot of the former Forever 21, and employs 180 staff recruited by the region's employment agency Actiris.

Primark has 284 shops across Europe and is known for its fashionable selection for very low prices. It comes under regular criticism for achieving such prices – €8 for a pair of jeans, and €3 for a T-shirt – at the expense of low-paid factory workers in India and Bangladesh. In 2013, a factory of a Primark supplier in Dhaka, Bangladesh, collapsed, killing more than 1,100 people. The company says it has since imple-



© Sander De Wilde/ImageDesk

According to police estimates, 2,000 lined up for the opening of Primark in Brussels. According to Primark, the number was 5,000

mented a stricter code of ethics for suppliers.

“I know that the garments I’m wearing, at €16 and €23, were not made at the expense of the employees in the supply chain,” Primark director Breege O’Donoghue told VTM News. “I’ve been to Bangladesh. I’ve been in those factories, and I have seen very high-end luxury brands in the same factory as Primark. You should be asking not why are we so cheap, but why are our competitors so expensive?” \ AH

British spying on Belgacom more extensive than previously thought

Espionage by the British intelligence service GCHQ in Belgacom's telecommunications network was more extensive than previously thought, according to documents revealed by *De Standaard* and the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*.

In September last year, the German magazine *Der Spiegel* reported, based on documents leaked by Edward Snowden, that GCHQ operatives had hacked the computers of Belgacom employees, gaining access to Belgacom's network, as well as to Belgacom International Carrier Services (BICS), the subsidiary that provides phone and internet traffic in Africa and the Middle East.

The information was provided by GCHQ to intelligence services in New Zealand, Canada, Australia and the US, which, with the UK, make up the group known as Five Eyes.

The new revelations show that the initial hack-



© Nilfanion/Wikimedia

ing – codenamed Operation Socialist – took place before June 2011 and was more extensive than Belgacom has so far admitted. Contrary to Belgacom's previous claims, the hacking gave GCHQ access via BICS to virtually every mobile number in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. It wasn't just private clients of Belgacom who

were under surveillance, but also the telephone networks of Nato and the EU in Brussels, as well as international delegations and embassies.

Belgacom has declined to comment on the additional allegations while a legal procedure launched last September is on going. The federal prosecutor's office, which is running the investigation, said it had taken note of the new information. The British government said GCHQ's operations were “essential, legal and proportional”.

“This is the first time that there has been ‘smoking gun’ evidence of a cyber attack carried out by one country against the critical infrastructure of another,” Snowden told *De Standaard* this weekend. “This documented example of one EU country attacking another is breathtaking and shows the scale of state-sponsored hacking.”

\ AH

Europe on the move

People of Antwerp explore link between transport and health



Andy Furniere
More articles by Andy \ flanderstoday.eu

Antwerp is regularly mentioned in the media as being one of most traffic-congested cities in Europe, with serious air pollution one of the results. Flemish researchers are now examining the link between the mobility of Antwerp's residents and their health, as part of a study being carried out simultaneously in seven European cities.

Last month, the seven teams taking part in Pasta – Physical Activity through Sustainable Transport Approaches – launched an online survey, which will investigate residents' transport choices and the link with their physical activity and health for a period of two years.

The Flemish team, which will be studying the situation in Antwerp, consists of four researchers who are connected to the Flemish Institute for Technological Research (Vito) and Hasselt University. Vito is also contributing to the financing of the study, which is for the most part subsidised by the European Commission.

"Our starting point was the conviction that the most efficient way to improve public health is not just to support progress in medical technology but also to encourage citizens to move more in their daily lives," explains Vito researcher Luc Int Panis, who is co-ordinating the project in Antwerp. "Lack of movement is the major cause of the increasing prevalence of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases."

In the survey, volunteer participants answer questions about issues such as the amount of time they spend on a bike and the most efficient way of getting to their destination in Antwerp. One question deals with the use of bicycle highways – cycle paths without junctions that allow cyclists



© Courtesy Stad Antwerpen

The survey will measure the effect of cycling in places with lots of congestion

to cover long distances quickly. Antwerp province recently created this infrastructure and wants to find out to what extent residents appreciate the initiative.

"One of the problems in cities is that it is difficult to estimate what effect such expensive infrastructure works have on residents' quality of life," says Int Panis. The Pasta project will provide insights through the expansion of the World Health Organisation's European Health Economic Assessment Tool (Heat), which is one of the partners of the project.

Heat is a way of conducting an economic assessment of the health benefits of walking or cycling, by estimating the value of reduced mortality that results from specified amounts of such exercise. It's especially useful in the process of planning new cycling or walking infrastructure. "But the data for the moment is mostly limited to the conditions in Scandinavia, which are of course not representative of the whole of Europe," says Int Panis.

The Pasta project will, therefore, provide new data assembled in seven European cities: Antwerp, Barcelona, London, Örebro, Rome, Vienna and Zurich. With more than 1,000 participants after just one week, the launch of the project in Antwerp has been the most successful.

“The response shows how many people are concerned with mobility and air pollution

"The great support of the province and the city in spreading the message was a major reason," says Int Panis. "But the response also shows how many people are concerned with mobility issues and air pollution in Antwerp."

The survey is available in several languages, and 10% of the Antwerp participants filled in the English-language version. "This means the

research is a good opportunity to examine the specific opinions and behaviour of the expat community," says Int Panis.

The survey will be conducted in all seven cities over two years, with short follow-up questions to analyse the possible differences between the seasons. Simultaneously, Antwerp, Barcelona and London will carry out practical experiments with a group of volunteers for a week, during which time the volunteers will carry instruments such as a GPS, heart rate monitor, accelerometer and air pollution monitor.

"We want to check the information that we gather during the survey, since people are often less physically active than they think," explains Int Panis. One of the purposes is also to measure the effect of cycling in places with lots of congestion, which results in short peaks of inhaling polluted air.

Comparing the European results should help researchers understand why certain infrastructure measures work in certain cities but

not in others. The project should lead to concrete advice for policymakers, which will be distributed through international partners like the World Health Organization and Polis – a network of European cities and regions working together to develop innovative technologies and policies for local transport.

WEEK IN INNOVATION

Antwerp biologist wins Eos award

Sara Vicca, a biologist at Antwerp University, has won the Eos Pipet award for her research into carbon storage in forests and the possible impact on photosynthesis. Her insights can help improve the scientific models that examine climate change. According to Flemish science magazine *Eos*, which presents the annual award, the jury said that "such research, which contributes to a better understanding of the carbon cycle, is of global importance". The Eos Pipet is awarded to a young scientist connected to a Flemish scientific organisation who has made an essential contribution to their field.

Elia adapts lines to protect birds

In response to the news that up to 500,000 birds a year are killed by high-voltage power lines, energy grid manager Elia has asked nature organisations Aves, Natuurpunt, Vogelbescherming Vlaanderen and Inbo to map the dangerous lines in its high-voltage network. On the basis of the results, Elia will make adjustments to help reduce the number of bird deaths. The lines are more or less invisible to the birds, especially in misty or dark conditions; one possible solution is to attach "beacons" to the cables – white or red balls that increase visibility. Another measure, used in France and Spain, is the placing of curled wires on the cables, which facilitates the birds' depth perception.

Hasselt researchers advise on housing

Hasselt University's ArcK research group has examined possible solutions to the problems resulting from linear settlements in Flanders – a concentration of houses along main roads that form a line or ribbon of development. One of the problems of this kind of development, according to the group, is that it makes the organisation of public transport very expensive. It also makes rubbish collection and postal distribution more expensive and requires more investment in sewers. In the short term, researchers propose concentrating new construction as much as possible around existing centres. They also suggest investing in collective water treatment instead of a separate sewer system, as is often currently done. \ AF

Application predicts hit potential of dance music

What makes a song a hit? It's the million-dollar question all record labels would love the answer to. Researchers at Antwerp University have now developed an online application that can predict the hit potential of dance songs.

The co-ordinator of the research project was Dorien Herremans, who carried it out as part of her PhD. "We know that record companies in the US use certain data mining techniques to examine a song's potential, but they don't disclose any information on it," she says. "Earlier academic projects have largely failed because they didn't concentrate on a specific type of music, which we decided to do."

The focus on dance music meant the researchers could clearly define which data to use and which songs could be considered hits. They set up a database of about 760 songs, from 1985 to 2013, which were listed in the Billboard charts and by the Official Charts Company. A song was



considered a hit when it entered the chart's top 10.

The researchers then examined in detail the songs' basic audio characteristics, such as the tempo, defined by the number of beats per minute, and the volume. One of the findings of this analysis, which may not sound too surprising, was a clear trend towards increasing tempo

and volume in dance music.

With their data, the researchers created an online application, which determines how likely it is that a song will become a hit based on the different audio characteristics. "A test on about 75 songs showed that the model works with about 83% accuracy," says Herremans. The application can be used for free by anyone who wants to upload a song to test its hit potential. Media attention has helped to create a lot of interest in the application, which has been used about 900 times in just a week. However, Herremans acknowledges that it is not the Holy Grail of the dance music business.

"Important characteristics of songs have not been taken into account for the development of the model, such as lyrics and the artist's popularity," she says. She hopes to integrate such additional characteristics in the future, as part of a possible follow-up project. \ AF

RUBENS IN PRIVATE

THE MASTER PORTRAYS HIS FAMILY

FROM 28 MARCH UNTIL 28 JUNE 2015

Rubens in private shows the master as painter of his relatives's portraits. The paintings are the most beautiful and most intimate paintings Rubens ever made. In 2015, these stunning portraits will be returning to his former home for the first time.

TICKETS: NOW AVAILABLE AT WWW.RUBENSHUIS.BE
THE RUBENS HOUSE ANTWERP



Rubens
HOUSE



CITY OF ANTWERP

GAZET VAN ANTWERPEN



www.rubenshuis.be
+32 (0)3 201 15 55

Spreading the healthy gospel

Ghent non-profit introduces fresh, healthy food to schoolchildren



Daan Bauwens

More articles by Daan \ flanderstoday.eu

WWW.WGCDESLEEBE

The Muide-Meulestede neighbourhood is known as one of the most socially vulnerable corners of Ghent. According to the city's Cel Armoedebestrijding, or poverty reduction unit, the average Belgian family in the area is at a 10% risk of ending up in poverty, while more than half the families with Moroccan and Turkish roots in the district live below the poverty line.

Such poverty as well as a lack of information about healthy lifestyles tends to have a detrimental effect on children, who often don't eat enough nutritious foods and don't get sufficient physical exercise.

In 2013, the city council and the Flemish Education Council sounded the alarm as several schools were seeing a growing number of children coming to school with empty lunchboxes. Moreover, health workers had already been warning officials for several years about the multitude of boxes with alarming contents.

Kim Schutyser, a counsellor at De Sleep, the local health centre in the Muide-Meulestede-Afrika-laan district, has seen everything from cold fast food hamburgers and french fries to kebabs. "Most lunches have less shocking, but hardly more nutritious, contents: white bread with chocolate spread or Danish pastries," she says.

In a bid to counter the worrying phenomenon, De Sleep's health advisers set up an innovative project in seven local nursery and primary schools three years ago. That project has since yielded promising results.

The project revolves around one central figure – a superhero called VitaMike. Clad in a green suit that shows off his impressive abs, complete with a mask and a red cape, he suddenly runs into the schools' canteens during the lunch break. "VitaMike is in serious trouble," Schutyser explains. "He's from another planet. He crashed on planet Earth and urgently needs to get back home."

VitaMike needs the children's help to fix his rocket and collect fuel for his journey. If the children eat healthy food, VitaMike can assemble the necessary amount of green energy to get back home. This means that the smallest children need to fill their lunchboxes with fresh vegetables or fruit and whole-grain bread, while the older kids need to exercise and channel their energy into the rocket, as it were.

"At the end of the year, we organise a big party where the kids say farewell to VitaMike. He leaves with his rocket, only to crash again at the start of the next school year," Schutyser explains. During his workshops, VitaMike teaches the toddlers and pupils to prepare their own boxed lunches and to choose healthy ingredients. He even teaches the toddlers the art of *kyaraben* – arranging food in a lunchbox to resemble smiling people or animals. Invented in Japan, *kyara-*



© Courtesy De Sleep

Kids are introduced to healthy meals by superhero VitaMike, then make their own

“Parents of underprivileged children are very hard to reach

ben was meant to get children more interested in their food.

Schutyser and her colleagues started this project from scratch. VitaMike sprang from their own imagination, and they had no idea whether it would work. But in the spring of 2013, they started seeing significant results. The success even spurred schools in the nearby Ghent district of Rabot – an equally underprivileged area – and in Leuven to adopt the programme. While VitaMike is currently trying to fix his rocket for the fourth time, the De Sleep team is getting help from a group of medical students. Focusing on one primary school in the district, eight Bachelor's students make several surprise appearances in classes as part of the project.

"We come in and start playing games in which the pupils have to distinguish healthy from unhealthy food," explains Marieke Nuytens

from the Ghent chapter of the Belgian Medical Students' Association, an organisation that focuses on international exchanges and civil society projects.

"Later on, one group starts preparing food – fruit skewers, smoothies, vegetable muffins and healthy sandwiches – while the others complete a race outside symbolising our digestive tract," she says.

Last month, the students made their first two visits of this academic year, and they already have two more visits planned. The students hope to expand their Healthy Food project and to include more schools in the years to come.

Still, both the health advisers at De Sleep and the medical students agree that it might actually make more sense to target parents, not their kids.

"Of course we know that, first and foremost, it's the parents that need to be made aware of the importance of healthy food," Nuytens says. "But parents of underprivileged children are very hard to reach. We need the children to ask the parents at home to change their attitudes toward food." That's a sentiment echoed by Schutyser. "We're getting there," she says. "The schools we're working with have organised large mother's groups. During the day, we hold information sessions on parenting and health for these mothers in our health centre. That helps a lot."

Struggling first-year university students to receive guidance

Flemish education minister Hilde Crevits has announced that she will introduce measures to ensure that students in higher education who score badly receive guidance right away. "Both the students and society benefit if students get on the right track from the beginning," she said. "The longer a student takes to get his or her diploma, the more it costs the students, the parents and society."

Crevits is following the advice of the Flemish Education Council (Vlor), which recently made several suggestions to the Flemish government to deal with the low pass rates in higher education. One of the most important proposals was a faster follow-up of exam results, linked with better assistance and re-orientation. In its advisory report, Vlor pointed out that students who get low

marks in their first academic year take longer to graduate and have an increased risk of dropping out. Intervening after the first semester would help them to reflect on their methods and choice of discipline, according to Vlor.

Vlor also advised giving both universities and university colleges permission to impose measures for the "remediation and re-orientation" of students if they don't

achieve 60% of the study points in their first year, rather than 50%, which is the threshold currently in place.

That means that the institutions could oblige students with lower scores to follow extra courses, learn how to improve their study methods or get the maximum amount of study points during the next exam period. \ Andy Furniere

WEEK IN EDUCATION

Students stage sleep-in against budget cuts

About 150 lecturers and students of orthopedagogy and social work at Karel de Grote University College in Antwerp spent the night at the college to support Monday's general strike. Before the sleep-in, the college organised activities to create awareness of government cuts, including guest lectures, workshops and a social film festival. The college was acting in support of the Hart boven Hard citizens' initiative against government cuts. During the workshops, students could discuss the necessity of going on strike and the best ways to take concrete action. College directors told *Gazet van Antwerpen* that they supported the action but had not called for a strike among its staff.

Teacher training expertise centres threatened

Budget cuts in the education sector threaten to eliminate Flanders' expertise centres for teacher training. The budget for the centres is being reduced from €3 million to €1.5 million next year, and their management contract finishes in 2015 – meaning they would no longer exist in 2016. Every Flemish university has a centre that supports teacher training lecturers via projects that involve diversity, team teaching, multilingualism and other aspects of the profession that should be passed on to students. The centres have started a petition against the cuts and Socialist Caroline Gennez brought up the subject in the Flemish Parliament last week.

Antwerp expects 4,000 more students by 2018

According to predictions announced last week by *Gazet van Antwerpen*, there will be 4,000 more students in Antwerp's secondary school system in four years' time. Antwerp's education alderman, Claude Marinower, has established the Task Force Capacity Secondary Education to tackle the problem. Representatives from all Antwerp education networks discussed the challenges posed by a surge in the student population with representatives from the Local Consultation Platform and the Flemish education administration. The task force will examine how space in existing schools can be used as efficiently as possible, where there is a lack of space and where new schools could be built. \ AF

WEEK IN ACTIVITIES

Brain Twisters Family Day

Explore the workings of the human brain at the Museum of Natural Science's exhibition *Hersenkronkels* (Brain Twisters). During Family Day, there will be extra workshops, entertainment and activities for kids and adults. 20 December, 10.00-18.00, Vautierstraat 29, Brussels
www.naturalsciences.be

Nativity Walk

Holiday-themed walk between four nativity displays in Antwerp province. Choose between two routes or combine them for a longer hike. Warm drinks and snacks, plus special offers from local cafes. Until 4 January, info and maps at Tourism Merksplas, Markt 1, Merksplas; free
www.toerismemerksplas.be

Almost-Longest Night

Want to celebrate the season, without the religious associations? Enjoy a day of readings, workshops and other activities for all ages. Book swap, games, food and drink, fire show, dinner and concert. 20 December, from 13.00, Martelarenlaan 42, Hasselt; free
<http://vrijzinniglimburg.be>

Winter Ambiance at Zilvermeer

An evening of firelight, warm drinks, surprising spectacles and live entertainment, in a beautiful outdoor setting on the shores of a lake. 19 December, opens at 18.30, last entrance 21.00, Provinciaal Recreatiedomein Zilvermeer, Zilvermeerlaan 2, Mol; free
www.zilvermeer.be

Winter Pub Crawl

A tour of the best bars in town, with an explanation of regional beer styles. Emphasis on Christmas beers and holiday cheer. 19-27 December, tickets from Tourism Leuven, Naamsestraat 3, tour starts at Leuven Leisure, Tiensestraat 5; €21 (includes 5 tastings)
<http://leuvenwalks.leuvenleisure.com>

Brussels Museums Nocturnes

Last chance to experience a selection of popular museums for free or a reduced fee. BELvue, Bozar, BIP, Coudenberg, the Musical Instruments Museum and the Royal Library of Belgium will offer special exhibitions and family activities after dark. 18 December, 17.00-22.00.
www.brusselsmuseumsnocturnes.be

The faces of Flemish farming

Government's new Agriculture Report dabbles in human interest



Alan Hope

More articles by Alan flanderstoday.eu

WWW.TINYURL.COM/AGRIREPORT

The latest edition of the Flemish government's Agriculture Report, published every two years, is a treasure trove of facts and figures. But this year, it also contains a bit of human interest.

This year for the first time, agriculture and fisheries are the subjects of two separate reports. Contained within are not only table after table of bare figures but also the stories of nine typical Flemish farming families, from dairy farmers to azalea growers.

Bert Wauters of Sleidinge in East Flanders is only 23 but has already taken over the family farm, raising more than 2,000 pigs and growing corn, wheat and barley for feed. The job has pros and cons, he says. On one hand, he gets to decide for himself how each day is structured; on the other, the markets are volatile and uncertain, while investment capital and land are in constant shortage.

At the other end of the scale are Romain and Arlette Vanweddigen, a husband and wife, both aged 60, from Sint-Truiden in Limburg. In the heart of fruit country, they grow cherries on Arlette's family farm, having extended the orchard from two to 20 hectares. They now also produce a cherry wine. Unlike many others facing retirement, they already have a successor: Their son has taken over 70% of the running of the business.

The farmers involved were all volunteers, explains Jonathan Platteau of the agriculture department and project leader. "We have an agricultural monitoring network of about 750 businesses that provide us with important figures and information throughout the year," he explains. The idea was to tap into that network to provide a representative sample of the sector. "We asked them how they came into agriculture, what are the positive and negative aspects of the job, what are they most proud of? These are interesting testimonies from business people who are trying to develop strategies in crisis to ensure the continuation of their businesses."

The reason for the addition of these case studies was hinted at by agriculture minister Joke



© Courtesy Agriculture ministry

"Flesh-and-blood humans": azalea grower Kristof Van Laere

Schauvlieghe when she presented the report at the home of azalea grower Kristof Van Laere in Lochristi, East Flanders.

"Agriculture reports have a double goal," Schauvlieghe said. "The report strengthens and supports government policy by bundling existing information and knowledge. Policymakers and people who follow the sector closely use it as a reference work. But it also reaches out with essential information to the population as a whole, giving people a better picture of the sector. In that way, the report increases society's understanding of policy."

Van Laere expressed the same idea differently. "My fear is that there will be so few of us in agriculture and horticulture in the future that it will be very difficult to find social support for what we are doing," he said. He chose to be involved in the "human interest" part of the report "to show that there are flesh-and-blood human beings behind the figures and statistics".

According to the report, farming in Flanders in 2013 had a production value of €5.8 billion and a net added value of €1.3 billion. This year's added value is expected to fall by 13%, due in large part

to the Russian boycott of a number of food products important to Flanders. The region has long been a leader in Europe in terms of productivity and profitability, and it is coming up on the rails in innovation, the report reveals. 43% of farms introduced a substantial new innovation over the period 2012-2013, from 35% in the beer sector to 53% in horticulture.

Van Laere, for example, demonstrated how, on his farm, a robot has taken over such tasks as moving potted plants and spraying the crops.

Within Flanders, 88% of all farms specialise in one of the three main sub-sectors: livestock, field crops and horticulture. The whole food production sector is made up of more than 35,500 businesses, 16% fewer than five years ago.

However, over the same period, earnings increased by 15%. There are fewer businesses, but they are larger now on average, and they are making more money – €61 billion in turnover in 2013, with employment at 147,400. Farms in Flanders receive a total of €288 million a year in subsidies from the Common Agricultural Policy.

BITE

The perfect Sunday: La Tricoterie

WWW.TRICOTERIE.BE

The holiday shopping season is upon us. In my case, it means avoiding all city centres, and especially their shopping streets, for the next couple of weeks. But I do need to buy some pressies for a select few friends and family, so thankfully there's an alternative.

La Tricoterie is a covered market in the Brussels district of Sint-Gillis that's open every Sunday for a unique experience combining brunch with a Fairtrade, organic market and games for kids, in addition to opportunities for massage, laughter yoga and more feel-good activities.

These next two Sundays at La Tricoterie (pictured) are reserved for the second edition of the artisanal Christmas market, which will see its halls filled with stallholders selling local crafts.

Discover the beauty of small-scale production and find unique gifts, including recycled jewellery, original fixtures, knitwear, traditional Christmas decorations, leather goods and more.



La Tricoterie opened in 2013 in an old industrial building not far from South Station. The name La Tricoterie, which essentially means "knitting", was not chosen at random: "Forging new ties to combat the unravelling of the social fabric is at the heart of it all," say the organisers. The space is to be a "contact factory, and the beating heart of a folksy community in full evolution," according to co-founder Paul Hermant, who helped La Tricoterie come to fruition, a dream that was 10 years in the

making.

The ability to cross off my holiday shopping list while supporting local artists and artisans is in line with my definition of holiday spirit. As always, the market at La Tricoterie promotes the values of Fairtrade, offering products that guarantee fair prices for their producers, and many of these are organic, as well.

This year, organisers promise there will be more of everything: more cheese, butter, yoghurt, pasta, spices, sauces, fruit and veg, oils and vinegars, beer, wine and more to taste and take home (or give away). Try beers from local brewery Brasserie de la Senne, such as Zinnebir, Stouterik and Taras Boulba.

Brunch can be any combination of these products – including tea or coffee, freshly squeezed orange juice, boiled egg, cheese platter, fruit, bread, yoghurt and pastries – with or without an additional item or two from the *à la carte* menu, from a 100% organic beef burger and made-to-order omelette to a smoked salmon salad and soup of the day. \ Robyn Boyle

Jingle all the way

Whether you're young or old, there's no shortage of activities this holiday season

Run like Santa's reindeer

Historic buildings, Christmas lights, late-night shopping and the smell of mulled wine in the air: that must mean it's December in Antwerp. Sure, there's the traditional Christmas market with its cute trinkets and festive treats, and the ice skating rink and Ferris wheel next to the Scheldt, which offers spectacular views of the city.

But there's more to Antwerp than that this winter. If you're looking to do something a bit more special, try one of the guided tours that take in the city's most beautiful sights, complete with local tales that will warm the heart.

Starting at the Grote Markt, this three-hour Winter Walk takes you along to the Sint-Paulus Church, where you'll learn more about old Christmas traditions. Then, it's off to the Plantin-Moretus Museum for a look at a unique 18th-century Neapolitan nativity scene. The tour proceeds with a visit to the Parochie aan de Stroom, where you'll listen to intriguing, festive anecdotes. Several stories, tidbits and kilometres later,



you'll arrive at the Van Campen puppet theatre, where you'll be served a glass of the Elixir d'Anvers local liqueur as well as an uplifting

authentic performance.

You could, alternatively, speed it up a notch and join the city's eighth annual Santa Run

for Life. Hundreds of *Antwerpenaars* and their fellow merry men will dress up as Santa Clauses, Christmas trees or even Christmas turkeys for a five-kilometre run from the MAS Museum to Hangar 29. Bring friends and family along to cheer you on, or to accompany you to the post-run Santa party with live music and serious beats.

After all that hustle and bustle, you may want to sit down and relax. You can do exactly that at the New Year's Drink on 4 January, the first Sunday of 2015. Bubbles and snacks will be offered at the Grote Markt, courtesy of the City of Antwerp, so you'll be able to toast in the New Year with locals in style. You'll also be able to enjoy a carousel ride, theatre and music performances at various locations across town.

Oh, and seeing as the sales will have just started, shops will be open, too. So what are you waiting for? Head to Antwerp for happy holidays. \ Rebecca Benoot

\ WWW.TINYURL.COM/WINTERANTWERPEN

Take an indoor snow ride

Stardust is an indoor playground in the Brussels district of Vorst, located where the ice skating rink used to be. With a surface area of 4,000 square metres, it's huge, and it's got everything to keep your brood happy for a couple of hours.

The littler ones can play in the ball pit, take a train ride across the park, try the soft foam slides or float on water in little rubber boats. Older kids can buckle up for the Inca trail, jump in the bouncy castles or on the trampolines, play indoor football and defy all traffic rules in the bumper cars.

The park is celebrating its fifth anniversary with an 8D movie called *Snowride* to mark the occasion. With eight dimensions and moving chairs, smoke and soap bubbles, the four-minute movie is the first of its kind in Belgium and is shown several times throughout the day.

Note that parents aren't allowed into the playground. Instead, the Stardust team will keep a watchful eye on your children, while you have a relaxed meal at the restaurant or chill at the lounge bar, with free wi-fi.

\ Katrien Lindemans

\ WWW.STARDUSTPARK.BE

Bake. It's the holidays, after all

If you like homemade treats but can't be bothered seek out the perfect recipe or carefully measure ingredients, this is for you. Brussels-based Bake founder Bérangère Train has created a limited-edition, DIY chocolate chip cookie box for Christmas. All you have to do is open the box of ingredients – you'll be pleased to note the chocolate chips bag is the biggest one of the bunch – add butter and eggs, and off they go into the oven.

While you patiently wait for the cookies to bake and cool, your kitchen will fill with delicious smells – better than any scented candle could ever pull off (even the Christmas gingerbread ones). And that's it. Just pop open Netflix, nestle into the sofa and relax. (Hint: Americans dip their chocolate cookies in milk.) The box makes 12 big cookies (though we preferred to make 24 smaller ones) and comes with a foolproof recipe in three languages. \ KL

\ WWW.MADEBYBAKE.BE



Spend time with the kids

Children have two weeks off school, so take advantage of it by going to a special festival just for them. The Spekken Kindertheaterfestival, running until 30 December in Ghent, is great fun, with dozens of performances for kids up to age 12.

Most of the performances are in Dutch, but some are wordless, such as *Still* by the local figure theatre company Meandertaal. They use shadows, paper architecture and pop-up paper figures to tell the story of a man who tries to escape the madness of the world.

Most of the performances take place in Ghent's old Tinnenpot theatre, in a rather hidden part of town with tiny, cobbled streets and historical houses. Inside Tinnenpot is a colourful cafe designed just for kids with snacks and drinks, cushions to sit on and toys to play with until the curtain goes up.

\ Lisa Bradshaw

\ WWW.SPEKKEN.BE



Heal your post-Christmas blues

The Brussels Vintage Market normally takes place at Sint-Gorikshallen in Brussels, but the event is travelling to Antwerp during the final weekend of December for a special New Year's edition. It will open its doors there as part of Aspen Bocadero, a winter wonderland setting at Waagnatie that brings the atmosphere of the famous Rocky Mountains ski resort to the city of Antwerp.

You can visit the indoor market, shop for vintage clothes, accessories and furniture and discover the work of young, exciting designers. As always, there will be food, drinks and entertainment.

On Saturday, DJ Ignacio will spin records, while on Sunday you'll find Nasty Bartender behind the decks. There will even be a Hawaiian Christmas-themed burlesque show on Saturday. Access to the event is free. \ KL

\ WWW.ANTWERPVINTAGEMARKET.BE

GIVE THE GIFT OF EUROPE.

 **gift:** the €99* gift voucher for a return flight in Europe.

Choose a gift that will bring a smile to everyone's face. With our b.gift, your partner, friend or relative will be able to enjoy a return flight to one of our 32 selected destinations in Europe.

A b.gift for a single person costs €99*, baggage and taxes included.

Book by 28 December on
brusselsairlines.com
or your travel agency.



**brussels
airlines**

* Conditions: see brusselsairlines.com

YOUR DAILY NEWS

Sign up now for our **daily** and **weekly newsletters** with local headlines, events and features, tailor-made for **expats in Belgium**



Subscribe for free at
www.thebulletin.be

**THE
Bulletin**

Bittersweet melodies

Lieven Tavernier writes songs about love, death and everything in between



Christophe Verbiest
More articles by Christophe \ flanderstoday.eu

WWW.LIEVENTAVERNIER.COM

Ghent singer Lieven Tavernier is what you would call a songwriter's songwriter – a musical giant to local artists but an unfamiliar name to general audiences. His latest album offers a melancholy tribute to quiet patience and faith in the face of life's everyday trials.

Rarely have I been moved as much on hearing a song for the first time as I was when I heard "De eerste sneeuw" (The First Snow) in 1990. Granted, it was sung by the great Flemish singer Jan De Wilde, which helped. But the song in and of itself is truly a gem. "De eerste sneeuw" was written by Lieven Tavernier (*pictured*), a little-known name back then. He had written a couple of songs for other musicians, but his debut album would only be released in 1995, which is on the late side for an artist born in 1947.

"I think that was still fast," says Tavernier with a wide grin when I meet him in a coffee bar in his hometown of Ghent. "Being a songwriter was good enough for me. Now and again I did some solo concerts, but I suffered from terrible stage fright. Quietly writing new songs, on my own, was much more appealing than going out and performing them."

But it turns out that a sense of urgency is what eventually pushed him to record that first album. "If I don't try it now, I might never try it, and maybe I'll regret it later," was his thinking, he explains.

But he kept his day job, teaching literature at the Sint-Lucas art school in Ghent. "I realised I wouldn't be able to live off my music, so it was an easy choice. It might not have been the bravest thing to do, but I also loved my job." Smiling, he adds: "As a matter of fact, for years, teaching was my way of performing. With this advantage: I had everything under



© Christina Coene

Lieven Tavernier plays Ghent's Handelsbeurs this week and Merelbeke's Flora later in the month

control."

His former students include writer Bart Moeyaert, musicians Bent Van Looy and Gabriel Rios, and photographer Stephan Vanfleteren. "But name-dropping is unfair to all those unknown students that were maybe as talented as they were," Tavernier says.

Tavernier, 67, has released five

the winter and only now during the spring.

"But it's really about winter grass people," Tavernier explains, "people who take a beating from life but have the patience to wait until the winter blows over to get on their feet again. I'm interested in people who are forgotten by everyone else. 'I'm sometimes told that I write

all include a song or two about death. 'For me, it's part of the dirge genre, erecting a memorial for the dead. It's a tradition I'm working in, like other songwriters – myself included at times – work in the tradition of love songs. I don't like purely confessional songs, although people often call them authentic.'"

Turning the personal into a universal song – that's more Tavernier's aim.

Today, the Ghent musician is a songwriter's songwriter – perhaps not a familiar name to large audiences but adored by other musicians. His songs have been recorded by a diverse group of artists that include Flip Kowlier and An Pierlé, but also Dutch musician Thé Lau and the rock band De

Dijk. The artist himself situates his work in the tradition of other, American songwriters like Townes Van Zandt, Gillian Welch and John Prine.

While he might belong to the American roots tradition, Tavernier has always sung in Dutch. "I grew up with people like Jaap Fischer and Lennaert Nijgh, and their Dutch lyrics never felt artificial. So, I never thought about singing in English. But I have written sporadically in French; my roots are in 19th-century Ghent, with writers like Emile Verhaeren and Maurice Maeterlinck, who wrote in French."

Ghent regularly appears as a character in Tavernier's songs. "That's not a deliberate choice, but I like it when it happens," he says. "I like it when writers are linked with one specific town: James Joyce with Dublin or Patrick Modiano with Paris. I don't think a songwriter can make statements about the world. You have to go through your own world."

To prove his point, he offers the example of his signature song, "De fanfare van honger and dorst" (The Fanfare of Hunger and Thirst) – incidentally, also recorded by De Wilde in 1990. "That was one of 100 or so songs I had written up to that point. I thought that people outside the city wouldn't relate to that song. But I was wrong."

"De fanfare" tells the story of six friends from Ghent with little money but high aspirations. It's a relatable, wistful reflection on times past and the idea that everyone that has seen a dream fall to pieces. "It's *my* Ghent, just as it is Modiano's Paris," Tavernier says. "And I avoid being parochial at all costs."

“Dutch lyrics never felt artificial, so I never thought about singing in English

additional albums since 1995, with *Wintergras* (Winter Grass) the latest one. On the surface, the title refers to the dirty grass that people tend to leave untouched during

bleak songs, but I disagree." Tavernier's songs aren't devoid of all light and hope. At the same time, they are pervaded by a somewhat sad melancholy. Plus, they

18 December, 20.15

Handelsbeurs
Kouter 29, Ghent

MORE NEW ALBUMS THIS MONTH

dEUS

Selected Songs 1994-2014 • Universal

dEUS, Flanders' most acclaimed rock band of the last two decades, look back on seven albums with this 30-track double record. *Selected Songs* is the ideal introduction to the Antwerp quintet that paved the way for many other bands, both musically and psychologically. dEUS proved that the appeal of a Flemish rock group didn't have to be confined to the region. The first CD in *Selected Songs* compiles the louder tracks, while the second focuses on their more intimate tunes. Still, a 30-song



track list is not nearly enough to cover all the highlights of their career, so allow me my five seconds of hair-splitting: I really missed "Gimme the Heat", though I was extremely pleased this record unearthed the amazing "Disappointed in the Sun". ★★★★★

Vaya Con Dios

Thank You All • Sony

Dani Klein, known by her band name Vaya Con Dios, recently brought down the curtain on her 28-year career with a farewell concert in Brussels. In the late 1980s

and the first half of the 1990s, the original trio were very popular in Europe, with hits like "Just a Friend of Mine", "Puerto Rico" and "What's a Woman". When the trio split up, Klein kept the name as a solo singer and songwriter. The classics and 15 more songs are on *Thank You All*, the live recording of her final concert. The album also includes one new song, "Look At Us Now", and a DVD of the concert, with the whole palette of musical styles for which the band were famous: jazz and gypsy, Latin American influences and pop music, making *Thank You All* a fitting outro. ★★★★★

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Flemish museums nominated for EMYA

Two Flemish museums – the Red Star Line in Antwerp and the Ijzer Museum in Diksmuide, West Flanders – have been nominated for the prestigious European Museum of the Year Award. The list of nominations contains 42 museums from 21 countries. The prize is awarded annually by the European Museum Forum; the first Belgian win was Tongeren's Gallo-Roman Museum in 2011. Antwerp's MAS won for its youth outreach in 2013, and the Kazerne Dossin in Mechelen received a special mention last year. The awards will be announced in Glasgow in May.

"Kev" Marasligil wins first Golden Roots award

Mechelen journalism student Kevser Marasligil has won the first-ever Golden Roots award, awarded by listeners to rock radio station MNM. Marasligil, 20, has Turkish roots and gets tens of thousands of hits on her YouTube videos in which she talks animatedly about her various experiences in Flanders and Turkey. She is also part of the VRT's s project, which give six students the chance to create their own TV talk shows. The Golden Roots award recognises a well-known Fleming proud of their foreign roots.

Kinepolis launches Ultra

Kinepolis introduced a world premiere last week with the launch of Laser Ultra, a new technology, developed by West Flemish firm Barco, that allows the viewing of 4K content in the cinema, including the projection of 3D films. 4K delivers four times as much detail as normal high-definition content. Coupled with the immersive Dolby Atmos sound system, Ultra delivers the most technologically advanced sound and image quality in the world. Ultra is available in the Brussels and Antwerp Kinepolis cinemas. The first film made for Ultra is *The Hobbit: Battle of the Five Armies*, playing now.

Flanders votes for favourite book

One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel Garcia Márquez has been voted the best-loved novel of all time by visitors to the VRT's culture website Cobra.be. Rounding out the top three on the 50-book list are Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* and Dutch author Harry Mulisch's *The Discovery of Heaven*.

Blurring the lines

Photographer and journalist find the real Poland behind the stereotypes



Tom Peeters

More articles by Tom \ flanderstoday.eu

Two journalists and long-time friends teamed up for a trip to Poland's heartland to discover the real country behind the vodka and zealot clichés. The result of their ambitious effort is on view in *Wisla Stories*, a photo exhibition in which blurry truths trump sharp details

"If you want to say something relevant about contemporary Poland, it can only be blurry." To illustrate the fundamental ambiguity of this European country, which is currently celebrating 10 years of EU membership, 15 years of NATO membership and 25 years of freedom (from Communism), Flemish radio journalist Marc Peirs recently gave his old friend Peter De Bruyne a call. Peirs felt that De Bruyne's trademark hazy style of photography would be the perfect metaphor for the project he had in mind. The results can be seen in the intriguing photo exhibition *Wisla Stories* at Atelier 34zero Muzeum in the Brussels district of Jette. An accompanying book by Peirs with stories about the changes Poland is going through will follow next year. "Peter's hazy images emphasise my point: We are sure that the cocoon of Polish history will produce a butterfly in the future, but we don't have a clue what the butterfly will look like." You could say that the outlines of that future Poland are as unclear as the Bruges photographer's photos.

The two men first met at the Seaside alt music festival on the Flemish coast in the mid-1980s. Peirs was there to interview the new wave icon Anne Clark, and he asked De Bruyne, 18 at the time and with a camera around his neck, if he wanted to take some pictures. That chance encounter was the start of a closer collaboration between the two.

"For us Western Europeans, the Polish were mentally, politically and physically distant

They later lost touch, until Peirs recently again came across the photographer's work. He called to ask De Bruyne to accompany him on his trip to Poland. Just like that one summer day two decades ago, De Bruyne accepted the invitation, though he did hesitate a bit this time around.

"For my photo work, I usually travel to the US or Mexico," he explains. "What did I know about Poland? Nothing, except for the clichés –



In many of the photos, the old, communist Poland is distinguishable next to the new one



© Peter De Bruyne

Peter De Bruyne (right) was surprised by the vibrant country he discovered during his trip with Marc Peirs (left)

grey, Solidarity and the pope." But for Peirs, that cluelessness made De Bruyne the perfect comrade. One of his main goals was precisely to do away with prejudices about Communist dullness, packed churches and moustachioed men drinking vodka. In Peirs' view, the actual dynamism of the country has made such ideas outdated.

"I understand this misconception, since the Polish were hidden behind the Iron Curtain," says Peirs, whose wife is from Poland. "For us Western Europeans, they were mentally, politically and physically distant. But the Polish

east were moved."

But the river crucially also connects the three main Polish cities. With its source near Bielsko-Biala, it runs through Kraków, the former capital and the country's most important university and cultural city, and Warsaw, the current capital and economic centre. It also passes Gdansk, Poland's port to the world and the birthplace of Solidarity founder Lech Wałęsa, the place where he co-founded the trade union that would mark the beginning of the end of the Communist era.

Peirs succeeded in his two-fold mission. De Bruyne was pleasantly surprised by the vibrant country he discovered. But, more importantly, the subtle, analogue photos he produced transcend the ambiguity of the country – squeezed between its past and future.

The pictures were shot at symbolic locations, with an old Poland distinguishable next to the new one. There are images of pre-war buildings with bullet holes and Communist landmarks such as the Palace of Cultures and Science next to newly built skyscrapers.

"This detail reminded me of *Metropolis* by Fritz Lang," De Bruyne says, referring to the classic sci-fi epic by the Austrian filmmaker. "And it's

simply incomprehensible why they put a modern tower of Babel on the spot of a demolished synagogue." Depending on the colours of the houses, grey or bright, visitors to the exhibition can see whether the "subsidy sponge" from Europe has visited.

One photo shows a dead tree in a place where political prisoners used to be detained, with a threatening sky looming ominously. Even more unsettling is the blurry image of the fence at Auschwitz, with the sky as a sole witness. "The only thing people saw there that was unrestrained was the sky," De Bruyne says.

Suggestion has always been part of the appeal of De Bruyne's blurry photography, at least since that one fateful day that he took an unfocused picture of a tree in Utah. "When I worked as a press photographer, my work was realistic and with sharp contrasts, but I felt that by offering fewer details and diminishing the sharpness I could better show the essence."

Changing the focus of his camera became his second nature, and with series like *American Icons*, *American Stills* and *Décors*, in which he explored Flemish suburban life, he has developed a very personal, instantly recognisable style.

When his pictures first appeared in the newspaper *Le Soir* 10 years ago, the editors had to reassure worried readers that the presses worked just fine. De Bruyne's next photo in that daily came with a disclaimer that explained that the image was meant to be blurry.

In the meantime, Poland also seems to be doing just fine. With former prime minister Donald Tusk's recent appointment as the new EU Council president and next year's coinciding parliamentary and presidential elections, more media attention is guaranteed. "Poland is more and more like a normal European country, something the people there really long for," Peirs explains.

"What more can they do?" he asks. "They're militarily engaged in Nato, politically in the EU, and economically they're the best pupil in the class. A few months ago, for the first time in my life, I saw gays walking hand in hand in the streets of Warsaw." Even just three years ago, he says, that would have been unthinkable.

"But it's particularly the Polish work ethic and booming economy – an average growth of 6% for 22 consecutive years – that makes other countries plain jealous."

Until 25 January

Atelier 34zero Muzeum
Rivierendreef 334, Brussels

Raoul Servais:

Duiven-Mythologieën

Until 10 May

Talbot House, Poperinge
WWW.TALBOTHOUSE.BE

Last summer, film animation pioneer Raoul Servais – born in Ostend in 1928 – received a star on the Walk of Fame on the Zeedijk in his native city. The on-going recognition for his work as an artist and teacher hasn't led the Wizard of Ostend to shun new projects. Under the umbrella of Gone West, initiator of a variety of cultural events related to the First World War, Servais shows drawings for a work-in-progress in the exhibition *Duiven-Mythologieën* (Doves-Mythologies) in the war-time club-house-turned-museum Talbot House in Poperinge. For years, Servais worked on a script that combines four stories based on paranormal sightings of soldiers in the trenches. As a young boy, Servais had an uncle who had been a soldier in the First World War. He lived



in Servais' family home in Ostend with his French wife, who told young Servais all kinds of tales. His uncle and aunt would leave a lasting impression. This rather comfortable middle-class life ended abruptly when the next global military conflict placed its boots on Belgian ground. Twelve-

year-old Servais had a first-hand encounter with the atrocities when he tried to escape from the German invasion and, upon his return to occupied Ostend, found his family home burned to ashes. They lost everything, including a classic film collection and all the young Servais' drawings.

Oppression, via a repressive regime or in other forms, would prove a recurrent theme in the filmmaker's work. His only feature-length film, *Taxandria* (1994), a blend of live-action and animation, deals with the struggle for freedom in a fantasy land. More explicitly related to the Second World War, *Chromophobia* (1966) shows how colour ultimately triumphs over Nazi-inspired anticour soldiers. Hopefully, Servais will add another ambitious film to his already impressive oeuvre. \ Bjorn Gabriels

OUTDOORS

Midwinter Night Run

21 December, 19.30

Vrijdagmarkt, Ghent
WWW.GENTLOOPT.BE

The winter solstice approaches, and there's arguably no better way to celebrate the shortest day of the year than with an evening run through Ghent. Thousands are expected to participate in this bi-annual event (the previous edition— Midsummer Night Run — took place exactly six months

earlier, on the summer solstice). Athletes can choose between 5km and 10km. Both pass through the city's most charming streets, rendered all the more whimsical by open-air performances and holiday magic. It's all for charity, too; proceeds go to Unicef. \ Giorgio Valentino



CONCERT

Macy Gray

18 February, 20.00

Het Depot, Leuven
WWW.HETDEPOT.BE

American soul singer Macy Gray returns to the stage to promote her eighth album, *The Way*. The disc is a chronicle of the veteran artist's struggles with the record industry. Gray started strong in 1999 with a Grammy-winning debut album and the global smash hit single "I Try." It was too good to last. Fifteen

years of career ups and downs have dampened her enthusiasm for the business. Her current approach is less pop and more personal, but Gray insists that there is a place for mature, introspective music, despite the hegemony of youth-oriented pop. \ GV



EVENT

Treed in de bloedsporen van Vesalius

19 December, 20.15

M Museum, Leuven
WWW.VESALIUSLEUVEN.BE

Leuven is celebrating the 500th birthday of Andreas Vesalius, perhaps the most influential alumnus of the city's ancient university. The Brussels-born physician pioneered the field of modern anatomy by dissecting human corpses, a method heretofore forbidden by the church. We've all benefited incalculably from Vesalius' work, so it's only natural that Red Cross Flanders and M Museum Leuven ask us to give a little something in return. This blood drive aims to enlist at least 500 volunteers, one for each year since the good doctor's birth. \ GV



ACTIVITY

Yogadiscovery Love Concert

21 December, 15.00

Aspen Bocadero, Antwerp
WWW.ASPENBOCADERO.BE

Everyone knows that yoga is the path to serenity. The guerrilla gurus behind Flemish pop-up wellness community Yogadiscovery hope to put you on the fast track to Zen with their final session of 2014. Not only does yoga master An Block guide you through some supremely relaxing bodily contortions, but

— leave your Enya CDs at home — New Age singer-songwriter Luc Acke performs a live soundtrack. The venue itself is one of Antwerp's winter wonders. Until 25 January, temporary lounge/restaurant Aspen Bocadero is the closest thing to a Rocky Mountain ski lodge in these here Low Countries. \ GV



CONCERT

Overpelt (Limburg)

Irish Christmas with The Celtic Tenors: The popular Irish singing trio performs Christmas classics such as "Joy to the World", "We Three Kings" and "The First Noel". 19 December 20.30-23.00, CC *Palethe, Jeugdlaan 2*
www.palethe.be

CLASSICAL

Brussels

L'Enfance du Christ (Christ's Childhood): French conductor Ludovic Morlot leads an ensemble of soloists and the De Munt Symphony orchestra and chorus through this little-performed work by Hector Berlioz, an oratorio for soloists, chorus and orchestra from 1850-1854, in which Berlioz describes Jesus' birth and early youth in the form of a sacred trilogy. 19 December 20.00 & 21 December 15.00, Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23
www.demunt.be

PERFORMANCE

Brussels

GET TICKETS NOW

Violetta Live: Unique concert experience starring Martina Stoessel, from the Disney Channel hit series *Violetta*, featuring more actors and dancers performing songs from the first three seasons; a fifth performance was added due to popular demand, and tickets are flying out the door (ages 6 and up). 13-15 March, Paleis 12, Brussels Expo
www.disney.be/violettalive

VISUAL ARTS

Brussels

Sax200: Exhibition in honour of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Adolphe Sax, featuring everything there is to know about the inventor of the saxophone and his beloved instrument. Until 11 January, Musical Instruments Museum, Hofberg 2
www.sax200.be

Ghent

Donkere kamers: Over melancholie en depressie (Dark Rooms: On Melancholy and Depression): Works by a diverse range of international artists illustrate centuries of the various facets of melancholy, revealing a long-standing artistic fascination with the condition and how it differentiates itself from its contemporary, pathologised counterpart, depression. Until 31 May, Guislain Museum, J Guislainstraat 43
www.museumdrguislain.be

Talking Dutch

System error: Restart



Derek Blyth
More articles by Derek \ flanderstoday.eu

You might have seen the headlines in the international press. Belgium is in a mess again, they all say. The country is falling apart, lurching from one crisis to another.

The Dutch newspaper nrc.next recently devoted its entire front page to Belgium's imminent collapse by showing a mock Microsoft error message that read: *Systeemfout België: start het land opnieuw op* – System error Belgium: Restart the country.

De wegen zijn kapot, justitie gaat failliet en er dreigt een tekort aan stroom – The roads are in a dreadful state, the courts are bankrupt, and there are threats of power cuts, it said. *België is een land vol problemen* – Belgium is a country full of problems.

Waarom gaan de Belgen dan demonstreren tegen een regering die belooft de problemen op te lossen? – So why are Belgians demonstrating against a government that promises to solve the problems?

Any Dutch person reading the article would probably think twice before booking a weekend break in Brussels. *Rookpluimen boven Brussel. Smeulende autowrakken op straat. Politie, gewapend met traan-gas en waterkanon, oog in oog met*



gemaskerde relschoppers – Smoke rising above Brussels. The smouldering wreckage of cars on the streets. Police armed with tear gas and water cannon confronting masked demonstrators. *Wat is er mis bij onze burens* – What's the matter with our neighbours?

The alarmed newspaper called on professor Marc Hooghe of the University of Leuven to explain what was happening. *“Belgen houden niet van verandering en het invoeren van strenge regels”* – Belgians don't like change or the implementation of strict rules, he said.

“Een land als Nederland is rigide als het op begrotingsregels aankomt” – A country like the Netherlands is rigid when it comes to budgetary rules. *“België is rigide als het om tradities gaat”* – Belgium is rigid when it comes to traditions.

But there is something else about Belgians that make them different from the law-abiding Dutch. *“Belgen zijn anarchistisch van aard”* – Belgians are inherently anarchistic, argues Hooghe. *“Ze houden de overheid graag op afstand”* – They like to keep the government at arm's length.

“Men wil de ruimte houden om zijn eigen ding te doen” – People want to be free to do their own thing. And they like to do their own thing in their own house. *“In België is het belangrijk dat je eigen huis en tuin er goed uitzien, maar níet de ruimte die van iedereen is”* – In Belgium, it's important that your house and garden look good, but no one cares about the public space. *“Belgen kunnen goed leven met verwaarlozing”* – Belgians can live with mess. *“Daar schuilt een zekere schoonheid in”* – They find it rather beautiful. So now you know why the country is in a mess, and why it's not going to be easy to fix it. Because the locals like it that way.

VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY



In response to: *Crowds go wild as Primark store opens in Brussels*
Steven Ennogwa

How about the people who are making these clothes for us? Are they paid well enough on the other side of the world? Do they have good and healthy labour conditions?



In response to: *Monday's strike will bring country to a standstill*
Paul Walsh

Yeah, but it's not like the 80s. Most people can work from home. I'm going to be working extra hard just to show them.



In response to: *Proximus goes after disgruntled Telenet customers*
Brendan Mullooly

It's really difficult to compare the two services – on a pure price point of view Belgacom probably wins, but I have no idea if their current pricing model also includes line rental.



In response to: *Increasingly fewer men becoming teachers in Flanders*
NinaJ @NovaNina

@flanderstoday Damn! And I've just finally learned the word “Meester” (having always had a “juf” in my Dutch courses).



Dimitri Vegas @dimitrivegas

5 days till the Madness hits Antwerp !!! @tomorrowland presents #BringingTheWorldTheMadness #WorldTour @like-mike



Shireen Nicholls @ShireenNicholls

Was definitely surprised to end up in #Bruges #belgium at the weekend! What a lovely place! <http://instagram.com/p/wnwwdHEs27/>



LIKE US

facebook.com/flanderstoday

CONNECT WITH US

Tweet us your thoughts @FlandersToday

Poll

Should Brussels-City build several new car parks as part of its plan to pedestrianise large swathes of the city centre?

a. No. Why push a city centre pedestrianisation plan and then encourage people to drive to get there? It's madness

56%

b. Yes, but fewer. There are already several car parks in the centre, so only one or two more are needed, not four

11%

c. Yes. If we want day-trippers to come to the city, we need to accommodate them but also keep their parked cars off the street

33%

A fairly even split between pro and con on the planned new car parks – including one that will temporarily push out the historic flea market in Brussels' Marollen district – was an unexpected result, given the heat the issue has generated in the media since the idea was launched. Apart from mobility alderwoman Els Ampe and Brussels-City mayor

Yvan Mayeur, virtually everyone has been against the proposal. The opposition has two good points: The construction of the car park under Vossenplein could be the death knell of a beloved flea market, and encouraging traffic in the narrow streets of the Marollen seems like madness when it's part of a plan to make the city centre

more accessible to pedestrians. But visitors coming into the centre need to be accommodated, one-third of you argue, and you're right. The question is: Does a car park have to be built under this particular square when there are already car parks in the area? A majority of you thinks not.

\ Next week's question:

The Brussels-Capital Region's plan for a new modern art museum is being undermined by the federal government (see p2). Does Brussels need its own modern art museum?

Log in to the Flanders Today website at www.flanderstoday.eu and click on VOTE!

THE LAST WORD

Cash flow problem

“Welcome to the town without money. You can ask me anything, as long as it's not for cash.”

Lambert Hollands, 83, of Zichem in Flemish Brabant is just one resident left strapped when the last bank branch closed and the cash machine disappeared

The elephant in the room

“The baby will come, for sure. If not next week, then next month ... or maybe only in June. In any case we're ready.”

Spokesperson Ilse Segers, as the planned birth of an new elephant baby at Planckendaal appears even more difficult to predict than previously imagined

Far and away

“I was overcome by a feeling of nostalgia, remembering the squeaking wheels in the town centre as if it were yesterday. That made me feel sad – that such a monument should show up there, abandoned and dilapidated.”

Carine Maniquet, born and raised in Vilvoorde, discovered an old Tram 58 on show in Tucson, Arizona

Kasteel for sale

“It's not so much the price that scares people off but more the energy requirements. It's no easy task to make a castle that's a couple of hundred years old energy efficient.”

Dajo Hermans of the real estate industry federation, on the collapse of the castle market in Flanders

