The international press could agree on one thing last week: The agreement reached by the eight parties negotiating the formation of a new federal government in Belgium was “historic”. For an event that had been more than a year in the preparation, the agreement on the first major stumbling block in negotiations seemed to come out of the blue. A day before, the king had been requested to return from his holiday in the south of France.

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City on rails
Brussels North-South line celebrates its 60th anniversary

Meet the robot tractor at Machinery Days
Visitors to the International Agricultural Machinery Days in Oudenaarde, East Flanders, later this month – among them Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters and environment minister Joke Schauvliege, have a surprise in store: A tractor that drives itself.

The robot tractor (pictured) is the work of the Flanders Mechatronics Technology Centre and the Mechatronics, Biostatistics and Sensors department of the Catholic University of Leuven. Their job was to develop a sensor system that could perform the operations carried out by an experienced tractor driver: constantly evaluating the position of the tractor, the condition of the terrain and the dimensions of the field, and then be able to judge the correct direction and speed needed.

To do that, the tractor, constructed by the Italian machinery manufacturer New Holland, is fitted with sensors that measure the soil conditions, and even keep track of the slippage of the wheels in wet or muddy conditions.

“By allowing agricultural machines to ride around autonomously, the ever-increasing operating costs can be reduced,” said Vincent Theunynck of New Holland. “On top of that, there is no longer any need to adjust the driving mechanism in changing conditions, thanks to the robot’s own learning behaviour.”

The robot tractor can be seen in action in a video here: www.lecopro.org/tractor.wmv. Agricultural Machinery Days is on 24-25 September.

BHV will be split
Negotiations to form a federal government clear major hurdle

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Cycling has never been so popular in Flanders, according to a study by the Catholic University of Leuven, with 1.1 million people in the region regularly doing outdoor exercise on the roads, and another 150,000 taking part in spinning exercises in gyms.

Flemish interior minister Annemie Turtelboom has promised new resources for the city of Ostend to tackle the problem of “transit illegals” — illegal immigrants who pass through the port on their way to the United Kingdom. A new intervention team will carry out regular patrols in the station area in September, with back-up support from police forces in Bruges and Ghent. Illegal immigrants will be picked up and held in detention before being repatriated.

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters, who last week announced a grant of €50,000 for research aimed at tackling the problem of in-breeding of dogs. Pedigree dogs are often bred for specific physical characteristics, a practice that can lead to health problems in the animals. The measure aims to secure the future of dog breeding. Peeters said, without losing sight of the animals’ welfare.

A civil action for damages by 39 victims of sexual abuse by clergy against the Holy See and the bishops of Belgium was last week postponed by a Ghent judge after a request from the defendants for the evidence to be heard by three judges. The victims are seeking provisional damages of €10,000 each.

Flemish Opera has for the first time ever issued an age restriction on audiences for the new production of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill’s opera Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny. Visitors under the age of 16 will not be admitted because of scenes of extreme violence and explicit sex, the opera said. The production, conducted by Yannis Pouspourikas and directed by Calixto Bieito, premières in Antwerp on 21 September.

Companies that buy advertising space in newspapers and magazines have a 7-27% greater chance of obtaining additional editorial coverage in the month following the ad, according to a doctoral thesis by researcher Dries De Smet of the Catholic University of Leuven. The exact mechanism, which is stronger in magazines than newspapers, is not clear, De Smet said, but there is no evidence that businesses exercise any pressure on newsdesk.

A man suspected of four rapes and several attempts in the Antwerp area since 2008 was last week arrested after a speeding incident in Ninien, Antwerp province. The man, who is 47 and lives in Boom, has no police or criminal record.

The Royal Museum of Central African Forestry has removed the horns from stuffed rhinoceroses on display in its permanent collection as a precaution against thefts. Poachers are reputedly rewarded by Chinese medicine, were recently stolen from the Natural History museum in Brussels and a zoological institute in Lierge.

Ghislain Londers

The senior judge at the Cassation Court, the highest court in the country, announced his resignation last week.

Ghislain Londers was educated at the Catholic University of Leuven and took up the position as president of the Cassation Court in 2007 after a 20-year career as a magistrate. Even such an elevated position rarely brings any public fame, but that changed for Londers when, in December 2008, he wrote a letter to Herman Van Rompuy, then speaker of the federal parliament, alleging “unacceptable government contacts” in a case dealing with the rights of shareholders of Fortis bank. The bank was then in the process of being sold by the federal government to BNP Paribas of France.

The government, Londers alleged, had attempted to influence the opinions of the four judges sitting in the case. The letter, an unprecedented breach of protocol, led to the resignation of federal justice minister Jo Vandeurnen (now a minister for the Flemish government) and later to that of prime minister Yves Leterme. Van Rompuy, stepped down as caretaker prime minister and, in July of 2009, Leterme became foreign affairs minister, returning to the PM’s office when Van Rompuy became president of the European Council.

The letter earned Londers an investigation by the prosecutor general for possible breach of professional confidentiality. That investigation is still running, and federal justice minister Stafana De Clerck, responding to Londers resignation, was careful to point out last week that he did not consider the announcement to be connected in any way to the case.

Meanwhile the four judges who were sitting in the so-called Fortisgate case last week heard the verdict in their trial for breach of confidentiality and forgery of official documents (see story, p7).

With the departure of Londers, the justice system loses one of its most prominent advocates for reform to tackle the chronic backlog of cases, which has seen many charges dropped for lack of time or for passing the statute of limitations. The number of cases normally destined for jury trial dealt with instead by lower courts.

Pennine, Cornelia PJP

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Hallowed hamster

When you think of an endangered species, the image that springs to mind probably isn’t one of a fluffy hamster. Colour-blind, hamsters caught in Syria. But the breed was only introduced to the Netherlands recently — an image that springs to mind probably isn’t one of a fluffy hamster. Colour-blind, hamsters caught in Syria. But the breed was only introduced to the Netherlands recently — an image that springs to mind probably isn’t one of a fluffy hamster. Colour-blind, hamsters caught in Syria. But the breed was only introduced to the Netherlands recently — a time and at a period that’s too early, “Natuurpunt said.

Hamsters are small rodents that are often kept as pets. They are known for their cute appearance and friendly nature, and they are popular in many countries around the world for their playful behavior.

The hamster breed was introduced to the Netherlands recently, according to the conservation organisation Natuurpunt. The organisation said the hamster is facing extinction in Flanders, where it is only found in a few cities.

But the breeding of hamsters in Flanders is illegal, said the organisation. The authorities have taken steps to protect the hamster, such aschioing and licensing of dealers and breeders.

The hamster is on the list of endangered species, according to Natuurpunt. The organisation said that the species is threatened by habitat loss and competition from domestic dogs.

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Lack of Flemish voters in the capital

Flemish Brabant is alone among the provinces of Belgium in not being a single electoral district. One part of the province, around Louvain, is a single district, the rest, 35 Flemish municipalities, is tackled onto the 19 communes of Brussels. Both sets of parties stand in elections there, and the growing number of French-speaking voters in the municipalities around Brussels has become an important constituency for French-speaking parties, in particular the hard-line FDF of Olivier Maingain. The constitutional court has already declared the situation unconstitutional, so that even before the elections of June 2010, there was serious concern that the election itself was invalid. However, no agreement could be found to split the district.

The stakes for Flanders

- For Flanders, the ability to vote in a Flemish province for French-speaking parties is a serious anomaly: There are at present only two Flemish members of the federal parliament representing Brussels. These owe their seats to the voters cast for their party lists in Halle-Vilvoorde, because there are not enough Flemish voters in the capital.
- If Flemish parties were to present lists for Brussels alone, none would achieve the minimum number of votes needed to take a seat.

The agreement

The agreement reached last week places the Halle-Vilvoorde municipalities back into the Flemish Brabant electoral district. The exception is the six facility municipalities: Knaiem, Wezembeek-Oppem, Linkebeek, Sint-Genesius-Rode, Drogenbos and Wemmel, where the option will exist to vote for Brussels lists.

There is also a new procedure for dealing with cases like that of the three mayors in Linkebeek, Wezembeek-Oppem and Knaiem, whose breach of the language laws tied the Flemish government refusing to recognise their appointments; such disputes will now be dealt with by a bilingual Chancelor of the Council of State.

The agreement also brings about the end of the 40 senators currently directly elected to the Senat. The number of community senators goes up from 21 to 50, 23 from the Flemish parliament, 10 from the French community and one from the German community, while senators co-opted by the parties stay at 10. The three senators ex officio – the offspring of the monarch – vanish completely.

What Flemish politicians think

The negotiations collectively released a statement describing "an important breakthrough obtained at a reasonable price" which "on the one hand, is far from being over". Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters said the agreement was "an important and essential first step in reaching a global agreement. The borders of Flanders must be intact."

For former prime minister Jean-Luc Dehaene, the agreement was "honourable and balanced". Bart De Wever, president of the N-VA, which dropped out of negotiations, said that his party "felt expected a lot worse. It’s not a good agreement, but it’s not a nightmare either".

In the meantime, the party negotiators started this week on the rest of the dossiers still on the table, some of them not easier to deal with than BHV, new financing rules governing how much the regions receive, the composition of a coalition and a devolution of powers from the federal to the regional level. BHV was a first step, but there is still much work to do before a new government can be formed.

New campaign to break stigma around dementia

Flemish minister for well-being, health and family Jo Vandeurzen (CD&V) presented on Monday a package of measures before World Dementia Day on 21 September, “to break the stigma that is associated with dementia.” There are around 100,000 people in Flanders who suffer from the disease that affects mostly the elderly and causes a loss of cognitive ability – a number that will “double in the next 35 years,” the minister’s cabinet said, citing the simple fact that the population is aging. A different approach is needed, because “the presence of dementia in our society will reach a level at which it will affect each and every one of us.”

The campaign will focus on raising awareness about the disease. “We need to have a more nuanced approach to dementia” says Vandeurzen. “We need to get rid of the stigma.” He also plans to invest in so-called dementia-friendly communities, which will take extra measures to facilitate the care of people with dementia, and to promote a healthy lifestyle, one of the few known preventative measures.

“Despite of impressive research into the causes of the disease, we are still mostly in the dark.” Flemish minister of Innovation Ingrid Lieten promised to launch a scientific research.

Foreign decision makers visit Flanders

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters met with decision makers from Spain and Poland at nano-Belgium on Monday met with decision makers from Spain and Poland at nano-Belgium on Monday. This meeting was initiated to support Flanders as an international innovation hub. The region aims to attract even more foreign talent and investment by demonstrating its potential as a key location for international innovation.

The meeting was attended by representatives from companies such as IBM, Siemens, and GE. Peeters discussed the region’s strengths in the fields of life sciences, biotechnology, and nanotechnology, and how Flanders is working to position itself as a leader in these areas.

In order to achieve these goals, Peeters stressed the importance of collaboration between the public and private sectors. He highlighted the region’s commitment to investing in research and development, and its ongoing efforts to create a more favorable business climate for innovation.

Besides the economic benefits, Peeters also talked about the cultural aspects of Flanders. He emphasized the region’s rich history and architectural heritage, as well as its vibrant arts scene and food culture. This diversity provides a unique environment for creativity and collaboration, he said.

Peeters’ visit comes at a time when Flanders is making strides in attracting foreign talent and investment. In recent years, the region has implemented a number of initiatives aimed at making Flanders a more attractive destination for innovation.

These initiatives include partnerships with leading universities and research institutions, as well as the creation of incubators and accelerators to support early-stage startups. Flanders is also working to improve its infrastructure and talent pool, with a focus on developing a highly skilled workforce.

Overall, Peeters’ meeting demonstrated Flanders’ commitment to fostering innovation and growing its international footprint. The region is well positioned to continue building on its successes, and attracting even more talent and investment in the future.

The external relations department of the government of Flanders is home to the International Bureau for Flanders, an international organization that promotes Flanders as a location for investment and innovation.

The bureau works to attract foreign investors to Flanders by highlighting the region’s strengths in areas such as life sciences, biotechnology, and nanotechnology. The bureau also organizes events and missions to showcase Flanders’ innovations and potential to global audiences.

In addition to the bureau, Flanders also has a network of international representatives, known as Flanders’ Ambassadors, who work to promote the region’s strengths abroad.

These ambassadors are stationed in key markets around the world and have the task of raising awareness about Flanders’ strengths and opportunities. They also help connect Flanders’ businesses with potential partners and investors. The ambassadors are an important part of Flanders’ efforts to attract foreign investment.

In summary, Flanders is a strong and dynamic region with a strong focus on innovation and growth. With initiatives like the International Bureau and its network of ambassadors, Flanders is well positioned to continue attracting foreign talent and investment in the future.
A warm welcome to Belgium!
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www.kbc.be/expats
City on rails

The multi-disciplinary Jonction festival continues into 2013

continued from page 7

Barely 20 years later, due to an exponential growth in traffic, it became clear that another connection was needed. The Belgian state and the city of Brussels collaborated on the works that began 1903. In the name of urban regeneration and the promise of a better life for the working class, entire mediaeval neighbourhoods were demolished. Enthusiasm and disillusion

As with the covering of the river Zenne – which used to meander through the old parts of the city – in the name of public health, modernisation applied to poor areas of the city caused displacement. From 1903 until the First World War, around 10,000 Brusselaars were displaced. Stirrings of activism had little effect, and, in the 1920s, due to rising costs of raw materials and workforce, 15 more years were added to the completion of the project.

Further, several actions were taken by the city of Brussels against the state in order to abandon the entire project, as it became clear that the costs were escalating and the damage done was irreversible. Only in 1936 did the works start again fully, as it was considered that this building site would help create jobs in a crisis-stricken era. The Second World War put another halt to the works; they started again in 1948.

King Boudewijn finally inaugurated the line – originally meant to be finished by 1914 – on 5 October, 1952. After all these tragic ups and downs, Brussels and Belgium could finally look towards the future, full of promise and prosperity. Instead of these run-down quarters, a new fresh and modern city would grow, based on the wide boulevards that would allow the increasing flow of cars to bring new life to the city.

It is finally time that Brussels’ north-south line becomes the epicentre of everything good and positive that can happen in this city

But because centuries-old neighbourhoods had been razed to the ground, the dense and complex connections from the upper to the lower parts of town had vanished. In their place stood office buildings for the growing middle classes. A whole new lifestyle was created with this engineering achievement: Office workers could now take their train right next to where they worked. The pendelaars (commuters) had replaced the Brusselaars.

The saturation of the line

Now 1,200 trains a day pass through the 2.8 kilometre-long tunnel through Central Station, making Brussels the first city in Europe that had a train station in its very heart. So useful to both locals and visitors alike, it has become a victim of its own success. It is calculated that by 2020, the need to double the tracks, to create a new tunnel, to reconstruct – reconstructing everything in its passage – is all of Brussels at once. From lively and decrepit working-class districts, to a grand cathedral and peerless monuments, to derelict and bland office buildings, Passing through 15th-century cobblestone streets, a 1950s bowling club, 1,000-year-old city walls, modernist train stations, contemporary skate parks and postmodern Bruegelian buildings, this route sums it all up.

Life among the ruins

In the late 1990s, several small cultural organisations like Recyclart and Congres, started new, creative projects along the north-south line. Events along Line 0

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Several architectural and urban debates took place regarding, for instance, the future of the disused Rijkadministratief Centrum, Ursulines square and the surrounding streets themselves. The urban canyon was barren no more. The new Square international congress centre opened a couple of years ago on the Kunstberg, Central Station opened new shopping galleries and new entrances made it a more accessible and agreeable place. Opportunities are on the rise – what used to be an empty zone is now full of new projects.

The Kapellekerk train station in 1948. Brussels, during works on the north-south rail line, which lasted nearly 50 years

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Living in transition

People across Flanders join forces to diminish their energy consumption

Jacqueline Fletcher

It might come as a surprise to hear that over the last quarter, Belgium’s GDP growth was the highest in Europe. The British commentator John Lanchester attributes this to the simple fact that Belgium doesn’t have a government. And he’s far from alone in assuming that politicians worldwide haven’t grasped Albert Einstein’s basic dictum: “No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.”

So, what to do in the face of fossil-fuel depletion and the potentially devastating consequences? Some think it’s time for the average person in the street to take the initiative and find sensible solutions within their own local communities. That is the goal of Transitienetwerk Vlaanderen, or Flemish Transition Network, a steadily growing number of ordinary individuals, families, friends and ad hoc groups who are already rolling up their sleeves and getting on with it.

No more oil

“In principle, the transition takes about 20 years,” says Debbie Eruly from Transition Initiative Ghent, referring to the time it takes to adjust to diminishing fossil fuel resources and achieve sustainability with renewable energy. Peak oil, or the point beyond which fossil fuels become too expensive, is not only inevitable, she says, but is happening right now. “We haven’t much time left, so the sooner we start to adapt, the better. Then we’ll be able to use the remaining oil much more wisely.”

This doesn’t mean a return to the bad old days. As many local citizens’ groups are discovering, dispensing with the derivatives of the petrochemical industry can actually free us to adapt to diminishing fossil fuel resources and achieve sustainability with renewable energy.

Some initiatives even have a local currency, the ringing of which might be a rehabilitating reminder of a post-fossil fuel age; but convincing neighbours to participate isn’t always easy. In rural areas like the Flemish Ardennes, small groups of people organise nature walks, cycle trips or just gatherings to raise awareness and stimulate activities. There are transition trainings and manuals for guidance, courses on permaculture and sustainable economics, and, of course, support and advice through the network’s website. And it doesn’t all have to be a doom-and-gloom attitude. Flemish performance troupe Fou de Coudre is only one of many festive initiatives that put zest into the movement, while encouraging participants to discover their skills and imagine their futures.

The Transition Network is seen by many citizens as the most hopeful and inspiring development in decades. Local governments are welcoming the idea of ordaining ad hoc groups to be their development officer in the post-fossil fuel age. The European Parliament has launched an official Transition Network, and local governments and social organisations organise the Vlaamse Vredesweek, or Flemish Week of Peace.

Exhibitions, documentaries, debates, markets and other get-togethers across the region this year focus on the global arms trade. There will be mysterious “street actions” in Hasselt and Leuven, a screening of the Polish film Aylan in Bruges and a debate on “the sense of innocence of holding elections in Congo” in Brussels, among many other events. There’s also a small web shop with books and games. All under the explosive slogan “Don’t shoot development to bits!”

Come on, neighbour

According to participants, transition initiatives engender a community spirit, empathy and a common purpose. They see it as the ideology of a post-fossil fuel age; but convincing neighbours to participate isn’t always easy. In rural areas like the Flemish Ardennes, small groups of people organise nature walks, cycle trips or just gatherings to raise awareness and stimulate activities. There are transition trainings and manuals for guidance, courses on permaculture and sustainable economics and, of course, support and advice through the network’s website. And it doesn’t all have to be a doom-and-gloom attitude. Flemish performance troupe Fou de Coudre is only one of many festive initiatives that put zest into the movement, while encouraging participants to discover their skills and imagine their futures.

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This year marks the 22nd edition of the week of peace, which aims to “draw the attention of the public to the theme of peace” by reaching out to politicians, schools and the general public alike. The event has already been partly responsible for such lasting effects as the Belgian law against land mines and the foundation of the Flemish Institute of Peace.

Vlaamse Vredesweek

21 September to 2 October

Across Flanders

→ www.vredesweek.be

World’s biggest lock gets go-ahead

The Port of Antwerp is set to build the world’s biggest lock, after an agreement was reached last week to finance the project. The lock will link the existing Deurganck dock with the other docks on the left bank of the Scheldt, which at present have only one nautical link with the rest of the port area.

The budget for the project is €340 million, of which just under half will be paid by the European Investment Bank. KBC will extend a credit line of €381 million, while the Port of Antwerp and the Flemish government make up the rest.

According to Flemish minister for public works, Hilde Crevits, “the construction of the Deurganckdock lock is important for the maritime future of the Antwerp port area. Access to our ports is crucial for Flanders.”

The project will be completed by 2019, and will have four gates. The lock is 500 metres long and 68 metres wide. That’s as long as the Meir shopping street in Antwerp’s city centre, or the equivalent of 28 De Lijn buses parked nose to tail. The width will be equivalent to a 19-lane motorway.

Those dimensions are the same as the Berendrecht dock, but the new dock is deeper. 17.8 metres compared to 13.58 metres. The concrete required for the new dock is enough to build a 35-storey building with a footprint the size of a football pitch, and the steel needed is enough for three Eiffel towers.

Construction is planned to take about four-and-a-half years, with the new dock becoming operational in 2016. When the port is fully operational, we provide an answer not only to the growth of ship traffic on the left bank of the Scheldt but also to the increases in scale,” Crevits commented. “A second lock will ensure more business security in the world.”
CEO Didier Bellens reached an agreement with Belgacom board

CEO Didier Bellens reached an agreement with the board of telecoms company Belgacom to end the employment contract of Concetta Fagard. Fagard had been fired from her post at Belgacom earlier this year, and Bellens (pictured) later under intense criticism this month when he announced he was hiring her back. Bellens and Fagard had both worked at TV station RTL, where he was CEO and she was his colleague and ex-girlfriend. When he moved to Belgacom in 2003, she came also, and, in 2007, she was promoted to vice-president in charge of corporate social responsibility. Fagard was fired earlier this year, accused of bullying staff and using fear as a management technique. Her departure, which included a €600,000 settlement and using fear as a management technique. Her departure, which included a €600,000 settlement

Before: at the time of his re-nomination to the post in 2008, a majority of the board was against him continuing in the job, accusing him of a lack of vision and international ambitions. To be re-nominated, he was forced to give up some of the remuneration package that had made him one of the best-paid CEOs in the Bel-20 group of top companies.

Bellens issued a statement after the board meeting last week: “The director-general stresses that he appreciates her work and that he could make use of her qualities in some other capacity outside of NV Belgacom”. That signals a return via a back door, through one of Belgacom’s other properties, says opponents within the company. Inge Vervotte, federal minister for government enterprises (Including Belgacom) said: “My first priority has always been to find an agreement between the board of directors and the director-general. I am pleased that this has been achieved.”

Shopping centre refused permit

Plans for a massive shopping, fitness and hotel complex on the site of the former Renault factory in Machelen have been cancelled after the province of Flemish Brabant last week refused to grant an environmental planning permit, claiming the site would cause insurmountable traffic problems and present a threat to further environmental planning permit, claiming the site uses more of the available redevelopment space. Flemish Brabant claims the site uses up too much of the available redevelopment land in the coastal zone. Uplace points out that their site takes up only 11 of the available 200 hectares, not counting the 230 hectares left over from the province’s own master plan. The available space has already been set out by the Flemish government in its brownfield covenant, “Parys said.”

Beverage · Miko

The out-of-home coffee service specialist Miko, based in Turnhout, has acquired the Czech Excellent Pizn fair trade coffee and tea distributor.

Dredging · PMV

The Belgian government investment company PMV has acquired a 30% stake in Dembe Blue energy, the affiliate of the Dutch VPK group specialised in seeking alternative sources of energy in sea water.

Education · Vlerick

The Ghent-based Vlerick management school, one of the world’s leading business education institutions, is to open a campus in downtown Brussels in September 2012 to expand its activities. The school already operates a campus in Leuven in addition to its headquarters in Ghent.

Materials · Umicro

The Brussels-based materials and nanotechnology group recently inaugurated its new €25 million laboratory in Brussels. With a capacity of 7,000 tonnes a year, the plant is to process up to 150,000 electric vehicles, or 50 million mobile phone batteries.

Packaging · VPK

The European-based producer of corrugated board and cardboard is investing €30 million to build a plant in Leinfelden, Germany, its third in the country. The new unit, due to open in 2012, will use recycled fibres and will help strengthen VPK’s position in the German market.

Telecommunications · Mobistar

The country’s second largest mobile phone operator is investing €30 million over the next two years to renovate its network and implement equipments compatible with the fourth generation of mobile phones.

Textiles · Santens

French venture capital group Astrance is paying at least €11 million to acquire the ailing Oudenaarde-based Santens textile group. The move is expected to save the Santens brand, which carries a long reputation for quality. Astrance is expected to keep 200 of the company’s 430 employees.

Transport · Thalys

The Thalys high-speed train will link Brussels Airport to Paris in 1h47 from 10 October. The move will allow French passengers to connect with the Brussels Airlines African network and let Airway routes to Asia and the US.

Wealth · Belgium near top

The total liquid assets of the Belgian population topped the €600 million mark last year, according to the Roland Berger Strategy Consultants Group. This amount, which excludes property, is almost triple the country’s national debt of €375 billion. As a result, the Belgian population is among the wealthiest in Europe, after residents of Switzerland and among the wealthiest in Europe, after residents of Switzerland and Switzerland, and just ahead of the eighth richest in the world.

Judge found guilty in Fortisgate case

Christine Schurmans will not receive a sentence but will appeal the decision

J udge Christine Schurmans will appeal her conviction in the so-called Fortisgate case to the Court of Cassation, her lawyer announced last week. Schurmans was the only one of four senior judges found guilty of breach of their oath of confidentiality. The court, however, decided to apply no sentence, as allowed under Belgian law if the court finds there is no public interest in punishing the accused.

The case was a culmination of the crisis in 2008 over the sale of Fortis Bank, which is now owned by the French BNP Paribas. The court of appeal in Brussels, where Schurmans (pictured) and two other judges were sitting, was being asked to rule on the legality of the sale, organised by the government over the heads, plaintiffs argued, of the Fortis shareholders. One of the main criticisms was that the government had sold off the bank for a low price, instead of intervening to support it until it could ride out its difficulties.

Schurmans was on the bench, together with judges Paul Blondeel and Mireille Salmon, but while they took the side of the shareholders, she leaned more to the government’s side. Schurmans was accused of having passed news of this division on to a friend and former magistrate. Later, according to a letter sent by the head of the Cassation Court to parliament speaker Herman Van Rompuy (see Face of Flanders, p2), representatives of the government attempted to put pressure on the two judges to make them change their minds. The revelation led to the resignation of prime minister Yves Leterme and federal justice minister Jo Vandeurzen.

The case against then-president of Cassation, Ivan Verougstraete, was not proven because, the court in Ghent found, there was nothing told to him that breached confidentiality. In the case against Salmon and Blondeel, meanwhile, there was not enough evidence to convict them of breach of confidentiality and an additional charge of falsifying documents. Schurmans announced her immediate intention to file an appeal. “I don’t understand the decision of the court at all,” she told reporters after the verdict. “I’ve been found guilty according to an extremely, told by all academic approach because I asked for advice from a colleague. That is common practice among judges, who, like doctors, have to be able to consult among themselves.” Schurmans also faces an internal disciplinary procedure within the magistrate, but details of that are unlikely to be revealed until all available legal appeals have been exhausted.

CEO reaches agreement with Belgacom board

Before: at the time of his re-nomination to the post in 2008, a majority of the board was against him continuing in the job, accusing him of a lack of vision and international ambitions. To be re-nominated, he was forced to give up some of the remuneration package that had made him one of the best-paid CEOs in the Bel-20 group of top companies.

Bellens issued a statement after the board meeting last week: “The director-general stresses that he appreciates her work and that he could make use of her qualities in some other capacity outside of NV Belgacom”. That signals a return via a back door, through one of Belgacom’s other properties, says opponents within the company. Inge Vervotte, federal minister for government enterprises (Including Belgacom) said: “My first priority has always been to find an agreement between the board of directors and the director-general. I am pleased that this has been achieved.”

Shopping centre refused permit

Plans for a massive shopping, fitness and hotel complex on the site of the former Renault factory in Machelen have been cancelled after the province of Flemish Brabant last week refused to grant an environmental planning permit, claiming the site would cause insurmountable traffic problems and present a threat to further environmental planning permit, claiming the site uses more of the available redevelopment space. Flemish Brabant claims the site uses up too much of the available redevelopment land in the coastal zone. Uplace points out that their site takes up only 11 of the available 200 hectares, not counting the 230 hectares left over from the province’s own master plan. The available space has already been set out by the Flemish government in its brownfield covenant, “Parys said.”

Beverage · Miko

The out-of-home coffee service specialist Miko, based in Turnhout, has acquired the Czech Excellent Pizn fair trade coffee and tea distributor.

Dredging · PMV

The Flemish government investment company PMV has acquired a 30% stake in Dembe Blue energy, the affiliate of the Dutch VPK group specialised in seeking alternative sources of energy in sea water.

Education · Vlerick

The Ghent-based Vlerick management school, one of the world’s leading business education institutions, is to open a campus in downtown Brussels in September 2012 to expand its activities. The school already operates a campus in Leuven in addition to its headquarters in Ghent.

Materials · Umicro

The Brussels-based materials and nanotechnology group recently inaugurated its new €25 million laboratory in Brussels. With a capacity of 7,000 tonnes a year, the plant is to process up to 150,000 electric vehicles, or 50 million mobile phone batteries.

Packaging · VPK

The European-based producer of corrugated board and cardboard is investing €30 million to build a plant in Leinfelden, Germany, its third in the country. The new unit, due to open in 2012, will use recycled fibres and will help strengthen VPK’s position in the German market.

Telecommunications · Mobistar

The country’s second largest mobile phone operator is investing €30 million over the next two years to renovate its network and implement equipments compatible with the fourth generation of mobile phones.

Textiles · Santens

French venture capital group Astrance is paying at least €11 million to acquire the ailing Oudenaarde-based Santens textile group. The move is expected to save the Santens brand, which carries a long reputation for quality. Astrance is expected to keep 200 of the company’s 430 employees.

Transport · Thalys

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Living

Going home to shop

Make an appointment in Ghent for some old-fashioned personal attention from the lady of the house

With an uncle who owns Movies, one of the trendiest clothing shops in Ghent, and a mother heading up the Fallen Angels retro and antiques shop on the other side of town, it seems only natural that Debi-Shri Vancoillie is also on her way to local fashion stardom.

Vancoillie is the owner of Be-Angeled, a private women’s boutique, and creator of both a jewellery and a new handbag line. Although she might seem to have followed a pre-destined path, her career has been anything but typical. Soft-spoken and petite, one of her two adopted dogs, she tells her story while her business and life partner looks on proudly.

“All the jobs that I’ve done in my life have helped me to do what I do now,” she says. “At the time, I didn’t know that it would all lend itself to today.”

That might explain how for three years Vancoillie has been everything from a stylist to a fashion photographer to an accountant. She has applied all she knows to create what can only be described as an impressive, consistent and noticeable style. Her home-made jewellery features bows and pearls, her colours of choice are pink and black, and the clothes in shop tend towards the feminine, the flattering and ethereal – but decidedly fashion-forward.

While not quite retro, there is a sweet ’50s charm to both the shop and the couple who runs it. The cozy, intimate boutique feels more like a large in-closet than a store. Her “inspiration room,” a tiny space off of the main entrance, is covered with pin-ups, and an old-fashioned vanity has been transformed to house thousands of beads for her jewellery production.

Bust a move

Competition aims to select Flemish dance ambassadors

So You Think You Can Dance, Dancing with the Stars, Move Like Michael Jackson. TV these days is saturated with dancers popping, locking and crunking across the stage to hip-hop music. The dance world, previously considered formal, has shed its ball gown for street gear and the music of yore for something decidedly more modern. The talent, though, is every bit as amazing, and the work it takes to look good every bit as gruelling. That is why Danspunt was founded. An organisation sponsored by the Flemish Region, it holds a competition to reward hard-working dancers and choreographers come together to announce the winner, not based on points but on overall appreciation.

The first edition of the event was in 2005. “I have seen it every year,” says Schipper, the event’s organiser for the last five years. “And every year, the quality of the dancing improves, as does the storytelling and the use of the stage, which is not easy in a real theatre. The performances are getting more artistic and nice to watch.”

So, no solo performances, he explains. “There are 15 minutes. The jury of five professional dancers and choreographers come together to announce the winner, not based on points but on overall appreciation.”

www.be-angeled.com
Lego’s leading man

Dirk Denoyelle has turned the passion of many a child into an art form

The Zebrstraat is a well-known apartment complex and cultural centre in Ghent and will also be showcased in miniature – using Legos. The owner of the building, known for his penchant for the arts, wanted to have something different on display. So he picked up the phone to call Dirk Denoyelle, the only Lego Certified Professional in Belgium and one of only 13 worldwide.

Denoyelle’s home atelier in Hoboken, a municipality of Antwerp, is strewn with parts of the maquette. “I’ve had to dismantle it to have some room for us to talk,” he tells me. The roof of the thing is almost a metre high. It looks just like the bird’s eye view in the photo he has on hand, including details like the winding staircase in the courtyard and the lanterns on the walls. “I used the wizard wands from the Harry Potter series of merchandise to make those,” he says. He did cheat a little, he admits, by sawing off the ends. “There are purists who would have a problem with that. But sometimes there’s just no other way.”

“People may not know my head, but they do know my heads”

Denoyelle has always liked to fool around with Lego blocks. He used to build whole towns as a kid, until he was 18 years old and other things in life began to demand his attention. “They call those years the dark ages,” he says, not without a healthy dose of self-mockery – the time in a Lego-boy’s life that he loses interest.

Enlightenment came on the seventh birthday of one of his daughters when a friend gave her a small box of Legos. “I went and got all the Lego I had stored away, and began to build towns again, “ he says. “Supposedly for my daughter, but really for myself.”

“Aegimus writing a book on how to prepare one (the Greeks use mizithra cheese from sheep or goats). But versions exist from Sweden to Japan, the differences being more significant than the similarities.

The cheesecake from the draaiwinkel is a typical product brought out on feast days, when traditionally in decades past every housewife would prepare her own, taking it to the local baker to be baked (few homes in those days had an oven). It consists of a number of variable additions: rum, almonds, macaroons. The base is dough, the cream cheese filling dense and creamy. When sliced, the cake should retain its shape. The topping is browned in the oven to a golden caramel colour.

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A grand old dame

The National Orchestra of Belgium turns 75 this season

**MA RIE D E R E U T**

The National Orchestra of Belgium has three fans. Well, actually, it has quite a few more than that – but three famous, official “fans” will be lending it their names and faces this coming season, as it turns the ripe old age of 75.

One of them is Kim Gevaert, the petite Leuven-born sprinter who brought back a silver medal from the Beijing Olympics in 2008. What few people know is that Gevaert is also a serious music lover who studied the flute and piano as a child and once dreamed of being professional – like her brother John, who is now a concert pianist.

The second fan is Ozark Henry, the lanky Flemish pop singer with a steely voice and eclectic tastes ranging from film to fashion. The third, French pianist Hélène Grimaud, is the only bona fide classical artist of the lot, although she enjoys a pop star aura due to her magnetic personality and, let’s face it, dewy-eyed looks.

Three will soon be seen across Brussels and Flanders, peering down from stylish black posters next to the words “Ik ben een fan.” A tram bearing the same slogan will shuttle back and forth between Brussels’ communities Zuperbeek and Ukkel. And there might even be a short advert on television, for the NOB has splashed out on unprecedented hype to mark the occasion.

A party season

**Concert-wise, this promises to be “a party season” in the words of orchestra manager Albert Wastiels. Between now and next summer, there will be gala concerts with prestigious soloists (Grimaud included), an elaborate Christmas event, several world premières, an avalanche of children’s performances and even the odd foray into crossover. Not to forget the lunchtime chamber concerts, the Queen Elisabeth Competition appearances and myriad other events that dot the life of the country’s flagship orchestra.**

They seem to whisper to us that one needn’t be bald or geeky to like Mahler or Tchaikovsky.

For the NOB, this jubilee season is a chance to spruce up its image at a time when “Belgian” and “National” are uncomfortable epithets to wear, and when classical music has a sore need of new, younger audiences. Hence the three fans: as the orchestra’s glamorous ambassadors, they embody just the kind of curious, independent-minded young people it hopes to attract. From their posters, they seem to whisper to us that one needn’t be bald or geeky to like Mahler or Tchaikovsky.

They seem to whisper to us that one needn’t be bald or geeky to like Mahler or Tchaikovsky.

Classical in crisis

As things stand, though, symphonic orchestras are the poor parents of the ailing classical industry. Of the few people under 50 who actually listen to classical music, most prefer the crisp sounds of Baroque ensembles, the hushed Germanic sound, luckily alleviated by the lighter touch of one per year, with a few gems among them. Meanwhile, the NOB had signed up with Fuga Libera, a principal guest conductor since last year.

Everyone is now looking forward to the next step: the arrival of new chief conductor Andrey Boreyko next season. Boreyko, who’s from Saint Petersburg and has worked with the Berlin Philharmonic and Chicago Symphony, among others, is also a first-class programmer. “He has a very good feel for what can and should be recorded in today’s difficult climate,” says Stockhem. Let’s hope he manages to bring the NOB the recognition – and fans – it deserves.

Saved by a rising star

Its fortunes turned in 2002, after Simonov left. The orchestra’s modest resources meant that it could either opt for a second-rate but experienced conductor or bet on a rising star. It chose the latter. Mikko Franck, a diminutive Finn who was only 23 when he took up the post, shaped the orchestra sound, breathed in clarity and depth, introduced contemporary composers (he is a fan of Rautavaara) and played mild havoc with the sacrosanct concert ritual.

“‘There is no law that says every concert programme should consist of an overture, a concerto and a symphony,’” he quipped at his inauguration press conference. A triumphant tour of Japan restored the musicians’ confidence and cohesion. “The phoenix is reborn to the world,” enthused conductor Walter Weller, a 67-year-old Austrian and former concertmaster at the Vienna Philharmonic. His gifts to the orchestra have been a full, Germanic sound, luckily alleviated by the lighter touch of Stefan Blunier, the orchestra’s principal guest conductor since last year.

Meanwhile, the NOB had signed up with Fuga Libera, a young, dynamic record label with a mission to promote the best of Belgian music. CDs have been released to the tune of one per year, with a few gems among them.

Coming of age

So it looks like the 75-year-old ensemble is coming of age at last. “I love it here,” says Blunier. “It’s a nice change from German orchestras, which never seem to want to play the music.” The main asset is just right, with power but also lots of fragile colours.”

“The orchestra in very good shape,” agrees Fuga Libera founder and artistic director Michel Stockhem. “It’s versatile, at the junction of Germanic and Latin cultures. Like other local ensembles, it struggles to be recognised internationally, but that’s where recordings can help. Our Richard Strauss CD, which caused us endless grief to record, has had excellent reviews abroad.” Everyone is now looking forward to the next step: the arrival of new chief conductor Andrey Boreyko next season. Boreyko, who’s from Saint Petersburg and has worked with the Berlin Philharmonic and Chicago Symphony, among others, is also a first-class programmer. “He has a very good feel for what can and should be recorded in today’s difficult climate,” says Stockhem. Let’s hope he manages to bring the NOB the recognition – and fans – it deserves.

NOB: the season’s best picks

• Angel-faced French pianist Hélène Grimaud brings her huge talent to Brussels and performs Brahms’ first concerto (21 & 22 October). More big-shot soloists will be invited throughout the season, including pianist Maria João Pires (18 March) and German tenor Jonas Kaufmann (15 April).

• The NOB celebrates Christmas with seasonal music by Tchaikovsky, Debussy, Prokofiev and others. Stirsweet drawings (pictured) by Brussels-born children’s illustrator Kitty Crowther are the icing on the cake (23 December).

• Composers Jean-Luc Fafchamps and Wim Hendrickx are living proofs that Belgian contemporary music is alive and kicking. The NOB pays them tribute with two world premières: the latter’s first symphony at the Edge of the World (2 March) and the former’s haunting Lettre Soufie: Qâf (22 March).

• Anyone for crossover? Flemish pop singer Ozark Henry steps on stage to perform a selection of his songs with orchestral backing. Purists needn’t fret: the rest of the programme revolves safely around Berlioz, Tchaikovsky and Ravel (12 July).

• How does one get children interested in orchestral music? By giving them a chance to play. This autumn, select students from music academies will receive special coaching from NOB musicians, joining them for a performance of Tchaikovsky’s Sleeping Beauty (22 January). Sign up for an audition before 3 October at www.onb.be/kids.
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As one of the key global hubs for politics and business, Brussels is home to a massive international community and for the last five decades, one publication has been their bible – The Bulletin.

After an extensive redesign, The Bulletin is back this September with a brand-new look and a renewed focus on everything the international community needs to know about what is happening in the capital of Europe. The Bulletin will be packed with exclusive interviews, expert analysis and your definitive guide to lifestyle & culture in Brussels and Belgium. The agenda will also be back in The Bulletin, covering the highlights in and around Brussels.

TRY IT OUT!

Request a free trial of three issues by visiting www.thebulletin.be/ft as of September 8.
A visual artist who is also a poet usually has little chance to combine the disciplines, but not so for Bruges-based Renaat Ramon. The title of his new exhibition in Hasselt is Oogrijm, or Eye Rhyme. “Oogrijm” is also the title of one of the pieces in the show – a grid of geometric figures, straight lines and coloured circles. “Eye rhyme means words that have endings spelled identically, so they appear to be similar, but are not pronounced the same,” the artist explains. Meaning, say the words “blood” and “wood”. This verbal correspondence is expressed in purely visual terms, one of the hallmarks of Ramon’s work. His unique approach blends word and image, letters and symbols, numbers and text, creating graphic works that delight the viewer with unexpected associations. “I was and I am still a visual artist and a poet,” he tells me at the opening of the show in Hasselt’s cultural centre. “At a certain point, there was a spontaneous but logical interaction between the two genres.”

Ramon is fascinated by all kinds of symbolic systems, not just alphabets (and the words they form) but also pictograms and other forms of graphical representation. Another of his pieces makes use of Ogham, an ancient Irish alphabet made by scratching lines in stone. In his work, even familiar symbols find new meanings and become the elements of poetry. Not surprisingly, Ramon was trained as an architectural draughtsman at a time when precise rendering was still done by hand. This attention to detail and commitment to clarity of expression is evident. Stylistically, he is influenced by neoplasticism, the Dutch minimalist movement that emphasised simple geometric shapes and primary colours.

As an accomplished sculptor whose monumental steel designs can be seen in locations around his native West Flanders, he works with geometric forms like squares and circles. This formalism is also expressed in his poetry. Ramon explains his aesthetic by quoting the 20th-century Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein: “Ultimately, mathematics is poetry.” Ramon’s work also pays homage to the writings of Thomas More. Above all, Ramon’s visual poetry entices the eye and the mind, daring the viewer to see, read and think in new ways. He challenges our definitions of poetry, of art, and of the difference between the visual and the verbal. One of the pleasures of viewing each piece is the “Aha!” moment when its internal code reveals itself. There is a great, humanistic wit behind these works. As with all good poetry, Oogrijm offers a fresh way of looking at the world – thereby seeing it more clearly.

The Boudewijn building, on the northern section of Brussels’ inner-ring road, is not just the home of many a Flemish government employee, it also hosts free exhibitions open to the public. Curators often choose international artists that are rather unknown here, lending the shows a notable cultural inclusion, Moldova is getting a bit of boost east of Romania – but as a candidate for EU inclusion, Moldova is getting a bit of boost from the Flemish Region here. The country is one of the poorest in Europe, still finding its post-Communist footing. The photos show a country struggling between the past and the future, though Potârniche is clearly keen on illustrating traditions that are not – and, he seems to say, should not – disappear with modernisation. Potârniche neither sentimentalises the working classes nor chooses the easiest landscapes. One wonders, for instance, how many hours he waited for the sun to appear? Potârniche neither sentimentalises the working classes nor chooses the easiest landscapes. One wonders, for instance, how many hours he waited for the sun to appear?
Agenda

COMEDY

Don’t let the photo fool you; Seann Walsh is in fact a very funny man - in a sort of absurd, self-deprecating kind of way. The British comedian who made his breakthrough four years ago is today perhaps best known as the motor-mouth from Brighton. Walsh’s delivery is self-assured and quick to the punch. At the acclaimed Edinburgh Comedy Fest, he had the audience rolling in the aisles during a sold-out show entitled I Would Happily Punch Myself in The Face. You might want to get there early, and not only because the bar opens at 19.00 and not only because a scrummy Indian meal is served shortly thereafter, but because Walsh’s performance is preceded by two fellow funny countrymen: Josh Widdicombe and Phil Butler. (Robyn Boyle)

MORE COMEDY THIS WEEK

Eeklo (East Flanders)
Comedycafé De Luxe: Multi-faceted Flemish artist Kamaluzaka tries out his new act, plus supporting show by up-and-coming comedian William Roeve (in Dutch)
SEP 23 20.30 at CC De Herbaker, Pastorstraat De Nevestraat 10
www.ccluxemilie.be

Mechelen
Bert Gabriels in Drak Drak Drak (Busy Busy Busy): A full evening of situation comedy with sketches by the Flemish comedian (in Dutch)
SEP 24 20.30 at Moonbeat, Oude Brusselsestraat 10
www.moonbeat.be/prm

Oostmaalle (Antwerp province)
The Line-Up: Four stand-up comedians in one night, hosted by MC Joost Van Hyfte: Jeroen Leenders, Veerle Malschaert, Han Solo (in Dutch) and Jovanka Steele (in English)
SEP 22 20.00-22.30 at De Notelaar, Lierselei 21
www.theilineup.be

FAMILY

Bozar Sundays
Every Sunday
Bozar, Brussels

Brussels’ Fine Arts Centre has a lot of good ideas, but this one is brilliant. Invite parents to get their little ones up and out on a Sunday morning so they can essentially drop them off for a full-immersion culture bath. Meanwhile, said parents are free to sink off for a relaxing classical concert sans kids. And no need to even bother feeding them beforehand; there’s a full breakfast for the whole family. This Sunday, while the kids (ages three to 10) are flexing their creative muscles in art and music workshops, the adults will sit back to the blithe sounds of flutist Erik Bosgraaf and his trio as they perform The Dancing Master, music that was popular in London around the year 1700, with a particular focus on the works of John Blow and Nicola Matteis. (RB)

MORE FAMILY EVENTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp
Antwerp Giants Family Day: Annual family day for fans of the professional basketball team, featuring merchandise, bouncy castles, tombola, justice bar and more; plus the official presentation of the team, followed by autograph and photo sessions with the players
SEP 25 13.00-18.00 at Lotto Arena, Schippoortweg 119
www.antwerpgiants.be

Ghent
Poppeskaat Zootecnom: Puppet theatre group performing Noten voor Gange (Dance for the Gange), an entertaining story for young and old about India in all its colourful glory
SEP 25 13.00 at DOK Beach, Kooivoorstraat/Afrikalei
www.dokgent.be

Leuven
Blauwe Storm (Blue Storm): Premiere of the dance performance and choreography Randi De Vliegh’s latest creation for kids (ages six and up)
SEP 24 15.00 at 36 CC Schouwburg, Diestrastraat
www.falbeleu.be

NEW MUSIC

“How can music express the apocalypse?” is the question at the heart of this engaging, witty, shamelessly cerebral and at times violently disturbing performance by Flemish ensemble Bledsmidn. Its founder, Eric Schiehm, is a superlative artist with something of a split personality, constantly hovering back and forth between the avant-garde and the intricate polyphonies of Bach and his predecessors. The concert pits these two sound worlds against each other: poised cantatas by 17th-century composer Heinrich Schütz, composed on the aftermath of the horrendous Thirty Years War, are rendered beautifully by a sax and a voice quartet, then give way to screeching sounds, disjointed video footage and the pleading, gasping voice of singer Cristina Zavalloni – the sole survivor, it seems, of some future disaster. In between is a debate between two musicologists discussing the current craze for Baroque music, the importance of harmony and the writings of Theodor Adorno. You’ll soon find your head swimming with hope, beauty, modernity and aesthetic enjoyment dissolve into a bewilderment jumble. (in Dutch and English)
(Maris Dumont)

MORE ROCK THIS WEEK

Across Flanders
Ozark Henry: Flemish musician Piet Goddeer plays favourites from his last six albums on two pianos, featuring appearances by up-and-coming artists
SEP 23-24 20.15 at De Kortrijkse Schouwburg, Schouwburgplein 14, Kortrijk
SEP 24 19.30 at Het Depot, C. Deberistraat 24, Leuven
SEP 26 20.00 at Ancienne Belgique, Anspraaklaan 110, Brussels
http://tinyurl.com/6xdz766
Kortrijk
Ganglians: Poppy, ’60s-style garage band from California, with supporting act by British band The Lovely Eggs
SEP 25 20.00 at De Kreun, Conservatoriumplein
www.dekreun.be/live/event/ganglians

Leopoldsburg (Limburg province)
Stoned Again: Rolling Stones Tribute by five look-alike musicians who know all the Stones’ greatest hits
SEP 27 20.15 at CC Leopoldsburg, Kastanjendreef 1
www.ccleopoldsburg.be

Smashing Pumpkins
7 November, 20.00-23.00
Vorst Nationaal, Brussels

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Food & Drink

Slow Food: it’s a concept that is - slowly but surely - creeping back into mainstream culture. With this fourth edition of Proef Brussel (Taste Brussel) themed “From Farm to Table”, organiser Karolik aims to highlight a lesser-known side to the capital city – one that is green and eco-conscious, an overall nice place to discover with all five senses, especially your taste buds. Choose from a whole range of taste-inspired activities, including a guided walking tour through the organic market on Sint-Katelijneplein, a visit to the studio of artisanal chocolate-maker Laurent Gerbaud, a cooking workshop using all local, organic products. Or learn how to create your own vegetable garden at home, whether you have lots of space or just a small balcony. Rather slide your legs under a table to experience the best environmentally friendly food Brussels has to offer? Then visit one of the 71 restaurants across town that have put together a special Slow Food menu. The week ends on Sunday with a potluck picnic at Warandelapark, where the cost of entry is bringing a dish to share (R8).

→ www.proefbrussel.be

Proef Brussel
1 Until 25 September
Across Brussels

More Food & Drink This Week

Ghent
English Afternoon: Tea time at the museum with a variety of English-related activities including a guided tour of the John Constable exhibition by Mary Poppins and her Magnificent Five (in Dutch), guided walk through Citadelpark, acoustic sessions and DJ sets, cricket on a big screen, crochet workshops and more.
SEP 25 13.00-18.00 at the Museum of Fine Arts (MISK)
www.miskgent.be

Londerzeel (Flemish Brabant)
Gouden Kerkensstoepworst (Golden Chicken Foot Toss): Annual folk tradition in Londerzeel (in the past known for its numerous chicken farms) involving the tossing of thousands of chicken feet from atop town hall to downtown below where visitors gather to catch as many as possible in order to win prizes.
SEP 24-25 at Town Hall, Grote Markt
www.foestlinderzeel.be

Tienen (Flemish Brabant)
Local beer market: Week-long celebration of beers from the Hagedoor region, with tastings and workshops.
SEP 26-28 OCT 2 in and around the Museum Café, Grote Markt 4
www.vrijgekestienen.be

Utopia :: 47 – A Very Last Passion
September 23, 20.00
De Abri, Antwerp

Five Years of Radio Modern
30 September, 21.00
Vooruit, Ghent

More Parties This Week

Ghent
New-wave Classics: Newest edition of the nostalgic party featuring new-wave dub classics and synth-pop from the 70s, 80s and 90s.
SEP 24 22.00-5.00 at Vooruit, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23
www.vooruit.be/en/event/2889

Leuven
STUK Sturtfeet: DJ dance party to kick off the cultural venue’s new season
SEP 29 21.00 at STUK Café, Naamsestraat 96
www.stuk.be

Merksem (Antwerp)
Villa Cabral: Hot southern-atmosphere party featuring Buscemi & Squadra Bossa and DJ set Sokolow Cocktail Party
SEP 23 20.15 at Culturecentrum Merksem, Nieuwdeg 135
www.villacabral.be

Hindu Nights
24 September
Vooruit, Ghent

The annual Hindu Nights parties have been a sensation since they were firstorganised in 2008. Beats and trebles are banned from the dance floor; instead, rock ‘n roll is your guide for the evening. The edition this weekend in Ghent’s Vooruit is dedicated to the late Amy Winehouse (pictured). If rock music can draw hundreds of thousands of people to summer festivals every year in Flanders, then surely we’d all be up for an autumn party with nothing but poppy guitars. And that’s how the first edition of Hindu Nights was born. The crowd got served by DJs playing, for example Oasis, Arctic Monkeys, Blur, New Order and, yes, Amy Winehouse. This Saturday, every DJ devotes some of his tracks to the singer-songwriter, who passed in July at age 27.

The line-up features some fine British music makers. Manchester’s Jeff Wooten, for instance, who joined The Gorillaz on their last tour and is now part of Liam Gallagher’s new band Beady Eye. Fellow Manchesterite Phil Smith will be present too: He’s the tour DJ of the other Gallagher brother’s band, Noel’s High Flying Birds. The Gallagher presence is, in fact, assured at most Hindu Nights – eldest brother Paul is one of the regular Hindu DJs (though he’s not there this weekend). Also this weekend, expect a soulful DJ set by Katia Vlerick, the music journalist behind the former radio programme Rock Ahoy on rock radio Studio Brussel. Some of the regular Hindu Radio DJs will be there too. Don’t forget to pop into the Icon Bar, where Gigolos in retirement mix Elvis and The Beach Boys with Oasis and Franz Ferdinand. Later in the evening, the Dilly Boys serve some Britpop classics.

Tickets to Hindu Nights are €12, available in any Free Record Shop or on the Hindu Nights website. Don’t expect any to be left at the door.

→ www.hindunights.be

More New Music This Week

Bilzen (Limburg province)
The Clement Brothers Play Sting Sing: Brush up on your Dutch song classics because members of the Marli Hartenstijn join violinist Gert Van den Bosch for a classical sing-along of the Flemish land.
SEP 24 20.15 at CC De Kempel, Eikenlaan 25
www.dekempel.be

Massmechelen
International Choral Contest: Top choral groups from Belgium, the Netherlands, Ireland, Russia, Hungary and more vie for first place in this annual prestigious competition.
SEP 23-25 at CC Massmechelen
www.ivs-massmechelen.be

→ www.dusktildown.com

Dusk 'til Dawn
Kathryn Linteman
Le goût avant tout★★★★

My guess is that fondue restaurants across Flanders made bank this summer. Considering the exceptionally wet weather, it comes as no surprise that people would make the best of it by going out to enjoy this special treat typically reserved for winter.

And so the restaurant with the name “taste above all” has our group scurrying down Ghent’s Ketelvest alleyway on a Friday evening in late July, umbrellas in hand, dodging puddles. Once inside, we hang up our jackets in a separate hallway (handy tip from a friend, to avoid them reeking of hot oil) and take our seats in the packed dining room. The tables have stove-top burners built into them and elegant place settings of light grey linen, white plates, long-stemmed wine glasses and flickering candles. Happy to be warm, dry and cozy, our group of 10 promptly orders three bottles of both red and white bold South African wines.

We all want fondue, so the fish eaters shift to one end of the table while the meat eaters shift to the other. I stay put in the middle with the only other fan of cheese fondue. The reason for sitting together is this: You have to cook your own food. A variety of bite-sized pieces of raw meat arrive on small plates, some containing different cuts of lamb, others holding chicken, beef, meatballs and sausage, plus here and there some courgette and mushroom. These go on your skewer and into a big pot of hot grape seed oil. After a few minutes, the meat is cooked through, tender and full of flavour, thanks to this particular kind of oil. Same concept with the fish, although this goes into a bubbling pot of seasoned bouillon instead of oil, which makes fish fondue all the more healthy. Not only that, but the few bites of white fish and prawn that I sneak off my friends’ plates are extremely tasty and succulent. I promise myself I’ll come back and order the all-fish fondue platter.

We cheese eaters are happy, too, as we use bits of crusty white bread to sop up the broth. The fondue is excellent and rich in flavour, despite having a tad too much white wine in the mix. Thankfully, they keep bringing us salad as a counterweight: an overflowing bowl of crispy fresh watercress, carrots, wittlof, cucumbers and ripe red tomatoes. It just keeps coming every time a bowl is emptied, another one arrives. The same goes for the house-made fries.

Of particular importance to the natives at our table are the six bottomless bowls of sauce to go with the meat and fish: spicy, garlic, tartar, mayonnaise, cocktail and mustard. The portions turn out to be just right, with nobody leaving hungry. The bill is surprisingly mild — around €35 a head.

But it’s the quality of the ingredients that counts the most, and these are top notch. Taste above all indeed.

Contact Bite at flandersbite@gmail.com

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TALKING SPORTS

Two cheers for the great Genk

The city of Genk in Limburg province has a population of just under 65,000, which is only about 10,000 more than the capacity of Valencia’s Estadio Mestalla. That’s quite something when you remember that the local side, Koninklijke Racing Club Genk – KRC Genk, Racing Genk, or just Genk to fans – last week drew 0-0 with Valencia in its second tilt at the European Champions League.

The football match itself was at Genk’s 25,000-capacity Cristal Arena, which is tiny in European terms yet one of the biggest in Belgium. And simple mathematics suggest that the team’s fan base is culled from far beyond the town itself. Indeed, even in Belgian terms, Genk’s story is quite remarkable.

The club was founded in 1988 with the merger of local Limburg sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei. The first eight years saw no remarkable. The club was founded in 1988 with the merger of local Limburg sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei. The first eight years saw no remarkable. The club was founded in 1988 with the merger of local Limburg sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei. The first eight years saw no remarkable. The club was founded in 1988 with the merger of local Limburg sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei. The first eight years saw no remarkable. The club was founded in 1988 with the merger of local Limburg sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei. The first eight years saw no remarkable. The club was founded in 1988 with the merger of local Limburg sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei. The first eight years saw no remarkable. The club was founded in 1988 with the merger of local Limburg sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei. The first eight years saw no remarkable. The club was founded in 1988 with the merger of local Limburg sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei. The first eight years saw no remarkable. The club was founded in 1988 with the merger of local Limburg sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei. The first eight years saw no remarkable. The club was founded in 1988 with the merger of local Limburg sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei. The first eight years saw no remarkable. The club was founded in 1988 with the merger of local Limburg sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei. The first eight years saw no remarkable. The club was founded in 1988 with the merger of local Limburg sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei. The first eight years saw no remarkable. The club was founded in 1988 with the merger of local Limburg sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei. The first eight years saw no remarkable. The club was founded in 1988 with the merger of local Limburg sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei. The first eight years saw no remarkable. The club was founded in 1988 with the merger of local Limburg sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei. The first eight years saw no remarkable. The club was founded in 1988 with the merger of local Limburg sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei. The first eight years saw no remarkable. The club was founded in 1988 with the merger of local Limburg sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei. The first eight years saw no remarkable. The club was founded in 1988 with the merger of local Limburg sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei. The first eight years saw no remarkable. The club was founded in 1988 with the merger of local Limburg sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei. The first eight years saw no remarkable. The club was founded in 1988 with the merger of local Limburg sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei. The first eight years saw no remarkable. The club was founded in 1988 with the merger of local Limburg sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei. The first eight years saw no remarkable. The club was founded in 1988 with the merger of local Limburg sides KFC Winterslag and Thor Waterschei. The first eight years saw no