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CULINARY OLYMPICS

As Belgium makes the top 10 at Europe's most prestigious competition in the world of gastronomy, the tourism minister launches a culinary project

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STEEL SURGEONS

A Flemish doctor is pioneering the robot surgery method, which mixes the skill of a surgeon with the precision of a machine

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THE WEED DEBATE

A trio of academics have published a book on how legalising marijuana would be good for patients, the police and the economy


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Nellie L and Bruno L, twins born to a Belgian mother and German father, with their Belgian grandfather

Born of war

Close-to-home book explores fate of children born on two sides of conflict

Ian Mundell  
follow Ian on Twitter \ @IanMundell

Personal history led Gerlinda Swillen to carry out the first in-depth study of Belgian children born to parents on either side of the conflict during the Second World War. *De wieg van WO II* (The Cradle of WWII) sheds new light on their stories and calls for legal protections.

When Gerlinda Swillen talks about war children, she has something specific in mind. Not simply children born during wartime or affected by a conflict, but those whose parents were on opposing sides. In the strictest sense, these children only exist because of the war.

“Until now there has been very little research on war children, and then the focus has generally been on the mothers and not the children,” she explains. It’s an imbalance she set

out to address in her research.

Her interest in the subject is a personal one. She was born in 1942 to a Flemish mother and a German father, a soldier in the *Wehrmacht*. When he knew there was a child on the way, he asked for her mother’s hand in marriage but was refused. Posted to France, he married there and after the war returned to Germany.

Initially, the young Gerlinda was raised in Ostend by her grandparents while her mother worked out the war years in Ghent and Brussels. After the war, her mother married a widower with a child of his own, and together they formed a family.

In a sense, Swillen’s research dates back to this early period of her life. “The adults would start whispering when we were nearby, so that became interesting! That’s when you

have to listen closely,” she recalls.

It was clear that something was amiss, so she set out to investigate. “When I was six or seven I looked through all my parents’ papers. I even climbed up an old wardrobe to get to the suitcase where they kept their documents.”

In the margins of birth and marriage certificates were notes that indicated an unconventional family history, but the details remained a mystery. “My mother never wanted to talk about it – like the majority of mothers – and the family closed ranks.”

After going to university in the 1960s, Swillen became a teacher. This was her dream, she says, and she spent nearly 40 years mainly teaching Dutch in Brussels’ secondary schools. Though she remained curious about her biological father, there was nothing she could do without know-

# Flemish chefs compete in prestigious Bocuse d'Or

Tourism minister launches Culinary Talents project with chefs in Lyon



Flemish tourism minister Ben Weyts was in Lyon last week for the Bocuse d'Or, referred to as the Olympics of culinary competition. Belgium came in ninth at the prestigious event, which tests 24 countries in culinary excellence. Peter Aesaert of the Kelderman restaurant in Aalst and student sous-chef Michelle Boone represented Belgium at the event. And Weyts took the opportunity to announce the Culinary Talents project, part of the larger Flemish Food Faculty campaign to promote regional cuisine internationally. Culinary Talents consists of two teams of chefs who will represent Flanders and Belgium in culinary competitions. The Young Chefs Team is made up of eight chefs aged 25 and under from Flanders' hotel schools. The young chefs will be sent to compete in the Culinary World Cup in Luxembourg in 2018



© Flanders Food Faculty  
From left: Bocuse d'Or team coach Jo Nelissen, chef Peter Aesaert and sous-chef Michelle Boone  
and the Olympiade der Küche in Germany in 2020. The Bocuse d'Or team, meanwhile, is made up of experienced

chefs and will deliver the best representatives – one chef and one sous-chef – to the competition, which takes place every two years, following pre-final rounds across the world. The international jury of this year's final included Peter Goossens of the three-Michelin star Hof van Cleve restaurant in Kruishoutem, East Flanders. Aesaert previously served as sous-chef under Goossens. Belgium last won a medal – a bronze – in 1999, bringing the country's tally to three silver and three bronze. Competition has gotten tougher, and Aesaert told *De Morgen* last week that "a top 10 place would be nice". "No Bocuse d'Or medal for 18 years – that has to come to an end," Weyts said. "My ambition is to get on the podium again within a few years." To support the two teams and provide expert coaching, Weyts has provided a subsidy of €500,000.

## Municipal police shortage is 'dramatic' due to recruitment policies says union

The shortage of officers in local police forces in Belgium is the result of recruitment policies rather than any effect of the terrorist threat, according to the public service union NSPV. Too few recruits are trained to the level required, and account is not taken of requirements expected in the future, union chair Carlo Medo said. According to Medo, local police forces have been faced with a shortage of personnel since long before the terrorist attacks of last March, simply because the forces had not been able to attract sufficient new recruits. Now the majority of new recruits are being swallowed up by anti-terrorism duties, he said. "The shortage is indeed dramatic, both on the federal and the local levels," Medo said. "It's mainly caused by the embargo on recruitment of the last few years. Capacity in police schools is inadequate, and the loss of personnel through, for example, retirement was not sufficiently anticipated." Now, he explained, new recruits attracted to the job after last year's events are being deployed to anti-terror duties because of a €400 million federal budget that can only be spent on those duties. Local forces will now have to wait until the autumn before new graduates from police schools will be available for them to put to work. \ AH

## Antwerp testing digital no-parking signs

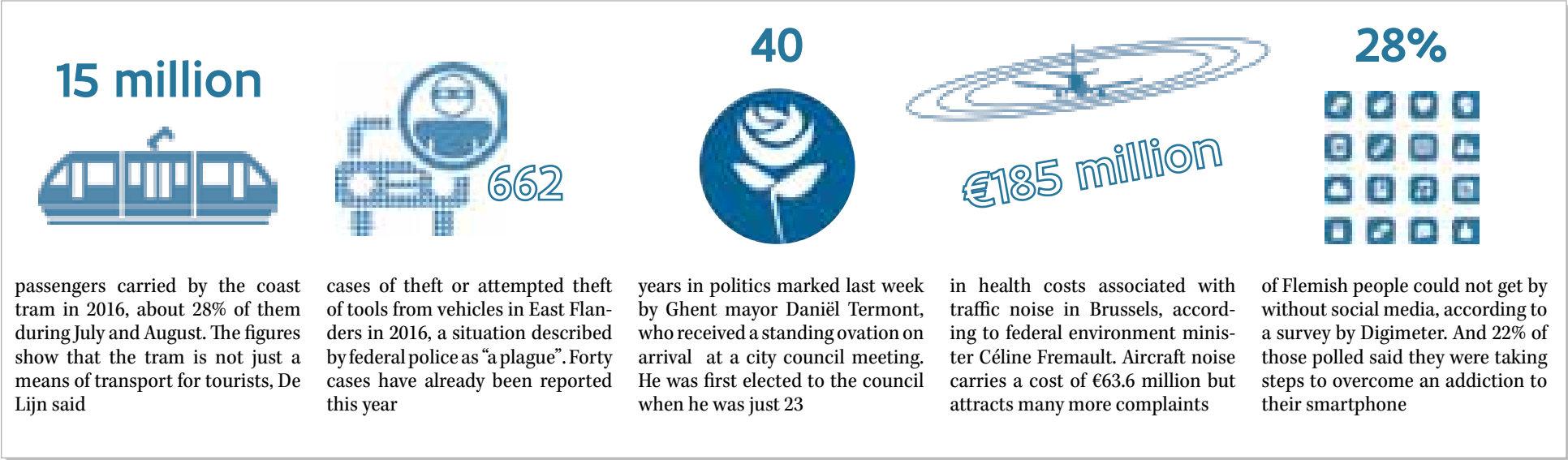
\ PARKEERVERBOD.INFO

The City of Antwerp is launching a pilot project to test a new kind of mobile no-parking sign, which are used when needed to temporarily block parking in a street for any reason, such as moving house. The new signs are electronic and fitted with a GPS to avoid misuse and theft. The signs are made available by the city for anyone who needs them but are often stolen to be used later without authorisation. That will be impossible with the new versions, according to Antwerp mayor Bart De Wever. "Thanks to a built-in GPS system and alarm, the signs are always traceable. Theft and later unauthorised use become very difficult," he said. A digital display also means the signs are more legible than the current version, where the dates of the parking ban are written by hand in chalk. It can also be checked online, which shows all temporary restrictions on parking in the city. The signs will be tested indoors before making their public debut to see how they perform in different weather conditions. Later in the year comes an evaluation, before full implementation of the system. \ AH

## Foundation to poll Brussels on attitudes towards solidarity

The King Baudouin Foundation, with the backing of the Brussels-Capital Region, is launching a major participative project in which it will question the people of Brussels about social solidarity and the future of society in the capital. The project is called BruVoices. "Society in Brussels has been under heavy pressure in recent months," the foundation said in a statement. "After the lockdown of 2015 and the attacks of 2016 we saw a huge wave of solidarity, but there were also major questions about the future of society in the city." BruVoices starts with a selection of 50 focus groups from members of culture centres, neighbourhood committees,

sports clubs and other organisations. Any kind of group can apply to take part, with selection made to ensure a reflection of the capital's diversity. Then it will carry out an opinion poll among a representative sample of the city's population. The results of both sections of the research will be considered by a panel of experts and representatives of civil society, business and policy-making. Finally, their conclusions and recommendations will be put to a citizens' assembly early next year. "Social cohesion is what helps create a stable and balanced society, and we have to create the conditions for it to work well," said Rudi Vervoort, minister-president of the Brussels-Capital Region. \ AH





WEEK IN BRIEF

The royal residence in Brussels’ Laken area could soon be **heated entirely by the waste incinerator** across the canal if talks with the government’s buildings agency are successful. The incinerator produces a great deal of heat, some of which is used to generate electricity and some of which is ejected into the canal in the form of hot water. Talks are underway to fuel the heating system of the nearby palace, which currently runs on about one million litres of oil a year.

**Part of the ceiling** in Flemish minister Philip Muyters office in Brussels collapsed last week. Muyters was out of the office at the time, and no one was injured. A fitness room is located above the office, and a well-used treadmill could be the reason that the infrastructure was weakened. A professional investigation is being carried out.

Rental car federation Renta has vowed to fight a proposal that would allow courts to **seize the vehicle of any driver** who commits a serious offence, even if he or she is not the owner of the car. The federation said the proposal was “a declaration of war against our members”. The proposal by Jef Van den Bergh, member of the federal parliament for CD&V, has the support of party colleague and justice minister Koen Geens.

Supermarket chain Carrefour has announced it will **no longer stock pangasius**, a type of white fish, as it cannot find a supplier that can continue to guarantee that the fish is being bred sustainably. Pollution has been blamed on the intense farming of the species because of the amount of waste it produces, while antibiotic abuse is also a concern. Delhaize, meanwhile, said it had found a reliable supplier.

Flemish public works minister Ben Weyts cut the ribbon on a new

project last week that will see a **protective wall built along the canal** at Grimbergen. The wall will be made out of fibreglass reinforced plastic, which is more durable and environmentally friendly than concrete or steel. The plastic panels were developed by Hye, a company based in Zwijndrecht.

**A Flemish hacker** made international headlines last week when he managed to insert a video into a 2012 tweet from Donald Trump that then went viral. The video, called “Congress in Moscow”, put images of the new US president into various scenes, while a song in Aalst dialect recounted illicit adventures.

Foreign truckers are using a type of **GPS scrambler** to interfere with the devices every truck passing through Belgium must have in order to pay road tolls. According to Viapass, the company that runs the toll system, mobile patrols are on the roads daily to carry out spot checks, and fines could run up to €50,000 for infractions.

According to Flemish public broadcaster VRT, terrorists in Belgium had a plan to **kidnap a well-known individual** who would be held in return for the liberation of Mehdi Nemmouche, the man accused of killing four people in the Jewish Museum in Brussels in 2014. The plan would also have involved the release of Mohamed Bakkali, suspected of links to terrorists in Syria. The identity of any kidnapping target is not known.

Alexander De Croo, federal minister for development co-operation, has come out in support of an initiative by his Dutch counterpart to set up a programme that would help compensate international organisations losing funding because of an order signed by US president Donald Trump last

week. The order **cuts off funding to family planning organisations** that include abortion counselling or services. The decision, De Croo said, would lead to more illegal abortions, which would mean “a great many teenage girls would be mutilated for the rest of their lives”.

The **cafe in Muntpunt**, the Flemish library and info centre in Brussels, will re-open in February. Several week ago, the concession-holder closed down suddenly after the death of one of the partners. A temporary management will run the cafe for three months, while a permanent replacement is sought. The eatery in nearby Flemish cultural centre De Markten is also closed while it undergoes a renovation. It is also in need of new management.

Brussels Airport is joining the European Commission in **fighting an appeal lodged by the Walloon region** with regards to Charleroi Airport. The Commission ruled that the concession fee paid by the airport to the region is worth at least €15 million rather than the €3 million it is paying, which amounts to illegal state aid. The region appealed to the European Court of Justice, and now Brussels Airport has joined the Commission as a party of interest in fighting that appeal.

The **Islamic Cultural Centre**, located in the Great Mosque in Brussels, spent €1.2 million between 2012 and 2014 to “spread its ideology,” according to Jaak Raes, administrator-general of the state security agency, speaking to the parliamentary commission on last year’s terrorist attacks. The mosque is known to be allied to the fundamentalist Wahhabi style of Islam championed mainly by Saudi Arabia. The mosque also paid €600,000 in donations to people and associations who helped propagate the doctrine, Raes said.

FACE OF FLANDERS



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Hanne Gaby Odiele

Flemish fashion model Hanne Gaby Odiele was all over the news last week, not because of a new contract or the cover of *Vogue* but because of a personal detail she shared with the newspaper *USA Today*. She was born intersex and wanted to use her fame to break the taboo around it. Odiele, 29, was born in Kortrijk and was discovered at the age of 17 by stylist Tom Van Dorpe while working at the local Nova-rock musical festival. Her distinctive, slightly other-worldly look caught on, and in just over a decade, she has amassed a huge portfolio. The industry website Models.com lists 581 appearances, including catwalk shows, magazine covers and photo shoots for multiple brands such as Adidas, Diesel and Moschino. In last week’s interview, she revealed that she was intersex and had agreed to work with the non-profit InterACT Advocates for Intersex Youth in Massachusetts. Intersex people, once referred to as hermaphrodites, have variations in sex-determining characteristics.

This can include hormones, chromosomes or genitalia that, according to the UN, “do not fit the typical definitions for male or female bodies”. In Odiele’s case, the condition was caused by androgen insensitivity syndrome, which means a genetically male embryo is resistant to male hormones and is born with all the physical traits of a female. About 1.7% of babies are born intersex, according to the UN, making the condition about as common as red hair. Odiele, who now lives in New York, will serve as a role model and work with other young intersex people, particularly in the area of gender assignment surgery. She herself underwent such a surgery at the age of 10, without having given consent. “I am proud to be intersex,” she told the newspaper, “but very angry that these surgeries are still happening. If they had just been honest from the beginning. It’s not that big of a deal being intersex; it became a trauma because of what they did.”

\ Alan Hope

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OFFSIDE  
A little help from my friends

If ever you’re planning on moving some of your stuff, it’s a good idea to rope in some mates and save a bit of money. That’s what Ghent city council must have been thinking, faced with the chore of moving all those books from the municipal library on Woodrow Wilsonplein to the new premises on De Krook, 300 metres away. “The library’s books are for everyone, and that’s why I put out the call for everyone to come and help us start the move,” said culture councillor Annelies Storms. The idea sparked the public’s imagination: More than 850 school kids signed up, as did nearly 200



© Wim Oosterlinck/Twitter

adults. The kids’ music trio De Piepkjes provided the tunes, while

the volunteers formed a human chain to pass from hand-to-hand no fewer than 1,250 books from the young people’s collection from their old home to their new one. That’s not all the books, of course. Another 200,000 are being packed and moved this week by more conventional means. They will join the 150,000 already in place, which were moved in past weeks from storage. The old library is now closed, and the new library and media centre opens on 10 March. Gentenaars can borrow materials from one of the city’s other 14 neighbourhood libraries in the meantime. \ AH

## 5TH COLUMN

### It's the identity

It's the identity, stupid. Financial daily *De Tijd* paraphrased an old political phrase to describe a mind shift in Flemish politics.

The Flemish are known for a lack of patriotism, as allegiances are divided between Belgium, Flanders and neither of these. For decades, concerns about Flemish identity were also tainted by the presence of Vlaams Belang, a party regularly accused of racism.

But the rise of the nationalist N-VA has changed that. Before the 2014 elections, even N-VA realised that nationalism rarely motivates the Flemish, emphasising social and economic issues instead. Deposing the socialists would bring about the change Flanders needed, the party promised.

That focus has shifted, though. That Maggie De Block (Open VLD) became the most popular politician as secretary of state for migration and asylum in the previous federal government was a tell-tale sign. Unsurprisingly, when N-VA entered the federal government in 2014, it claimed this portfolio (as well as internal affairs and defence, all of them so-called departments of authority).

Since the Paris and Brussels attacks, identity is firmly on the agenda, especially in relation to Muslim immigrant populations. N-VA party president Bart De Wever has spoken out often on the issue, stating, for instance, that German chancellor Angela Merkel's "Wir schaffen das" was a mistake. The most popular politician now is the equally outspoken Theo Francken (N-VA), who succeeded De Block in migration and asylum.

N-VA is not the only party to address identity. Open VLD party president Gwendolyn Rutten has echoed the words of fellow liberal Mark Rutte, the Dutch prime minister. "Act normal or leave", Rutte wrote in an open letter, in which he condemned anti-social behaviour.

Rutte was criticised because he seemed to attribute this lack of "normal" behaviour to Muslim immigrants. This did not stop Rutten from repeating his words, citing a rising influence of Salafism.

International events are likely to fuel this trend even more. US president Donald Trump's "Muslim ban" sparked a fierce debate in Flanders, too. Prime minister Charles Michel (MR) and Flemish minister-president Geert Bourgeois (N-VA) have both rejected the ban, but not as strongly as Germany and the Netherlands. Francken, meanwhile, has suggested we "look beyond the hysteria," invoking strong reactions from the opposition. \ Anja Otte

# Belgium 'disagrees' with president Trump's refugee ban

## US refuses entry to nationals of seven Muslim countries at weekend



Alan Hope

More articles by Alan \ flanderstoday.org

Prime minister Charles Michel has expressed his government's "disagreement" with the decision by US president Donald Trump to impose a temporary ban on accepting refugees from seven majority-Islamic countries. "Belgium will not be following the example and will be seeking further information via diplomatic channels," he said in a statement.

Meanwhile, opponents of the ban protested in the centre of Brussels on Monday. "President Trump issued formal bans on entry to the US for all refugees (people fleeing a war) and people from seven Muslim-majority countries," organisers said. "It's a violation of general human rights principles, completely unnecessary and antithetical to our political and economic goals." The ban imposes a temporary stop on arrivals to the US from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Sudan and Yemen. This was applied not only to those who had already been granted refu-



© Alex Milan Tracy/Anadolu Agency

A protest against the ban on entry to the US at Portland International Airport at the weekend

gee status but also to permanent residents of foreign nationality, known as green card holders, whose access to the US is supposed to be assured.

Both new arrivals and green card holders were being held at immigration in airports across the US or stopped from boarding US-bound flights

at foreign airports. In response, Canada issued an invitation to all those excluded from entry to the US.

The following day, Trump's executive order was suspended by a federal judge. Critics pointed out that no citizens of the countries concerned were responsible for terrorist attacks on the US or on its citizens since 11 September 2001.

The countries whose citizens were responsible for terrorist attacks – principally Saudi Arabia and Egypt – were not covered by the ban. Media sources have confirmed that Trump has business interests in both Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

"This seems to me to be unacceptable," Flemish minister-president Geert Bourgeois told VRT. "I'm slightly reluctant to react to what the media is reporting. This has to be looked into properly." The ban on people in possession of a green card or visa was, he said, "unacceptable", while the 90-day suspension on refugees appeared to be in breach of the Geneva Conventions.

## €100,000 in humanitarian aid for families in Syria

Flemish minister-president Geert Bourgeois, whose portfolio also includes foreign relations, has approved a grant of €100,000 in humanitarian aid to families in Syria. Working through the Flemish Red Cross and the Syrian Red Crescent, the grant brings Flanders' total aid to Syrian refugees to €1.5 million. The civil war in Syria has taken a heavy toll on the Syrian people, depriving many of them of food supplies and a reliable link to clean drinking water. Babies and young children are the biggest victims of a lack of nourishment. The latest grant will go towards

hygiene kits and logistical support that will allow the Red Crescent to service the "last mile" to families in need. These are areas that international aid agencies cannot currently penetrate.

Hygiene kits contain soap, toothpaste, feminine hygiene products and other daily essentials. "With this subsidy, more than 2,000 families in Aleppo and elsewhere can be provided with hygiene kits," Bourgeois said. "Together with the Flemish Red Cross we can support the volunteers of the Red Crescent to bring these kits to families in need."

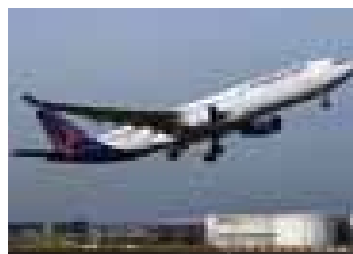
\ AH

## No regional agreement yet on aircraft noise limits

The governments of Flanders and Brussels have been unable to reach an agreement over the latter's strict new limits on aircraft noise. Flanders argues the new limits simply push flights taking off from and landing at Brussels Airport over the Flemish periphery, while Brussels insists the limits are needed for the quality of life of its residents.

At the end of last year, Flanders lodged a complaint of conflict of interest – a mechanism that allows one region to challenge a measure introduced by another if it feels its own interests are being compromised. Last week the consultative committee, made up of representatives of the federal government and the regions, failed to find a compromise on the issue.

The conflict of interest move meant that Brussels' measures



© Siwtme/Wikimedia

could not be implemented on 1 January as planned. The new levels are suspended for 60 days, with prime minister Charles Michel calling the parties back to the table next month.

Flemish mobility minister Ben Weyts promised his government would "exhaust every judicial possibility" to combat the Brussels plan. If no agreement can be reached by the end of the 60-day term the measures will simply come into force by default. \ AH

## Homans to limit private use of company cars by officials

Flemish minister for administrative affairs Liesbeth Homans is working to limit the personal use of company cars assigned to government officials. The government had previously announced that it would cut down on the fleet by creating shared departmental cars, rather than assigning individual cars to some officials.

Questioned on that matter by socialist Joris Vandenbroucke, Homans said only 3.4% of officials with access to a car also had the right to private use. She stressed that it was up to other ministers to take the measures necessary for their own departments.

"I absolutely support the minister in her ambition to reduce the Flemish government fleet and to



© Courtesy liesbethhomans.be

limit private use of service vehicles to the minimum necessary," Vandenbroucke said. \ AH

## Proposal to increase teaching hours debated by unions

Unions representing teachers in Flanders have had mixed reactions to a plan by education minister Hilde Crevits to increase the number of classroom hours per week and invest the savings gained from a restructuring of staff into training young teachers.

The proposal is part of a package of measures being taken to improve the image of the teaching profession. At present, secondary school teachers' classroom hours depend on which grade they are teaching.

For the first grade, which covers the first two of six years of secondary school, teaching hours are 22. In the second grade, that reduces

to 21, and in the subsequent grades to 20.

Crevits said that all teachers should spend 22 hours a week in front of the class and that this measure would save €150 million. Marnix Heyndrickx, chair of VSOA Onderwijs, said that teachers should not be the source of savings and that temporary teachers would lose their jobs.

The COC union said there were some positive elements but added: "You cannot possibly speak of increasing the attractiveness of the teaching profession if teachers in the second and third grades undergo a substantial workload increase."

\ Emma Portier Davis



# Born of war

Researcher is one of the children who wouldn't have been born without war

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TINYURL.COM/GERLINDA-SWILLEN

ing his name.

Finally, in 2007, she provoked her mother into revealing this crucial fact. "We were discussing the war, and I said to her: 'It would be better if you didn't talk about it, since you don't even know my father's name.' My children were there, and my grandchildren as well. And at that moment she said: 'But I do know his name!' 'Well, tell me then!'"

Once she had the name, and a few additional details, Swillen could start her research in earnest. Through the Deutsche Dienststelle in Berlin, which keeps the records of the *Wehrmacht*, she learned that she had a half-brother and sister in Germany, and that their father had died in 1958.

But while doing further research in the archives at Cegesoma – the Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Society in Brussels – she was persuaded to broaden her inquiry beyond her personal history. She updated her degree with courses in research methodology, historiography and law and began a doctorate at the Free University of Brussels (VUB). In the course of her research she interviewed more than 120 people who were war children, many of whom came forward after hearing Swillen tell her own story on TV and in the papers. Most had been born outside marriage and shared Swillen's desire to know more about their biological fathers. "Rediscovering these biological links liberates us," she says. "Even if we cannot say that this was someone who loved us, or who should have done something for us. Simply knowing helps us understand."

Yet most also wanted their secret history to involve a love story. "The children really have this desire to have been wanted, to have been loved from the very first moment."

This first moment was a particular focus of Swillen's research. "I tried to get as close as possible to the moment the child was conceived. I couldn't get into the bed itself, but it was nearly that."

She was curious why these children were born at all, given the intense social disapproval attached to illegitimacy in Belgium at that time, and the additional stigma of consorting with the occupying forces. Meanwhile, army records showed that German soldiers were issued with the best quality condoms.

The testimony of the children provided some pieces of the jigsaw, while court and hospital records shed light on contemporary mores and the circumstances of some births.

Swillen's research – and the resulting book – stands apart from most studies of the Occupation in Belgium, which tend to deal with



The parents of one of the war children featured in the book by Gerlinda Swillen (pictured below)

topics such as collaboration and resistance, or the role of institutions such as trade unions.

"One of the merits of Gerlinda Swillen's research is that she focuses on the everyday life of

was German bureaucracy, which demanded a racial pedigree before unions between its soldiers and local women could be approved.

"I found cases where requests had been sent to Berlin, but before

“

The children have this desire to have been wanted, to have been loved from the first moment

ordinary people during the Occupation, and more particularly on the sexual and emotional context between the occupied people and the occupier," says Guy Vanthem-sche, a professor of contemporary history at VUB, who oversaw her doctorate.

It's unusual for a researcher to be part of the group being studied, and Vanthem-sche admits having initial concerns that this might compromise her judgement. "But she succeeded in giving a really distanced and objective analysis of the problem," he says.

In the end, her past turned out to be an asset. "Her background opened many doors and encouraged many people to talk to her in confidence."

Among the cases Swillen investigated were love stories and relationships that could have resulted in marriage. Often the problem

authorisation came back, the child was already born and often the father was dead, fallen on the Eastern Front or elsewhere."

Letters in the archives also show a desire to maintain contact. "There were fathers who were concerned, who asked: 'How is my little one doing?' or 'Wouldn't it be better to come and give birth in Germany?'"

This option was supported by the German authorities, who were keen to keep the home population up, although there would also be racial checks down the line. Other children, however, were born from casual affairs, with both sides seeking distraction from the conflict. And there were more practical relationships, with sex traded for favours and gifts, or in the depths of the conflict for food or other essentials. The fathers in these cases may never have known of the pregnancy.

Both in the archives and among her interviewees there were cases of rape that produced children, but these were relatively rare.

The subsequent fate of the children also varied. Some had relatively happy childhoods, particularly when the family rallied round and subsequent marriages provided stability and a secure legal status. Equally, however, stepfathers or even the mothers themselves sometimes mistreated their children, while those put up for adoption or into homes sometimes suffered abuse.

One of the conclusions of Swillen's research is that a secure legal status is very important to war children, both to protect them when they are young and vulnerable and to allow them to trace their origins when they are grown. It is hard, for example, for war children to access archives with information about them unless they are accredited researchers.

Swillen and many of her interviewees would like to see this situation addressed, not so much for themselves as for present-day war children, such as those conceived in conflicts in Africa and the Middle East, who arrive in Europe as refugees.

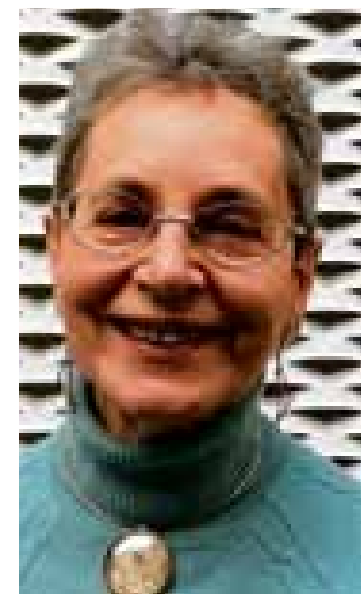
"We do not want to be victims, but we would like something to be learned from our stories," she says. "Our aim is to realise a legal status for war children, which is not something provided up to now in the UN Convention on the Rights

of the Child."

The ideal, she says, would be a European Union directive, which would both strengthen protection for children and oblige states to implement it as law.

But at the same time as campaigning for this legal change, Swillen has other research leads to follow up. "I'm torn, because I love the research, but at the same time we really need this status, so there are two things that I have to do," she says. "But basically it's a good thing, because if you stay in the archives you moulder a bit and finally *you* become an archive!"

*De wieg van WO II is published in Dutch by ASP Edition (€37.95)*



## WEEK IN BUSINESS

### Diamonds \ Omega

Antwerp-based diamond dealer Omega Diamonds has escaped a potential fine worth billions of euros after the court of appeal confirmed a lower court ruling. The case was filed by the customs department, which claimed that Omega had avoided paying €2 billion in import duties between 2003 and 2008.

### IT \ Lipa

The IT services company in Diepenbeek, Limburg, has won a competition organised by Unizo and project developer Futurn to take over free office space for a year. The competition followed news that four in 10 Limburg businesses are looking for new premises.

### Catering

#### \ Good Kompany

The two sports bars opened in Brussels and Antwerp in 2014 by Red Devils captain Vincent Kompany, which closed the following year, made a loss of €1.3 million and €1 million respectively. A large part of the reason was high rental prices, according to the company.

### Media \ P-Magazine

Flemish magazine P-Magazine will publish its last print edition in February, before moving to online-only. Owner Mediageuzen blamed vanishing ad revenue.

### Media

#### \ Telegraaf Groep

Dutch media tycoon John De Mol has made a counter-bid to acquire TelegraafMedia Groep, publisher of the biggest-selling paper in the Netherlands, *De Telegraaf*. De Mol is offering €5.90 per share, 60 cents more than Mediahuis, publishers of *De Standaard* and *Flanders Today*.

### Photo \ Smartphoto

The photo services company, based in Wetteren, is moving all production of Webprint, acquired from the Dutch last year, to Flanders. The move will bring all 50 jobs to Flanders.

### Software \ Itineris

Ghent-based software company Itineris has raised more than €10 million in a venture capital round, €7.8 million of it from Flemish investment agency Gimv. The money will finance new growth in Europe and the US. The company provides software for utilities.

# Peeters calls for tougher fines for fake sales prices

## Customers think they're getting a deal when they're not, says minister



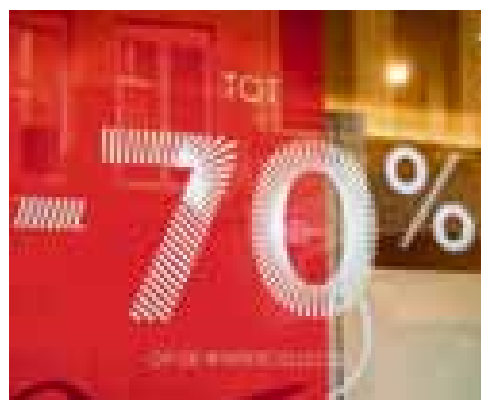
Alan Hope

Follow Alan on Twitter \ @AlanHopeFT

Federal minister for consumer affairs Kris Peeters has proposed increasing the fines for retailers who offer fake discounts during sales periods. Fines currently run from €1,500 to €60,000.

The law currently states that the official sales periods – in January and July – should be preceded by a 30-day period where no price cuts are offered. That way sales prices can be compared to the original prices.

Aside from “sales” prices often simply being the same as the original price, frequently discounts have no bearing on any original price. Shops buy in extra stock just before the sales period and



© Belpress

sell it at an inflated price in order to offer it at a “discount” during the sales.

The proposed measure follows reports of fake discounts offered by Mango retailers at stores in Antwerp and Brussels, where the sales price ticket was no different from the normal price ticket. The shop owner argued the original ticket carried the price in Spain and Portugal, where prices are lower.

“We’re familiar with this sort of practice,” a spokesperson for Peeters said. “We can’t talk about individual cases, but the law makes it more difficult to check if retailers are in fact offering a discounted price.”

## Butcher chain wins libel case against animal rights organisation

Renmans, a chain of butcher’s shops based in Beersel, Flemish Brabant, has won a libel case against animal rights organisation Gaia. The organisation had placed a video on its website alleging that Renmans was selling horse meat sourced from a slaughterhouse in Argentina that mistreated its horses.

Renmans said its meat was sourced legally, according to the strictest rules on slaughter and animal welfare. Gaia must now remove any mention of Renmans from its campaign or face a fine of €1,000 a day.

The organisation’s lawyer said he was “honestly shocked” at the Brussels court’s ruling. “In a time when basic rights are under pressure from all directions, I have to ask if the judge is not adding his own contribution by silencing Gaia,” Anthony Godfroid said.

Gaia, which describes the abattoir as “a house of horrors for horses”, intends to appeal. \ AH

## Project points to ‘copy-paste journalism’ in local press

Too much of the Flemish media contains material copied and pasted from other sources, such as press releases, without any fact-checking, according to journalism students at the Erasmus University College in Brussels. The students were delivering the results of a two-year fact-checking exercise.

“This is not a journalism witch-hunt,” the school stressed. Nevertheless, in an era of “post-truth” and “fake news”, the students became concerned about the number of facts and figures that were not checked or the way the figures were presented.

For the project, 35 students scanned articles from all the Dutch-language print media that were based on conclusions drawn from delivered figures. Examples included an article claiming that half of women always wanted to know where their partners were, although the study on which the articles were based showed that a majority of women were never jealous. Another based its conclusions, drawn from a press release rather than the actual study, on a tiny sample of people questioned.



© Courtesy De Standaard

“We visited various newsrooms to speak to experienced journalists about the pitfalls of journalism,” said project leader Ria Goris. “We found out that serious time pressures and moments of inattention led to mistakes. Editorial oversight – including the lack of any at all in online journalism – or an editor changing the angle of a story from that intended by the journalist were both common problems.”

The school found the project useful, not just to spark discussions in newsrooms but for the students. “We will certainly be addressing the question of whether we are arming our students sufficiently to deal with news about polls and figures,” Goris said. \ AH

## Fit announces nominations for Foreign Investment Trophy

The Flemish government’s foreign investment agency Flanders Investment & Trade (Fit) has announced the five projects nominated for this year’s Foreign Investment Trophy, which will be handed out next month.

The trophy is awarded by Fit together with minister-president Geert Bourgeois in a ceremony to mark the most outstanding foreign investment of 2016 in Flanders. The trophy is joined by awards for Newcomer of the Year and Lifetime Achievement, but nominations for those prizes are not announced in advance.

The contenders for the Foreign Investment Trophy this year are:

**Daikin:** The Japanese air conditioning manufacturer opened two modern test facilities in Ostend (pictured)

**Decathlon:** The sporting goods chain, based in France, built a new distribution centre in Willebroek

**IVC:** The American firm modernised its production facility in Avelgem, West Flanders

**Sanofi:** The French pharmaceutical company established a biotech



facility in Geel, Antwerp province  
**UPS:** The American courier service opened a new distribution hub in Lummen, Limburg province

Last year foreign investments in Flanders reached nearly €1.9 billion, down from €2.7 billion in 2015, Fit reported, but more than in 2013 and 2014. “It’s encouraging that Flanders delivered strong investment results,” commented Fit CEO Claire Tillekaerts. “After all, foreign investments are a major part of the driving force behind our economy.” \ AH

## Belgium is third-best European country for LGBT employment

Belgium is one of the top three countries in Europe for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) workers, according to a study by B2B marketing company Expert Market. The study looked at each country’s legislation on discrimination because of sexual orientation and identity.

The study, which took in 43 countries, also examined the political climate relating to gender expression and intersexuality, societal tolerance, discrimination in regard to housing and employment and monthly disposable income.

Norway came in first, with a total of 49 points out of an available 50, followed by Finland with 47 points. Belgium was third, with 46 points, being edged out slightly in the area of monthly income. Germany and Sweden completed the top five.

At the bottom of the table are Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Macedonia and Armenia. The survey used data from Ilga Europe’s Rainbow Europe study and the Social Progress Imperative’s Social Progress Index. \ AH



# Domo arigato, Dr Roboto

## A Flemish surgeon is at the helm of a medical revolution



Senne Starckx

More articles by Senne \ flanderstoday.org

\ ORSI-ONLINE.COM

With the unstoppable train of automation hurtling forward, robots have entered our hospitals' operating rooms. But don't worry, Alex Mottrie has them under control.

The 53-year-old doctor is considered one of the absolute pioneers in the field of robotic surgery. Together with his team from the OLV Hospital in Aalst, Mottrie, who specialises in urology and nephrology, has completed more than 3,000 robot-assisted surgeries. This means he has spent more time operating with the help of robots than with a traditional scalpel.

When I show up for our interview, Mottrie immediately invites me to attend a surgery. Moments later, dressed in green scrubs and a surgical mask, I find myself hustled into the operating theatre, with no time to prepare myself for the sight of blood and intestines. What's worse, Mottrie's speciality is prostate interventions.

But there is not a drop of blood in sight. The patient lying on the operating table is attended to by Da Vinci, a white, tubular robot equipped with four arms and a camera.

I move in for a closer look and watch as the tiny metal tube disappears inside the patient's stomach – the only way for Da Vinci's long spidery arms to access the intestines.

But where is Mottrie? I find him again a few metres away from the operating table, perched over a controller that reminds me of microfilm readers of bygone days.

“We prefer the term ‘tele-manipulator’. This is an extension of our eyes and hands. Our manoeuvres are much more refined

But the surgeon isn't merely looking at the screen, which displays a magnified image of the inside of the patient's body. Wrapped around two joysticks, his hands guide the robot's mechanical claws, as if they were part of an arcade game at an amusement park.

“The word ‘robot’ is a misleading term,” says Mottrie, all the while working on the patient. “We prefer the term ‘tele-manipulator’. It is the exten-



© Peter De Schryver

Dr Alex Mottrie with the Da Vinci surgical system. While Mottrie manipulates the apparatus on the right, the machinery on the left performs the surgery

sion of our eyes and hands. We can see a lot better and our manoeuvres are much more refined.”

For Mottrie this is a routine surgery; he often performs several in a day. The atmosphere is relaxed, and there is no hierarchy on the team. What a change from only a decade ago, when Mottrie's team was the first in the world to remove a kidney tumour with the help of a robot. Someone cracks a bad joke. “Dirty words don't hurt,” says Mottrie, casually snipping away another lymph gland.

Since the early 2000s, when the OLV Hospital was only one of a handful of institutions in the world to perform such surgeries, robots have come and gone, illustrating the fast pace of innovation in this high-tech industry. But if you believe Mottrie's claims, Flanders is well on its way to becoming the hub of a medical revolution.

Robotic surgery holds many advantages over the traditional practice. One of the absolute strengths of working with a robot is that it recreates the surgeon's joystick manoeuvres in real time and scales them down by a factor of five. This enables the surgeon to, for example, make a knot inside a blood vessel that's only millimetres wide.

“Thanks to the robots, the surgeries are much less invasive,” explains Mottrie. “The combination of hyper-accurate incisions and the surgeon's hands brings collateral damage down to a minimum.”

To avoid disturbing the prostate's normal functions, like continence and erection, the tumorous cells have to be removed with the highest precision. “You could compare this to keyhole

surgery,” says Mottrie, “though performed with a very specialised instrument.”

With a decade of robotic surgeries behind him, Mottrie is convinced that it's time for the next phase in the revolution – the establishment of a training platform for surgeons of all backgrounds, from urology to heart and brain surgery. “Today's graduates from university hospitals have only learned to cut and snip with their own hands,” says Mottrie. “That's because their education and training is still rather traditional. Nowadays, surgeons are allowed to work with robots without a minute of additional training. It's a striking fact.”

He compares it to holding a violin for the first time and being asked to play Vivaldi. “It's illustrative of how far behind our legal and medical frameworks are.”

Mottrie dedicates an increasing amount of time to the expansion of Orsi Academy, a robotic-surgery institute he founded in Melle, East Flanders. His ambition is to transform the institute into a school and research centre for innovative medicine. Two multinationals from the United States have reportedly expressed interest in the project, estimated to cost from €15 to €20 million. The surgeon also hopes to establish a validation mechanism to guarantee that training in robotic surgery adheres to the highest standards. And he envisions putting Flanders on the map of top medical research.

“We should aim to become the next Vlerick,” says the surgeon. “Just like the world-renowned business school, only for medicine.”

## VUB researchers discover possible ‘cancer vaccine’

\ NATURE.COM

Oncologists from the Free University of Brussels (VUB) and the Flemish Institute of Biotechnology (VIB) have succeeded in isolating two dendritic cells, located inside tumours, that induce a surprisingly strong immune response within the patient's body. Their findings have been published in the open-access journal *Nature Communications*.

Dendritic cells, or DCs (pictured), are central targets in today's – still largely experimental – immunotherapies. The idea of immunotherapy is that it cures cancer by (re)activating the immune system.

Normal DCs block the immune response, but the team has discovered that two specific types do



exactly the opposite. They were able to extract them from tumours in several patients.

The research opens up new perspectives for the further development of immune therapy, which is a promising field in cancer research. After the surgical removal of a tumour, doctors could theoretically use the two DC cell types to “vaccinate” patients against their own cancers.

VUB professor Jo Van Ginderachter said that the application could become a cornerstone of future immunotherapies. “They induce a very strong immune response, even though they are quite rare in the tumour,” he said. The team will now investigate if the DCs could be used as an actual vaccine against cancer. \ Senne Starckx

## WEEK IN INNOVATION

### Old forests best at capturing CO<sub>2</sub>

An international team of researchers, including scientists from Antwerp University (UAntwerp), have compared the ability of 50 forests around the world to absorb CO<sub>2</sub> and discovered that old-growth forests consisting of many sorts of trees offer the largest and most stable carbon dioxide-capturing mechanism in the biosphere. The findings, published in the journal *Nature Ecology and Evolution*, “should serve as a wake-up call; we have to treat these kinds of forests that we still have very carefully,” said professor Ivan Janssens, a plant and vegetation ecologist at UAntwerp. “Older forests are more resistant to climate extremes and they are a reliable partner in our fight against global warming.”

### Vito taps into geothermal energy

The Flemish institute for technological research (Vito) has completed the first two phases of a local project aimed at extracting geothermal heat – an energy source that is based on touching the heat of the deep layers of the earth, where temperatures are naturally higher than at the surface. At the Vito site in Mol, Antwerp province, drilling went down to 3,610 metres, to the 350-million-year-old limestone layer under the ground, where the temperature reaches 138 degrees Celsius. The third stage consists of installing a power station on the surface where water will be pumped up from the depths, used as a source of energy and then re-injected into the limestone layer to be reheated naturally.

### Universities divest from fossil fuels

The University of Leuven (KU Leuven) has announced that it is stopping all investments in the fossil fuel industry, while the Free University of Brussels (VUB) said it will phase them out as quickly as possible. KU Leuven invests about 0.19% of its budget in fossil fuels annually. In an open letter, signed by some 300 KU Leuven professors and staff, the university promised that all future energy-oriented investments would be in sustainable resources, calling the transition to low-carbon consumption the contemporary society's greatest challenge. The move follows in the footsteps of Ghent University, which ceased all fossil fuel investments last year.

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# School on the go

## Ghent start-up provides education to Flemish children living abroad



Ian Mundell

More articles by Ian \ flanderstoday.org

\ D-TEACH.COM

Thousands of Flemish people go abroad to work every year, many taking their families with them. This can be an adventure for the kids, but also a challenge when they return and rejoin the Flemish school system. D-Teach, a start-up company from Ghent, is here to help. "When children go abroad they adapt very easily," says Lieselot Declercq, who set up the company in 2012. "In the first year, they still speak their language, but after a while they stop – and that's good; they are very flexible. But if they have lessons regularly in Dutch, and stay in touch with the language, reintegration goes much more smoothly." D-Teach works with 35 accredited freelance teachers to provide their services over the internet at pre-, primary and secondary school levels. So far 330 children have followed its lessons, from the UK and Eastern Europe to as far away as the United States, Australia and China.



© Reynermedia/FLICKR

also help prepare them for French, for example, or for Chinese." Most of the teaching, however, consists of lessons in Dutch for the children while they are abroad. This keeps them in touch with their mother tongue and covers the essentials of the Flemish school curriculum.

ing with the computer. So, a child might have a one-to-one hour a week with the teacher, and then be given exercises to complete on their own online.

"It must be very interactive, and it must be personalised to their level, so they can go at their own speed," Declercq explains. "Motivation is also very important, so we can learn what their interests and hobbies are; then we can use this in the lessons."

The virtual classroom that appears on the computer screen includes video panels in which the pupil and teacher can see one another, a little like Skype. Alongside is a white board where the teacher posts texts, quizzes and other exercises, and on which the pupil can give answers, receive comments and corrections. The kids can also share material of their own, such as pictures or videos.

Each lesson is recorded for quality control and, after each session, the teacher sends an email to parents and pupils saying what has been covered, what went well and scheduling the next lesson.

While most of this teaching complements what the children

learn at their schools abroad, a small number of pupils get all their schooling through D-Teach. Sometimes this is because their families move too frequently for regular schools, sometimes because they live in countries where local education is not possible or not acceptable to the parents.

One such family lives in Dubai. "Each week the children have four or five hours of lessons, one hour a day, and for the rest they learn independently," Declercq explains. "And we work together with the Flemish department of education to give them online exams, so they can get a certificate."

Finally, D-Teach also helps when children return to Flanders by providing tutoring when necessary. In mathematics, for example, differences in teaching methods or the curriculum can sometimes make reintegration into education tricky.

It also helps when returning pupils may be far ahead of their peers and therefore get bored going over old ground. One example is a girl who returned from China speaking English very well, and has been allowed to follow Chinese lessons online instead.

"She is being encouraged to stay in touch with what she has learned abroad, and she is still learning something new," Declercq says. "And that's in co-operation with the school here and the parents."

While D-Teach is entirely digital, there is an opportunity each year for real-life interaction. D-Teach at the Beach is a week-long summer school in Ostend.

"The kids can meet each other and their teachers," explains Declercq. "And the parents can meet each other." Last year 33 children attended, working together in Dutch on projects, games and excursions.

“It must be very interactive, and it must be personalised to their level, so they can go at their own speed

Some 145 pupils are currently involved each week, the costs usually being met by the parents or by their employers. The lessons can begin before the families set out, for instance with language classes to prepare the children for their destination and enrolment in either local or international schools.

Often that means learning English. "In Flanders, they don't get English lessons in primary school, so this is a hot topic," says Declercq. "But we

D-Teach uses the same teaching materials that are used in Flemish schools, apart from the topic of Flanders itself, where it has designed additional lessons. "It is important that they learn about the local culture where they are, but also that they learn a bit about our history and our cities, such as Ghent and Bruges and so on," says Declercq.

The teaching method is online, blended learning, a combination of contact with a teacher and learn-

## UGent ramps up efforts to attract more students from China

\ UGENT.BE/CHINAPLATFORM

This year, Ghent University (UGent) plans to step up its efforts to attract more Chinese students. Apart from launching a new website in Chinese, the initiative will focus on building a presence on the country's social media. All this with a little help from the students themselves.

The social media campaign may be new, but it builds on previous efforts, says Inge Mangelschots, co-ordinator of the university's China Platform, which handles all matters related to China. "Chinese students make up the largest international group at UGent," she explains. "At the moment, we have 352 Chinese students."

In the past, she continues, "our main recruiting channels were the Chinese universities, projects and fairs, but we've noticed that in order to reach prospective students, a presence on China's social media is crucial".

The social media landscape in China is fundamentally different than in Europe. Forget Twitter or Facebook; China's young people look to WeChat,



Sina Weibo and Youku, says Thomas Buerman, the vice-president for intercampus affairs at UGent's overseas campus in South Korea.

"Their platforms are much bigger and much more extensive than what we are used to," says Buerman. "At the same time, we've noticed that a big proportion of our current and former foreign students were not using our social media channels. So these networks are not only important

in recruiting new students, but also in staying in touch with former ones – which is not an easy task."

UGent's aim is to involve its current Chinese students in the new campaigns. "We've put out a call for help and got a lot of responses," says Mangelschots. "Now we are working with a group of 20 people. It's easier for them to translate the information on UGent into Chinese than it is for us."

But the importance of their involvement goes beyond practical issues, says Buerman. "It's really useful for potential students to speak with their peers who are currently at the university, or have been in Belgium in the past."

Aside from academic feedback, they can get first-hand accounts of what student life in Ghent is like, he explains. "Sharing the experience of someone who has gone through the same process is far more valuable than simply providing information." \ Toon Lambrechts

## WEEK IN EDUCATION

### €100,000 to help socially vulnerable

The government of Flanders has provided €100,000 for three social assistance projects that provide homework help, language assistance and family support for socially vulnerable children. A team of student teachers, special education specialists, psychologists, social workers and nurses will work with some 400 families in Ostend, Bruges, Blankenberge and Ghent, cities with many vulnerable families. The assistance will range from helping with homework and developing study skills to encouraging language development. Education minister Hilde Crevits said the projects will help "make both parents and children stronger." The social commitment of many students, she added gives more power to the project. "They have an enriching experience for their future career and their lives."

### End special education, says rights organisation

The Brussels-based organisation Equal Rights for People with Disabilities (Grip) has spoken out against Flanders' M Decree, which mainstreams children with special needs into regular education. Grip said the measures fall short of the goals of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which the Flemish government has ratified, and could slow down the move to a more inclusive education. The organisation also expressed regret at the education minister Hilde Crevits' plans to maintain special needs schools, given that the UN Convention provides for every child to be educated in the general system. According to Crevits, such schools are not in conflict with the UN convention.

### Workplace learning project to be expanded

The Flemish government is extending its Schoolbank op de werkplek (School desk at the Workplace) scheme, in which pupils 15 and older take lessons at school for a number of days each week and gain practical experience by working at a company on the remaining days. The trial project was launched this school year in seven study programmes at about 30 schools, with the aim of better preparing students for the labour market and helping those struggling at school to obtain a diploma. Education minister Hilde Crevits and labour minister Philippe Muyters have now announced they will expand the scheme to 26 study programmes next school year.

## WEEK IN ACTIVITIES

### Citizen Lights

For three nights, the Louis Bertrand neighbourhood of Schaerbeek lights up, as residents, local artists and international performers illuminate the night with torchlight processions, projections and installations. The festival culminates on Saturday evening with a light promenade and large fire installation in the park. *2-4 February 18.00-22.00, Info point at Schaerbeek Beer Museum, Louis Bertrandlaan 33, Brussels; free*  
[\ citizenlights1030.be](#)

### Pateekes Week

For anyone who enjoys a little something sweet with their afternoon tea or coffee, it's a good time to visit Antwerp. Just buy a Pateekes-pass for €10 and exchange each of the 10 coupons for a sweet treat in the participating bakeries or tearooms. The passes can be purchased at the city's tourist offices on Grote Markt or in Central Station. *3-12 February, across Antwerp; €10*  
[\ antwerpenkoekenstad.be](#)

### Bruges Beer Festival

For two days, the historic heart of Bruges plays host to some 80 Belgian brewers pouring more than 100 kinds of beer, including some world premieres. Entry buys you a commemorative tasting glass and tokens for five tastings. Additional tastings cost €1.80 each. *4-5 February, Markt and Belfort courtyard, Bruges; €15*  
[\ brugsbierfestival.be](#)

### Asia in Antwerp

A two-day cultural festival featuring food and performances from all over Asia. Besides numerous food stands, there will be continuous entertainment including a traditional Chinese lion dance, acrobats, Thai and Balinese dance, music and contortionists. *4-5 February, Waagnatie, Rijnkaai 150, Antwerp; €15*  
[\ azieinantwerpen.be](#)

### Harry Potter Day

Calling all would-be wizards and witches! Believe it or not, the first book in the series appeared 20 years ago, so it's time to celebrate with a Harry Potter-themed party. Put on your best robe, grab your wand and join other fans for a day of readings, games, contests and more. *5 February 15.00-18.00, Waterstone's, Adolph Maxlaan 71-75, Brussels; free*  
[\ tinyurl.com/harrypotterbrussels](#)

# Free wheeling

## Rickshaw travel gets Antwerp's oldest residents out and about



Clodagh Kinsella

More articles by Clodagh \ [flanderstoday.org](#)

\ ANTWERPENIZE.BE

It's no secret that the elderly are particularly prone to social isolation. But, since last summer, Wind in De Haren (Wind in Your Hair) has helped dozens of Antwerp seniors re-engage with their local community on rickshaw rides around the city. The project was launched by Lieven Jacobs and Stijn Wens of the biking blog Antwerpenize.be. The lion's share of the funding came from the Burgerbegroting (Citizen's Budget), the City of Antwerp's experimental initiative that lets the citizens allot 10% of the annual district budget – some €1.1 million. Cycling support agency Fietsberaad Vlaanderen and sustainable transport company Mobiel 21 also contributed funds, but “the whole idea of rickshaw rides for elderly people came from Ole Kassow, the founder of Cycling Without Age in Denmark,” explains Wens, a graphic designer by trade. Founded in 2012, the Danish non-profit has spawned 200 chapters from Argentina to Australia, encouraging the elderly to share their stories and get out and about on rickshaws piloted by volunteers.

Wens and Jacobs flew to Copenhagen last July to buy two Christiana Bikes – or “trishaws” – from the company, and then spent the next 10 days cycling them back to Antwerp with cardboard cut-outs of seniors seated in the front. (On

the flight there, a flight attendant sat the cut-outs in first-class.)

One of the trishaws went to Leuven, while the other has been rotated around various Antwerp nursing homes. Gulden Lelie and 't Zand, both on the left bank of the Scheldt river, proved particularly receptive to the idea.

“Our agreement with the Burgerbegroting was to provide 50 rides from August to December,” explains Wens, “but in fact we did many more.”

Volunteers sign up via the website to take seniors out on the bikes, which seat up to two passengers and are fitted with hoods and blankets for colder months. Handily, they're also electric.

“The passengers usually don't know the volunteer in advance, and in the beginning some are a bit unsure about the idea,” says Wens. “But after five minutes or so, they're talking.”

The two passengers engage in conversation, which they may have not done previously in the nursing home. “And they're seeing things and are triggered by the new experience to talk to each other. Sometimes they start to talk when they haven't for years. It's better than medicine.”

Many of the passengers have lived in Antwerp their whole lives, or used to work in the city, so they want to go and see their old homes or the parks they used to visit. Coffee breaks also regularly figure



© Courtesy Antwerpenize

Cycling blog Antwerpenize takes the port city's elderly on free excursions

on the itinerary.

“My first ride was with two Marias,” Wens recalls. “One was 93 years old and had lived in a retirement home on the left bank for 10 years. She had never been into the city in that time, though it was just 15 minutes by bike to the Sint-Anna tunnel.”

While this Maria opened up about her life, the other Maria casually fell into conversation with a Spanish tourist – revealing a dormant

fluency in the language.

Next month, the cycle starts again, with a new crop of nursing homes and volunteers. Beyond that, Wens hopes that the City of Antwerp will fund it for another year.

“Our idea was to plant the seed,” he says. “Now all the nursing homes know about it, so maybe they'll buy their own bikes, or another organisation will pick it up and spread it. There are so many possibilities.”

## BITE

## Antwerp's newest restaurant mixes Nordic and Asian vibes

\ GANORD.BE

The old coach house in Antwerp's Spoor Nord park stood empty for 20 years before Sven Wille and Nicolaj Kovdal turned it into the The Little Butcher's Summer Grill pop-up restaurant last summer. Following a complete makeover, the iconic building has now reopened as a permanent foodie fixture in one of Antwerp's up-and-coming neighbourhoods.

Wille and Kovdal have renamed their new restaurant Gå Nord – “Go North” in Kovdal's native Danish tongue – and focus on simple food done well, with influences from both Scandinavia and the Far East. Natural, local and organic ingredients are the stars of the show wherever possible, including on the drinks menu, which features natural wines, handcrafted cocktails and speciality beers.

The interior was conceived by the proprietors in collaboration with local designer Anja Schwerbrock. The team maintained the rough details of the former industrial building, leaving exposed brickwork, weathered wooden ceilings and the original arched windows in place.

Two green islands bustling with ferns and trees help to accentuate the size and scale of the interior. Outside there is a huge terrace which, when



© Alexandre Van Battel

complete,

will almost double the capacity of the restaurant in the warmer summer months.

Central to the design is the open kitchen, led by Timothy Tynes, a chef from Amsterdam known for his interpretation of world cuisine. Everything is on show to guests, from the chefs at work to the meat-maturing cabinet.

“The cabinet keeps the meat at the right temperature and humidity to guarantee its tenderness,” says Tynes. “Guests can choose their own piece of meat, and how much of it they want on their plate.”

Only 29, Tynes has already worked with some big names in the local culinary scene, including Sergio Herman of celebrated Antwerp eatery The Jane, and Kobe Desramaults of Ghent's De Superette. His style is all about simplicity.

“I want people to know what they're eating,” he says. “When you eat a peanut, you should clearly taste a peanut. For me, it means creating the richest possible flavours with the fewest possible steps.”

Fortunately, you don't have to make too many choices as the restaurant offers four-, five- and six-course tasting menus for dinner, and two and three courses for lunch. You can also order *à la carte*, and there is a bar menu if you just want to sit and watch the kitchen work its simple magic.

A word of warning though – reservations are highly advised. Even on a cold and rainy Sunday, it was full. \ Dan Smith

*Hardenvoort 5, Antwerp*



# High time for change

Flemish academics make case for decriminalisation of marijuana



Linda A Thompson  
Follow Linda on Twitter \ @ThompsonBXL

With cannabis use on the rise in Belgium, a trio of academics argue in a new book that a regulated legalisation of the drug is more beneficial than criminalising its use.

An economist, a toxicologist and a criminologist put their heads together to come up with a plan. It sounds like the beginning of a bad joke, but that unlikely get-together was the first in a series of steps that led to the development of a comprehensive blueprint to legalise marijuana in Belgium.

The trio, employed at the London School of Economics, the University of Leuven and Ghent University, respectively, make a coolly rational plea for the regulated legalisation of marijuana in their new book *Cannabis onder controle, hoe?* (Cannabis Under Control, How?).

The simple realisation that federal drug policies are failing is what motivated the three academics – Paul De Grauwe, Jan Tytgat and Tom Decorte, each of whom have studied drug use in their respective disciplines – to get together. “It wasn’t a particular incident or occasion, but we happened to find each other at a particular moment in time,” explains Decorte.

Their book is the latest in a growing, but still timid movement that has argued for legalisation of marijuana, the most popular drug in Flanders. Its proponents include the youth wings of parties of SPA and Open VLD, as well as aid workers and NGOs working around substance abuse.

Decorte (the criminologist) made a similar plea for regulating recreational cannabis use 20 years ago and notes that the mood has since changed. Back then, “I received a full-on wave of hysterical and negative responses,” he says, noting that there is more interest in the arguments he is making this time around.

Under the 2003 federal drug law, possession and use of marijuana



© Ingimage

The movement to legalise recreation use of marijuana is growing, says UGent criminologist Tom Decorte (pictured below)

by adults is punishable by law, but it is rarely prosecuted in practice as police and prosecutors have been instructed by the prosecutor’s office not to prioritise possession or use of small amounts of the drug. Dealer activities such as import, production and transport of the drug carry fines of up to €600,000 and prison sentences of up to a year.

According to the researchers this criminalisation of cannabis use and possession is failing to achieve the stated aims of local drug policies, as outlined in the 2001 Federal Drug Policy Paper – to reduce the number of dependent users and to reduce the physical and psychosocial harm cannabis abuse can cause, as well as to decrease the negative consequences of cannabis use to society, in the form of crime, for instance.

According to figures from the Flemish centre of expertise on alcohol and drugs (VAD), the number of residents in the region who have experimented with cannabis at least once between 2001 and 2013 has increased from 10.6% to more than 14% of the population – a 33% increase.

Local and certified centres specialised in drug addiction, meanwhile, have reported a threefold increase in the number of new treatments launched for cannabis over the period between 2003 and 2012.

“That’s the biggest toll – that the number of people who experience serious health problems because of cannabis use is increasing,” Decorte says. This rise in cannabis-related health problems is partly explained by the illegal provenance of the drug, which is produced on a thriving black

market that naturally operates with little oversight of the government.

Cannabis now frequently includes dangerous substances such as heavy metals, glass particles, pesticides, bacteria and fungi. The amount of tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, the psychoactive ingredient in cannabis, has also been steadily increasing over the last few decades.

decriminalisation. “We think that the criminal atmosphere around cannabis use by adults should be eliminated,” says the centre’s director, Marijs Geirnaert, “but as part of an overall policy that in the first place aims at prevention, with non-use being the norm and early intervention when psychosocial or health problems arise.”

The centre’s position, Geirnaert adds, was informed by the experi-

“

We think that the criminal atmosphere around cannabis use should be eliminated but as part of an overall policy that makes prevention its top priority

“That’s not because of climate change or because the cannabis plant has naturally evolved,” Decorte says, “but because it is cultivated in an illegal market and because those producers make much more money on stronger weed.”

Els Cleemput, a spokesperson for federal health minister Maggie De Block, says that the minister opposes legalisation of cannabis because “it’s damaging to one’s health; it has harmful effects and is damaging to the brain”.

The minister, she notes, signed a royal decree with the effect of legalising sales of Sativex, a cannabis-based, prescription-only nose spray that can relieve symptoms associated with multiple sclerosis. “But these are two totally different things,” adds the spokesperson. VAD, meanwhile, supports

ences of the addiction care sector and existing academic expertise on the effects and risks of cannabis use. “We also argue for quality care for individuals who have problems due to the use of the drug,” she adds.

In *Cannabis onder controle, hoe?*, the academics set out a scenario for regulated small-scale cannabis cultivation for personal use, cultivation and use in cannabis social clubs and provision of medicinal cannabis to patients. This, the authors stress, would be part of drug policies that would remain centrally focused on medical assistance, prevention and raising awareness.

They also argue for a tightly regulated model that stands in contrast to the free-for-all marketplace model under which alcohol and tobacco are currently produced,

consumed and promoted. “When you say legalisation, a lot of people think, ‘Oh, so like alcohol and tobacco,’” explains Decorte, “but what we’re saying is legalise it in a more stringent and non-commercial way than tobacco.”

Rather than letting the free market play its way, with businesses inevitably focused on increasing sales of cannabis-containing products, Decorte, De Grauwe and Tytgat argue for the phased introduction of a regulated market. The government, they say, would fully control the production process and the availability of cannabis as well as selling points – complete with a yet-to-be founded regulatory agency.

Still, Decorte recognises that even their model of regulated legalisation won’t solve the cannabis problem. “There will always be people in our society who are interested in taking intoxicants,” he says, “and there will always be people interested in making them.”

Electoral promises to root out drugs, he adds, are populist because they’re simply impossible to achieve. “There’s not a society in the entire world and there’s not a single period in history where drugs did not exist.”

The solution then, he says, is to limit the harm that drugs can do through careful policies. “What we’re saying is continue the fight against cannabis but with the right weapons that can actually achieve

their aim and that can help you effectively accomplish something.” A spokesperson for justice minister Koen Geens says his administration would review the book and its proposals. “Our existing policies are already balanced policies – not tolerance policies,” says Sieghild Lacoere, noting that the federal government and the Drug Policy General Cell was in the process of discussing actualisation of current policies.

The minister of justice, she adds, is pursuing a realistic policy in terms of penal investigations and prosecution to enforce drug laws. “For users, the emphasis will always be on assistance, especially in case of problematic use and in a criminal context.”

*Cannabis onder controle, hoe?* (€19.99) is published by Lannoo



# Your guide to life in Belgium

The latest issue of the Bulletin Newcomer mixes practical information with features on getting Belgian nationality, personal safety, learning to drive, kids' activities and more.

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# Melodies and mystery

Opera Vlaanderen evokes Verdi's power games with Simon Boccanegra



Tom Peeters

More articles by Tom \ flanderstoday.org

\ OPERABALLET.BE

In the teaser to promote *Simon Boccanegra*, the new Verdi production by Opera Vlaanderen, you can get a glimpse of Donald Trump. This melodrama, divided into a prologue and three acts, and set in early Italian Renaissance Genoa, is about both the past and the future.

“It's very recognisable in the nationalist agenda of today's political playground

By projecting the story back to the 14th century, Verdi was able to write a parable about the political situation of his own time as well as the future. “It's indeed very political,” conductor Alexander Joel (*pictured*) says, right after a rehearsal in Antwerp. “It's about the unification of Italy, one of Verdi's main themes, and very recognisable in the nationalist agenda of today's political playground.”

German director David Hermann called it “*House of Cards* in opera form”. Joel agrees: “Political intrigue and power games are everywhere, and they are intertwined with personal affairs.”

The theme also influences the music. “The colourful orchestration and sublime melodies are joined by mystery,” he says. “This opera has more soft parts than any of Verdi's other operas, illustrating mistrust and conspiracy.” *Simon Boccanegra* was first performed in 1857, but this is the reworked version from 1881. Inspired by *Othello*, created in the same period, it mixes old- and new-style Verdi. Parts of it sound like his earlier works, such as *La Traviata* or *Rigoletto*; other parts sound like *Don Carlos*, Joel says.

“It may not be Verdi's best-known opera, but it is certainly one of his finest,” enthuses Joel, who points out that it was rarely performed until a recent revival. It hasn't been performed

in Flanders since 1989.

Verdi distanced himself from the expectations of the audience, initiating a rather declamatory *parlando* style that runs through extended scenes. It's quite unconventional for the lead character – played alternately by baritones Nicola Alaimo and Kiril Manolov – not to sing an aria, Joel explains, “but then again, *Don Carlos* didn't have an aria either.”

After seven years as musical director at the Staatstheater Braunschweig in Germany and a rewarding job as guest conductor at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden in London, Joel launched a successful freelance career in 2014. *Simon Boccanegra* is his first production as principal guest conductor for Opera Vlaanderen.

In addition to one new opera production each season, he will also conduct a number of symphonic programmes, such as the Mahler/Brahms concert later this month. “It's a fantastic house with exciting productions,” he says. “I'm most impressed by the acoustic, especially in Antwerp, and I love working with the orchestra. We seem to have a similar sense of humour.”

Joel grew up and studied in Vienna, London and Switzerland. “I learned to play the piano at an early age,” he says, “but it was only after an attempt to study law that I tried to build a career in classical music.” It was a decision greatly influenced by his German father, Howard, a classical pianist, who used to play for hours when Alexander was still a child.

Joel's more famous half-brother, the American singer-songwriter Billy Joel, experienced the same during his early childhood, when Howard was still married to his mother. After divorcing in 1957, Howard moved to Vienna, and 14 years later Alexander was born.

“We operated totally independently from each other,” the younger brother says. “I worked my way up in the opera world without any outside help.”

The brothers met for the first time when Alex-



House of Cards, in opera form: Alexander Joel conducts *Simon Boccanegra*

ander was five. “In the 1970s, America was really the other side of the world,” he says. “But from when I was 18, when Billy had just turned 40, I saw him regularly, and we developed a deep affection for each other. It was funny to discuss similar problems we had in the business.”

He agrees that what really connected them was their father's piano playing when they were young, despite their being “of different generations, on different continents”. A few weeks ago, he says, “I told Billy I really love his classical *Fantasies & Delusions* album, which he recorded in 2001 in Vienna as an homage to our father. I get emotional listening to it.

“While working on it, my brother used to play the pieces to me and I would say: ‘Well, this sounds a bit like Chopin, this like Tchaikovsky, this like Rachmaninov, and this like Bach. At least I hear only good guys,’ he said.”

In a recent interview Billy Joel confirmed: “I think we're both very much like our old man.”

5-21 February

Opera Antwerp  
Frankrijklei 1

1-9 March

Opera Ghent  
Schouwburgstraat 3

## Kortrijk's music festivals and club join forces for Wilde Westen

\ WILDEWESTEN.BE

Several music festivals in Kortrijk and the city's De Kreun music club have merged, becoming Wilde Westen. The aim is to build up existing activities in all genres of music and extend the pair's reach in the Eurometropole region, which also takes in Tournai in Wallonia and Lille in France.

The flagship event of Wilde Westen remains the Festival of Flanders in Kortrijk, which focuses on classical and contemporary music. The 2017 edition, in May, begins a five-year cycle exploring the elements according to Greek philosophy: earth, air, fire, water and ether.

The “earth” theme will be Brave New World, with performances of Dvořák's symphony *From the New World* and programmes devised by



© Lau Kwok Kei

Chinese conductor Elim Chan will lead the National Orchestra of Belgium at Schouwburg Kortrijk on 6 May

accordionist Philippe Thuriot and multi-instrumentalist Dick van der Harst.

The Sonic City festival also continues in Kortrijk, running in November this year, but with the ambition to grow. Each edition has a different curator. Last year it was English rock group Savages, who brought in artists such as post-rock outfit Tortoise and performance poet Kate Tempest. This year's curator will be announced in the coming months. Then three new projects are planned. The first will have alternating atmospheres, called Bos one year and Factory the next. In a Bos year the event will take place in a wood, park or other natural environment, while in a Factory year it will move to an industrial location. Each programme will cross genres and take inspiration from the location. The sequence begins with

Bos on 24 June, in a location to be revealed in April.

The second new project will turn the Festival of Flanders Kortrijk's sound art strand Klinkende Stad into a separate event. Combining music and exhibitions, the first edition will take place in February or March 2018.

Finally, Festival X will be a new a cross-border festival organised with a partner in the Eurometropole region. The first edition should take place in May next year.

On top of these events, Wilde Westen will organise about 30 concerts each year. Highlights in the coming months include melancholy Flemish songwriter Jan Swerts and veteran US noise makers Helmet and Shellac. \ Ian Mundell

## WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

M Museum closed until June

Leuven's M Museum closed its doors earlier this month and will re-open on 10 June with a fresh look for its permanent collection. The city museum's collection contains more than 52,000 works of both old and contemporary international art, with a focus on Leuven and Brabant masters. The reconfigured space will be able to show more of the collection and will be organised around stories and themes. Multimedia installations will also be placed, allowing better interaction with the public. Until the museum re-opens, it will host exhibitions and events under the title Open M at both the nearby Sint-Pieters Church and the University of Leuven's library as well as its Valk building.

\ mleuven.be

De Keersmaecker directs Paris Opera

The Paris Opera's new production of *Così fan tutte*, which opened last week, was directed by Flemish choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker. The world-famous opera house has co-operated with De Keersmaecker in the past, performing her production *Rain* and a Bartok/Beethoven/Schönberg repertoire. Mozart's ever-popular *Così fan tutte* is the story of two young men who test the loyalty of their sweethearts with the help of a cynical philosopher. De Keersmaecker has fused opera and dance by pairing a dancer with every singer, giving more shape to the music and playing out more fully the game of attraction and repulsion. The production runs until 19 February.

Star chef Luc Bellings to close restaurant

Chef Luc Bellings has announced that he is closing his two Michelin-star restaurant Aan Tafel in Hasselt in June. He has been running the restaurant for 32 years. “It's a tough job, and the stress eats away at you,” he said. “What actor or athlete can continue to offer a top performance for so many years from morning to night?” He is considering opening something more modest, which would make him the third major chef to downsize in recent months, following Geert Vanhecke of the three Michelin-star De Karmeliet in Bruges and Kobe Desramauts, who abandoned In De Wulf in Dranouter last month to concentrate on his simpler De Superette and a new pop-up restaurant in Ghent.

\ lucbellings.be

# Art with teeth

Sven 't Jolle show at Wiels pushes art's potential to drive social change



Christophe Verbiest  
More articles by Christophe \ [flanderstoday.org](http://flanderstoday.org)

\ SKETCHBOOK.LUNARGRAVITY.BE

\ WIELS.ORG

Antwerp-born sculptor and installation artist Sven 't Jolle has a new show at Wiels commenting on social issues, from refugees to health care.

**T**he *Age of Entitlement, or Affordable Tooth Extraction*: the long and intriguing title of this exhibition by Antwerp-born sculptor and installation artist Sven 't Jolle refers to his new homeland, Australia. "The age of entitlement is over," the country's former MP Joe Hockey announced a few years ago as he blocked funds to various social programmes.

In reaction, 't Jolle made "Affordable Tooth Extraction", an installation that shows a figure trying to pull a tooth with a wire attached to a door handle. The funny, unsettling work denounces any dismantling of publicly funded health care.

One of the other striking works at the show at Wiels in Brussels is "Citizenship (Protect Your Loved Ones)". A brown inflatable paddling pool is surrounded by a safety barrier. Around that is a second barrier, comparable to those seen around detention centres. It's 't Jolle's way of

commenting on how refugees are handled in this day and age. Curator Zoë Gray calls the artist's work "a fiery critique of capitalism, combining humour and poetry with social engagement". But how does 't Jolle see it? Does he really hope to change things? "That would be great, but I'm

aware of art's limitations," he tells me. "Still, this doesn't restrain me in using my social commitment as the foundation of my art. If I cause only one visitor to think, I've already made an impact."

In 2003, 't Jolle appeared on the Senate list for Belgium's radical-left cartel Resist. "It was a statement: I wanted to support the cartel not only with words but also with actions – even though I knew I would never get elected. I didn't become an artist with the goal of airing political views. Making art isn't the best way to do that."

't Jolle moved to Australia in 2009, after meeting his partner a decade earlier when he was selected for the Melbourne International Biennial. "For those 10 years we divided our time between the two countries, but at one point she had to finish her PhD.

There are more chances for her to work over there."

In Australia, 't Jolle obtained the status of perma-

What a difference from Belgium, he sighs. "My partner lived in Antwerp for more than a year. Every few months she had to go and queue to get permission to remain."

Though in recent years, Australia has gained a reputation for being very tough on migration. "You have to differentiate between migrants and refugees," says 't Jolle. "Migration, where someone contributes to society, isn't seen as a problem. Don't forget that the country is 98% based on migration. But indeed, the right-wing government is very refugee-unfriendly, to say the least."

Did moving influence his work? "Undoubtedly. Even though I keep myself informed on a daily basis about what's happening in Belgium, the physical distance alters my viewpoint. Moreover, it's an experience that's difficult to share, because when I talk about Belgium in Australia, most people have no idea

that 't Jolle has filled over the past 20 years. We're talking about more than 10,000 drawings. He might mostly be known as a sculptor, but almost overnight he's also become an sketch artist.

Or is it a mistake to see these sketchbooks as art; are they "only" preparatory studies? Both, says 't Jolle.

"It started out of a practical necessity: It's a way of documenting ideas that I might forget afterwards," he explains. "This way I can always go back to them. It helps me, too, to visualise a solution for an artistic problem. I also draw just for the pleasure of it."

He's been drawing since he was young, he says, though he studied sculpture at Antwerp's Royal Academy of Fine Arts. "I thought it more interesting to choose

something I wasn't very good at," he says with a smile. "I'm not the most dextrous guy, which is not an advantage for a sculptor."

When he was really young, 't Jolle wanted to become a comic strip artist. He's a great fan of Franquin, the father of cartoon series *Gaston*. But it's another comic master who's present at the Wiels exhibition, in a collection of 24 drawings from 1996.

't Jolle copied them from one of Flanders' most famous comic series, *Suske & Wiske*. Each drawing is a reproduction of a frame from the strip containing a denigrating view of migrants.

"You could argue that having one of the characters talk in a xenophobic way was a sign of the times," says 't Jolle. On the other hand, he points out, the characters are heroes, so it *does* leave a bitter taste.

As a child, 't Jolle started drawing comics, "but I didn't finish one of them. I don't have that ambition anymore. I used to quote comics, whereas now I'm absorbing their formal language into my own, with more abstract results."

commenting on how refugees are handled in this day and age. Curator Zoë Gray calls the artist's work

"a fiery critique of capitalism, combining humour and poetry with social engagement". But how does 't Jolle see it? Does he really hope to change things? "That would be great, but I'm

nent resi-

dent. "I had to submit a huge file," he says holding his thumb and index finger five, six centimetres apart. "But once you're granted the status, you don't have to apply for renewal."

what I'm talking about. And vice versa." Along with the exhibition in Wiels, there is a website where visitors can leaf through 100 sketchbooks

Until 19 March

Wiels  
Van Volxemlaan 354, Brussels

## MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK

### Winter Harvest & Kamrooz Aram

The Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, just outside Ghent, is starting 2017 with two intriguing shows. *Autumn Harvest* aims to appeal to all five senses by gathering four young artists who are strongly influenced by music and performance (pictured). Two of the quartet are Flemish: Andy Wauman and Joris Van de Moortel. The smaller wing of the museum hosts an exhibition by Iranian artist Kamrooz Aram, who's trying to bridge the gap between traditional art from his home country and Western



modernism. 5 February to 9 April, Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Museumlaan 14, Sint-Martens-Latem \ [museumdd.be](http://museumdd.be)

### Virginie Bailly: Effervescent

The new exhibition by Brussels artist Virginie Bailly continues her examination of the borders between abstract and figurative art. Though you see abstract compositions, it's good to know that those whirlwinds of colours refer to reality. This time around, Bailly gets her inspiration from

baroque (Rubens) and rococo (Tiepolo) painters, but also from the weekly market near her home. One painting even refers to a dislodged metro car after the Maalbeek terrorist attack. 5 February to 5 March, Galerie Transit, Zandpoortvest 10, Mechelen \ [transit.be](http://transit.be)

### Boris Tellegen: A Friendly Takeover

Boris Tellegen rose to fame in the 1980s as graffiti artist Delta. After studying industrial design, he changed his focus to sculptural

works. He plans a friendly takeover of the Mima (Millennium Iconoclast Museum of Art) in Brussels, filling it with collages, sculptures, drawings, installations and video art. "Mankind is driven by an unshakeable faith in progress," the Dutch artist says, "where modern technology and constant growth leads us to a better world. My work explores a different outcome, where the automated forces unleashed develop structures and minds of their own." 3 February to 28 May, Mima, Henegouwenkaai 39-41, Brussels \ [mimamuseum.eu](http://mimamuseum.eu)



Exit through the gift shop

# The Art of Banksy



Until 19 March

Stadsfeestzaal, Antwerp  
THEARTOFBANKSY.BE

Amid much fanfare, equal amounts of controversy and a canny promotional strategy involving strategically placed red balloons – a nod to one of Banksy's most iconic works – the travelling exhibition *The Art of Banksy* opened in Antwerp's Stadsfeestzaal shopping centre last month. The exhibition features more than 80 works by the anonymous British street artist, known for his dark humour, anti-capitalist stance and distinctive stencilling technique. Highlights include

his much-loved "Girl with Balloon" (2002) and his Warholian portraits of Kate Moss. All pieces come from private collectors, and the archive of the show's curator, Steve Lazarides – a street art mogul who rose to fame as Banksy's former agent. "This exhibition is a one-off – never will you be able to see this amount of work in one place again," says Lazarides. "Once the show is over, the artwork



will dissipate back to the 40 collectors around the world, and the likelihood of them being brought together again in the future is very slim." While the show has already drawn crowds in Amsterdam, Istanbul and Melbourne, it has also raised the hackles of critics. The latest "100% unauthorised" show staged by Lazarides, who famously fell out with Banksy 10 years

ago, its pricy entry fee (€17.50), a gift shop and gimmicky layout – brick wallpaper mimics the urban setting of the original stencils – are all anathema to Banksy's anti-commercial ethos. The Stadsfeestzaal is a curious choice of venue, too. While the gilded neoclassical shopping centre has hosted art exhibitions in the past, these days it's more familiar as the home of Habitat and Urban Outfitters. Just don't forget to exit through the gift shop. \ Clodagh Kinsella

## VISUAL ARTS

### Label It: Trademarks in Fashion

Until 12 February

Fashion Museum, Hasselt  
MODEMUSEUMHASSELT.BE

Hasselt's fashion museum explores brands in its current exhibition. Branding is the beating heart of the fashion industry, located as it is at the intersection of identity, publicity, intellectual property and the booming black market in counterfeit goods. *Label It* illustrates the complexity of the brand through pieces from designers' personal archives as well as collections from international museums. Some of the fashion world's most recognizable brand names are represented here, including Alexander McQueen, Olivier Theyskens, Christian Dior, Louis Vuitton, Fendi, Dries Van Noten and Maison Margiela. \ Georgio Valentino



## FOOD&DRINK

### Meug Tasting Festival

17-18 February

Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp  
MEUG.BE

Antwerp's annual beer, wine and whiskey festival is back and maltier than ever. Last year five local organisations (including – who else? – Beerlovers, Winelovers and Maltlovers) joined forces to put on a tasting of epic proportions. Thus was born Meug. This second edition kicks off with an after-work

party and continues with an all-day binge worthy of Bacchus himself. Some 30 vendors are on hand to deal drinks from around the world. Meug aims to introduce you to more than the product, though. Craft producers themselves are put in the spotlight through several meet-and-greet events. \ GV



## FESTIVAL

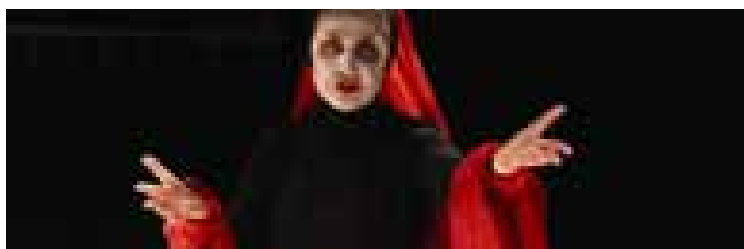
### Moussem Cities: Beirut

2-18 February

Across Brussels  
MOUSSEM.BE

This second edition of Moussem Nomadic Arts Centre's Moussem Cities festival celebrates Beirut. The Lebanese capital has rebounded from conflict to become a hotbed of artistic creation, a space where contemporary artists negotiate history, local identity and global citizenship. The Brussels festival encompasses 19 events at five venues, from Moussem's own

headquarters to Kaaiteater to Bozar. As always, Moussem Cities cuts across genres and disciplines. Pioneering activist theatremaker Hanane Hajj-Ali (pictured) performs her monologue *Jogging*. Graphic artist Hatem El Imam presents the fruits of his recent Brussels residency. Lebanese hip-hop diva Malikah shares the stage with Belgian musicians. \ GV



## EVENT

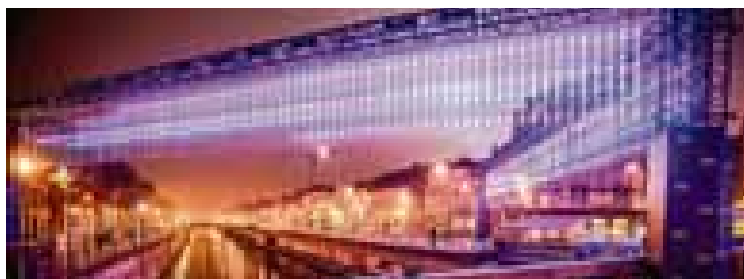
### Bright Brussels Festival

2-5 February

Akenkaai, Brussels  
BRIGHT.BRUSSELS

If you need a dose of light therapy in these dark days, the Brussels-Capital Region invites you to stroll through this open-air festival. An illuminated pathway leads visitors down a stretch of Brussels' waterfront, where they can enjoy 10 majestic light installations created by local and international artists. All the while, food

trucks serve some of the capital's best street food (and drink). The festival highlight is the unveiling of "Naked Truth" by Brussels-based ACT Lighting Design. This installation colonises a construction site and uses 64 beams of light, cutting through fog and reflecting in the water's surface, to create a moody, minimalist masterpiece. \ GV



## CONCERT

Brussels

**Lula Pena:** Portuguese singer-songwriter presents her third and latest album, *Archivo Pittoresco*, which combines fado with other folk traditions from French chanson to Brazilian bossa nova. 3 February, 20.00, Ancienne Belgique, Anspachlaan 110 \ abconcerts.be

## CLASSICAL

Hasselt

**symphoniaASSAI:** Hasselt-based ensemble, led by Limburg native Wouter Lenaerts, perform *Footprints*. The programme places Mendelssohn's *Hebrides Overture* and *Scottish Symphony* in the tradition of Mozart's Linz symphony. 4 February, 20.00, Cultuurcentrum Hasselt, Kunstlaan 5 \ ccha.be

## THEATRE

Ghent

**What I would like to be if I wasn't what I am:** Contemporary Flemish theatremakers Benjamin Verdonck and Willy Thomas collaborate in this adaptation of Argentinian writer César Bruto's gonzo journalism. 1-3 February, *Campo: Nieuwpoorttheater, Nieuwpoort 31-35* \ campo.nu

## VISUAL ARTS

Brussels

**Bart Van Dijck: Waking Up the Bear:** The multimedia Flemish artist works with folk tradition to herald the end of winter and celebrate of carnival. 17 February to 19 March, *Le Clignoteur, Oud Korenhuis 30* \ leclignoteur.be

Bruges

**Henk Van Rensbergen: Abandoned Places/In No Man's Land:** Twin photographic exhibitions present real abandoned places around the world and project a post-apocalyptic future in which humanity is extinct and nature reclaims the world's urban spaces. Until 16 April, *Concertgebouw, 't Zand 34* \ concertgebouw.be

## FESTIVAL

Brussels

**Afropolitan:** This celebration of Afropolitan art and creativity boasts 30 multidisciplinary events with over 70 artists. Guest of honour include Afrosoul singer Fredy Massamba and TV personality Tatiana Silva. Most events are free. 3-5 February, *Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23* \ bozar.be

# Talking Dutch

Don't worry, be happy



Derek Blyth  
More articles by Derek \ flanderstoday.eu

Did you mark *klaagvrije maandag* – complaint-free Monday this year? Don't be angry if you missed it. Be happy is the message. That's the opinion of Sandra Brandt, a Dutch woman who in 2015 created a Facebook group calling on people to make 23 January a complaint-free day. *Telkens wanneer ik samen met mijn partner op visite was geweest* – Every time I went out with my partner *zat ik achteraf in de auto te klagen* – I sat in the car afterwards complaining *over die mensen die altijd klaagden* – about those people who are always complaining. *Dus besloot ik om 24 uur niet te klagen* – So I decided to spend a whole day without complaining, *als uitdaging voor mezelf* – as a challenge to myself. *Intussen is Brandt uitgegroeid tot de goeroe van de klaagvrijbeweging* – Since then Brandt has become a guru for the gripe-free movement. Experts seem to agree that this is a good idea. *Geluksexpert Leo Bormans is gewonnen voor dat idee* – Happiness expert Leo Bormans is all in favour of the idea, wrote *Knack* magazine. But Bormans (who describes himself as *ambassadeur van geluk en levenskwaliteit* – an ambassador of happiness and quality of life) doesn't want us to stop grumbling. *Klagen heeft een functie* – Moaning has a purpose,



© ingimage

Mr Happy says. *Het is belangrijk om problemen aan te kaarten* – It's important to bring problems out into the open *en je hart te luchten* – and get them off your chest. *Daarmee stellen we ons kwetsbaar op* – In so doing we show ourselves to be vulnerable *en dat is crucial* – and that's essential. But that doesn't mean you should complain about everything. Take the weather in Belgium, for example. *Belgen overschatten de kans op regen trouwens enorm* – Belgians actually exaggerate the chance of rain enormously, he says. *Ze denken vaak dat het 30 procent van de tijd regent* – They often believe that it rains 30% of the time, *terwijl dat in werkelijkheid maar 8 procent is* – whereas the real figure is just 8%, *waarvan dan nog de helft 's nachts* – and half of that falls during the night. Bormans has some other useful tips for Belgians who might feel like a good old moan on a Monday morning. *In plaats van te klagen over de file* – Instead of complaining about the traffic jam, *kun je een collega zoeken om te carpoolen* – you can look for a co-worker to carpool. *En als de trein vertraging heeft* – And if your train is delayed, *kun je ook positief denken* – you can also think positive thoughts *en gewoon wat meer tijd nemen om een boek te lezen* – and just spend some more time reading your book. That's easy for him to say, you might complain. But give it a try.

## VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY

**In response to: High time for change: Flemish academics make case for legal marijuana**  
**Joren Bosmans:** Not a big fan of legalisation but they do seem to have some good points. If it makes it possible to reduce addictions and notice possible other problems than it is interesting to follow their ideas.

**In response to: Peeters calls for tougher fines for fake sales prices**  
**Nesli Han:** I don't do shopping in Mango anymore.

**In response to: Flemish surgeon at the helm of a medical revolution**  
**Irina Jidobin:** I feel blessed and happy that we have him!

**Andrew Black @BBCAndrewBlack**  
This is my favourite thing of the week so far – Library in Ghent moves home via human chain

**DaisLikeThese @DaisyHuntington**  
Making the most of beautiful #Bruges with grumpy kids! When #familytravel doesn't always go to plan!

**Sid Glover @SidGlover**  
Day off in Leuven. Thanks so much for last night

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## THE LAST WORD

### Serving everyone

"A lot of people call themselves Christian but have no faith. In that case, the celebration of communion makes little sense." A spokesperson for Antwerp bishop Johan Bonny, introducing the option of a less religious funeral

### Home-wreckers

"Half of couples said they had got to know their partner better during the works, but not in a good way." Stefan Hallez of construction company Maison Blavier, which commissioned a survey on the effect of renovations on relationships

### A bridge too far

"It took years to complete this project, and now this. A total scandal." Gaspard Van Peteghem, Sint-Niklaas councillor for public works, as a new cycle bridge over the Stekense Vaart must be demolished because it's too steep for cyclists to cross

### Keepin' on

"I'm overwhelmed by my 100th birthday> I did nothing to deserve it> I just kept breathing" Jan Verroken of Koksijde, Belgium's oldest Twitter user, turned 100

## PHOTO OF THE WEEK



© REUTERS/Francois Lenoir

**WING AND A PRAYER** A potential buyer inspects a bird at last weekend's Pigeon Olympiad in Brussels, a highlight of the pigeon-fancying community's calendar. This racing pigeon was on sale for €2,500



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