

Belgium Today

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SPEAKING OUT AGAINST CLUB DRUGS

Belgian Ambassador Frans van Daele was in Chicago on October 20, along with Dutch Ambassador Boudewijn Van Eenennaam, at the invitation of Illinois Congressman Mark Kirk, to address some 2,000 students at Wheeling High School about their respective governments' efforts to cut the production and shipment of illegal "club drugs."

Ecstasy is the best known of the so called club drugs — pills ingested primarily by teenagers and young adults in night clubs or at all-night dance parties. The synthetic substance, known technically as methylenedioxy methamphetamine (MDMA), is manufactured clandestinely in Belgium and the Netherlands and is shipped by organized drug traffickers to the U.S.

The ready availability of the drug at low cost to young people throughout the country has American health officials very concerned: ecstasy can precipitate heart attacks or strokes and can cause a variety of other adverse effects.

Acknowledging that its small size, efficient road and transportation system and large numbers of exports have unfortunately made Belgium a country of choice for producers

and traffickers of synthetic drugs, Ambassador van Daele told the students that Belgium has made the fight against club drugs a very high priority.

"The government has a proactive approach and acts on many fronts simultaneously," explained van Daele. "We are developing a strong awareness policy—at the local, national and European levels." Belgium has strengthened anti-narcotics law enforcement: its authorities actively investigate individuals and organizations involved with illicit drugs trafficking into and through Belgium.

The country is also providing special training for non-uniformed personnel at Brussels Zaventem airport, in a focused effort to stop the flow of ecstasy to the United States. Their searches of passengers, luggage and freight have paid off: more than five million tablets were seized in 2002.

Belgium is committed to international cooperation in fighting illegal drugs, which has included the signing a mutual assistance treaty with the U.S. in 2000. As a result, the exchange of information between U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency officials and Belgian authorities continues to expand.

ANTI-TERRORISM CAMPAIGN CONTINUES

On September 30 Nizar Trabelsi, a Tunisian national, and Tarek Marroufi, a Tunisian-born Belgian, were both sentenced in Brussels, the first for planning an attack against the NATO base in Kleine Brogel and the second for providing stolen passports to the murderers of the Afghan Northern Alliance Leader Ahmed Shah Massoud. These convictions are recent examples of Belgium's commitment to the global fight against terrorism.

Belgium has been active on many fronts of the war on terrorism, including at the European level. Under Belgium's EU Presidency, Europe reacted rapidly and strongly to the attacks of September 11, 2001, and many fundamental decisions made by the EU and its member states at that time have become policy. Before the end of 2001, the UN Convention on terrorism financing was ratified, the Security Council resolutions on the freezing of terrorists' assets were implemented; and an EU Clearing House responsible for compiling lists of terrorist groups was created. Framework decisions defining the crime of terrorism and establishing a European arrest warrant were approved in 2002 and a treaty

between the EU and the U.S. on extradition and mutual legal assistance was signed in June 2003.

At the national level, Belgium has been equally active. In March 2001, it modified its passport and the new document is now considered one of the most secure passports in the world (see sidebar, below). The Government also overhauled its system of passport production and delivery —creating a centralized facility where passports are manufactured, stored and issued, and effectively preventing theft and fraud.

Belgian police apply the most innovative and modern methods, such as the Cash Watch that earlier this year was

launched at the Brussels airport and has proved successful in combating attempts at money laundering. The Belgian military is engaged in Operation Enduring Freedom and backs NATO efforts targeted at terrorism.

Bilateral cooperation between Belgium and the U.S. is both close and strong: Belgium fully complies with the mutual legal assistance treaty and U.S. Customs officials are permanently present at the Port of Antwerp.

KUDOS FOR NEW PASSPORT

The new tamper-resistant Belgian passport is recognized as one of the most fail-safe travel documents in the world. Since its introduction in 2001, not a single one has been successfully forged. At its latest general assembly, held in Spain at the end of September, Interpol presented Belgium a "special award" for the passport, acknowledging that it incorporates the latest technologies for preventing counterfeiting.

BELGIUM RETAINS IMPORTANT SEATS AT IMF & WORLD BANK

For the next ten years, Belgium will continue to have a director's seat on the International Monetary Fund's Executive Board. The Executive Board is responsible for conducting the day-to-day business of the IMF. It is composed of 24 Directors. The five largest shareholders (France, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States) appoint an Executive Director, while other member countries are represented by 19 Executive Directors elected within constituencies. Belgium is in the largest constituency with 5.15% of the Fund's shares.

An agreement among Belgium and its constituency partners (Luxembourg, Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey, Kazakhstan and Belarus) recently confirmed that the executive director representing this constituency for the next decade will be the Belgian representative Willy Kiekens.

At the World Bank, there are four Boards of Executive Directors representing the institutions of the Group: the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the International Development Association (IDA), the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA). On these Boards, Belgium is member of a constituency grouping the same countries as the at the IMF. The position of Executive Director of IDA, IBRD as well as Director of IFC is alternatively occupied by Belgium and Austria. Gino Alzetta is at present Alternate (Executive) Director at the IDA, IBRD and IFC. He is also director at the MIGA.

With these positions, the Belgian representatives control an important voting power, roughly equivalent to that of countries like Japan, Germany or the UK.

MORE TROOPS FOR AFGHANISTAN

Belgium, which has been a participant in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) since February of this year, has recently decided to commit to ISAF IV. Operating under a United Nations mandate and now led by NATO, ISAF offers help to the Afghan Government as it develops a national security structure.

The Belgian input in ISAF IV will consist of 220 military personnel from the Liberation Regiment —5th Line of Leopoldsburg, the Air Component and the Medical Component of the Belgian Defense forces.

As of the beginning of November, the Belgian military will continue to secure the Kabul International Airport. This will be the third Belgian contingent assigned this responsibility since February. The main tasks will be to guard the airport's control and check points, to assure the escort of VIPs, and to decontaminate contaminated vehicles. The Belgian detachment will also perform logistical tasks at the airport and administer medical care to all ISAF personnel. All of this will make it possible to land and take off safely at KIA so that supplies, vital for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, can be flown in.

At a later date (not yet set), Belgium will also participate, together with Germany, in the PRT (Provincial Reconstruction Team) of Kunduz, thereby expanding its activities into the interior of Afghanistan.

GET ENOUGH BELGIAN NEWS?

Do Belgian citizens living abroad keep themselves informed about current events in Belgium? Which topics are they most interested in: politics, economics, cultural events, sports? Through which media do they get their information and do they have ideas or suggestions to improve the stream of information? These are some of the questions to which the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs would like answers. Belgians living in the United States who want to participate in this survey can send their comments to *Belgium Today*, or more easily, fill out a questionnaire that is available on the Embassy's Web site: www.diplobel.us.

Our friends at the Belgian Tourist Office have moved. Their new address is:
Belgian Tourist Office
220 East 42nd Street, Suite 3402
New York, NY 10017

BREVIA

On October 3, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum signed an agreement of cooperation with the Belgian National Archives that will permit the Museum to survey and microfilm Holocaust-related records held by those Archives. These records will be made available to researchers through the USHMM's archives.

In recent weeks there have been important developments concerning complaints filed against Americans under the Belgian legislations to combat serious breaches of international humanitarian law (formerly called the universal competence law). On September 24, the Court of Cassation formally withdrew from the Belgian judiciary the accusations filed against former President Bush, Dick Cheney, Colin Powell and Norman Schwarzkopf in connection with Desert Storm. A day earlier the Brussels Court of Appeals rejected a procedural move aimed at the Government's decision to transmit to U.S. authorities a complaint against General Tommy Franks related to the war in Iraq.

This fall, Ford announced drastic measures to improve its profitability through the reduction of its production and work force all over the world. One of the measures concerns the Ford plant in Genk, in the Province of Limburg. A planned investment of 900 million euros was canceled and the existing assembly of the Mondeo model will be reduced from three to two shifts. The decision by Ford will result in a loss of up to 3,000 jobs at Ford and among small and medium-sized subcontractors. The economic cost might be as high as 0.25 of GNP. The labor force at Ford Genk has protested and negotiations are now underway with the unions on severance packages. More positive news is that Ford has announced that the new model of the Mondeo will be produced in Genk, thus guaranteeing the future of the car plant from 2006.

CORPORATIONS AND KBFUS ENABLED 17 ATLANTA ARTISTS TO DISCOVER BELGIUM

Thanks to a three year partnership between the King Baudouin Foundation United States (KBFUS) and the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta seventeen Atlanta-based artists have had an opportunity to further their artistic development through travel and residencies in Belgium and other European countries. The grants were awarded by the KBFUS Cultural Exchange Program.

“The KBFUS was founded to facilitate transatlantic philanthropy. Through the success of this unique program, we also accomplish our broader objective of increasing understanding between the United States and Europe,” said Jean Paul Warmoes, KBFUS executive secretary. “We are most grateful to the corporations that embraced this concept and enabled the program to be so successful.” Supporters include The Coca-Cola Foundation and Belgian corporations such as Barco, Bekaert, Solvay Pharmaceuticals and UCB.

The Exchange Program was open to a variety of professional artists living in the Atlanta region, where the KBFUS has an office. Applicants were required to include a link to Belgian culture in their proposals and were asked how they would “give back” to the Atlanta community upon their return. Each artist selected to receive a grant consulted with the KBFUS to arrange a tailor-made program; the average stay was one month.

Once in Belgium, grantees were expected to engage in significant artistic expression, participate in international conferences and festivals and/or create new work. Some established links with Belgian artists and local cultural organizations and several stayed in private homes. For many of the selected artists, the KBFUS Cultural Exchange provided a first-time opportunity to travel outside the United States.

Such was the case for Etienne Jackson, a 1998 graduate of Morehouse College in Atlanta and an emerging sculptor and community activist, who has a strong interest in public art and public art policy. Jackson traveled to Brussels where the King Baudouin Foundation arranged an intensive public art tour for him. He then became a resident artist in Arnhem, The Netherlands, at the SLAK Guest Studio, where he developed a new drawing series, participated in a printmaking workshop and became quite involved in the Dutch art scene. Later in Antwerp, he joined fellow KBFUS grantee Freddie Styles to view public art there.

“These are things that I may not have had a chance to do otherwise. The experience broadened my perspective as an artist and as a person and helped me to appreciate the importance of experiencing other cultures,” said Jackson. He is now applying his knowledge and experience in his new position as public art coordinator for the City of Atlanta.

Although the three year cultural exchange concludes at the end of 2003, organizers are hopeful that additional supporters will step forward to continue the program.

BACC HONORS CHOREOGRAPHER

The Belgian American Chamber of Commerce will present its annual Friendship Award to Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, one of the most significant contemporary choreographers working in Europe. Born in Wommel, Belgium, De Keersmaeker studied at Mudra, Maurice Béjart’s school in Brussels, and later at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts. In 1992, De Keersmaeker and the troupe she founded, Rosas, were invited to be the resident choreographer and dance company of Brussels’ Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie. There, De Keersmaeker also directs P.A.R.T.S., the international contemporary dance school that she founded. Her work has been highly acclaimed in the U.S. and she has been the recipient of numerous awards, including four Bessies.

DOES SANTA HAVE BELGIAN ANCESTORS?

Santa Claus, a Belgian thing? Well, sort of...let’s say an embodiment of the tradition of Saint Nicholas, who himself could have been an embodiment of pagan deities such as Gargantua and Odin/Wotan.

The real Saint Nick lived in Asia Minor at the end of the second /beginning of the third centuries AD, was from a wealthy family and was ordained bishop of Myra (South Western Turkey) at a rather young age. He died on December 6, 326, and is celebrated in the Catholic Church on the sixth of December.

During the Middle Ages, facts morphed into legend: St. Nicholas became hugely popular and was credited with miracles. In the popular tradition of the Low Countries, the saint from Myra was recast as a Spaniard! Along the way, he became surrounded with popular creeds associated with Saint Michael, Odin and even... Gargantua. So writes Alain de Maisonneuve (*Et si les fêtes m’étaient contées*, Editions de l’Etoile, Brussels, 1998) who reports that the benevolent qualities of the Celtic idol were transferred to the popular image of the Saint.

But, like the German deity Wotan/Odin, Saint Nicholas (as Santa) travels through the air. As Flemish poet Guido Gezelle observed, Saint Nick received attributes of Odin (the former rides a donkey, whereas Odin rode a horse), and was placated with similar offerings, for instance leaving a bushel of wheat on the harvested field...

In Belgium and the Netherlands, on the eve of December 6, the children leave a plate of vegetables in the fireplace for Saint Nicholas’s flying donkey. After the veggies are consumed by the beast, the Saint leaves toys and goodies for the child to discover on the morning of the 6th.

It seems that old Saint Nick took his transatlantic flight in the early XIXth century, and was introduced first in New York (hardly a surprise, as the city was founded by colonists from the Low Countries : Peter Minuit had “Belgian” origins). The first mention of Santa, it seems, was in a book by Clement Clark Moore (a professor of theology) in 1822, in a poem composed for his six children. He would later be sketched by Thomas Nast in *Harper’s Magazine* in 1868, with roughly his contemporary (definitive?) appearance. But that is another story...

EVENTS OF INTEREST

Through December 10 — New York, NY

Julia Calfee is exhibiting a collection of photographs *Spirits and Ghosts: Journeys through Mongolia*, at the 92nd Street Y Art Gallery. Info: 212 415-5479

Through December 30 — Los Angeles, CA

Exhibition of paintings by Bruno Vekemans at Lucas, LA. Info: 310 777-8816

November 5-10 — Los Angeles, CA

Kim Clijsters and Justine Henin will participate in the Bank of American WTA Tour Championship, at the Staples Center. Info: 1 866 WTA CHAMP

November 6 & 8 — Silver Spring, MD

Film *Any Way the Wind Blows*, directed by Tom Barman, included in the European Union Film Showcase, at the American Film Institute's Silver Theatre. Info: 301 495-6720

November 9 — Naugatuck, CT

Belgian Beer Festival, co-hosted by Mountainview Plaza Wines and Liquors and the Colorado Brewery and Steakhouse. Info: 203 729-5445

November 12 — Whittier, CA

The Rubio String Quartet and Patrick Riguelle perform "The Juliet Letters," music written by Elvis Costello, at the Shannon Center of Whittier College. Info: www.shannoncenter.org

November 12 — New York, NY

The Belgian-American Chamber of Commerce hosts its annual Friendship Award Dinner. Info: 212 672-1632

November 12-15 — Brooklyn, NY

Rain, performed by Rosas and choreographed by Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker, at Brooklyn Academy of Music. Info: 718 636-4100

November 14 — Atlanta, GA

A sumptuous gastronomic feast will be the highlight of the annual *Taste of Belgium*, hosted by the Belgian American Chamber of Commerce, Southern Chapter, at the Swissôtel in Buckhead. Info: 404 870-8085

November 14—30 — Various Cities

Gustave et Alexandre, a play written by Jean-François Viot in honor of the bicentennial of Alexandre Dumas' birth, performed in French with English subtitles, will be presented in Miami, FL 11/14; San Juan, PR 11/15; Washington, DC 11/18; Chicago, IL 11/19; Atlanta, GA 11/24 & 25; Montreal, Canada 11/29&30. Info: 202 234-7911

A BIT OF BELGIUM IN THE BAHAMAS

Over 12,000 people were attracted to the ninth International Cultural Weekend in New Providence, Bahamas, which took place on October 18 & 19. They had the opportunity to enjoy cultural presentations, cuisine, drinks, fashion, music, arts and crafts from over fifty countries.

The Belgian booth featured beers from Interbrew, Cote d'Or and Corné chocolates, "speculoos" cookies, and many small items made of lace, pewter or crystal. Hervé Kelecom, Belgium's recently appointed honorary consul in Nassau and organizer of the booth, reported that 1100 beers and 375 pounds of chocolate were sold. All profits made by the various participating countries are given to worthy causes; proceeds from the Belgian booth will be donated to the various charities of the Rotary Club of East Nassau.



Belgium's honorary consul in Nassau, Hervé Kelecom, proudly sporting the costume of a "Gille de Binche," stands in front of a van transformed into a "frietkot" or "friture" —where Belgian fries were made and served with traditional, imported, sauces.

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