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STATE OF THE UNION SPEECH



Belgian Prime Minister
Guy Verhofstadt

Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt gave the traditional "State of the Union" declaration on October 11, the opening day of the Belgian parliamentary session.

In his speech, he detailed the measures that the Government is taking to further the economic performance of the country. For several years now, the Belgian economy has been performing better than the European average, and, with an expected growth of 2.3%, this should again be the case in 2006.

The Prime Minister confirmed policy measures to improve employment and to stimulate investment, innovation and creativity. This will happen in the context of the recently negotiated agreement with the social partners, to ensure harmonious labor market relations, and will reinforce the high quality of life in the country.

The Government's ambitious goals will be pursued, for the seventh year in a row, in the framework of a balanced budget. Its public debt, once one of the highest among European countries, will decrease to the average debt ratio of the countries of the European Union.

Verhofstadt stressed the importance of giving new momentum to the European project, to reinforce the competitiveness of the European economy and to consolidate political cooperation among the Member States. Belgium will continue its dynamic and engaged foreign policy, bilaterally as well as in international forums, with a view of promoting international understanding, development and trade. In this context, Belgium will take up the Presidency of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2006.

At the start of this new parliamentary year it is especially the intended changes in the prevalent system of so-called "pre-retirement" which have attracted much attention.

The full text of the Prime Minister's speech can be found, in Dutch and in French, at www.premier.fgov.be.

PRAISE FOR BELGIAN FOREIGN AID POLICY

On October 26, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) presented the draft version of its final report on Belgian development cooperation. The report commended Belgium's policy and the budget allocated to carry it out.

Like all members of OECD/DAC, every four or five years Belgium's development cooperation is subjected to scrutiny in a so-called 'peer review,' which is regarded as a learning process from which Belgium and other donor countries can benefit.

During the presentation, Minister of Development Cooperation Armand De Decker reiterated the official commitment by the Belgian Government to succeed in earmarking 0.7% of Belgium's GNP to public development aid by 2010. Much of this effort focuses on the fundamental development sectors of food, drinking water, education/training and basic healthcare.



Development Minister
Armand De Decker

The "targeting" of Belgium's bilateral Official Development Aid (ODA) on the poorest countries is well above the DAC average. That emphasis indicates a deliberate effort to concentrate ODA in terms of the relative poverty of recipient countries, first and foremost in sub-Saharan Africa.

For Belgium, combating poverty holds a central place in efforts to achieve sustainable development. Its reference to the political dimension of poverty points out that globalization entails risks as well as advantages and that peace and security are essential preconditions for establishing sustainable development.

In the African Great Lakes Region Belgium has a comprehensive program that couples respect for the safety and freedom of men and women living in insecure circumstances due to war and social injustice, with its priority aim of combating poverty. This effort goes hand in hand with special attention to the rights of children, who are the first victims of poverty and war.

It is critical for Belgium's aid to be focused on real needs, cognizant of the on-site realities and the often difficult contexts, and guided by the principles of good governance and the fight against corruption.

Belgium continues to draw inspiration from the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in order to meet these requirements. As a result, its priorities focus specifically upon promoting the equality of men and women and upon the massive challenge presented by the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other poverty-related diseases.

People-oriented non-governmental organizations remain Belgium's preferred partners for development cooperation. They make a valuable contribution and complement other institutions and mechanisms that provide aid.

MINISTERIAL CHANGES

This fall reshufflings have occurred in both the Federal and the Walloon Regional cabinets. The first followed a completely unexpected move by the Head of the Flemish Socialist Party (Sp.A), Steve Stevaert, who accepted an appointment to become governor of his native Limburg Province. Technically, the move to a governorship equals leaving political life – at least temporarily – since a governor has to remain above the fray.

When Stevaert relinquished his chairmanship of the Sp.A in mid-October, he was succeeded by Johan Vande Lanotte, who until then had been Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Budget & State Corporations. Labor Minister Freya Van Den Bossche took over Vande Lanotte's job; her title is Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Budget and Consumer Protection. Peter Vanvelthoven, State Secretary in charge of Computer policy in Administration, was promoted to Labor Minister, while Bruno Tuybens, a banker and prominent figure with Amnesty International, was appointed State Secretary in charge of State Corporations, attached to the Budget Minister.

On the Regional level, at the end of September, Wallonia's Minister-President Jean-Claude Van Cauwenbergh resigned from his position, and was succeeded in early October by... his predecessor, Head of the French-Speaking Socialist Party (PS), Elio Di Rupo. The latter will carry out the Walloon Region's new economic recovery program.

BRAINPORT FLANDERS

The United States attracts high quality researchers from all over the world, and Flanders is no exception. The Flemish Government is taking steps to ensure that Flemish scientists in the U.S. remain aware of initiatives to improve career and funding opportunities for scientists in Flanders.

Interest from the expatriate science community seems to be running high. About 70 Flemish researchers working in the U.S. attended a seminar on October 28, in New York, called "Brainport Flanders." Flemish Minister for Science & Innovation Fientje Moerman gave two policy speeches at the seminar dealing with transatlantic R&D, and mobility and cooperation between Flanders and the United States.

Moerman also listened to personal testimonials from scientists, and participated actively in a lively debate focused on issues such as distribution channels for research vacancies at universities, the selection process, grant mechanisms in Flanders, and the link between basic research and industrial innovation. Legal issues such as financial and linguistic barriers for international researchers for moving from the U.S. to Flanders, dual nationality, and local patents and intellectual property laws were raised as well.

Minister Moerman outlined a new program to attract more researchers to Flanders. The "Odysseus" program will have a budget of up to 12 million euros in 2006 to finance a return of scientists to Flanders. Top scientists can get between 1.2 and 1.5 million euros, while promising young scientists can expect between 300,000 and 400,000 euros. An international jury will determine the level of scientific achievement. The "Methusalem" program gives top scientists in Flanders long-term financing. The program will have a budget of 3 million euros in 2006. Researchers who leave Flanders will lose the funding.

The seminar was seen by the Minister as the beginning of a more structured dialogue with expatriate scientists in the U.S.

AVIAN FLU

European Union countries are developing plans to fight a possible bird flu pandemic. After meetings with EU health ministers in October, Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt named Federal Food Agency director Piet Vanthemsche "avian flu czar." Vanthemsche will be responsible for coordinating measures against the spread of the disease in Belgium. Scientists from several Belgian universities are working with the Government to determine risks and create preventive measures.

While there are no plans to vaccinate the entire population, Belgium is building up a stock of anti-viral medication. This will be used for people at risk, depending on need. The Government also will spend some 5 million euros to take a place on a flu vaccine waiting list, which should guarantee 350,000 doses, once it is developed. On the preventive front, as of October 31, Belgian poultry farmers have been required to keep their birds indoors, out of reach of migrating birds.

For information on the Avian flu, including general preventive measures and recommendations for Belgians living abroad, please see the Embassy's Web site: www.diplobel.us

FRIENDSHIP AWARDS TO PFIZER, UCB

The Belgian American Chamber of Commerce in New York gave a nod to the biotech industry on November 7 when it presented its annual Friendship Award to Pfizer and UCB. Accepting the awards were Karen Katen, Vice Chairman of Pfizer, Inc., and Baron Jacobs, Chairman of the UCB Group.

Pfizer, an American company, markets many of the world's best known medicines. Its over-the-counter and prescription medications are widely available in Belgium.

Brussels-based UCB is a global biopharmaceutical company with operations in over forty countries. Forty percent of its biopharmaceutical sales are in the U.S., where its allergy medications Zyrtec and Xyzal are doing well, and its epilepsy treatment Keppra is in top position.

A recent study designed to assess biopharmaceutical innovation in the OECD Member States found that, in terms of innovation and industry development, Belgium is the best performing country. The study based its results on the number of biopharmaceutical patent applications, the number of drugs under development, the venture capital invested in biotechnology and the number of biotech companies. The report pointed out that, especially in terms of biopharmaceutical innovation, Belgium is the brightest star in the OECD firmament. One out of every twenty new medicines discovered in the world comes from Belgium.

FATHER HENNEPIN REMEMBERED



Photo taken in 1930 of the Father Hennepin Statue (Embassy archives)

Officials of the Basilica of Saint Mary in Minneapolis, Minnesota, organized a civic commemoration to mark the 75th anniversary of the dedication of the statue of Father Louis Hennepin, a Belgian missionary, which stands in front of the cathedral. They invited civic authorities from Minneapolis and St. Paul and other leaders from throughout Minnesota to celebrate the memory of Father Hennepin, who was a priest as well as an explorer author, and historian.

Born in Ath in 1640, Father Hennepin was a Franciscan friar, who became part of a French missionary expedition sent first to Canada. He traveled to Quebec and Ontario and then to Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota and other areas

around the Great Lakes. He named St. Anthony's Falls in Minnesota, the only waterfall in the Mississippi River, and is also said to have discovered Niagara Falls.

Father Hennepin is credited with being the first European to explore the area that has grown into the city of Minneapolis. When the statue of him was unveiled in 1930, to a crowd of approximately 5,000, he was referred to as "Minneapolis' first citizen." Today, Minneapolis is part of Hennepin County, named in the missionary's honor, as is Father Hennepin State Park in Central Minnesota.

JEAN-MICHEL FOLON: AN APPRECIATION

One of Jean-Michel Folon's best loved images is the logo he did for the bicentennial of the French Revolution: three soaring birds. Throughout his life, he drew many other fanciful winged creatures and when he died on October 20, of leukemia, at age 71, the Belgian press announced "He has flown off with his birds, towards the pastel skies he depicted so well..."

Folon was born in Brussels in 1934 and after briefly studying architecture, opted for drawing instead and moved to France. He quickly developed a style that was immediately popular with Americans and he provided illustrations for magazines like Esquire, The New Yorker, Fortune and the Atlantic Monthly. Time featured a Folon drawing on its cover four times.

Steven Heller, writing for the *New York Times* (October 22) describes his style: "His pen line was simple, bordering on naïve, and his luminous watercolor palette was intentionally optimistic, but his subject matter was often downbeat, criticizing what he believed was relentless urban conformity and the loneliness it caused."

In 1977 Folon designed the poster for the (all American) Spoleto Festival. From the 70's on he exhibited in galleries in the United States. His ultimate accolade in this country came as a solo exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1990: "Folon's Follons" —his works that he retained in his own collection.



1978 Time Magazine cover by Folon

BREVIA

On October 4, **Princess Mathilde gave birth to her third child**, a son named Emmanuel. The baby is fourth in line for the throne, after his father, Prince Philippe, his sister Elisabeth (age 4) and his brother Gabriel (age 2). Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt called the birth of the new royal a joyful event for the entire country.

In a recently published survey conducted by the Economist Intelligence Unit to assess the "livability" of 127 cities worldwide, **Brussels** placed twentieth. Other cities that shared that ranking were Oslo, Norway; Auckland and Wellington, New Zealand; Berlin, Germany; and Osaka and Kobe, Japan. The survey took over 40 factors into consideration which were weighted across five different categories: Stability; Healthcare; Culture and Environment; Education; and Infrastructure.

Cyclist **Tom Boonen won the World Championship Men's Road Race** in Madrid at the end of September, becoming the 25th Belgian to hold the World Champ title. He completed the 169.6 mile race in 6 hours, 26 minutes, 10 seconds. Boonen, who turned 25 on October 15, has had a very good year, winning the Tour of Flanders, the Paris-Roubaix and two stages of the Tour de France.

André Waterkeyn, the engineer who had the idea of creating the **Atomium** for the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels, died on October 4. Immediately following his death, Brussels city authorities decided to name the upper ball in the Atomium in his memory. The Atomium is currently undergoing a refurbishment and is expected to reopen to the public in February.

In the article "From Trappist Monks, Heavenly Brew", published on September 25 in the *New York Times*, the virtues of Trappist beers were extolled. The author points out that "only six breweries in the world, all affiliated with Trappist monasteries in Belgium, are permitted to use the hexagonal seal designating each bottle an "Authentic Trappist Product"...but admits that "dozens of Belgian breweries make excellent versions of Trappist ales. A four member panel sampled 25 ales. Of the 10 judged the best, 8 were from Belgium and the "consensus favorite" was **Westmalle Belgium Trappist Triple**.

EVENTS OF INTEREST

Through November 19 — New York, NY

Ten new paintings by Luc Tuymans, including a portrait of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, at the David Zwirner Gallery. Info: 212 727-2070

Through December 10 — New York, NY

Images of Belgian Resistance, wartime photos of Belgians during the German occupation paired with portraits of them today, at The Cooper Union, Arthur A. Houghton, Jr. Gallery. Info: 212 353-4195

Through December 24 — New York, NY

Fernand Vanderplancke is the artist in residence at the Agora Gallery. Info: 212 226-4151

Through December 24 — New York, NY

Memling's Portraits at the Frick Collection. Info: 212 288-0700

Through January 1 — New York, NY

Fred Eerdekens solo exhibition at the Spencer Brownstone Gallery. Info: 212 334-3455

Through January 6 — New York, NY

Paintings by Paul-Henri Bourguignon (1906-1988), at the Island Weiss Gallery. Info: 212 861-4608

November 8-13 — New York, NY

Anne Teresa DeKeersmaecker, in a solo dance performance to the music of Joan Baez, at the Joyce Theater. Tickets: 212 334-7479

November 8-22 — Silver Spring, MD

European Union Film Showcase — new prize-winning films from the EU, at the AFI Silver Theatre. (See article at right.) Tickets may be purchased at the box office or online at www.afi.com/silver/new

November 14 - March 9 — New York, NY

Producer Guy Joosten presents 11 performances of a new version of Gounod's *Romeo and Juliette*, sung in French with MET titles in English, at The Metropolitan Opera, Lincoln Center. Tickets: 212 362-6000

EUROPEAN UNION FILM SHOWCASE

All twenty-five Member States of the European Union will be represented in the 18th annual European Union Film Showcase, presented by the American Film Institute at the AFI Silver Theatre, in Silver Spring, Maryland, from November 8 through 22.

Belgium will be represented by two feature films. *Gilles' Wife* (La Femme de Gilles) by Frédéric Fonteyne, will be shown on Thursday, November 10 and Sunday, November 13. In a story set in a 1930s mining town, a woman shows unstinting devotion to her children and husband, and worries about the way her husband looks at her sister...

The Wedding Party (Die Bluthochzeit) by Dominique Deruddere, which will be screened on Thursday and Friday, November 17 and 18, is described as a "blackly comic thriller." Things go awry at a wedding set in a beautiful country inn, when the father of the groom starts a feud with the chef, the bride and her mother-in-law are held as collateral and mayhem ensues.

A third film from Belgium, *Self Portrait* by Stijn Coninx, will be shown as part of a special presentation called "Visions of Europe." Called an "omnibus" by the AFI, this program groups together twenty-five short films (each no longer than five minutes) from every country in the European Union. The filmmakers were asked to contribute a personal vision of current or future life in the EU. According to the AFI, "the resulting works convey both a unique vision of life in each filmmaker's country and an overall mosaic of the present-day European Union."

For the complete program of films in this year's showcase, please see the AFI Web site: www.afi.com/silver/new

CHRISTMAS MARKET IN BRUSSELS

Brussels will hold its annual European Christmas Market on the Place St. Catherine from December 2 through January 1. For more information, see the Web site of the Belgian Tourist Office: www.visitbelgium.com

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