

# Belgium Today

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## BELGIUM ELECTED TO UN PEACEBUILDING COMMISSION

The UN World Summit of Heads of State and Government, held in New York in September 2005, agreed upon a final document calling, among other things, for the creation of a Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). On May 12th Belgium was elected to the membership of this new body.

The PBC is to be an essential tool with which the international community will be able to assist countries that are coming out of an armed conflict. These countries require a comprehensive strategy and good coordination of all the different actors involved in the reconstruction process – such as the World Bank, the UN Security Council, bilateral donors and other international organizations.

The aim is to foster sustainable peace in post-conflict situations by improving, in the short term, the living conditions of the local populations. Disarmament and security sector reform are equally important tasks on the road to stability. The setting up of a political system that guarantees free and fair elections is also essential.

The Peacebuilding Commission is an advisory body which will give advice to the Security Council on the planning and commencement of peace-building activities. It is estimated that the Commission will take up four to five cases per year.

## MONUMENT TO BATTLE OF THE BULGE



### INAUGURATED ON VE-DAY

Prime Minister of Belgium Guy Verhofstadt (second from right) and Secretary of State for Culture of Luxembourg Octavie Modert (center), lay a wreath at the new memorial to the American soldiers who fought in the Battle of the Bulge, at Arlington Cemetery on May 8. The two government officials are accompanied by Lt. Gen. N. Ross Thompson, (Ret) (left), Secretary R. James Nicholson, Department of Veterans Affairs, (second from left) and Brig. Gen. Dany E. Van De Ven, Defense, Military, Naval and Air Attaché of Belgium (far right). Story on page 2.

## MILITARY PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN

Two large-scale military operations are currently underway in Afghanistan: Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in the eastern and southern parts of the country, led by the U.S., and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in the northern and western areas, led by NATO. For more than three-and-a-half years, Belgium has contributed to ISAF and is today still intensely involved in different missions.

The largest Belgian group (240 military personnel) is in charge of protecting the airport at Kabul. This airport is of vital importance for ISAF. On a yearly basis, 12,000 military flights provide support (personnel, supplies, equipment and material) to all ISAF units. At the main gate more than 2,000 vehicles are checked every day.

The second group (44 persons) is part of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) located at Kunduz (a city of 60,000, in the northern part of the country), which is led by Germany. There are about fifteen PRT's in ISAF's area of responsibility. These PRT's are structured as a civil-military partnership; their role is to facilitate the development of a secure environment and reconstruction in the Afghan regions including the establishment of relationships with local authorities. In particular, Belgium provides a mine-clearance squad, marshals to load/unload aircraft, medics and communications specialists.

The Belgian Defense Department also supports ISAF by providing seventeen Staff Officers at its headquarters in Kabul and fourteen Liaison Officers around the country.

## OSCE MEETS IN BRUSSELS

The Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE will hold its annual meeting in Brussels from July 3 to July 7. This fifteenth annual session of the OSCE PA—the previous one took place last year in Washington, DC—has 'Strengthening Human Security in the OSCE Region' as its main theme. The full program of the event can be found on the website of the PA (<http://www.oscepa.org/>).

The session will be held on the premises of the European Parliament and Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht will address the meeting in his capacity as Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE for 2006. The opening reception will take place at the Royal Palace of Laeken in the presence of His Royal Highness King Albert II. Parliamentary delegations are expected from all of the OSCE member countries, and will include one from Capitol Hill.

**BATTLE OF THE BULGE MEMORIAL DEDICATED**

Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt flew to Washington on VE-Day, Monday, May 8, to attend the dedication at Arlington National Cemetery of a new memorial to commemorate the sacrifices of the American soldiers who fought in the Battle of the Bulge. The monument is an initiative of the Association of the Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge, which the Embassies of Belgium and Luxembourg have been happy to support financially. The inauguration was an important event, honoring those who fought for our freedom, and reminding us of our common duty to defend democratic values and to promote peace and dialogue with all nations.

More than 300 veterans and their families attended the dedication. In addition to remarks from the Belgian Prime Minister (see excerpts, right), greetings were extended by Octavie Modert, Secretary of State for Culture of Luxembourg, James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and Congressman Christopher Smith from New Jersey, who sponsored this memorial in the U.S. Congress.



*Prime Minister pins medal on Stan Wojtusik*

After the ceremony, Ambassador Frans van Daele and his counterpart from Luxembourg, Ambassador Joseph Weyland, offered a reception at the Belgian residence for a delegation of veterans, their families and friends, and Administration officials.

During the reception, Prime Minister Verhofstadt bestowed the decoration “Knight in the Order of the Crown of the Kingdom of Belgium” on Stan Wojtusik, President of the Association of the Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge, and a driving force

**Excerpts from the PM’s remarks**

“The Battle of the Bulge was one of the worst of all battles. Altogether the battle claimed tens of thousands of casualties. Every single one of them was somebody’s friend, son, husband, or father. But they did not die in vain. They did not fight for nothing. In the Ardennes, they defeated the worst possible enemy. They crushed a dictatorship of hate, a dictatorship of racism, the ideology of the Holocaust.

Soldiers who fought in the Battle of the Bulge led the free world to victory. But they were not just victors. They were founders of freedom and democracy. They brought two strong pillars of the free world, America and Europe, back together again. The bond of Allies became a band of brothers. And on behalf of my country I would like to thank every veteran, every nurse and every citizen who made a contribution to this historic achievement to this triumph of courage.

For us you are more than soldiers.  
You are heroes.”

**BREVIA**

On May 26 some twenty thousand people took part in a silent march through Antwerp to protest mindless violence, racism and intolerance. The march was in reaction to an incident that occurred earlier in May which shocked the Belgian nation: a Belgian teenager shot and killed a 24-year-old Malinese nanny and the Belgian child in her care and seriously injured another woman — all three apparently selected at random— in an attack thought to be racially motivated.

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Within hours of the May earthquake that struck the Indonesian island of Java — the most serious natural disaster to befall the country since the tsunami of 2004— Belgium pledged a million euros to the international aid relief campaign. Belgium was one of the first countries to send a medical team — including two doctors and two nurses — to help surviving victims. The Foreign Ministry reported that the 21 Belgians living in the area were unharmed by the quake.

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Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt, Defense Minister André Flahaut, and Justice Minister Laurette Onkelinx attended the re-inauguration of the Belgian Pavilion in Auschwitz on May

7. The pavilion, located in the Auschwitz Museum, includes an exhibition dedicated to the Belgian Jews who were deported to the concentration camp in Poland during World War II. The Prime Minister stated that he and the other members of the delegation came to the ceremony “as witnesses to the truth, as witnesses to history. Every story of the Holocaust must be told, every detail preserved, every fact unveiled. We owe it to the victims, both to the dead and to the survivors.”

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In Ernst & Young’s annual European Attractiveness Survey, issued this year on June 7, Belgium ranked as the fourth most attractive country in Europe for foreign investment. Of the twenty countries evaluated by the consulting firm, only the United Kingdom, France and Germany were ahead of Belgium. Belgium attracted 180 of the 3,066 foreign investments in Europe in 2005. According to the study, Belgium’s success is due largely to investment extension: more than 38% of last year’s foreign investments involved expanding existing activities. The study is based on actual investment statistics for 2005 as well as a survey of 1000 business leaders world-wide. According to the latter, Belgium’s most important asset is the quality of its infrastructure in terms of transportation, logistics and telecommunications.

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## RIVERSDALE MANSION PROUD OF ITS BELGIAN PAST

Several miles north of Washington, D.C., in Prince George's County, Maryland, there is an early 19th century mansion with an important Belgian connection. Originally known as the Calvert Mansion and now called Riversdale, the house was built by Baron Henri Joseph Stier, a descendant of Peter Paul Rubens.

Stier and his family had come to United States in 1793, fleeing the Low Countries during the Reign of Terror, and bringing with them a significant collection of old-master paintings. In 1803, after Napoleon declared an amnesty and aristocrats no longer feared for their lives or their property, the Stiers returned to their home, the Château du Mick, near Antwerp. Their daughter Rosalie, however, had married into the Calvert family and remained in Maryland for the rest of her life. She bore nine children and with her husband, George, managed a plantation that grew to include some 2,000 acres (of which only seven and a half remain today). Completion of the house that her father started was a labor of love for Rosalie Stier Calvert and throughout the process she wrote letters to him, seeking advice about interior decoration and requesting furnishings from Belgium.

After the deaths of Rosalie and George Calvert, the house became the property of their son, Charles Benedict Calvert, who later founded the University of Maryland. It was sold by the Calvert family in 1887 and was subsequently used as a boarding house and a hotel, undergoing significant changes and repairs over the years. Prince George's County acquired the property in 1949. Thanks to a grant from the State of Maryland, a major renovation of the exterior was completed in the 90's. Riversdale opened as a museum in 1993 and was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1997.

Before the renovation began there was debate about which era the house should represent. Some thought the mansion should be restored to the way it was in the late nineteenth century, when it was sold by the Calvert family. After the discovery of a major stash of letters between Rosalie and her father, providing rich detail about how the house looked at the beginning, others felt that the mansion should be restored to what it was in 1837, the year in which George Calvert died. Ultimately, the latter viewpoint prevailed: the 1801-1837 period was deemed very important to American history, coinciding as it does with the first years of the young republic.



*Front view of Riversdale*

Today Riversdale is an historic house museum with interpretive programs designed for the general public. Many of the special events hosted at the mansion have a distinctly Belgian angle. In 1994, to honor the 200th anniversary of the arrival in the U.S. of the Stier family, Riversdale exhibited reproductions of some of the paintings in Baron Stier's collection. More recently, current director of Riversdale, Ed Day, has organized an annual "Fête fédérale" that strives to re-create holiday menus and decorations in the style of Rosalie Calvert.

Local writers and scholars have followed suit. Margaret Law Callcott has edited more than 230 letters that Rosalie Stier Calvert sent to her family in Belgium between 1795 and 1821: entitled *Mistress of Riversdale* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991) the collection of letters provides intimate details about family and social life in the early years of the 19th century.

These letters, in turn, proved to be an inspiration to Suzanne Pratt, director of Theatre Hopkins at Johns Hopkins University, who wrote two one-woman dramas, performed by actress Cherie Weinert. The first, "Caroline's Debut" includes descriptions of European fashions Rosalie Calvert ordered for her oldest daughter's debut. The second, "Mistress of Riversdale," reflects the burdens and pleasures of running a plantation.

Baron Stier's art collection—at the time possibly the most important private collection in the U.S. — was the impetus for a paper by University of Maryland Professor Jacqueline Letzer. In it she discusses the cultural implications of the public viewing of these works, organized by Rosalie and George Calvert in 1816, just before they were shipped back to Belgium.

Rosalie Stier Calvert has emerged as one of the most interesting early immigrants to the U.S. from Flanders. Her legacy lives on through her letters and through her home, Riversdale.

## THE SECRET IS OUT: BELGIAN EATS ARE IN

A visit to Belgique Pâtisserie & Chocolatier, in Kent, Connecticut, topped the list of "35 Things You Must Do This Summer" in the latest issue of *Travel Guide to New England*, published by *Yankee Magazine*. Belgian owner/chef Pierre Gilissen, formerly chef to the Dutch and British ambassadors in Washington, D.C., opened Belgique in 2000. The shop offers a variety of Belgian chocolates, both handmade and imported, and the magazine singled out the hot chocolate as worth the trip.

A Belgian restaurant creating a buzz on the East Coast is Belga Café, located on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. After its first year of operation, the Belga Café was nominated for two Rammy awards: "new restaurant of the year" and "neighborhood gathering place of the year." Chef Bart Vandaele is another Belgian who has made a smooth transition from embassy row to restaurant world. Belga Café is noted for its Belgian fusion fare. One example from the menu is the appetizer "Kip and Krab Sigaars," which features a European croquette-like filling and a crispy exterior served with sweet and sour and creamy curry sauces.

A traditional Belgian menu was requested of Pierre Burtonboy by the producers of the "Embassy Chefs" series on the American Life TV Network. Burtonboy, executive chef at the Belgian Ambassador's Residence in Washington, D.C., was happy to oblige. For the program he demonstrates classic Belgian fare: tomatoes filled with North Sea shrimp salad, pheasant breast stuffed with braised Belgian endive in a Belgian beer sauce, and, for dessert, a dark chocolate mousse with roasted nuts. (The episode airs again on July 13 at 6:30 p.m.)

EVENTS OF INTEREST

**Through July 30 — Los Angeles, CA**

The exhibition *Ensor's Graphic Modernism* unites James Ensor's great painting "Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889" (Getty Collection) with the artist's related prints, at the Getty Museum. Info: 310 440-7300

**Through July 31 — Las Vegas, NV**

*Rubens and His Age: Masterpieces from the Hermitage* at the Guggenheim Hermitage Museum within the Venetian Resort-Hotel-Casino. Info: 702 414-2440

**Through October 31 — New York, NY**

*Antwerp=America, Eugeen Van Mieghem and the Emigrants of the Red Star Line*, at the South Street Seaport Museum. Info: www.southstseaport.org

**June 20-24 — East Coast**

Pop singer Helmut Lotti performs timeless classics — *Love Me Tender, La Bamba, Toreador, Santa Lucia...*

— **June 20, 8 pm — Schenectady, NY**  
Proctors Theatre 518 346-6204

— **June 21, 8 pm — Providence, RI**  
Providence Performing Arts Center  
401 421-2787

— **June 22, 8 pm — Baltimore, MD**  
Joseph Meyerhoff Symphony Hall 410 783 8000

— **June 23, 8 pm — NY, NY**  
Avery Fisher Hall 212 721-6500

— **June 24, 8 pm — Hagerstown, MD**  
Maryland Theatre 301 790-2000

**July 15 — Cooperstown, New NY**

Annual *Belgium Comes to Cooperstown* festival includes beer sampling, draft horse exhibits, amusements. Info: 800 544-1809

**July 22 - 25 — Washington, DC and vicinity**

The Antwerp Chamber Duo, Jef vanBoven, flute, and Michel Verkempinck, classical guitar, at the Lyceum in Alexandria (7/22); at St. Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Bethesda (7/23); and "Live" on Woodrow Wilson Plaza, Washington, DC (7/25) Info: 301 809-5867



SUMMER FUN IN BELGIUM

The **Atomium**, a replica of an iron molecule built for the 1958 World's Fair, has long been one of Brussels' favorite tourist destinations. The nine-globe structure underwent an 18-month, \$32 million renovation and re-opened to the public earlier this year. Inside are exhibitions and an observation gallery that offers great views of Brussels.

From August 12-15 a **Flower Carpet** of 800,000 begonias will cover the cobblestones of Brussels' Grand' Place. The theme for this year is a traditional carpet of the late middle ages; the design will remain a closely guarded secret until the 100 gardeners responsible for its installation work their magic in less than four hours.

Thirty leading international artists will participate in **Beaufort Outside**, a seaside "art trail" that extends to ten coastal towns, through October 1. Each artist has been invited to work in a specific location with an existing work of art or one specially made for 2006 Beaufort. Renowned American sculptor Louise Bourgeois will send a gigantic spider.

The **Festival of Flanders** features more than 150 concerts, many of which are held in the medieval atmosphere of abbeys, cathedrals and city halls throughout Flanders. For a complete schedule of concerts, which run through the beginning of fall, please see [www.festivalvanvlaanderen.be](http://www.festivalvanvlaanderen.be)

On August 15 the annual **International Bathtub Regatta** takes place on the Meuse River. Competitors vie to create the most hilarious tub floating down the river. Close by is Dinant, with its 16th century citadel, and the Gardens of Annevoie.

*For more information on these events and suggestions of other activities, please visit the Belgian Tourist Office at [www.visitbelgium.com](http://www.visitbelgium.com)*

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