

Belgium Today

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PM ANNOUNCES FEDERAL POLICY

“Our country’s economy is in good shape. The stake now consists in maintaining this result.”

This is in essence the message that Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt gave to the Chamber of Representatives on October 17 in the “Declaration of General Policy” that will mark the last months of his government before the 2007 elections.

“Growth is tangible, investments are multiplying, the entrepreneurship spirit has taken hold and employment is proliferating,” affirmed the Prime Minister. He recalled the commitment to create 200,000 jobs made by the government at the beginning of the legislative session. It was an ambitious objective and last year Verhofstadt recognized that he might not be able to reach it. This year he showed himself more optimistic. And he quoted Eurostat’s latest figures showing that since 2003, 157,000 jobs were created in real terms. The Prime Minister believes the initial goal of 200,000 jobs is still within reach.

The Prime Minister also gave an outline of the budgetary situation (budgetary surplus of 0.3%, national debt reduced to 83.7% of GDP), cited policies that improve social benefits, and referred to the increase in the development co-operation budget that now brings it to .55% of GDP. “We are thus perfectly within the deadlines to reach 0.7% of GDP by 2010,” said Verhofstadt. He also devoted a long passage to the Kyoto plan and the fight against global warming, and in this context justified a new tax on non-recyclable packaging.

He stressed that the government has reinforced its social policy and underlined the importance of the Fund for Ageing and the creation of a Fund for the Future of the Health Care System. Next year’s budget also bolsters the policy that the government has followed for several years of increasing Belgians’ purchasing power. The Prime Minister also cited the housing plan, the energy sector and the reforms in the justice system that led to the hiring of new penitentiary agents and the establishment of courts for sentencing.

On the foreign policy front, Verhofstadt thanked Belgium’s peacekeeping troops operating in Lebanon, Afghanistan and the Balkans and underscored the country’s commitment to the democratic transition in Congo.

BELGIUM WILL JOIN UN SECURITY COUNCIL

Belgium has been elected to serve a two-year term as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, beginning on January 1, 2007. Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht was very pleased about Belgium’s election. “Being part of the Security Council gives Belgium a central role to play on the international scene,” said the Minister. “The task of the Security Council is to manage crises around the world. To me it serves as something of a global “core cabinet.... I’m a firm believer in taking a multilateral approach to the major challenges facing the international community, so I think it’s really important that our country is being given a chance to make a constructive contribution at the highest level over the two years in question. My experience as OSCE Chairman has taught me that Belgium’s enthusiasm, serious-mindedness, pragmatism and hard-working attitude can win it the respect of the member states and gain it a reputation for acting as a mediator in conflicts. I hope to achieve the same result within the UN Security Council.”

MEGAPORTS INITIATIVE UP AND RUNNING IN ANTWERP

Ninety percent of the world’s trade occurs via container cargo shipped in and out of seaports. The Port of Antwerp is one of the world’s largest seaports and a major player in the container cargo business. Indeed, in 2005 the Port of Antwerp moved 6 million containers, one million of which went to North America. The volume of containerized goods was 74.6 million tons. Over the last 10 years container tonnage in Antwerp has risen by 42.5 million tons, or 165%. Containers are also handled by other Belgian ports, such as Zeebrugge and Ghent.

To ensure that the international container trade remains safe, the U.S. and Belgium have been cooperating for years on the Container Security Initiative. Through CSI, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials work with the Belgian Customs Service to establish security criteria for identifying high-risk containers.

On October 19, in Antwerp, Minister of Finance Didier Reynders and U.S. Ambassador Tom Korologos officially expanded the cooperation between CPB and Belgian Customs to yet another security project, the Megaports Initiative. This initiative, which was launched by the U.S. National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) of the Department of Energy in 2003, is designed to keep illicit nuclear and other radioactive materials out of the global maritime system. The program provided for the installation of radiation detection equipment in the Port of Antwerp and for the training of personnel to specifically check for nuclear or other radioactive materials. The combined U.S. and Belgian investment in this project total more than \$50 million.

This is the biggest Megaports project world-wide, covering ten container terminals across 33,370 acres. Responding to the challenges of fully equipping a port of Antwerp’s size and activity level meant arriving at some innovative solutions that other countries may wish to emulate. Antwerp has become a world showcase for radiation detection technology as a cutting-edge secure port.

PREPARING FOR THE FEDERAL ELECTIONS

The Belgian Constitution stipulates that Parliamentary elections must take place every four years and the next elections are expected to be held between March and June 2007.

The last elections (2003), which led to the formation of the Verhofstadt II government, were also the first elections to see the participation of a large number of Belgians living abroad who are not registered in a Belgian municipality. More than 60% of the registered Belgians living in the United States showed up at the polling places created for them. The experience of successfully organizing these parliamentary elections abroad has led the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to develop new administrative procedures and computer programs that should facilitate the upcoming elections.

All Belgians living abroad who are eligible to participate in the 2007 elections will receive a mailing that will include all necessary information and they will be invited to register on the elector lists. The registration deadline is January 31, 2007.

Participation in the elections of the members of the House of Representatives and the Senate is considered a civic duty and is mandatory for Belgians.

Belgians who are accepted on the elector lists will, as in 2003, have five voting options. They may vote:

- 1) in person, in a municipality in Belgium
- 2) by power of attorney in Belgium
- 3) in person at the Embassy in Washington, DC, or at the Consulates General in Los Angeles and New York or the Consulate in Atlanta
- 4) by power of attorney at the Embassy or the Consulates mentioned above
- 5) by correspondence

For more information, please visit the federal portal Web site: www.belgium.be

BREVIA

Belgium is one of the safest vacation destinations in the world. In a survey conducted by Norwich Union, a British insurance company, based on claims filed by vacationers, Belgium came in second, behind Ireland. Belgium's immediate neighbors, The Netherlands, Germany and France, followed. The survey took into account a wide range of problems that can beset tourists including risks of theft, stomach troubles, traffic accidents and insect bites.

Next May, Northwest Airlines will begin **non-stop flights between Detroit and Brussels**. The plan is to start offering flights five days a week, and then to move up to daily service in mid June. Northwest will use Boeing 757s for the new service. Other airlines that provide daily direct service to Brussels include American (from Chicago and New York); SN Brussels (from New York, as a co-share with American) United (from Washington, DC); Delta (from New York and Atlanta) and Continental (from Newark).

The Belgian American Chamber of Commerce in New York has announced that the recipients of its annual **Friendship Award** will be Viscount Etienne Davignon, Vice-Chairman of Suez-Tractebel, Minister of State and former European Commissioner, and Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Chairman of Kissinger Associates and Former U. S. Secretary of State. The Award, established in 1985, is presented annually to individuals and/or companies that have contributed to fostering Belgian-American business relationships.

BELGIUM'S ROAD SAFETY SCORE IMPROVES

In the past few years Belgium has developed a strategy to reduce road casualties that has proven to be very effective. This was confirmed in the latest ranking carried out by the European Transport Safety Council (ETSC) in which Belgium came in third among European countries in reducing the number of road deaths between 2001 and 2005. Belgium thus belongs to a select group of countries that have recorded a reduction of more than 20% and which, thanks to that, are very likely to achieve the goal that EU transport ministers set for themselves in 2001—reducing annual road deaths by 50% by 2010.

This outstanding success was in large part due to stepped up efforts by national policymakers supported by other stakeholders. In Belgium, the new focus dates back to 2000 when the elimination of traffic accidents was first featured as one of nine priorities in a National Safety Plan. In May 2001, an Etats-Généraux meeting took place and a new strategy was subsequently worked out.

The system of fixed penalties has been revised for most traffic offenses, linking penalties to the level of risk associated with the offense. A New Traffic Penalty Fund was created to enable local police forces to enhance their efforts in the areas of speeding, drunk driving, safety restraints and heavy vehicles. In 2006, they received a total of over 60 million euros.

On the other hand, the rule of priority from the right has regularly triggered some discussion in Belgium and is also about to be adapted. A workgroup has been set up and the federal Council of Ministers will bring clarity and remove legal obscurity about this rule. Priority from the right will now always be applicable. Today the code stipulates that "each driver must, in a regular manner, give priority to the driver who comes from the right." Because the qualification "in a regular manner" caused numerous judicial discussions and interpretations, it will now be withdrawn. From now on, somebody coming from the right will always have priority. This also means that the rule according to which a driver loses his priority when he stops at an intersection will no longer be applicable. A driver now coming from the right will have priority be it with or without making a stop.

PRAYERS AND PORTRAITS – DIPTYCHS AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY



Master of the Magdalen Legend
Netherlandish, active c. 1475/1480 - 1525/1530
left: *Virgin and Child*, 1523, oil on panel, (9 5/8 x 5 11/16 in.)
right: *Willem van Bibaut*, 1523, oil on panel (9 11/16 x 5 5/8 in.)
Private Collection

On November 12, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, will open the first ever exhibition devoted to 15th and 16th century diptychs from Flanders. The diptych, composed of two hinged panels that could be opened and closed like a book, was popular with painters of the Low Countries. Typically small in size, the ease with which they could be transported made them ideal private devotional objects. The greatest artists of the period, including Jan van Eyck, Rogier van der Weyden, Gerard David, and Hugo van der Goes, worked frequently in this format. Many of their most important and beautiful works are in the exhibition.

Paintings that have survived in their original paired format are included in the show, as well as a large number of panels which are back together for the very first time since they were separated.

The diptych format has a long and varied history extending back to classical antiquity, when pairs of writing tablets were hinged. Initially, devotional portrait diptychs were exclusively commissioned by royalty and nobility, but soon after leading clergymen and affluent burghers would have themselves portrayed with the Virgin and Child, as in the example (left).

The show's handsomely illustrated catalogue (currently available in English and also to be published in Dutch) examines diptychs in the context of contemporary texts and religious practices in northern Europe.

After it closes in Washington on February 4, the exhibition will travel to the Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp, where it will be on view from March 3 to May 27, 2007.

MAGRITTE AND CONTEMPORARY ART: THE TREACHERY OF IMAGES

The first major exhibition to fully explore the impact of Belgian surrealist artist René Magritte's (1898-1967) work on American and European artists of the post-war generation will be presented at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art from November 19 through March 4, 2007.

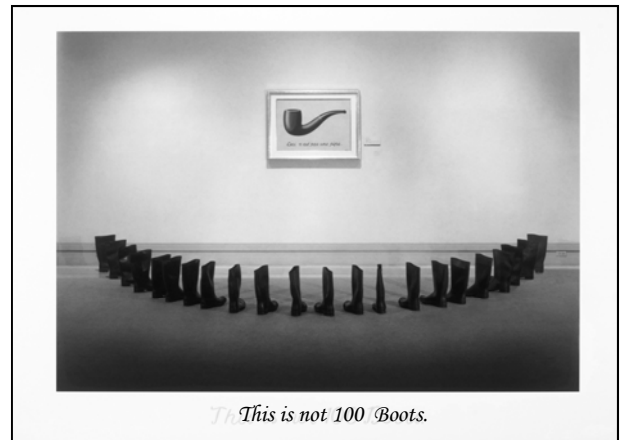
Co-curated by Stephanie Barron, LACMA Senior Curator of Modern Art, and Michel Draguet, Director of the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, with cooperation from the Magritte Foundation, "Magritte and Contemporary Art: The Treachery of Images" goes beyond overt analogies between the work of Magritte and contemporary artists to explore the more idiosyncratic and subtle connections of visual, thematic, and philosophical references.

Looking at works in a range of media from a number of decades, the exhibition reveals the ways in which Magritte's visual vocabulary and artistic strategies have seeped into our culture, and demonstrates how his subversive juxtaposition of words and images, flat painting style, and constant exploration of perception have profoundly affected subsequent generations of artists.

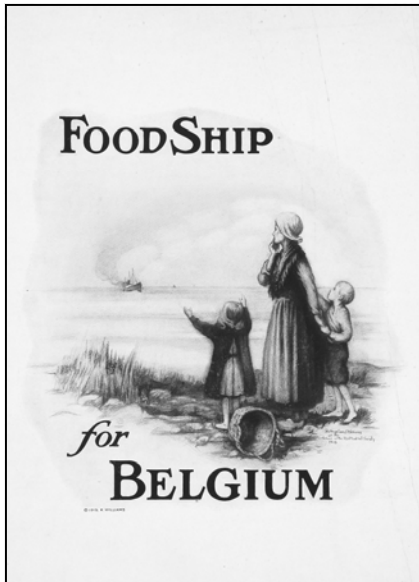
Among the well known contemporary artists featured in the show are John Baldessari, Mel Bochner, Marcel Broodthaers, Philip Guston, Jasper Johns, Jeff Koons, Joseph Kosuth, Barbara Kruger, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, Ed Ruscha and Andy Warhol.

At the center of the exhibition is LACMA's Magritte masterpiece —*The Treachery of Images* (This Is Not a Pipe) (1929) — a seminal painting and popular cultural icon. Although Magritte has been more commonly associated with surrealism, he was mainly fascinated by the arbitrary relationship between everyday objects, abstract images, and language. *The Treachery of Images* (*This Is Not a Pipe*) is his most well-known and groundbreaking word-and-image painting.

A fully illustrated 256-page catalogue, co-published by LACMA and Ludion in Belgium, accompanies the show.



Taken in LACMA's gallery during her 1999 retrospective, Eleanor Antin's photograph *This Is Not 100 BOOTS* (LACMA, March 17, 1999, 4:32p.m.) (1999) shows some of her boots contemplating *The Treachery of Images* (*This is not a pipe*).



Courtesy of the CRB collection
Hoover Institution Archives

BRUSSELS EXHIBIT COMMEMORATES HERBERT HOOVER

The exhibition *Remembering Herbert Hoover and the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, which will be on view until the end of the year at the Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and of Military History in Brussels, is a reminder of the long friendship between Belgium and the United States.

The show commemorates how Herbert Hoover and Belgian businessman Emile Francqui organized shipments of food and other necessities for the people of Belgium during World War I, when the country was occupied by the Germans and blockaded by the British. The Commission for Relief in Belgium (CRB) was created by Hoover in 1914; three million tons of food were brought to Belgium in CRB ships.

Hoover raised \$2.8 billion for the CRB. At the end of the war, \$30 million remained and that money was used to establish the parent organization of what is now the Belgian American Educational Foundation. According to the BAEF, by the start of World War II, nearly a quarter of the teaching or research staff of the four Belgian universities had studied or traveled in the US with the support of the Foundation. The BAEF continues to operate a scholarship fund that supports Belgians to do graduate study in the United States and Americans to do graduate study in Belgium.

The Web site www.rememberinghoover.be includes background information on Herbert Hoover. For more information on the activities of the Belgian American Educational Foundation, please visit www.baef.be/

EVENTS OF INTEREST

Through December 16 — New York, NY

Exhibition *Women in Symbolist Art* includes work by Fernand Khnopf, at the Shepherd & Derom Galleries.
Info: 212 861-4050

November 2-22 — New York, NY

Paintings by surrealist René Magritte, at Van De Weghe Fine Arts.
Info: 212 929-6633

November 4-28 — New York, NY

The Essence of Light, paintings by Philippe Ringlet, at the Agora Gallery.
Info: 212 226-4151

November 11 — Palo Alto, CA

Flemish Minister Fientje Moerman will chair the symposium *Brainport Flanders; Transatlantic R&D Mobility and Cooperation between Flanders, Europe and the USA*, at Stanford University. Info: 202 625-5851

November 12—February 4, 2007 — Washington, DC

Prayers and Portraits: Unfolding the Netherlandish Diptych, at the National Gallery of Art (see page 3)
Info: 202 737-4215

November 19— March 4, 2007 — Los Angeles, CA

Magritte and Contemporary Art: The Treachery of Images, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (see page 3)
Info: 323 857-6000

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of the
Embassy of Belgium
3330 Garfield St. NW
Washington, DC 20008
Phone (202) 333-6900
Fax (202) 333-3079

Email
BelgiumToday@diplobel.org
WWW
www.diplobel.us

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