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## **BRUSSELS CONFERENCE ON GOOD GOVERNANCE**

The debate about good governance and corruption in developing countries has largely focused on donor financing and the impact of donor resources on the public sector. The public sector and donor funds indeed play a critical role in shaping the governance climate, but foreign donors and investors are also decisive in defining the way decisions are made, transactions are handled, and governance reforms are carried out. The growth of foreign direct investment over the last decade suggests that the influence of the private sector will only increase.

Yet alliances among developing countries, international donors and the private sector have been relatively unexplored, despite a number of indisputable common concerns.

It was to address the potential of this three-way partnership of donors, developing partner countries and the private sector to improve governance and fight corruption, that Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel De Gucht and Minister of Development Cooperation Armand De Decker, in collaboration with the World Bank and the OECD, convened the conference “Improving Governance and Fighting Corruption —New Frontiers in Public-Private Partnerships” in Brussels on March 14 and 15.

H.M. King Albert II honored the conference with his presence during the closing session and H.R.H. Crown Prince Philippe attended the opening remarks and some technical discussions. Participants at the two-day conference included a wide group of stakeholders from international organizations, country partners, and private sector leaders. Speakers came from all over the world and included Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, Mr. Paul Wolfowitz, President of the World Bank, and Mr. Angel Gurría, Secretary General of the OECD.

During the meeting a 24-hour video conference was held with emergent leaders at business schools around the world. More than 500 students from 65 business schools and universities in 35 countries participated in discussion and role-play on the topic of corruption and good governance. The video conference took place in twelve consecutive two-hour sessions in an interpretation booth separated from the conference room by only a few centimeters of glass. The Web site on which the videoconference could be followed received more than 250,000 hits during the 24-hour time frame.

The conference was expected to be more than a forum for the discussion of the issues and aimed at identifying concrete policy recommendations. It called not only for stronger attention to the assistance strategies used by international donors and strong leadership by developing countries, but also for renewed consideration of the third leg of the triangle: the involvement of the private sector. Specific measures to strengthen ethical corporate practices and corporate citizenship, such as a reinforced code of conduct or a ‘clean business label,’ were put forward as ways to move ahead.

Finally, the importance of sector-level initiatives, such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, was underscored. Minister De Gucht announced at the conference that Belgium would participate in the financing of the EITI with an amount of \$650,000.

More information on the conference and its conclusions can be found at [www.improvinggovernance.be](http://www.improvinggovernance.be).

## **AL GORE SCORES HIGH IN BELGIUM**

Al Gore’s pro-environment message is resonating all over Belgium. In early October last year the former U.S. vice-president spent a day in Brussels to promote his film *An Inconvenient Truth*.

Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt and some 250 politicians attended this special screening. Gore told his audience: “Our planet has a fever, and the fever has been getting steadily higher.” Since then, Belgium has been willing to enact legislation inspired by Gore’s passion for the environment and concerns about global warming.

“We must take Al Gore’s message seriously,” said the Prime Minister when proposing a new “environmentally friendly” tax on packages that would penalize users of aluminum or plastic, which release harmful CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere.

The tax will provide incentives to switch to less harmful paper or cardboard. The measure is quickly becoming known as the “Gore tax,” and could become part of the 2007 budget. The government has also proposed tax breaks for car pollution filters and deductions for energy-efficient investors. The estimated revenue per year from the new Gore tax is roughly \$750 million (600 million euros). This revenue should make up for what the government expects to lose from planned reductions in social taxes.

On December 18, 2006, Verhofstadt presented his fourth “citizen manifesto” demonstrating his willingness to keep the environment a central issue in Belgian politics. On March 7, the eve of an EU summit set to adopt new targets to cut greenhouse gas emissions, Al Gore met with the Prime Minister in Brussels.

“I’m trying to get my country to change its policies, but in the meantime the European Union is absolutely key to helping the world make the change it must,” Gore told reporters after addressing a conference on biofuels.

**BREVIA**

◀Two Belgian explorers, Alain Hubert and Dixie Dansercoer, are participating in the International Polar Year 2007-2008 by attempting to ski and snow kite from Siberia to Greenland. If successful, their 4300 kilometer traverse will be the longest ever trek across the North Pole. They started out in February and their arctic expedition is expected to last until June. During the trip they are carrying out scientific experiments. Follow at: [www.polarchallenges.org](http://www.polarchallenges.org)

◀The Belgian Ministry of Mobility and Transport has announced that four Belgian pilots (formerly with Sabena Airlines) were the first to be issued licenses to fly the new Airbus A380, the largest passenger airplane in the world. The four pilots will also start training pilots from Singapore Airlines, the carrier that will receive the first Airbus A380 in autumn, 2007.

◀In an on-going campaign to educate the public about the dangers of smoking, Belgium has begun to require manufacturers to include graphic warnings on cigarette packs. It is hoped that the images of real tumors, toothless gums and blackened lungs will help reduce tobacco use in the population. As of January 1, Belgium has banned smoking in all public spaces, except for cafés and bars.

**JOB OPENING AT TOURIST OFFICE IN NEW YORK**

The Tourist Office for Flanders is recruiting a manager for its New York office. Applicants should have a university degree, a minimum of five years relevant experience in the travel industry, and a thorough written and spoken command of Dutch and English. To apply, send a detailed CV to Mrs. Frédérique Raeymaekers, Director, Belgian Tourist Office: [Frederique@visitbelgium.com](mailto:Frederique@visitbelgium.com), or 220 East 42nd Street, Suite 3402, New York, NY 10017. Applications are due by April 15.

**ECONOMIC OUTLOOK UPBEAT**

The *Economic Survey of Belgium*, released by the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) on March 13, has given Belgium very high marks for its economic performance. Economic growth in 2006 was close to 3%, which is stronger than in neighboring countries — and the OECD expects solid economic expansion in 2007 as well.

The OECD was most impressed with the evolution of public finance. The balancing of the budget since the start of the decade has allowed public debt to fall quickly relative to GDP. At the same time, structural reforms in the labor market have started to show some effect.

The Paris-based organization also pointed out that maintaining public finances on a sustainable footing would require additional reforms in health care and social security spending, for example through lower payroll taxes, which would lower unemployment and broaden the tax base.

The OECD encouraged Belgium to continue labor market reforms by considering greater regional differences in salaries, possibly examining the automatic adjustment of salaries to the index of consumer prices, and limiting unemployment benefits over time.

Overall, however, the economic watchdog concluded that Belgium is well placed to share in the benefits of globalization in the years to come.

Prime Minister Verhofstadt declared that the report is an incentive for the government to continue on the chosen path of socio-economic reform.

**MINISTER DEMOTTE HIGHLIGHTS BELGIAN HEALTH CARE**

Belgium and the United States face similar challenges in dealing with health care costs. Their elderly populations will more or less double over the next 25 years, aggregate health care expenditures will continue to rise, and health care costs will most likely grow at a faster rate than general inflation. Government budgets will struggle to meet their legislative mandates to finance quality health care for their respective constituents.

Yet, despite devoting only two-thirds as much of its GDP to health care as the U.S., and spending half as much per capita, Belgium has created a flexible, public-private partnership to pay for and deliver health care that preserves many desirable attributes: universal coverage, comprehensive coverage of physician services, hospital care and prescription drugs; free choice of primary physicians and specialists; and limited waiting periods for non-emergency services. According to the OECD, health care expenses as a share of GDP in Belgium increased from 3.9% in 1970 to 10.1% in 2003. During the same period, they increased in the U.S. from 7.0% to 15.3%. Expenditures per capita were \$3,044 in 2004 in Belgium, compared to \$6,102 in the U.S.

As the debate about health care reform in the U.S. gets underway, the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. hosted a presentation by the architect of Belgium's recent health care policy, Minister for Social Affairs and Public Health Rudy Demotte.

Minister Demotte explained how the agreement between the current governing parties in Belgium provides for an annual growth of health care expenditures of 4.5% in real terms. The health care budget was balanced in 2005 and 2006, allowing for the funding of projects such as the "SilverCareFund," established to deal with the rising health care costs connected with an ageing population.

During his visit to the U.S., the Minister had government-to-government contacts with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Food and Drug Administration. Regular exchange of information will be formalized between the FDA and the new Belgian Medicine Agency, and between the two governments, on the risks of bird flu. Demotte also met with Senator John Kerry, and visited the National Institutes of Health, Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, as well as the pharmaceutical companies Johnson & Johnson and Amgen. In Massachusetts, the Minister discussed the new local universal health care plan with Governor Duval Patrick and local state senators.

## YEAR-LONG CELEBRATIONS IN BRUSSELS WILL MARK EU'S 50TH



It has been fifty years since the signing of the Treaty of Rome, which established what is known today as the European Union. On March 25, 1957, there were six signatories —Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands — and today the Union has grown to include twenty-seven member states. As home to the headquarters of the European Union and the European Parliament, Brussels will celebrate this globally significant date with a year-long program of exhibitions, firework displays, sound & light shows, and vibrant festivals organized in cooperation with the EU member states.

The kick-off event — the *Grand Birthday Concert*— was held in Brussels on March 24. Musicians from across Europe performed for an audience of 30,000 people, which included the King and Queen and other members of the Belgian Royal Family. The musical program was followed by a light show and a spectacular display of fireworks around the Atomium, one of Belgium's most well known landmarks. The concert was broadcast in Belgium and in 40 other European countries.

Among other noteworthy events planned for “2007 The Year of Europe in the Capital of Europe”:

*Euro Visions*— Twelve contemporary photographers, from the countries which have most recently joined the EU, present highly individualized reportages on their cities. At the Royal Museums of Fine Arts, through July 1. [www.fine-arts-museum.be/](http://www.fine-arts-museum.be/)

*Europeans Look at Europeans* — Belgium has a great love of comic strip art and is home to famous characters such as the Smurfs and Tintin. The Belgian Center for Comic Strips (CBBB) will present an original comic strip portrait of Europeans. Starting with the question “How do Europeans see each other?” the exhibition compares the view that comic strip artists of various nationalities have of each other. At the Belgian Center for Comic Strips, from June 26 through October 2.

*Brussels Euritmix Festival* — More than sixty free concerts by European rock, world or jazz bands, at various squares in Brussels, from August 10-19. [www.euritmix.be](http://www.euritmix.be)

*Leonardo da Vinci-The European Genius* — Described as the archetype of the European ideal, Leonardo has been chosen to symbolize “50 years of Europe.” Original documents, scale models, notebooks and several of his inventions will be on view at the Basilica of Koekelberg, from August 18 through March 15, 2008. [www.expo-davinci.eu/](http://www.expo-davinci.eu/)

*Europalia.europa* — For the first time since its creation in 1969, the biennial festival Europalia will feature all the EU member states. The centerpiece will be the exhibition *The Grand Atelier* which will bring together art works from all over Europe at the Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels. Europalia.europa will demonstrate the cultural diversity of the 27 member states through dozens of music, theatre, dance, film and literary events with a European dimension. At various venues in Belgium, from October 1 through January 31, 2008. [www.europalia.be](http://www.europalia.be)

With thanks to the Belgian Tourist Office

### CULTURAL UPDATE

In 2009 **Gerard Mortier** will become the general manager and artistic director of the New York City Opera. His contract is for six years; he is expected to remain in New York until the 2014-15 season. The 63-year-old Belgian from Ghent headed the Theatre Royal de la Monnaie (De Munt) in Brussels from 1981 to 1991, was then tapped to lead the Salzburg Festival in Austria, (succeeding Herbert von Karajan) and is currently director of the Paris Opera, where he will remain until coming to New York. He is renowned for his innovative, avant-garde productions.

May 22 marks the centenary of the birth of Georges Remi, better known as **Hergé, the creator of Tintin**. To mark the occasion, an exhibition of original drawings was presented earlier this year at the Pompidou Center in Paris; a biographical exhibit titled *Hergé, from imaginary travel to self discovery* was hosted by the Brussels Book Fair; Brussels Airlines will decorate a plane with a Tintin motif; and the Belgian Post Office will issue commemorative stamps. Also, the head of the Hergé Studio has announced that Steven Spielberg's company DreamWorks will produce at least one movie about Tintin.

An expansion of the historic Cataldo Mission, the oldest building in the State of Idaho, is expected to include a section devoted to **Father De Smet**, the 19th century missionary and cartographer. The exhibition *Sacred Encounters — Father DeSmet and the Indians of the Rocky Mountain West*, which was presented at various American museums in the 1990's, will form the basis of the new installation. It seems especially fitting that the Belgian Jesuit will be honored in the new Visitors Center planned for the Cataldo Mission: it was he who chose the location of the mission on a low hill adjacent to the Coeur d'Alene River.

**EVENTS OF INTEREST**

**Through April 15 — New York, NY**

*Cornucopia*, a collaborative exhibition by painter Ellen Depoorter and architect Jeroen de Schrijver, at the Diesel Denim Gallery. Info: <http://www.diesel.com/denimgallery/ny>.

**Through April 29 — Boston, MA**

Chantal Akerman is one of 27 artists included in *Super Vision*, an exhibition examining the changing nature of vision, at The Institute of Contemporary Art. Info: 617 478-3101

**Through May 12 — New York, NY**

Paintings by James Ensor, at the Peter Freeman Inc. Gallery. Info: 212 966-5154

**Through June 18 — Virginia Beach, VA**

Two paintings by Mimi Verhulst Lanese are included in the juried group show *By Our Heirs Forever: New Waves 2007*, at the Contemporary Art Center of Virginia. Info: [www.cacv.org](http://www.cacv.org)

**Through July 22 — Chestnut Hill, MA**

*A New Key-Modern Belgian Art from the Simon Collection* continues at the McMullen Museum, Boston College. Info: 617 552-8100

**April 9, 11, 13 & 14 — Brooklyn, NY**

De Munt/La Monnaie production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, at the BAM Howard Gilman Opera House. Info: <http://www.bam.org>

**April 15 — New York, NY**

Award-winning documentary film *As if it were Yesterday* (Comme si c'était hier) about Belgians who hid and saved Jewish children during the Shoah, at the 88th St. Synagogue Sanctuary. Info: [www.bj.org](http://www.bj.org)

**April 19 — New York, NY**

Piano recital by Carine Gutlerner, at the Merkin Concert Hall at the Kaufman Center. Tickets: 212 501-3330

**EUROPEAN POETRY IN MOTION®**

The twenty-seven member states of the European Union and the EU Commission in Washington, DC, have launched a literary project titled *European Poetry in Motion®* to celebrate poets from the European Union.

Each country has selected 5 poems, which will be on display, in both the original language and in English, inside Washington-area Metro buses during the month of May. Additional advertising for the project will be installed on the outside of buses and in Metro stations. A Web site that includes all the poems will be accessible for a full year.

As of 2007, with the membership of Bulgaria and Romania and the addition of Irish as an official language, the European Union has twenty-three official languages.

The project provides an opportunity for the member states to spotlight their languages and literatures and at the same time support the United States in its valuable efforts to promote literacy, and engender interest in and build foreign language skills.

Belgium is represented by poems by Henry Bauchau, Guy Goffette, Stefan Hertmans, Jacques Izoard, Miriam Van hee, and Anton van Wilderode.

Related events include a marathon reading of all poems, in the original and in translation, at the Goethe-Institut, on May 5, and a reading of selected poems, in English, at the Busboys and Poets restaurant, on May 20.

Support for the project comes from the Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority (WMATA), the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, the Arlington, Alexandria and Prince George's County Arts Councils, and the Poetry Society of America.

Further information is provided on the project's Web site: [www.europeanpoetryinmotion.eu](http://www.europeanpoetryinmotion.eu)

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