

◆ Belgium Today ◆

Volume 12, Issue 1

A Publication of the Embassy of Belgium in Washington, DC

February-March 2007

AMBASSADOR STRUYE DE SWIELANDE



Dominique Struye de Swielande arrived in Washington on December 26 to take up responsibilities as Ambassador of Belgium. "Being Ambassador to the U.S. is a great honor and I look forward to promoting bilateral relations and to meeting Belgians wherever they live in the States. Never having served here before, I will be grateful

to everyone who helps me discover this great country."

A native of Ghent, the Ambassador holds a Doctor of Law degree from the Catholic University of Leuven, and Masters degrees from University College, London, and the University of Ghent. He joined the Belgian foreign service in 1974. His first posting in Vienna was followed by three African assignments: Lagos, Harare and Kinshasa. In 1984 he returned to Europe to become a Counselor in the Cabinet of Foreign Minister Leo Tindemans.

After serving as Deputy Permanent Representative at the UN in Geneva (1987-90) and Director of the European Union Section at the Foreign Ministry (1990), he was appointed Head of Cabinet of Foreign Minister Mark Eyskens (1991-92), Diplomatic Advisor to Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene (1992-94) and Head of Cabinet of State Secretary Reginald Moreels (1995-96). From 1997 to 2002 he was Belgium's Ambassador to Germany and immediately prior to coming to Washington, Permanent Representative of Belgium to NATO (2002-06).

FEDERAL ELECTIONS 2007

Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt has announced that the next federal elections will take place on June 10. The deadline for voter registration was January 31.

Registered Belgians living in the United States who plan to vote in person at the Embassy or at one of the three Consulates — New York, Atlanta or Los Angeles — will be able to do so on Friday, June 8.

A couple of weeks before the election, everyone who has registered will receive further information in the mail: those who have chosen to vote by mail will receive a ballot, while those who plan to vote in person will receive specifics about voting places and times. For updates, please visit www.diplobel.us.

U.S. AND BELGIUM SIGN NEW TREATY TO REDUCE DOUBLE TAXATION

At the end of 2006, Minister of Finance Didier Reynders and U.S. Ambassador to Belgium Tom Korologos signed a new treaty between Belgium and the United States to prevent double taxation and tax evasion. The treaty will be submitted for approval to legislatures in both countries as quickly as possible, so that it may become applicable as of January 1, 2008.

The new treaty significantly reduces tax-related barriers to trade and investment flows between the United States and Belgium. One of the main features of the new agreement is the elimination of taxation on cross-border dividend payments. The source-country withholding tax on dividends from shares --held for a minimum of 12 months-- will be abolished for beneficiary companies in the U.S. owning a minimum of 10% of a Belgian company. The low threshold of 10% reflects the Belgian Government's desire to attract U.S. direct investment. The new rules will also apply to beneficiary companies in Belgium owning at least 80% of a U.S. company. Under the current tax treaty, dividends are taxed at 5% or 15%. Other recent tax treaties concluded by Belgium --for example with Hong Kong-- already offered a 0% withholding tax for dividends. The withholding tax on interest payments will be eliminated as well.

The new treaty also introduces extended "limitation on benefits" (LOB) provisions along the lines agreed upon by the U.S. in its recent tax conventions. Those provisions are designed to prevent treaty shopping by third country residents. Whereas the previous treaty provided for a limitation on the benefits clause for persons deriving dividends, interest or royalties from the other state, the new treaty provides for a general clause concerning its benefits. However, the clause will allow more persons to benefit from the provisions of the treaty, such as pension funds and headquarters of multinational groups, for example. Residents of the EU, EEA, NAFTA and Switzerland can, under certain conditions, enjoy the benefits of the treaty.

The new treaty offers mandatory arbitration of certain cases that cannot be resolved by the tax authorities within a certain time period. It is only the second time a U.S. tax treaty has contained such a provision. The U.S. and Belgium will also, upon request by either Government, exchange information held by a bank or other financial institution.

A new article covering entertainers and sportsmen illustrates that the treaty aims to facilitate business travel or career moves between the U.S. and Belgium. For example, there will be tax relief for contributions made under pension plans by employees of multinationals before leaving their home country.

In combination with the introduction of a tax deduction for equity capital --the so-called 'notional interest deduction-- in 2005, the new tax provisions will undoubtedly add to Belgium's attractiveness for U.S. investors.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF BELGIANS IN THE UNITED STATES



There are currently 18,436 Belgians on the registers of the Embassy and/or Consulates. As the map indicates, Belgians reside in every one of the fifty states as well as in several U.S. territories. The total includes between six and seven thousand dual nationals. Not included are Americans of Belgian ancestry, who, according to the U.S. census of 2000, number 360,642. The Embassy would be pleased to hear from Belgians as well as Americans of Belgian descent about the Belgian experience in the U.S. If you have a story you would like to share, we invite you to send it to us.

CHANGES TO THE NATIONALITY LAW

On December 27, the Belgian Parliament voted several changes to the nationality law of 1985.

One important change affects young Belgians who were born abroad, have a second nationality and have never lived in Belgium. If they want to keep their Belgian nationality, they have to sign a declaration so stating between the ages of 18 and 28. In the past, the declaration had to be renewed every ten years, but this renewal requirement has now been eliminated. The Embassy would like to encourage these young people wishing to remain Belgian nationals to declare their intentions as soon as possible after attaining age 18.

The updated law also considerably simplifies administrative procedures and imposes a larger responsibility on the public prosecutor in granting Belgian nationality. Thanks to the new

procedures, applying for Belgian nationality will take less time in the future.

For several years, Belgians living abroad have lobbied for a change in the nationality law that prevented Belgians who voluntarily acquired a foreign nationality from keeping their Belgian nationality. Their efforts have not been in vain. The revised law no longer contains the article stating that an adult Belgian who freely chooses to take a foreign nationality would lose his/her Belgian nationality. While a step in the hoped-for direction, this does not mean that Belgians living in the U.S. can immediately apply for American citizenship. The new law states that this particular change to the nationality law will take effect at a later date, to be decided by the King. That date will depend on the final revocation of the European treaty to prevent multiple nationalities.

BELGIAN MODERN AT BOSTON COLLEGE

In early February, Ambassador Struye de Swielande will officially open the exhibition *A New Key, Modern Belgian Art from the Simon Collection*, which is being presented by the McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College.

The Simon collection, acknowledged by scholars to be the finest collection of modern Belgian art outside Belgium, was formed over the last thirty years by Henry Simon, a German-born businessman. It focuses on art of the late nineteenth century up to World War II.

From this collection, 48 paintings, 1 drawing, and 4 sculptures were chosen for the exhibition "to exemplify the national character of Belgian art." Jeffery Howe, Boston College Fine Arts Professor and exhibition curator, has grouped the works into six themes: 1) Looking outward: landscape and village scenes, (2) Work and Labor, (3) The View from Within: Interiors and Still Life, (4) The Human Dimension: the Figure, (5) The Impact of the First World War, and (6) The Fantastic and Carnavalesque. The exhibition explores how each of these themes reveals questions of meaning and identity that haunted Belgian artists during a period of political and social upheavals.

Included in the show are paintings by James Ensor, René Magritte, Paul Delvaux as well as by artists less well known to Americans such as Theo van Rysselberghe, Leon Spilliaer, Constant Permeke and Emile Claus.



James Ensor "From Laughter to Tears"
1908, oil on canvas, 50.5 x 100 cm
The Simon Collection. 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS),
New York/SABAM, Brussels

Howe, the leading American historian of modern Belgian art, says, "These works are not only extraordinarily beautiful, but they offer a fascinating window into the development of modern art. Belgium is clearly revealed as an indispensable font of Expressionism and Surrealism."

Howe and the group of scholars who have contributed to the 200-page catalogue hope that visitors will leave the show encouraged to explore further the Belgian contribution to modern culture. Boston College is doing its part by organizing a lecture and film screenings in conjunction with the exhibition. For details, please see "Events of Interest" on page 4.

EMBASSY CHANCERY TURNS FIFTY



office, Achiel Rawoens, an Army cryptographer, was entrusted with hoisting the flag for the first time at 3330 Garfield St., N.W. Rawoens, now retired, remembers the event well. He had to attach the flag to the halyard, while Minister Spaak held the rope's slack. The Brabançonne was playing in the background; all eyes were on the Belgian tricolor. Slowly the flag was raised. Apparently too slowly for the Minister, who, as the flag neared midpoint on the staff, was heard exclaiming "*Mais Nom de Dieu, c'est haut!*" (My goodness, that's high!). "I had to bite the inside of my cheek to keep from laughing during this solemn occasion," recalls Rawoens.

The two-storey curved structure, made of reinforced concrete faced with Indiana limestone, has stood up well over the years. The generously proportioned offices have high ceilings, large windows and parquet floors. Updates have included new windows, repairs to the slate roof and an improved heating/air conditioning system. Glass doors were added to the entrance lobby to separate the areas for the public from the offices, the visa/passport office has been completely revamped, and contemporary light fixtures were installed throughout the building.

The chancery provides office space for personnel from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Justice, the Flemish Community and the Walloon Region. It serves Belgians living in the District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, Delaware, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Bahamas, and the British Turks and Caicos Islands.

The building that serves as the Chancery of the Embassy of Belgium in Washington, D.C., will this year mark its fiftieth anniversary. The building was designed by the architectural firm Voorhees, Walker, Smith & Smith of New York City; an associate in that firm, Antwerp-born Hugo van Kuyck, is the architect of record.

The inauguration took place on the 15th of February 1957 and was considered important enough to warrant a visit from Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak, who came from Brussels to preside. At noon, Ambassador Robert Silvercruys, who had been Belgium's chief envoy to the United States since 1945, assembled the Embassy personnel outside the front entrance. The military section, headed by Major General André Bigwood, was in ceremonial dress. The youngest member of that

PARLIAMENTARIANS VISIT WASHINGTON AND NEW YORK

On January 22 and 23, a group of seven members of the Belgian Parliament, headed by Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Hendrik Daems, was in Washington on the first stop of a four-day visit to the United States. The mission had a dual objective: to gain insight into American domestic policy and to identify some of the challenges Belgium faces as it begins its two-year term as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

The Belgians were briefed on U.S. policy in meetings at the Department of State, the National Security Council, the Pentagon and at Washington think tanks. It was an opportune time to be in Washington, at the beginning of a new Congressional term, when the American Congress was shifting from Republican to Democratic control, and at the moment of the President's State of the Union address. The delegation had opportunities for discussions with senators and congressmen of both parties. They also had an exchange of views with representatives of the National Counterterrorism Center regarding different approaches in the fight against terrorism.

The delegation spent January 24 and 25 in New York where they met with representatives of the U.N. dealing with Security Council issues.

EVENTS OF INTEREST

Through February 28 — New Orleans, LA

Inside the Congo: An Introduction to the Field Research and Archives of Frère Joseph Cornet, at the Collins C. Diboll Art Gallery of Loyola University. Info: 504 861-5456 or www.loyno.edu/dibollgallery/

Through March — New York, NY

Musical *Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris*, at the Zipper Theater. Info: 212 563-0480

February 7 — Silver Spring, MD

The Belgian/French documentary *Sight (Without Seeing)* (Voir (sans les yeux)), a journey into the mental world of blindness, directed by Marie Mandy, will be shown at the AFI Silver. Info: www.afi.com/silver

February 10 - September 2 — Chestnut Hill, MA

Exhibition *A New Key, Modern Belgian Art from the Simon Collection*, at the McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College (see page 3). Info: 617 552-8100 Related events include:

February 13: Opening Celebration and concert

February 22: Film *La Promesse*, directed by Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne, Devlin Hall 026

March 15: Film *Daems*, directed by Stijn Coninx, Devlin Hall 026

March 22: Panel Discussion: *A New Key: Modernism's Other Voices*, with the exhibition curator and contributors to the catalogue, Devlin Hall 101

March 21 — Norfolk, VA

The Belgian-Quebecois film *Congorama* will be presented at the ON (Old Dominion University/Norfolk) International Film Festival, preceded by a lecture, in French, by Prof. Arnaud Huftier on "Cinéma belge: Hier et Aujourd'hui." Info: 757 683-3323

March 23 — New York, NY

Guitarist Raphaella Smits will give a recital at Christ and St. Stephen's Church. Info: 212 787-2755, ext. 2

March 23 — Washington, DC

Grande Fête de la Francophonie, at the Maison française, Embassy of France. Info: www.francophoniedc.org

BELGIUM TODAY

A bi-monthly publication
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

First Class
US Postage
PAID
Permit #670
Washington, DC

