

# ◆ Belgium Today ◆

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## KING ALBERT II AND QUEEN PAOLA IN NEW YORK

Their Majesties the King and the Queen of the Belgians were in New York on May 13 and 14 to mark Belgium's two-year membership in the United Nations Security Council.

On Sunday, they were received at Ground Zero in Lower Manhattan by New York City officials and private sector individuals responsible for redeveloping the site. King Albert II asked his hosts many questions about the two demolished skyscrapers, and was told about future plans and projects related to area.

The royal couple then stopped at 7 World Trade Center (7 WTC), the first building to be rebuilt on the site after the 9/11 terror attacks, and



Photo by Jefferson Siegel

*Larry Silverstein (left) and King Albert II look down on Ground Zero from 7 WTC*

which was inaugurated just a year ago. The King and the Queen were welcomed and guided by Larry Silverstein, the American developer who holds the lease to the World Trade Center. Mr. Silverstein had acquired the WTC site just two months before the attacks and will build the new "Freedom Tower" on the premises of the open hole left by the twin towers. It was from the 51<sup>st</sup> floor of 7 WTC (see photo left) that the royal couple could visually appreciate the scope of the works which are to be accomplished by 2012.

In the late afternoon, the royal couple was greeted and briefed on UN issues by Ambassador Johan Verbeke, Belgium's Permanent Representative to the United Nations. Later they had the occasion to meet members of the Belgian community living in New York at a reception hosted by Consul General Renilde Loeckx and Ambassador to the U.S. Dominique Struye de Swielande.

The next day was entirely devoted to the United Nations. The King was welcomed by UN Chief of Protocol Alice Hecht, a Belgian compatriot, who gave a tour to the visiting dignitaries. The highlight of the visit was the room where the Security Council meets. Albert II and Paola then started a long day of meetings and working groups. The King, accompanied by Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel De Gucht, had a meeting with the President-in-Office of the Security Council, American Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, and was received by the new UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki Moon.

## BELGIUM ASSUMES PRESIDENCY OF UN SECURITY COUNCIL

On January 1, 2007, Belgium became a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. The past six months have been hectic: Belgium has been an active player, succeeding in gaining the respect of the other members. The pace quickened further on June 1, when Belgium became the Council Chair for a month, taking over from the United States.

Although small in size, Belgium has ambitions in foreign policy. The important pillars of that policy are a strong attachment to effective multilateralism, promotion of sustainable democracy and movement towards an even more integrated and interconnected Europe. These three basic elements are being put into practice during our membership and presidency of the UN Security Council.

Of course, Belgium can not establish its own agenda. Some issues pertaining to world peace and security have been on the agenda for years and there should be continuity in the discussions of these topics. Other unexpected issues could come up, and then the chair has to handle things quickly, in an efficient way and always seeking as broad agreement as possible. Quite a challenge for a small country that does not have the same leverage as a permanent member with a veto right.

Nevertheless, Belgium can put its mark on the agenda by highlighting issues it considers important for the international community and thus contribute to world peace. Belgium intends to organize a public debate on "natural resources and conflict situations," given the close link that exists between those two issues.

As Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht stated: "In the past, the Security Council has had to take action in specific situations regarding natural resources and conflicts, such as penalty rules introduced and panels of experts set up by the Security Council. However, so far there has been no debate of the underlying issues. Belgium would like to make an effort to redress this [now that] it assumes the presidency of the UN Security Council. Natural resources must no longer be allowed to trigger and/or constitute the aim of conflicts. Instead, they must drive forward development." Belgium hopes that the debate as well as the lessons learned from the past will contribute to avoiding conflicts in the future.

*(continued on page 2)*

**BELGIAN PRESIDENCY** (continued from page 1)

The June agenda of the Security Council contains some difficult and delicate issues covering all continents of the world. This will lead to intensive debates on a wide range of issues: Africa with the critical security and humanitarian situations in Sudan/Darfur and Somalia; the Middle East with the situation in Iraq, Iran and its nuclear aspirations, and developments in Lebanon.

Right now, a hot issue for Europe is the Kosovo question, which must be resolved soon to ensure future stability in the European region. Last month, Belgium led a successful UN mission to Kosovo, the results of which were appreciated by all members of the Security Council and beyond.

Finally, Belgium tries to strengthen European cooperation on issues dealt with by the Security Council. Although no institutionalized coordination exists, together with France, the United Kingdom, Italy and Slovakia, the four other EU members of the Security Council, Belgium is trying to create more coherence between the debates in the European Union and in the Security Council in working out a common position.

At the beginning of July, when it hands over the Presidency to China, Belgium will evaluate its efforts. With commitment, modesty and perseverance, Belgium hopes it can contribute to the very valuable objective of peace and security in the world.

**DUAL CITIZENSHIP**

A long discussion concerning Belgian nationality has finally come to an end with a very positive outcome for Belgians living in the United States. Starting in June, adult Belgians will not lose their nationality when they opt to become Americans.

A Royal Decree issued in May puts into effect the last changes to the nationality law published in December 2006. As of June 10, 2007 Belgians 18 or older who voluntarily acquire the nationality of certain countries will not lose their Belgian nationality.

There are still some exceptions to this rule. The Council of Europe treaty that limits multiple nationalities, which was the main impediment to the change of the Belgian law, still remains in effect for several countries. That means that Belgians who voluntarily obtain the nationality of Austria, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, or the United Kingdom, will still lose their Belgian nationality.

The new change of law is good news for the Belgians in the U.S., many of whom have hesitated for a long time to become naturalized Americans because they want to retain their Belgian citizenship.

**GOOGLE TO BUILD EUROPEAN DATA CENTER IN WALLONIA**

Google will invest up to 300 € million in a new data information center in Saint-Ghislain, Wallonia. It is from this center that search demands from internet users throughout Europe will be met. Google services, such as Google Earth or Google Maps, are more and more in demand in Europe.

The center will occupy 85 hectares in the industrial zone of Ghlin-Baudour. Construction of the database center should start this summer and be finished by 2008. The project will create 120 new jobs in programming, security and maintenance. In addition, up to 300 construction jobs will be created during the building of the center. Most of the employees will be recruited locally.

The site chosen presents many advantages, such as proximity to a canal which will be used to cool off the company's computer systems at the site. In addition, the region's fiber optic network will guarantee optimal connectivity. The new data center will allow optimal service for customers and fast access to the data they seek, the company said in a statement.

Jean-Claude Marcourt, Wallonia's Minister for Employment, Economy and Foreign Trade, underlined that Google's investment was the fifth major investment by a U.S. company in a short period of time. The Walloon Region will commit 5€ million to the cost of the project, which will also benefit from EU financial support.

Multiple regions in Europe competed for Google's investment. "It is a very significant boost to St. Ghislain and to the Walloon Region. Google is a successful company and we are proud that it has chosen to invest in our region," Minister-President Di Rupo of Wallonia said.

Google, created in 1998 by two Stanford students, employs 12,000 people worldwide.

**BAXTER INVESTS 85 MILLION EUROS OVER 4 YEARS**

The American based healthcare giant Baxter will invest 85€ million between 2006 and 2009 into its production site at Lessines in Wallonia. 150 new jobs could be added by 2012. The Walloon Region will contribute 7.35€ million towards the investment.

The Baxter group intends in particular to increase its existing production capacity of intravenous transfusion systems. But it also plans to develop new manufacturing procedures for the perfusion bags used in hospitals. Finally, it will produce new oncologic and geriatric nutrition pockets.

This is the fifth time in 15 years that Baxter has invested in this facility. Lessines is undoubtedly a very important production plant. Baxter employs 2000 people in Belgium, with the facility at Lessines being the main employer (1600 people). In fact, Lessines was the first non-American based facility set up by the company in 1954. 85% of its production is exported worldwide.

Since 1996 Baxter's European distribution center has also been based at Lessines, to supply hospitals and home patients in France, Germany and the Benelux countries. Baxter also has a sales headquarters in Brussels and one of its two European research centers is based in Nivelles. Baxter is one of the top ten employers in Wallonia.

## BELGIUM'S CULINARY DELIGHTS ARE CATCHING ON IN THE U.S.

The introductory chapter to Ruth Van Waerebeek's *Everybody Eats Well in Belgium Cookbook*, published over a decade ago, referred to Belgian cooking as "Europe's best kept secret." Thanks to that book and to a new generation of chefs —both American and Belgian—the secret is out and Americans have more opportunities to eat Belgian than ever before. Here is a sampling of some the new names and places that are making this happen.

◀ Pierre Gilissen of **Belgique Pâtisserie & Chocolatier** in Kent, Connecticut, was sought out to provide handmade Belgian chocolates for two royal visits during the month of May. Guests at the state dinner held at the British Ambassador's residence in Washington, DC., for Britain's Queen Elizabeth II had the opportunity to taste his confections, as did those who attended the reception at the Belgian Consulate in New York for King Albert II and Queen Paola (see story on page 1).

◀ In the Washington, DC, area you can now enjoy local handmade Belgian chocolates and fine pastries and cakes in your home. **Locolat®**, recently launched by Niel and Ada Piferoen, features chocolate truffles and filled and flavored chocolates, all made with natural ingredients. Locolat uses some seasonal ingredients and thus offerings will vary throughout the year and special collections will be made up for certain holidays and events.

◀ Want to serve shrimp croquettes, Belgian endives or scores of other Belgian specialties at a dinner party for ten, a hundred or a thousand? Frederik De Pue, who with business partner and fellow chef Mickael Cornu recently opened **42° Catering Services**, can probably help you out. Trained in Belgium, De Pue was formerly executive chef to the Ambassador of the Washington Delegation of the European Commission.

◀ Robert Wiedmaeir, chef/owner of Marcel's, a Washington, DC, French/Belgian restaurant with a loyal following, branched out in April by opening **Brasserie Beck**, a bistro-style Belgian restaurant. Located near Washington's Convention Center, the 165-seat, casual dining room features moules-frites and a selection of approximately 50 Belgian beers, each served in its appropriate glass.

◀ A branch of the Belgian bakery/eatery **Le Pain Quotidien** will open in the Georgetown area of Washington in June and a second branch is expected to open in Bethesda, Maryland, by the end of the year. The organic bread chain, featuring dining at a communal table, started in Brussels in 1990 and is now located in 10 countries. There are already over 20 Le Pain Quotidien restaurants in the United States.

◀ "Unflinching Indulgences from Belgium" reads the headline of the New York *Times* review of "a terrific new restaurant named **Resto**...[which] calls itself Belgian, an inadequately revered genre in this city, and it flies that flag in the requisite ways." American-born chef Ryan Skeen has put beer, mussels and steak-frites on the menu, as you might expect, as well as beef cheek carbonade, "mousse-soft" boudin blanc, and stoemp.

◀ Other sweet news: **Neuhaus** chocolatier, already in New York, San Francisco and Seattle, has set up a new shop on the street level in Washington's Union Station.

Bon appétit! Eet smakelijk!

## CULTURAL UPDATE

Russian pianist Anna Vinnitskaya took the top prize at the 2007 Queen Elisabeth International Music Competition in Brussels. In second place was Bulgarian Plamena Mangova, while Francesco Piemontesi of Switzerland placed third. Belgian Liebrecht Vanbeckevoort was sixth. There were no Americans among the twelve finalists.

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*Last Best Hope*, a documentary film about the Belgian Resistance in WWII, received a Silver Award in the documentary/history category at the 43rd annual Hugo Awards for Excellence in Television in Chicago, on April 12. A month later the film screened at the Mendocino (California) Film Festival and won both "best feature documentary" and the "audience choice award."

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On May 6 tennis star Kim Clijsters, 23, announced that she would hang up her racket. Clijsters, who has been at the top of women's tennis for a number of years, may be best known in the U.S. for her win of the U.S. Open in 2005. The Belgian is expected to marry American basketball player Brian Lynch in the summer.

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A team of archaeologists from the Catholic University of Leuven discovered a 4,000-year-old tomb at the site of Dayr al-Barsha in Middle Egypt. The University has reported that, among other items, the chamber contained a fine and well-preserved set of tomb equipment dating approximately from 2050 BC, and a wooden coffin box, decorated with a line of hieroglyphic texts which provided the name of the deceased: Henu, and Henu's mummy.

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On April 28 Belgian geneticist Thierry Boon Falleur, on the medical faculty of the Catholic University of Louvain, and director of the Ludwig Institute for cancer research in Brussels, was inducted into the National Academy of Sciences. Election to the NAS is considered one of the highest honors that can be accorded to a scientist. Members are experts in their fields who serve as volunteers to address critical national issues and give unbiased advice to the U.S. federal government and the public. In its citation explaining why he was admitted, NAS states: Boon has dominated cancer immunology research ...and revolutionized the field through his structural identification of tumor antigens.

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In March, Isabelle de Borchgrave, artist and interior designer, and American retailer Target® unveiled *Isabelle Party*, a collection of hand-painted, paper party décor. The collection includes every element needed to set an exquisite table from centerpieces, tablecloths, runners, placemats and serving bowls, to place cards, plates, napkins, napkin rings, candles and chair covers.

**EVENTS OF INTEREST**

**Through June 16 — New York, NY**

An exhibition of paintings and sculptures of the CoBrA (Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam) movement (1949-1952) and its impact on European Abstract Expressionism, at Robinsons Art Gallery.

Info: 212 206-0002

**Through June 30 — New York, NY**

*Sterck and Rozo: From Spanish Chapels to First Born*, photographs taken during the artists' fertility pilgrimage through Spain, at the Frederieke Taylor Gallery.

Info: 646 230-0992

**Through Aug 12 — Roslyn Harbor, NY**

*Dreams on Canvas: Surrealism in Europe and America*, at the Nassau County Museum of Art, includes works by Magritte and Delvaux. Info: 516 484-9338

**June 30 — New York, NY**

Antonio Vilardi, artistic director of "Théâtre Saint-Michel de Bruxelles," performs an all-Vilardi piano program at Carnegie Hall.

Info: newyork@ufbe.org

**July 21 — Cooperstown, NY**

Brewery Ommegang hosts its annual Belgian festival/beer tasting event *Belgium Comes to Cooperstown*. Info: www.ommegang.com

**August 26– Nov 4 — Roslyn Harbor, NY**

The exhibition *Pieter Bruegel, the Younger: An Intimate Retrospective* will feature several seminal works by the master, at the Nassau County Museum of Art. A symposium on 16th and 17th century Flemish culture will take place on September 29 and is open to the public. Info: 516 484-9338, ext 11

**EU OPEN HOUSE DAY**



*Some of the 2,000 visitors welcomed at the Belgian Embassy on May 12*

European Union Member States opened their doors to the public on Saturday, May 12 and Washington-area residents responded enthusiastically and in great numbers. More than twenty EU countries and the Delegation of the European Commission participated in the program, offering tours and highlighting their national cultures and cuisines; more than 38,000 people

took advantage of the opportunity to have a look inside chanceries or residences and to meet some of their international neighbors.

Many of the visitors arrived by Metrobus, which provided continuous free shuttle service between Dupont Circle and the various participating embassies, while others drove and some took advantage of the good weather and walked from embassy to embassy.

Visitors to the Belgian Embassy were invited to taste hand-made Belgian truffles by Locolat, cookies made by the Ambassador's chef, specialty brews from the Brewery Ommegang, fruit beers and Looza juices. The Embassy's conference room was turned into a screening room for the occasion and "Belgium, the Movie," a twenty-five minute DVD featuring magnificent aerial footage of both urban and rural areas in Belgium, was shown continuously all day. Both the Embassy library and Ambassador Struye's office were open and embassy staffers were on hand to answer questions and give out documentation on the EU and on Belgium.

The EU Open House Day was an initiative of German Presidency; German Ambassador Klaus Scharioth said he found the concept "an excellent way for the EU to share Europe's story of diversity, integration, and peace..." A measure of its success: Slovenia, which will hold the EU Presidency in the spring of 2008, has already decided to repeat the exercise next year.

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