

Belgium Today

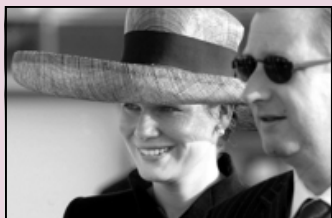
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ADDITION TO THE ROYAL FAMILY

The Royal Palace has announced that Crown Prince Philippe and Princess Mathilde are expecting a fourth child in the spring. They have a daughter, Princess Elisabeth, born in 2001, and two sons, Prince Gabriel, born in 2003, and Prince Emmanuel, born in 2005. The new baby will be fifth in line to the throne and the twelfth royal grandchild of King Albert II and Queen Paola.



BELGIUM ATTRACTS MORE FOREIGN INVESTMENT THAN CHINA

China may be the place to be for entrepreneurs today, but Belgium attracted actually more foreign investment in 2006. The latest *World Investment Report* by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) ranked Belgium as the fourth destination for foreign investment worldwide, one place ahead of China.

Foreign companies invested about \$72 billion in Belgium, more than double the amount of 2005 and 13.6% of all foreign investment in the European Union. One hundred thirty-five new so-called 'greenfield' investment projects were initiated. Foreign investment increased worldwide by 38%, fueled primarily by an increase in the value of mergers and acquisitions, as solid economic growth worldwide increased profits and stock values.

The tax-friendly regime of Belgian coordination centers and tax reforms like the Notional Interest Deduction (NID), enacted in 2005, probably contributed to the excellent Belgian performance, UNCTAD noted. The NID, in force since the beginning of last year, gives companies an extra tax break if they increase their capital.

The top foreign investment destination in 2006 was the U.S., followed by the U.K., France, Belgium, China, and Canada. Hong Kong, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and Russia complete the top 10.

Belgian investment abroad increased sharply as well, from \$31.7 billion to \$ 63 billion.

The study also revealed that three of the world's 50 most internationalized financial institutions are Belgian: KBC—ranked 23rd—, Dexia (35th), and Fortis (46th). Inbev, on the other hand, occupied the 63rd spot in an alternative ranking of global companies with the most foreign assets.

PRIME MINISTER SPEAKS OUT ON CHILD SOLDIERS

On September 25, Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt addressed a high level session on Africa at the United Nations Security Council. President Bush, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and leaders of the other Council members also attended this session. Belgium is a non-permanent member of the Security Council in 2007 and 2008.

In his address, the Prime Minister stressed how important it is that the world pay special attention to Africa. One of every five children born in Africa today will die of hunger, malnutrition or diseases that are easily curable. Two will live on less than one dollar a day. One will never learn to read or write.

Central to his address was the issue of child soldiers, which he referred to as "one of Africa's biggest outrages." Today, there are 300,000 of them – each with their own horror story. He told the world leaders the story of Christine from Uganda, one of the children the Prime Minister has adopted financially. "At age 14, Kony's rebel army forced her to kill her own uncle. After that, she was kidnapped – for four years. Christine was taken to Sudan where she was presented as a gift to an army commander. He abused and raped her. In the end she found a way of escaping. She shot dead one of the guards in doing so. The other guard shot her in the head. But she managed to get away. Finally she was taken in by the army and treated in a hospital for her bullet wound. There she was also found to be pregnant.

Christine's story is just one of many thousands of tragic, shocking tales of child soldiers. Each one of them is a stain on the soul of human civilization – unacceptable stains that politicians cannot and must not ignore."

Verhofstadt proposed to the Council three measures to deal with the problem of child soldiers: first, an embargo on the export of weapons to countries with child soldiers, by means of a new international treaty on arms trade. Second, an international agreement to stop development aid to countries which use child soldiers in their militaries. Third, all offenders must be put on trial. "Take Kony, the leader of the *Lord's Resistance Army* of Uganda, for instance. He has been responsible for the abuse of almost seventy thousand child soldiers. An international arrest warrant has been issued by the International Criminal Court in The Hague. We know where he is, but nobody arrests him. Worse still, his activities are going on to this day. The terror continues."

The Prime Minister pleaded for action, not just words. "To have a man like Kony arrested and put him on trial, as a warning to all criminals that exploit children in armed conflicts. And to make the world a better place for our children."

BELGIUM 18TH TRADING PARTNER FOR THE U.S.

Trade data published in the magazine *World City* confirm that Belgium and the U.S. have a very substantial economic relationship. Trade between the countries amounted to about \$36 billion in 2006, sparked by \$ 4.6 billion in diamond exports and imports. Belgium was the 18th trading partner for the U.S., just behind Ireland but ahead of larger countries like India, Australia, Russia, and Spain.

New York City handled 90% of U.S. diamond imports from Belgium. Refined fuel was also among the leading imports from Belgium. In 2006, \$696 million of the gasoline came through the New Orleans customs district, the leading importer of fuel from Belgium. Antwerp has one of the largest refining and petrochemical centers, and the second largest seaport in Europe, just behind Rotterdam.

The U.S. had a trade surplus with Belgium, with exports (\$21.3 billion) about 50% higher than imports (\$14.4 billion). The U.S. sent roughly \$1 billion in pharmaceuticals and chemicals to Belgium.

AMBASSADOR ACCREDITED IN THE BAHAMAS



BIS Photo: Derek Smith

On October 4th, Ambassador Dominique Struye de Swielande (right) presented his Letters of Credence to Sir Arthur Foulkes, Deputy to the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas. During his first visit to the Bahamas the Belgian Ambassador also met with the Honorable T. Brent Symonette, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs.

BREVIA

A random sampling of 227 final-year students at the Catholic University of Leuven revealed that 98 percent of them own a **cell phone** and 41 percent said that they can no longer imagine life without one. The survey showed that the average phone call lasted about 15 minutes and was mostly made to a parent or partner. The students sent text messages often: 11 times a day on average. The study was carried out by the Leuven School for Mass Communication (KUL).

The **Migrant Integration Policy Index** 2006, which aimed to measure the success of governmental policies that help immigrants to assimilate, ranked Belgium third from the top, after Sweden and Portugal. The study was conducted by various European organization and the Migration Policy Group in Brussels in the 25 EU member states, plus Switzerland, Norway and Canada. One hundred policy indicators were used and legislation and anti-racism laws were also taken into account.

In 2006 the Brussels' Town Hall reopened after a major renovation and the Atomium, another major tourist attraction in the Belgian capital, was completely overhauled and refinished. Now the facades of several of the **Guild Houses on the Grand'Place** — the Swan, the Brewers' House, the Star and the Rose — are being cleaned and restored by the Brussels Region. Life-size paintings of the buildings will help disguise the renovation works that are taking place.

DIVORCE NOW EASIER

A law reforming divorce procedures that was approved by Parliament in the spring went into effect on September 1. The new legislation aims to reduce as much as possible the damaging consequences of divorce proceedings on relations between the parties.

Aiming foremost to limit the “at fault” debate, the new legislation also tries to make the different divorce procedures similar enough to each other so that it is possible to shift from one procedure to another.

Divorce on the basis of certain facts has been replaced by divorce on the basis of irremediable breakdown of the marriage. A marriage is considered as “irremediably broken down” when living together is no longer possible for the spouses and reconciliation is impossible. The breakdown is identified after a separation of six months when a joint request is filed, or after a year when the request is filed by one spouse.

Divorce by mutual consent still exists, but the procedure is simplified. The new legislation foresees that, when there is no agreement between the parties, the judge can, in the framework of a divorce based on irremediable breakdown, upon the request of an indigent spouse, grant alimony at the expense of the other spouse. However, such alimony is no longer perpetual.

Nothing in the law has been changed as far as child support is concerned.

By virtue of the new legislation, the divorce procedure can in some cases be introduced by appeal. The possibility exists to switch from one procedure to another during the course of the divorce if relations between the spouses evolve.

AMERICAN INTEREST IN THE BELGIAN RESISTANCE



On October 13 in Brussels, Belgian Resistance heroine Andrée de Jongh died at age 90. In the ensuing days lengthy obituaries describing her rescue of downed Allied airmen during World War II appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and other American newspapers. At 24, “Dédé,” as she was known, was responsible for creating the “Comet Line,” an escape route to Spain for British and American aviators who would get shot down over Europe. It is estimated that the Comet Line rescued over 700 pilots, and that she herself saved 118 of these. After the War, de Jongh received the Medal of Freedom with Golden Palm, the highest award bestowed by the U.S. Government on foreigners who helped the American war effort.

The articles about Andrée de Jongh follow on several notable attempts in the last two years to make the work of the Belgian Resistance better known in the U.S.

◀ In April 2005 renowned Belgian ophthalmologist Charles Schepens (since deceased) spoke at the International Spy Museum in Washington, DC, discussing his role in the Resistance when, under the name of “Jacques Pérot,” he helped save the lives of 100 people fleeing Nazi occupation. Schepens was well into his eighties when he agreed to go public with his story, written by Meg Ostrum and published as *The Surgeon and the Shepherd: Two Resistance Heroes in Vichy France*.

◀ Later that year, *Images of Resistance*, a documentary exhibition organized by Professor Ann Griffin at the Cooper Union, New York, presented wartime images, contemporary portraits and personal testimonies of 25 men and women who actively resisted in Belgium.

◀ The film *Last Best Hope*, tells the story of Bill Grosvenor, an American pilot who was downed in Belgium and who survived thanks to ordinary Belgians who acted with extraordinary courage. Shown at festivals across the country and nationwide on PBS in 2006, the film garnered eight national and international awards.

◀ Another film, *Just a Link*, produced by the RTBF and shown at Lynn University in Florida at the beginning of this year, focuses on a group of 12 women in the Belgian Resistance, people who transformed compassion into organized cooperation, taking enormous risks to save young children. The women in the film showed, time and again, often in quiet but effective ways, true benevolence, the highest form of altruism and genuine reverence for life.

◀ This fall, the Holocaust Survivors’ Memoirs Project published *Flora, I was but a Child*, a memoir by Washington-area educator Flora Singer. Her life was spared thanks to the ingenuity of her mother and the help of many Belgians, among whom industrialist Georges Ranson and Father Bruno Reynders were later honored by Yad Vashem as “righteous Gentiles among the nations.” Singer has devoted part of her career to educating young people about the Holocaust by telling the story of her experiences in Belgium.

◀ Anyone interested in the history of the Shoah in Belgium will welcome the publication, in English, of Sylvain Brachfeld’s book *A Gift of Life*. This 320-page work just off the presses includes historical background, chapters on the deportations and the rescue of Belgium’s Jews as well as twenty-eight personal testimonies of hidden children and an up-to-date list of all the recognized Belgian Righteous Gentiles. (For more information, or to order, please contact the author at brasylv@bezeqint.net.)

These books, articles, films, and exhibitions all help us understand a complex period of history. Those who lived through World War II are now elderly and have had the time to reflect on their lives. Personal experiences that immediately after the war were too painful to share have surfaced in old age with the realization that if they continue to be suppressed their lessons may be lost. The stories of Andrée de Jongh, Charles Schepens, Father Bruno Reynders and countless other rescuers of great courage, who fought against intolerance and injustice during the occupation, deserve to be carried forth into the future, not only in Belgium but in the United States.

One thread that runs through these Resistance stories is an unwavering belief in what an individual can accomplish. Another is that even in the darkest of situations, there can be some goodness, some kindness, some love and compassion. Thanks to those who lived these stories, and now to those who have preserved these stories, their optimistic messages of humanism will not be forgotten.



Rear Admiral Willy Temmerman presented Ramona Kelly, executive producer of “Last Best Hope,” a decoration bestowed on her by King Albert II. The ceremony took place on October 15 at the Pritzker Military Library in Chicago.

CULTURAL UPDATE

Ben X, a debut film by Nic Balthazar, picked up three prestigious prizes at the Montreal World Film Festival and will represent Belgium at next year's Oscars. The film is based on a true story about an autistic teenager who escapes his schoolmates' bullying by retreating into the world of online role-playing games.

Dr. Philip Mosley, professor of English, communications and comparative literature at Pennsylvania State University, has published several translations of major works by Belgian authors who wrote in French. His most recent are a new edition by the University of Scranton Press of Georges Rodenbach's *Bruges-la-Morte* and from SUNY Press, a translation of Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Intelligence of Flowers*.

The Bulletin has reported that some 345 words from Belgium have been included in the 2008 edition of the Petit Robert French dictionary. With an interest in highlighting the richness of the French language, the editors often include words used outside of France. The Belgian words come from the areas of medicine, law, sports, music and cooking. Among the more colorful are "brol" (a mix of useless things), "carabistouille" (tall tales or rubbish), "guindaille" (student activity invariably involving beer) and "moquette" (generic word for wall-to-wall carpeting.)

In early September the Brussels-based International Polar Foundation unveiled the first Belgian Antarctic Research Station to be constructed in over 40 years. Named for Princess Elisabeth, it will run entirely on renewable energy and will be the world's first "zero emission" station at the South Pole. Eighty containers carrying the parts of the station left Brussels by barge on October 24 and a week later thirteen Belgian soldiers responsible for the helping with the station's construction were also on their way to the Antarctic. The station is a joint public-private venture.

What is the best country in the world for scientific research? According to a survey by *The Scientist*, magazine of the life sciences, which queried researchers in the United States, Canada and western Europe, it's Belgium! The U.S., Canada, Switzerland and Australia were the other countries in the top five.

EVENTS OF INTEREST

Through January 6 — New York, NY
The exhibition *Tapestry in the Baroque: Threads of Splendor* includes numerous works from 17th century Flemish workshops, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Info: 212 535-7710

Through January 12 — Washington, DC
Paintings by Arie Mandelbaum, at the Honfleur Gallery. Info: 202 631-6291 or www.honfleurgallery.com

Through February 10 — Los Angeles, CA
Exhibition *Francis Alys: Politics of Rehearsal* with paintings, drawings, films, videos and photography by the artist, at the Hammer Museum, UCLA. Info: 310 443-7000

Through February 10 — Los Angeles, CA
Exhibition *China on Paper: European and Chinese Works from the Late Sixteenth to the Early Nineteenth Century* includes a look at the cartography and astronomy of the Belgian Jesuit Ferdinand Verbiest, at the Getty Research Institute. Info: 310 440-7300

Through March 30 — Washington, DC
Works by Peter Paul Rubens figure in the exhibition *The Baroque Woodcut*, at the National Gallery of Art. Info: www.nga.gov/baroque

Through April 6 — New York, NY
Francis Alys: Fabiola — an installation of 286 portraits of the same 4th century female saint, in the same pose, by different artists — at the Hispanic Society of America in New York. Info: 212 926-2234

Nov 17-Dec 15 — Los Angeles, CA
First U.S. solo show of painter Ellen De Meutter, at Roberts & Tilton Gallery. Info: 323 549-0223 or www.robertsandtilton.com

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