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FROM EXPLORER SHIPS TO PARTNERSHIPS: 175 YEARS OF U.S.–BELGIAN RELATIONS

On April 8, the Embassy of the United States in Brussels and the Belgian Foreign Ministry co-hosted a commemoration of the 175th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Brussels and Washington, which American Ambassador Sam Fox characterized as “one of history’s great friendships.”

A highlight of the celebration was a twenty-minute documentary film entitled “An Invisible Bridge” that Ambassador Fox said will “‘memorialize’ the events of the past for the benefit of future leaders.” The film will be shown in schools on both sides of the Atlantic.

In his remarks at the ceremony, Foreign Minister Karel DeGucht made reference to the commercial ties that bind the two countries.

“Economic diplomacy is still very much at the heart of our bilateral relations although the nature and the size of our economic relationship have dramatically changed. Until the early twentieth century, trade was mostly a one-way street from Belgium to the U.S. Today, the picture is completely different. Our economies have developed into a flourishing integrated partnership.”

The Foreign Minister cited defining moments in the relationship: “Twice in the past century, in both World Wars, the United States came to our rescue against foreign aggression and occupation. We will never forget the huge war efforts of the American people and we will always keep the memory of the thousands of fallen heroes buried in Waregem, Henri-Chapelle and Neupré. (continued on page 2)

PRIME MINISTER YVES LETERME

On March 20, 2008, King Albert II appointed Yves Leterme (CD&V) as Prime Minister of Belgium. Before taking on this role, Leterme was Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of the Budget in the Belgian Government (December 2007-March 2008) and Minister-President of the Flemish Region (July 2004-June 2007). The new Belgian Prime Minister hails from Ypres in the coastal province of West-Flanders. He is married and has two sons and one daughter. Mr. Leterme succeeds Guy Verhofstadt (OpenVLD) who was Prime Minister of Belgium from 1999 to 2008.



The appointment of Prime Minister Leterme coincided with a cabinet reshuffle : Vice Prime Minister Joëlle Milquet (Labor & Equal Opportunities), Minister Marie Aréna (Social Integration & Pensions), Minister Annemie Turtelboom (Immigration & Asylum) and Minister Vincent Van Quickenborne (Enterprise & Administrative Simplification) joined the coalition government, as did seven junior ministers or “state secretaries.”

NEW STRATEGY FOR BELGIUM’S AID AT WORLD BANK AND IMF

At the recent annual meeting between the Bretton Woods institutions and the Foreign Ministry’s Directorate General for Development Cooperation, Belgium issued guidelines for its ongoing cooperation with the World Bank and the IMF for the four-year period 2008-2011.

Belgium’s new strategy will focus on three areas: further assisting the development and implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP), strengthening the macro-economic policy of developing countries, and promoting “good governance” and the struggle against corruption.

The Ministry will continue to support the “Belgian Poverty Reduction Partnership” as a coherent consequence of its strategic choices for a total amount of 11 million euros spread over the coming four years. The Partnership contributes to the establishment and implementation of national poverty-reduction programs in Belgium’s partner countries: Benin, Burundi, DRC, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Uganda, Rwanda, Senegal and Tanzania.

The World Bank Institute’s Good Governance Program can

count on an allocation of 2 million euros over the next four years. That program is especially active in DRC and Burundi. The Fast Track Initiative, promoting basic education, currently receives at least 4 million euros. Belgium will likewise contribute to the “Debt Management Facility for Low Income Countries” (LIC). This program helps the LIC to manage their debt in a sustainable way, with a main focus of avoiding future debt build-ups. There is a real need for this type of assistance, especially after the past rounds of debt cancellation for the “Highly Indebted Poor Countries.” Finally, the IMF will be granted 1 million euros each year for strengthening macro-economic policy, most of all through the training of local authorities, with special attention to Belgium’s partner countries and especially in Central Africa.

In addition, Belgium committed to increase its annual permanent contribution to the “International Development Agency” from 74 to 94 million euros, starting in 2009 for a three-year period. Taking into account its voluntary donation and its contribution to debt cancellation, Belgium’s grants to the Bretton Woods institutions for the period 2008-2011 will average 115 million euros a year.

EMBASSY CELEBRATES CLEMSON UNIVERSITY'S BRUSSELS CENTER



Clemson President Jim Barker (left) looks on as the University Vice Provost for International Affairs, Jim Cross, presents a photo of the new center to Ambassador Struye.

Ambassador Dominique Struye hosted a reception for Clemson alumni in late February in recognition of University's inauguration of a center in Belgium.

The Thomas Green Clemson University Brussels Center is named for the university's founder, who served as U.S. chargé d'affaires in Belgium from 1844-1851 and negotiated the first commerce and navigation treaty between the United States and Belgium in 1846.

The Center, a collaboration between Clemson, Ichee Brussels Management School and the Catholic University of Louvain, will serve as a portal increasing the flow of people, ideas and opportunities between the United States and Europe. It provides for Clemson students to study in Brussels, and for Belgians to study at Clemson.

Belgium has strong economic ties with South Carolina. The country is ninth on the list of the top ten foreign employers in the State and also ranks in the top 10 recipients of the State's exports.

BELGIAN SAX APPEAL

A recent edition of *The Economist* features a one-page ad with a saxophone player and the message that Belgium, as home of the saxophone, has sax appeal. It is part of the third international investment promotion campaign of the Belgian Government in five years, this time under the slogan *Only in Belgium*.

The new campaign stems from the realization that despite recent successes in attracting foreign investment, Belgium can ill afford to rest on its laurels. In a globalized economy, Europe attracts a smaller part of foreign investment each year, and Belgium is locked in a fierce competition for new investment with Western and Eastern European competitors. Over the last five years, the Belgian Government has therefore taken an increasingly pro-active approach in creating a business friendly environment that makes it more attractive for foreign investors to expand or start a local business.

Only in Belgium is a worldwide campaign mainly targeting investors, business leaders, financial directors and advisers. It was launched in Brussels' Egmont Palace on March 11. In the presence of many foreign dignitaries, former Prime Minister Verhofstadt explained that Belgium was the fourth destination worldwide for foreign investment capital in 2006, one place ahead of China. He also underlined that Belgium has one of the most globally integrated economies in the world, and of course referred to Belgium's status as gateway to Europe, in economic as well as in political terms.

In addition to ads in *The Economist* and *The Financial Times*, the campaign includes 30-second commercials on CNN and BBC World. At the heart of the campaign, however, is a new website, www.invest.belgium.be. The new site highlights what Belgium has to offer economically, explains steps to set up a business, offers links to relevant background information, and outlines the procedures to join the ever-expanding group of foreign companies in Belgium.

It is hard to miss, however, the central message on the opening page. Visitors to the site are introduced to Belgian surrealist painter René Magritte, cartoon hero Lucky Luke, and yes, Adolphe Sax, the Belgian inventor of the saxophone. The message is simple: Belgium is a country where you can achieve success by pursuing your ideas, a country where creativity and innovation are rewarded.

175 YEARS OF FRIENDSHIP

(continued from page 1)

We do remember the humanitarian assistance of the Commission for Relief in Belgium directed by the later President Herbert Hoover, delivered to the suffering Belgian population during World War I. American generosity continued after the war and made a great contribution to the reconstruction of Belgium, as is exemplified by the restoration of the library at the University of Leuven. The legacy of this generosity is still present in the Belgian American Educational Foundation which gives financial support to Belgian and American citizens who want to study and to do research on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

With great vision, the United States offered liberated Europe the Marshall Plan based on the conviction that economic reconstruction, prosperity and cooperation between countries are essential prerequisites to preserve peace. The Plan gave a jumpstart to the revival of the European economies and firmly established liberalism, free trade and free competition as the basic principles of economic policy.

...The question is no more what the United States can do for Europe, nor what Europe can do for the United States, but what America and Europe can do together to ensure the security of our citizens and to uphold our common

values. These values are easily defined. They are respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens, democracy, the rule of law, compliance with international law, peaceful resolution of conflicts and reliance on multilateral diplomacy.

We must convince our peoples that it would be a terrible mistake to ignore the importance, the strength, the merit and the accomplishments of our relationship. We must convince them that the strong transatlantic bond is necessary, that it serves the interests of American and European citizens alike and that it will flourish when the United States has a strong European partner that will live up to its obligations and commitments."

HUGO CLAUS, DEATH OF A HEAVYWEIGHT NOVELIST

The hugely versatile and constantly changing Belgian author and artist Hugo Claus's life came to an end with a characteristic act of defiance and great self-assurance. He made use of Belgium's laws on euthanasia, according to his friends and family, with a moment of calm and dignity, "choosing the exact moment of his death."



Hugo Claus

Claus had been stricken by the onset of Alzheimer's, and the loss of facility with words had been especially hard to bear for one whose career had ranged with great verbal dexterity and imagination across fiction, poetry, the theatre and translation as well as film and art. His reputation was formidable not only in Belgium but in the rest of Europe and beyond, especially following the publication and translation into many languages of his 1980s novel *The Sorrow of Belgium*. He was nominated many times for the Nobel prize for literature. And his poetry had a strong international following too, with the writer and Nobel laureate J. M. Coetzee praising work which had a "verbal concentration, intensity of feeling and intellectual range" that brought Claus into "the first rank of European poets of the late 20th century."

Although his reputation spread so far, Claus's literary work was rooted in the Flemish society in which he grew up in the deeply troubling period surrounding the Second World War. He was the born the eldest of four sons of a printer in 1929 in Bruges but did not have a happy childhood. Relations with his family were difficult—he later described his family as "suffocating" — and his work would be coloured by a dislike of authoritarian father figures, as well as an acute ear for the tensions and hypocrisies of bourgeois domestic life. Nor did he find the strict Catholic boarding schools to which he was sent a congenial environment. He ended up, as one critic termed it, a "visceral nonconformist."

Although he received a good educational grounding, he left school aged 16 and soon moved to Paris, earning a living working in a sugar factory (which he later portrayed in a play) while frequenting artistic and literary circles. Before long he had published his first volume of verse. As a painter and sculptor he associated himself with the CoBrA group Abstract Expressionists based in Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam, which emphasize the spontaneous and dynamic rather than a more formalist approach.

His horizons were further widened by travel to Italy and the US, and his interest in the English-speaking world was reflected in his translation of writers as varied as Shakespeare, John Donne and Dylan Thomas.

However, Claus's focus returned constantly to his Belgian origins. He was aware that Belgium, so much mocked by outsiders, was not the most fashionable of subjects, but claimed this helped his writing as he was never restrained by

any sense of grandeur. Within Belgium itself, he was determined to use his art to challenge the cosy consensus and denial of suffering which he had observed in the societies in which he had grown up.

"I am a person who is unhappy with things as they stand," he once said. "Each

day we should wake up foaming at the mouth because of the injustice of things." In political terms he was on the left, visiting Cuba approvingly in the 1960s. But he was as much, if not more, concerned with social rather than political issues and taboos. As well as sexually explicit verse, he wrote of repressed homosexuality. And in his 1970 play *Friday*, also staged in London, he portrayed the consequences of incest and adultery.

Claus's international literary reputation was secured by the publication in 1983 of *The Sorrow of Belgium*. Its inspiration was strongly autobiographical but the coming of age of the novel's leading character, Louis Seynaeve, and the relationships of others were interwoven in a loose, impressionistic style with reflection on how Flemish society had responded to the temptations of Nazi ideology and the confusion of identities that the war had intensified so disturbingly. Claus knew from his youth how appealing the fascist Flemish youth movement had been, how far collaboration and compromise had seeped into his society. Admiring critics compared the novel in its daring form, scope and historical subject matter with Günter Grass's German equivalent, *The Tin Drum*.

Claus's later work also engaged with another potent aspect of his country's unresolved past—the brutal Belgian colonial adventure. In *The Rumours*, a deserter who has fought in the Belgian Congo returns to his Flanders home in the 1960's and prompts all kinds of disruption in a village epidemic of gruesome death. Along the way Claus relished the portrayal of characters such as an alcoholic village priest and an over-amorous postman, though he was capable, too, of writing with compassion with those he saw as caught up in events or bewildered by what life could bring.

The Belgium in Claus's writings displayed deep fractures as well as dark secrets. However, he resisted the easy lure of the political nationalisms or sub-nationalisms that so plagued his native country, past and present. He publicly opposed recent proposals to split the country into its Francophone and Dutch-speaking parts. Following his death, the outgoing Belgian Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt, said of Claus: "With every text and poem, he was an emotional beacon in our dark world."

Hugo Claus was born on April 5, 1929. He died on March 19, 2008, aged 78. Claus is survived by his third wife Veerle De Wit and a son from his marriage to actress Sylvia Kristel.

From *The Times* (of London), March 23, 2008

EVENTS OF INTEREST

April 20 - May 11 — Washington, DC

The National Gallery of Art continues a series of lectures by Joseph Leo Koerner, professor of history of art and architecture at Harvard University, entitled *Bosch and Bruegel: Parallel Worlds*. The lectures take place in the East Building Concourse Large Auditorium at 2 p.m.

April 20 *Devilries*

April 27 "Self" *Portraiture*

May 4 *Epiphanies of Human Making*

May 11 *In Pursuit of the Ordinary*

Info: www.nga.gov/programs/lectures/

Through April 21 — New York, NY

Denkmal 11, Jan De Cock's floor-to-ceiling installation of photographs and sculptural modules that recall twentieth-century abstraction, at the Museum of Modern Art.

Info: 212 708-9400

Through April 30 — New York, NY

Fragments, a photography show featuring works by Alex Salinas, at the Gallery at Soho Grand.

Info: www.grandlifenyc.com

Through May 30 — Redding, CT

Heat and Pressure — 100 Years of Bakelite, at the Mark Twain Gallery. Info: www.MarkTwainLibrary.org

April 25 - May 7 — Various Cities

Journalist/author Lieve Joris will launch *The Rebels' Hour*, her third book on Congo. Events are free unless otherwise indicated.

April 25, 2-5 p.m. at UC Berkeley campus, Wheeler 210
510 642-3010

April 26, 5-6:30 p.m. Lecture in Dutch, San Francisco
RSVP to inge@bcnc.com (Entrance \$15)

April 27, 3-5 p.m. UC Berkeley Campus, Faculty Club
510 642-3010

April 28, 6 p.m. World Affairs Council of California,
San Francisco (Entrance \$15) 415 293-4675

May 7, 10:30 a.m. Woodrow Wilson International Center for
Scholars, Washington, DC www.wilsoncenter.org;

May 7, 7 p.m. Olsson's Bookstore, 418 7th St., N.W.,
Washington, DC. 202 638-7610

April 25 - May 4 — New York, NY

Belgian films at the Tribeca Film Festival include *Heartbeats* and *Moon Mermaid* (short narrative competition). For theatres and times, please see www.tribecafilmfestival.org/tff/details

April 29, 30 May 1, 7 — Philadelphia, PA

Lectures by Erwin Joos: *Eugeen Van Mieghem (1875-1930)* and *the Immigrants of the Red Star Line*

April 29 at the World Affairs Council, with a reception, \$45,
215 561-4700

April 30 at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 215 972-
7600

May 1 at the Cosmopolitan Club, 215 735-1057

May 7 at the Museum of the City of New York, 212 534-1672

May 2-July 6 — Cambridge, MA

Filmmaker Chantal Akerman's first major museum exhibition in the United States, *Chantal Akerman: Moving through Time and Space*, will feature all five of her multi-media video installations, at the List Visual Arts Center, MIT.

Info: 617 253-4680

May 3 — Washington, DC

The Belgian Embassy will take part in the annual EU Open House Day, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Visitors will get a rare behind-the-scenes look at the European Embassies, many of which are among Washington's historic and architectural treasures. Free shuttle buses will ferry visitors from embassy to embassy. Free admission. Info: 202 625-5813

May 25-30 — Washington, DC

Flanders, Wallonia & Brussels share a common booth to promote Belgium's institutions of higher education at the 60th NAFSA Conference and Expo, at the Washington Convention Center. Info: www.nafsa.org/annual_conference.

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