



Ressort: Mixed News

Germans now die for a pintje in Flanders

Selfkant, 04.06.2020 [ENA]

Thousands of holidaymakers from Germany are expected to travel to Belgium as of 15 June after Prime Minister Sophie Wilmes yesterday announced the re-opening of her country's borders that have been closed since March because of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Announcing the easing of the lockdown Ms Wilmès said that although businesses including restaurants and bars will resume Monday, tourists could only be welcomed a week later. The Kingdom imposed the lockdown on 18 March. With 9,522 deaths it suffered one of the world's highest per capita COVID-19 tolls. However, cases dropped off significantly in recent days, with just 70 new confirmed infections reported on Tuesday, down from around 700 hospitalizations a day in late March. The lockdown exit comes after Belgian authorities recently decided to partially reopen the borders with Luxembourg and Germany to allow family visits and cross-border shopping.

In Selfkant, Germany's westernmost location and separated from the Belgian town of Maaseik by a 16 kilometer-strip of Dutch territory, inhabitants eagerly await the border opening. "As soon as we can cross the Pater Sangersbrug grensovergang I'll be there to have a pintje (glass) of Jupiler (beer) and a toast cannibal (steak tartare)," one of them disclosed. Looking forward to camping in Belgium's province of Limburg he added that he and his family had been longing for Belgian food and hospitality along the Meuse, the river between Belgium and Holland. Others are keen to travel further to sea resorts like the Belgian Knokke and neighboring Dutch Cadzand.

This author remembers how Belgium shut down its borders three months ago when he was on a trip to the coast. The Dutch also plugged a loophole barring folks from escaping the Coronavirus at home by taking a vacation on the sea. After Germany had closed its Frisian (Wadden Sea) islands to domestic and foreign tourists and the Belgium lockdown, even Dutch homeowners, let alone those from Germany and elsewhere were suddenly forbidden access to their North Sea properties. The Gazet van Antwerpen daily quipped: Nood kent geen wet (necessity knows no law). European car drivers and cyclists attempting to cross the Dutch-Belgian border between Cadzand and Knokke found their way blocked like in war times:

A wall of concrete obstacles span across the road with a container backing up the fortification that observers said had last been experienced here in WWII. One bystander exclaimed: "The European Union crumbling fast in 2020." C'est bon c'est belge: When we realized that the container across the

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Dutch-Belgian border road was blocking entry into Belgium we had a hunger pang for things normally readily available at the Delhaize supermarket in Knokke, now seemingly worlds away, including Cote d'Or chocolate, kroketten van grijze garnalen (shrimp croquettes), toast cannibal and bitterballetjes (meatballs from a mixture of beef and pork).

My wife reminded me of a similar serotonin attack way back during the early 1980s in Zimbabwe where we, on posting for Reuters, developed an admittedly outlandish craving for Campari and, closer to the point of journalists, a quality newspaper instead of the local print staple food in the form of the Zimbabwe Herald party organ. Both could only be had at Francistown across the Botswana border, almost a thousand kilometers to the south of our Harare home. Surely we could have done with the Bitter on sale in Zimbabwe but certainly not with Mr Mugabe's daily propaganda tool.

So we hit the road in the early morning one day in 1984 and managed to realize our dreams by nightfall: over a superb Campari soda at the Francistown railway hotel we worked through the Rand Daily Mail from South Africa that enjoyed a superior status among the continent's papers of record. We were just on time for the exercise since a year later the strongly anti-apartheid newspaper born in 1902 had been controversially closed in the midst of a massive clampdown on activists by security forces.

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