

## **A Conference by Kristof Smeyers**

### **Het gestolde land. Een eeuw Belgische economie**

On Wednesday 14 December 2016 (at 2.30 p.m.), CegeSoma will give the floor to Kristof Smeyers (University College of London). He will use a totally new perspective to talk about the economic history of Belgium since the First World War.

The conference will be held in Dutch.

## **A Frozen Economy for Nearly a Century ?**

National Bank of Belgium "gold loading (32 millions BEF) (CegeSoma)

What if Belgium's economic difficulties started much earlier than is generally believed? This is the essence of the study of Kristof Smeyers and Erik Buyst recently published by Polis. A theory which is worth considering, decoding, analyzing.

Which is exactly what CegeSoma proposes by inviting Kristof Smeyers (*University College London*). He will talk about the economic history of Belgium since the First World War from a totally new perspective by examining the key question whether there was a recovery in Belgium after the First World War or whether the Belgian economy remained 'frozen' and static from then on?

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## **The War, a Socioeconomic Trauma**

Throughout the 20th century, the Belgian economy has undergone fundamental transformations. Before 1914, Belgium was a liberal, innovating and aggressive world power. It fundamentally remained this in 1918, although in a less pronounced manner. The war proved also traumatic on the socioeconomic level. In the following decades, the country tried to adapt by embracing protectionist trade policies. New economic mechanisms such as the index, the structures of social dialogue, social security, as well as a policy of pacification and international collaboration were introduced. The goal of these policies, which may well be seen as safeguards, was to prevent further catastrophes. At the same time, this meant that Belgium became a country that looked at real socioeconomic modernization with great hesitation. ? 100 years later, the little, open country still suffers from the effects of that policy caused by the trauma of WW I. Did little Belgium emerge from the trauma or did it remain in a frozen state for ever?

Kristof Smeyers (°1988) is cultural historian at the University College of London. Among his fields of interest are the history of books and libraries, the history of historiography, and also the history of globalisation which has inspired him to write a general study on the economic history of Belgium entitled *Het gestolde land* (Polis, 2016).

The conference takes place in the conference room of CegeSoma, Square de l'Aviation 29, 1070 Brussels, and will start at 2.30 p.m.

Participation is free, but registration necessary via 02/556.92.57 or [isabelle.delvaux@cegesoma.be](mailto:isabelle.delvaux@cegesoma.be)

14 & 23 / 11 / 2016