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Press conference passports with biometric data 17.05.2004

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Brussels, 12 May 2004, The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Louis Michel will hold a press conference on Monday 17 May 2004 following the introduction by Belgium of a pilot-project for passports containing biometric data. A demonstration will take place during this press conference when some 15 new passports will be issued. They contain a "chip" in which biometric data can be read with the help of a computer. This project shows that Belgium is once again in the lead when it comes to producing secure travel documents. The issue of biometric passports to the general public is expected to start in Belgium at the beginning of 2005. According to currently available information, our country will become the very first in the world to generalize the issue of high tech travel documents (Note: this renewal will not lead to the cancellation or phasing out of the "older" passports). To illustrate the fact that Belgium has become a world leader in the production of secure passports, let us quote James Sensenbrenner, Chairman of the American House of Representatives' Legislative Committee. Addressing a hearing on 21 April 2004, he said: "Belgium has now tightened up their process that I think they're probably going to be the best in all of Europe in terms of security of passports." The press conference will take place in the press room of the Egmont Palace (Place du Petit Sablon, 1000 Brussels) at 6 p.m. on 17 May 2004. Please register your attendance by 6 p.m. on 14 May at the very latest : pers@diplobel.fed.be or presse@diplobel.fed.be.

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